Getting Better Together:
Collective Well-Being and the Work of Staying In It



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NYU Langone Health

#2026BHPLearningCollaborative

Better Health Partnership

Getting Better Together: Collective Well-Being and the Work of Staying in It

Carley Riley, MD MPP MHS & Brita Roy, MD MPH MHS
Randall D. Cebul Keynote Address, 2026 Better Health Partnership Learning Collaborative
November 6, 2026

CollectiveWELL

Collective Well-being & Equity Learning Lab

We use community engaged,
evidence informed,
strengths based
research and action
to create the conditions in which
all people may thrive.

Our Learning Objectives

1

Describe CWB

Describe collective well-being (CWB) and the community-level conditions that drive it.

2

Measure CWB

Explain how CWB can be measured and what that measurement makes visible beyond clinical data.

3

Improve Together

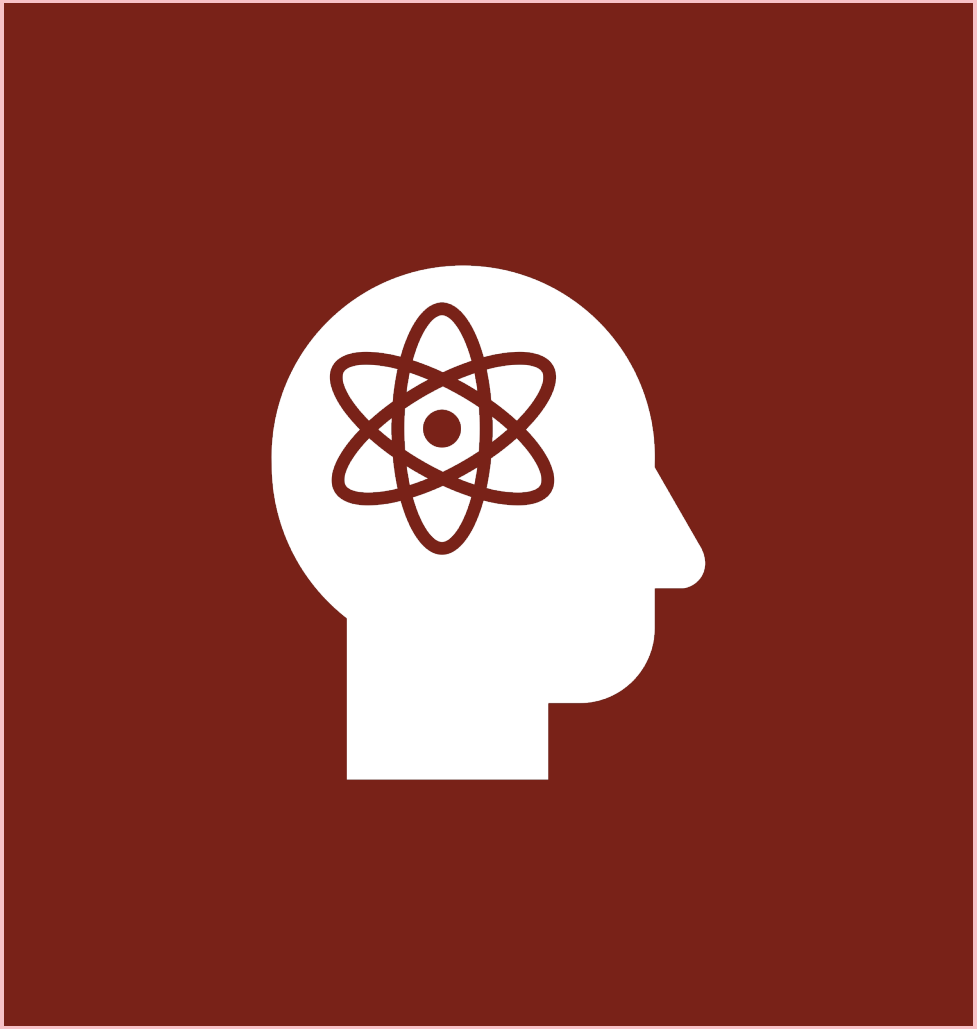
Identify approaches to building improvement efforts with community partners rather than for them.

4

Sustain Together

Apply strategies for sustaining cross-sector collaboration across the long timelines that community change requires.

Describe collective well-being



Well-being is a holistic,
positively framed,
multi-dimensional,
person-centered
assessment of quality of life.

Riley C, Roy B, Herrin J, Lam R, Witters D, Liu D, Krumholz HM. Trends and geographical variation in population thriving, struggling and suffering across the USA, 2008–2017: a retrospective repeated cross-sectional study. *BMJ Open* 2021;11: e043375. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2020-043375

Roy B, Riley C, Sears L, Rula EY. Collective well-being to improve population health outcomes: An actionable conceptual model and review of the literature. *American Journal of Health Promotion*. 2018 Aug 5:890117118791993. PMID: 30079743.

Thriving is a desirable state of being that encompasses all aspects of life – based on each person's unique values and experiences.

Supportive and loving environments, hopefulness to pursue goals and dreams, freedom to make choices and grow, and the ability to contribute to others and the community can contribute to thriving.

“Health is a means to an end. It means time with friends and family. It means being able to read a book, enjoy a meal, take a walk and think. It means road trips, hiking, days at the beach, the stuff of summer. We do not want health for its own sake. We want health because fundamentally, we want to live.”

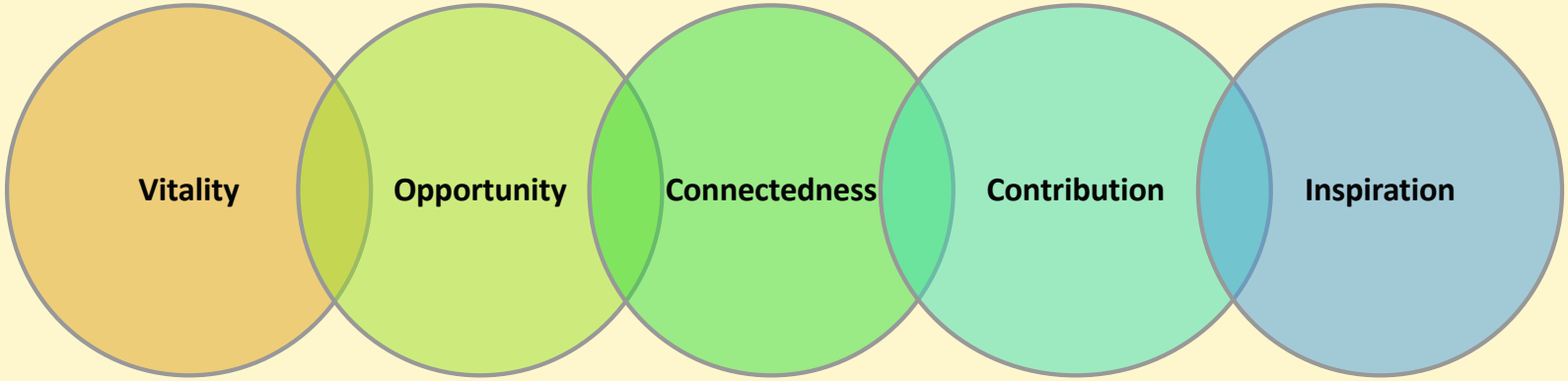
Sandro Galea

“We’ve been wrong about what our job is in medicine. We think our job is to ensure health and survival. But really it is larger than that. It is to enable well-being. And well-being is about the reasons one wishes to be alive.”

Atul Gawande (2014)

Collective Well-being

- Group-level construct
- Bi-directionally related to individual well-being
- Holistic assessment of how a *community* or group is doing overall
- 5 bipolar domains adapted from individual well-being theory



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Collective Well-being | Vitality





Rates of perceived overall health, positive functioning, and emotional health, including positive and negative affect, optimism, and emotional intelligence

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Collective Well-being | Opportunity

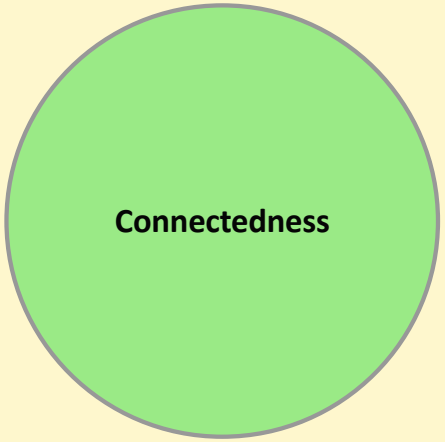




Cognitive appraisal of one's financial situation and the perceived opportunity to achieve life goals, as well as socioeconomic mobility

Roy B, Riley C, Sears L, Rula EY. Collective well-being to improve population health outcomes: An actionable conceptual model and review of the literature. *American Journal of Health Promotion*. 2018 Aug 5:890117118791993. PMID: 30079743.

Collective Well-being | Connectedness

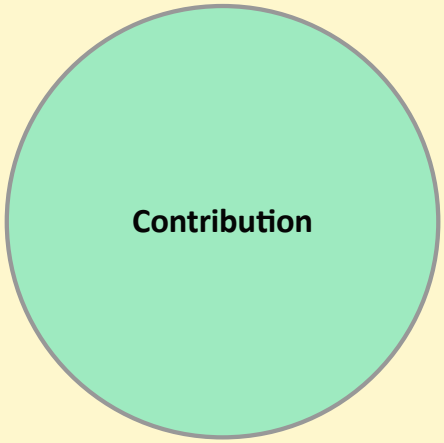




Level of connection and support among community members, including social acceptance (i.e., positive attitudes towards people) and social integration (i.e., feeling a sense of belonging to the community)

Roy B, Riley C, Sears L, Rula EY. Collective well-being to improve population health outcomes: An actionable conceptual model and review of the literature. *American Journal of Health Promotion*. 2018 Aug 5:890117118791993. PMID: 30079743.

Collective Well-being | Contribution





Feelings of meaning and purpose attributed to community engagement and sense of belonging

Roy B, Riley C, Sears L, Rula EY. Collective well-being to improve population health outcomes: An actionable conceptual model and review of the literature. *American Journal of Health Promotion*. 2018 Aug 5:890117118791993. PMID: 30079743.

Collective Well-being | Inspiration





Rates of engagement in activities that are intrinsically motivating or stimulating and the community's valuation and support of these activities by providing opportunities for such engagement

Roy B, Riley C, Sears L, Rula EY. Collective well-being to improve population health outcomes: An actionable conceptual model and review of the literature. *American Journal of Health Promotion*. 2018 Aug 5:890117118791993. PMID: 30079743.



Collective WELL

2026

"Every system is perfectly designed
to get the results it achieves."



Local Factors Associated With Well-being

Collective WELL



Social/Economic

- ↓ Percent divorced
- ↑ High school and college graduation rates
- ↓ Child poverty
- ↑ Median income



Clinical care

- ↓ Preventable hospital stays
- ↓ FQHCs
- ↑ % mammography rates



Physical environment

- ↑ % commuting by bicycle
- ↓ % commuting by public transit

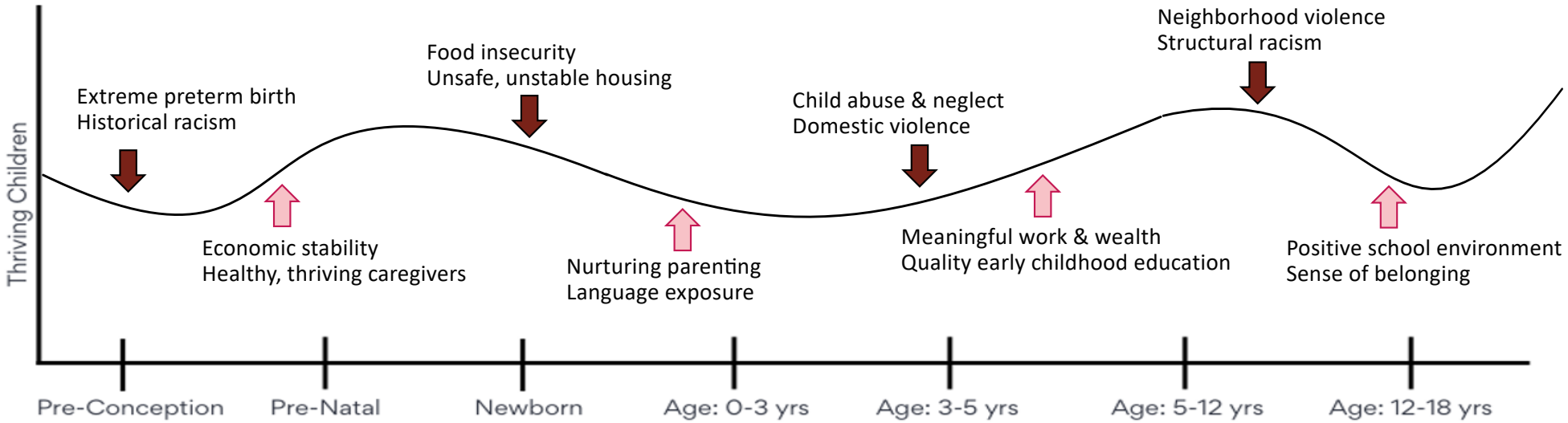


Demographics

- ↑ % Black

Roy B, Riley C, Herrin J, Spatz ES, Arora A, Kell KP, Welsh J, Rula EY, Krumholz HM. Identifying County Characteristics Associated with Resident Well-Being: A Population Based Study. *PLOS ONE* 2018; 13(5):e0196720.

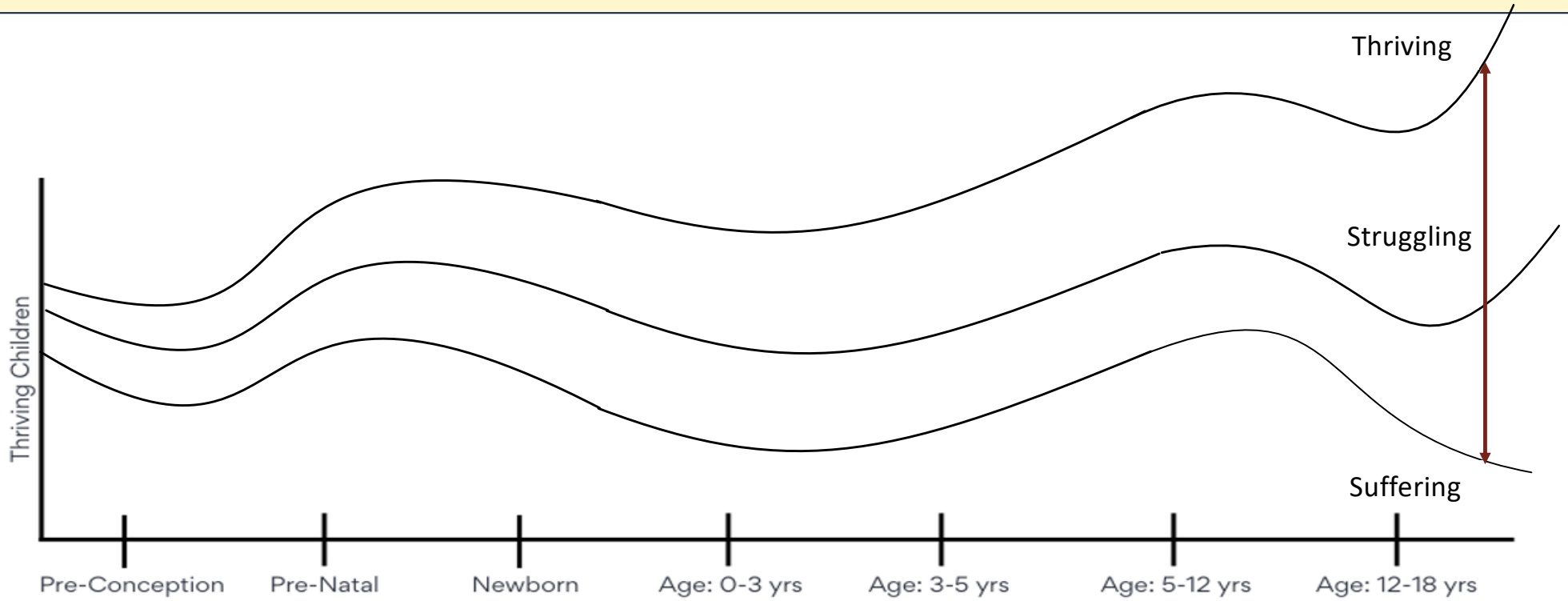
Life Course Trajectory for Thriving



Age

Adapted from Halfon

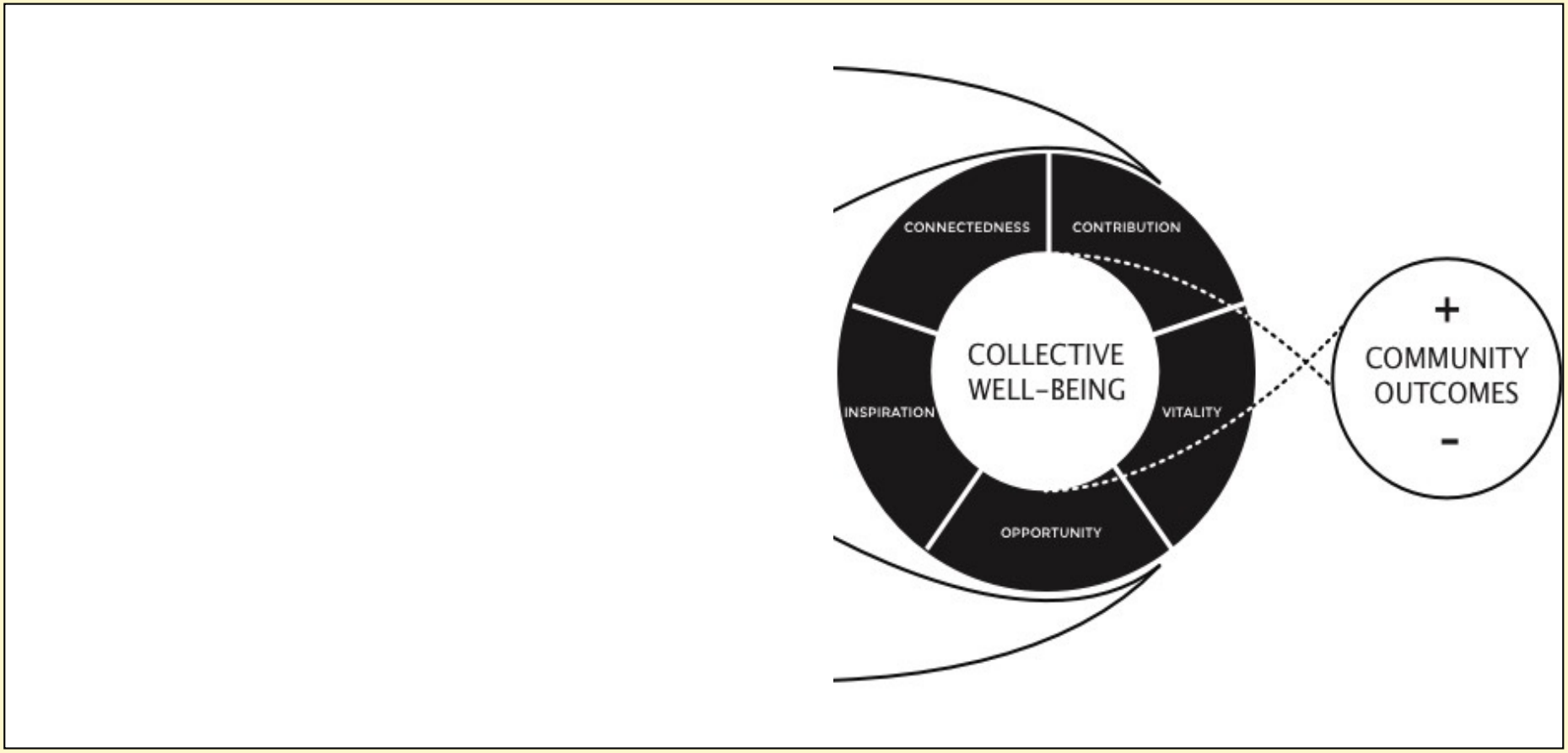
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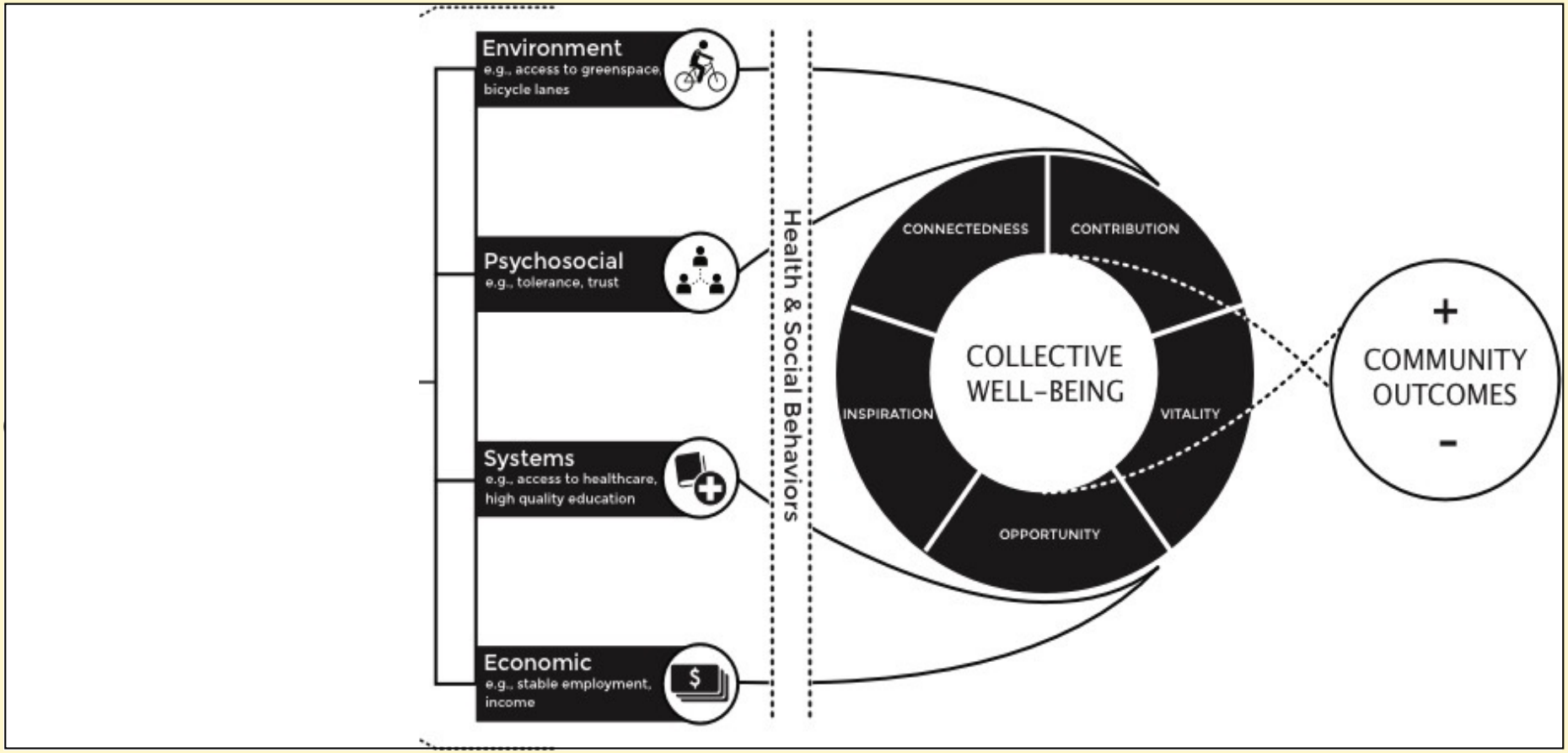
Adapted from Halfon

Actionable Community-Level Conceptual Framework



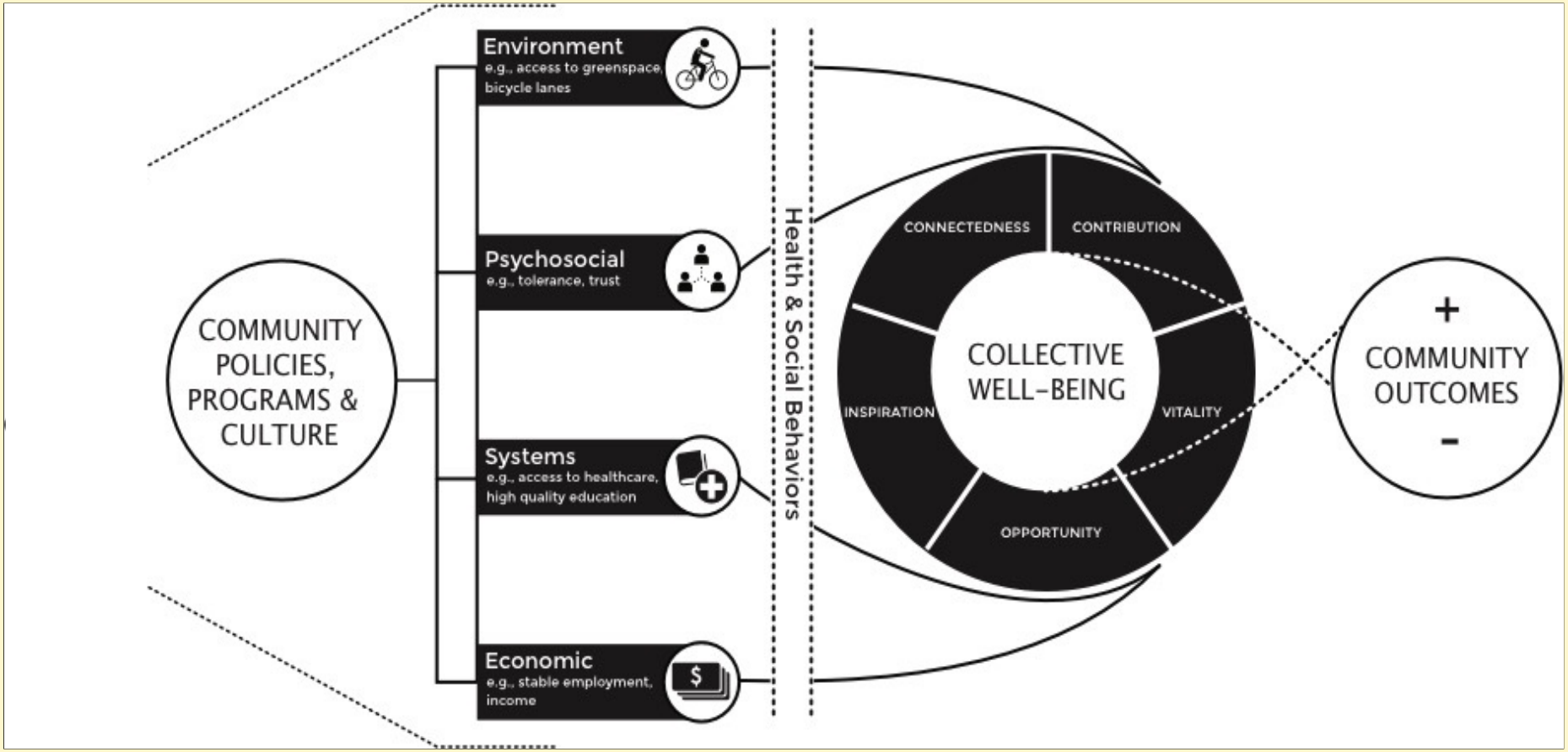
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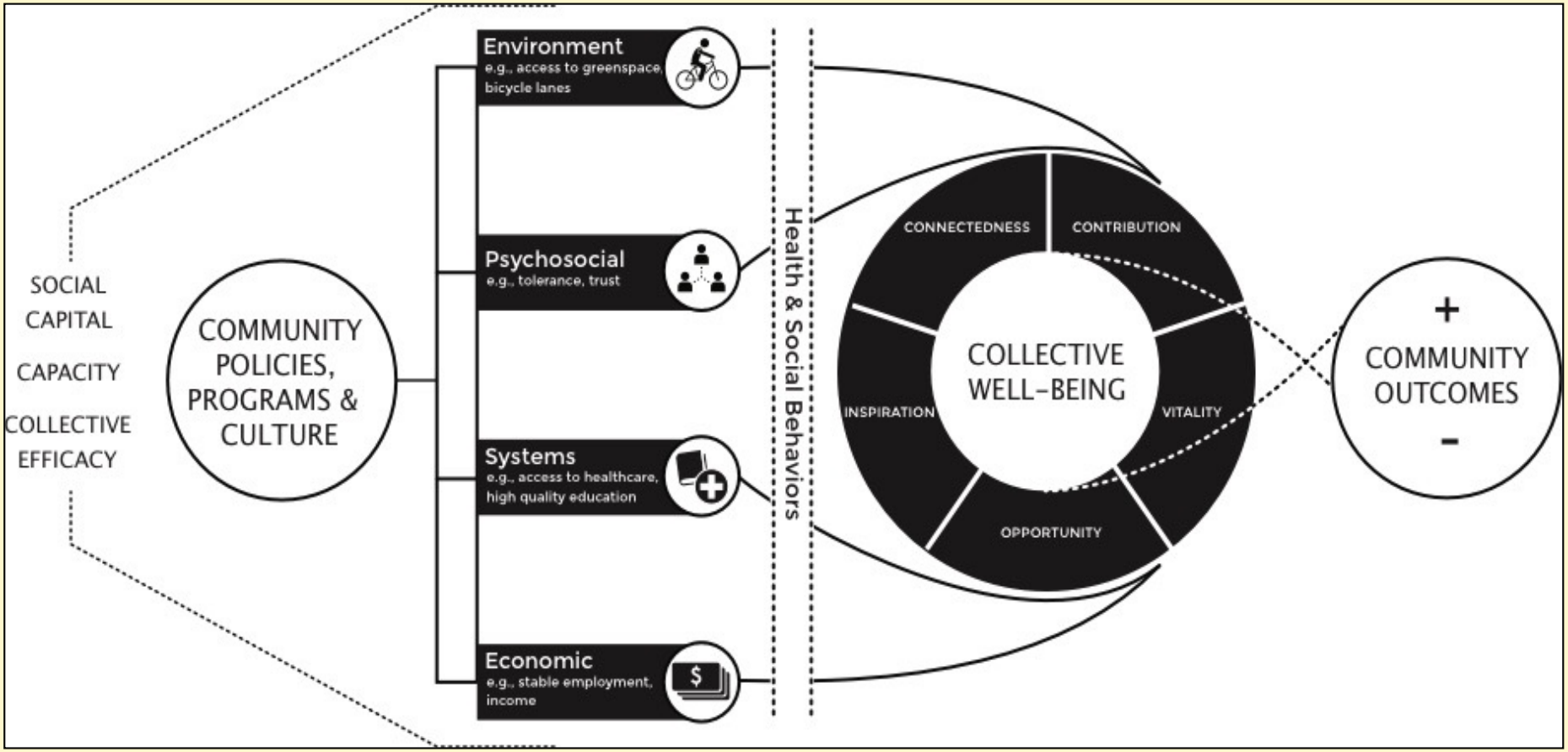
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Measure collective well-being



Why Measure Well-being?

Is an outcome of highest importance. Provides data on how people are actually experiencing their lives.

Centers people. Elevates people's priorities in strengths-based care planning and decision making.

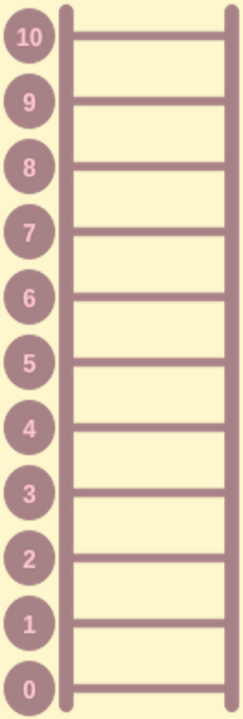
Guides improvements. Reveals services, processes, and systems that support thriving — informing continuous improvement.

Identifies equity gaps. Shows who is thriving and who is not — driving insight and action to improve equity.

Supports connections. Enables identification of those who are struggling or suffering, allowing for timely connection to supports.

Supports the big picture. Contributes to a broader set of measures used to improve population health outcomes in partnership with people, community organizations, and other systems.

Population Measure: Cantril's Ladder



Please imagine a ladder with steps numbered from zero at the bottom to 10 at the top.
The top represents the best possible life for you; the bottom represents the worst.

1 **On which step of the ladder would you say you personally feel you stand at this time?**

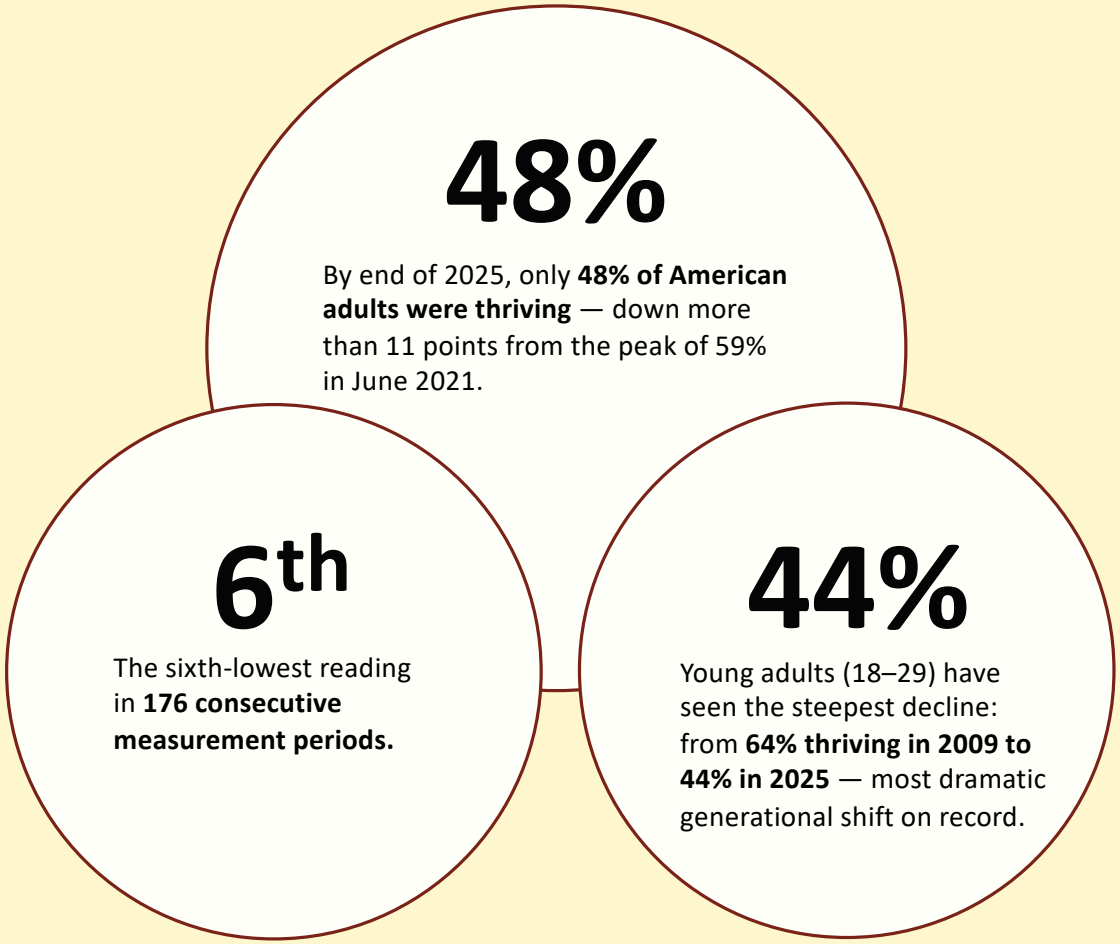
2 **On which step do you think you will stand about five years from now?**

How to determine whether someone is thriving, struggling, or suffering?*

	Thriving	Struggling	Suffering
Item 1	>7	Any other score combination	<4
Item 2	>8		<4

Resource: https://news.gallup.com/poll/122453/understanding-gallup-uses-cantril-scale.aspx

Why This Matters Now



People who are thriving report **fewer health problems, less worry, stress, sadness, and anger** — and more happiness, enjoyment, interest, and respect.

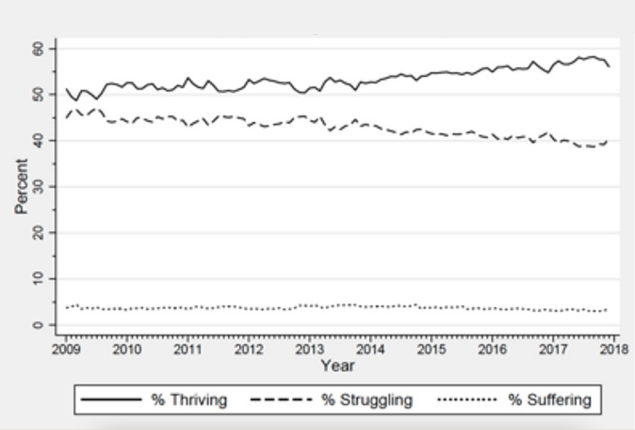
People who are suffering are more likely to face **insufficient food and housing, physical pain, considerable stress**, and **>2x the disease burden** compared to people who are thriving.

Greater flourishing is associated with **stronger economies, lower healthcare costs, longer lives, healthier births, better heart health, and greater resilience.**

Witters D, Milstein B, Homer J, Bryant C, Payne B, Riley C, Roy B. Thriving together in America: Trends, discoveries, community action and advice for leaders. Gallup. 5 October 2026.

Trends & Geographic Variation in US Population Thriving, Struggling, Suffering (2008-2017)

National Thriving, Struggling, and Suffering from 2009 to 2017

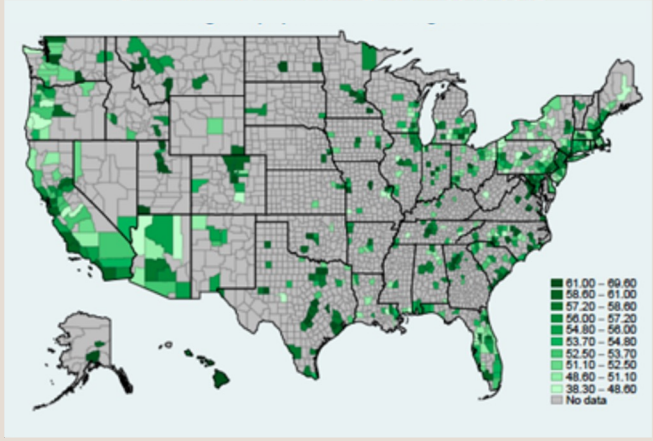


For US adult population

% thriving increased (48.9% → 56.3%)

% suffering unchanged (range: 4.4%-3.2%)

County % Thriving in 2013-2017

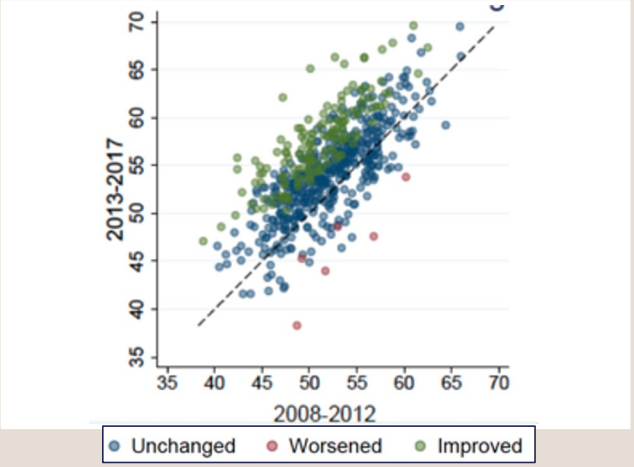


Geographic variation exists

Counties experience up to 10% suffering

(3x the national average)

Change in County % Thriving 2008-2012 to 2013-2017



Counties with greatest improvement:

10-15% increase in absolute % thriving or

3-5% decrease in absolute % suffering

Most counties experienced no change

Some experienced worsening

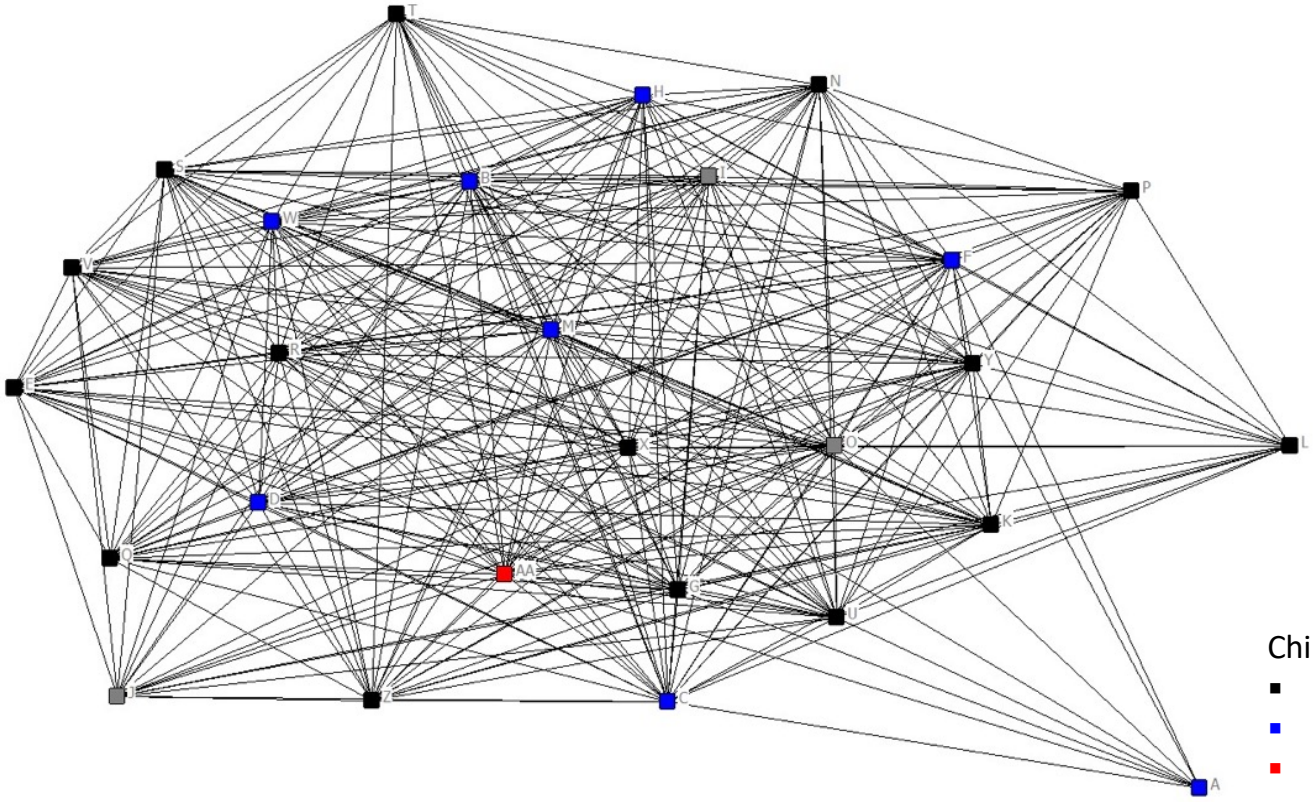
Collective WELL

Riley C, Roy B, Herrin J, Lam V, Witters D, Liu D, Krumholz HM. Trends and Geographic Variation in Population Thriving, Struggling, and Suffering Across the US, 2008-2017: A Retrospective Repeated Cross-sectional Study. BMJ Open. https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/11/7/e043375.full

BMJ Open

Start Small, Learn Deep, Then Scale| One Social Network

October 2018



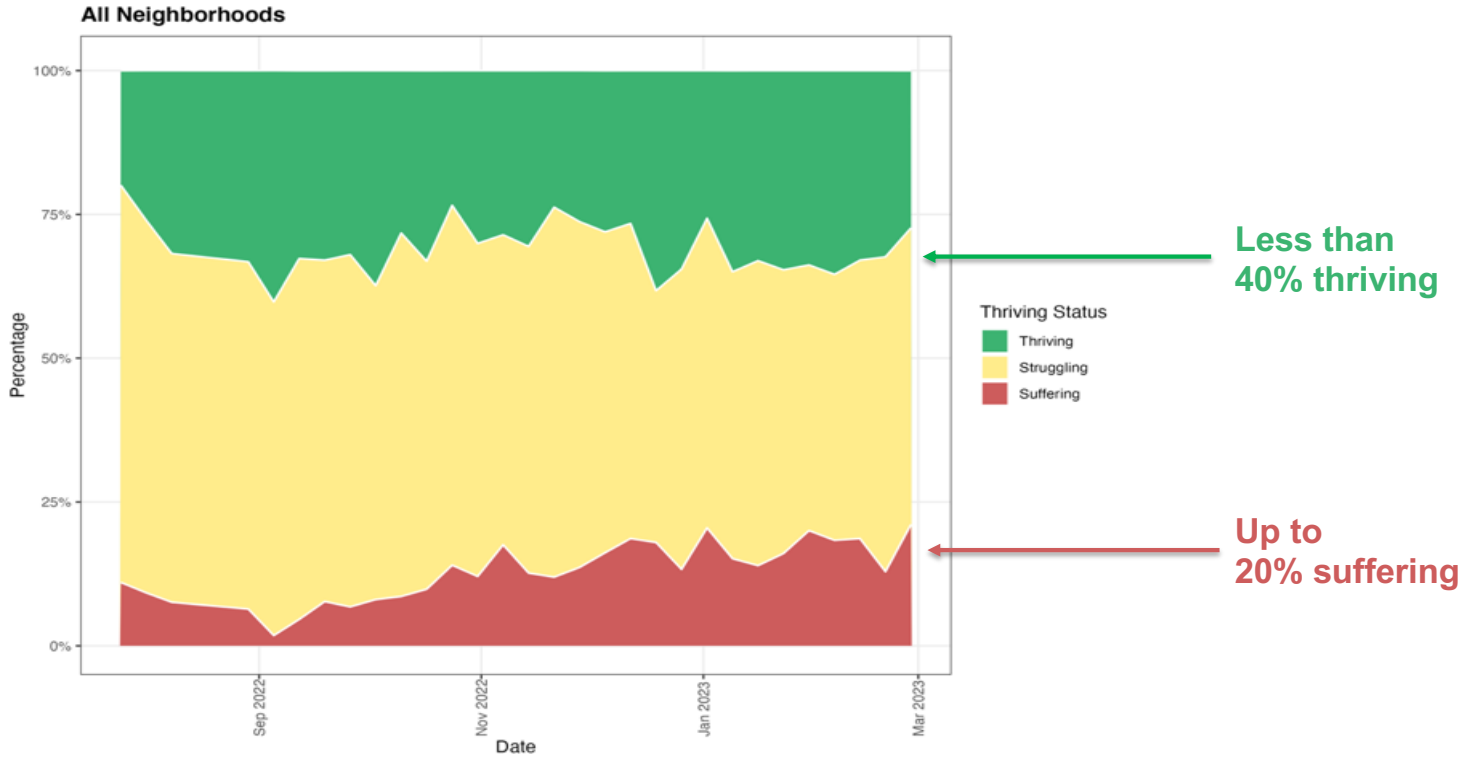
Child Current Life Satisfaction

- **Black**: High
- **Blue**: Middle
- **Red**: Low

Grassroots Campaign | Four Disadvantaged Neighborhoods

2022-2023

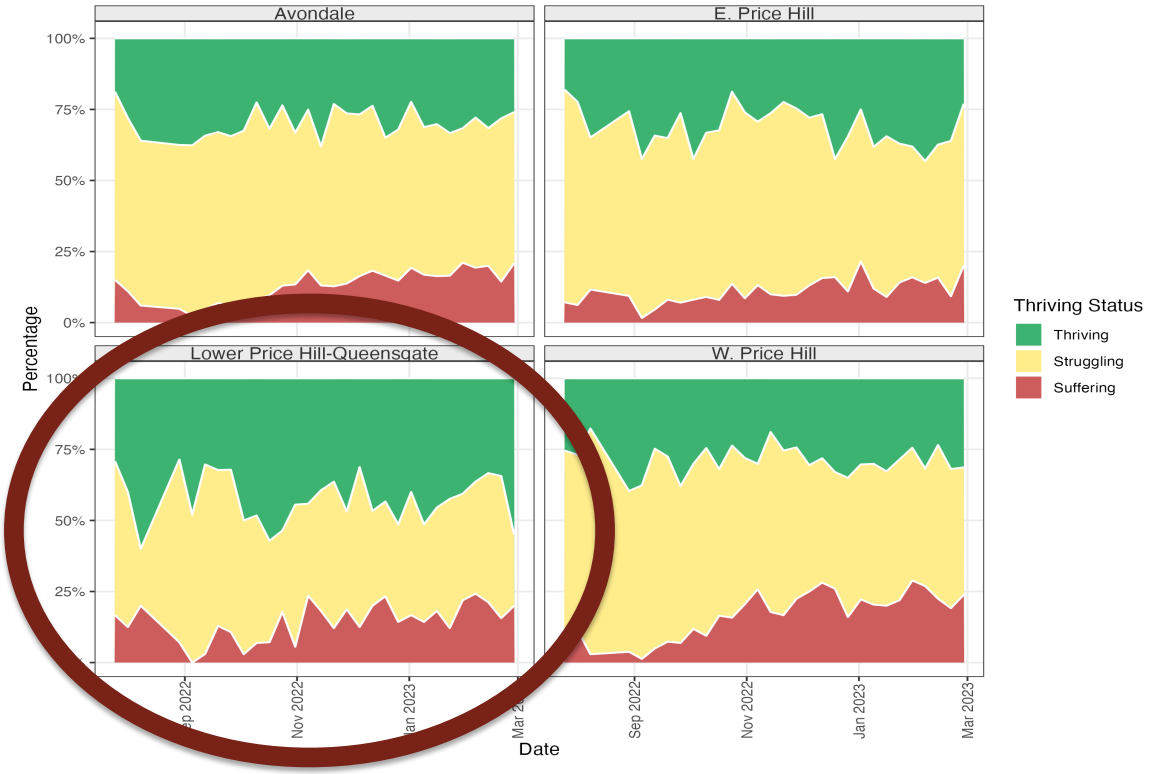
Preliminary Data from 2022-2023



Grassroots Campaign | Four Disadvantaged Neighborhoods

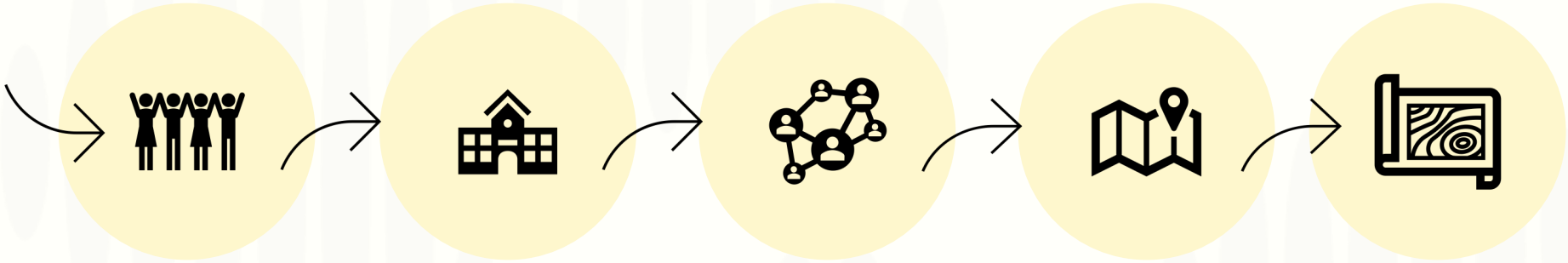
2022-2023

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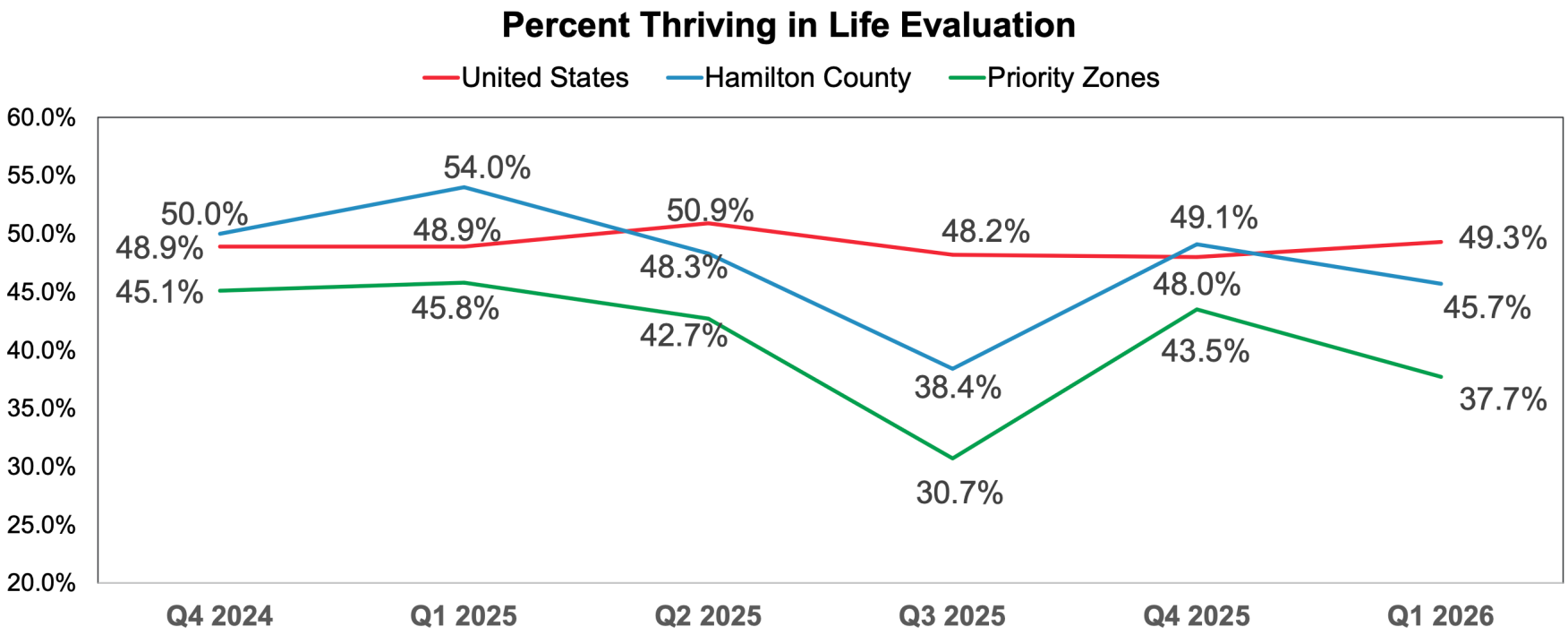
Scaled thru Pull, Not Push

2023-2026

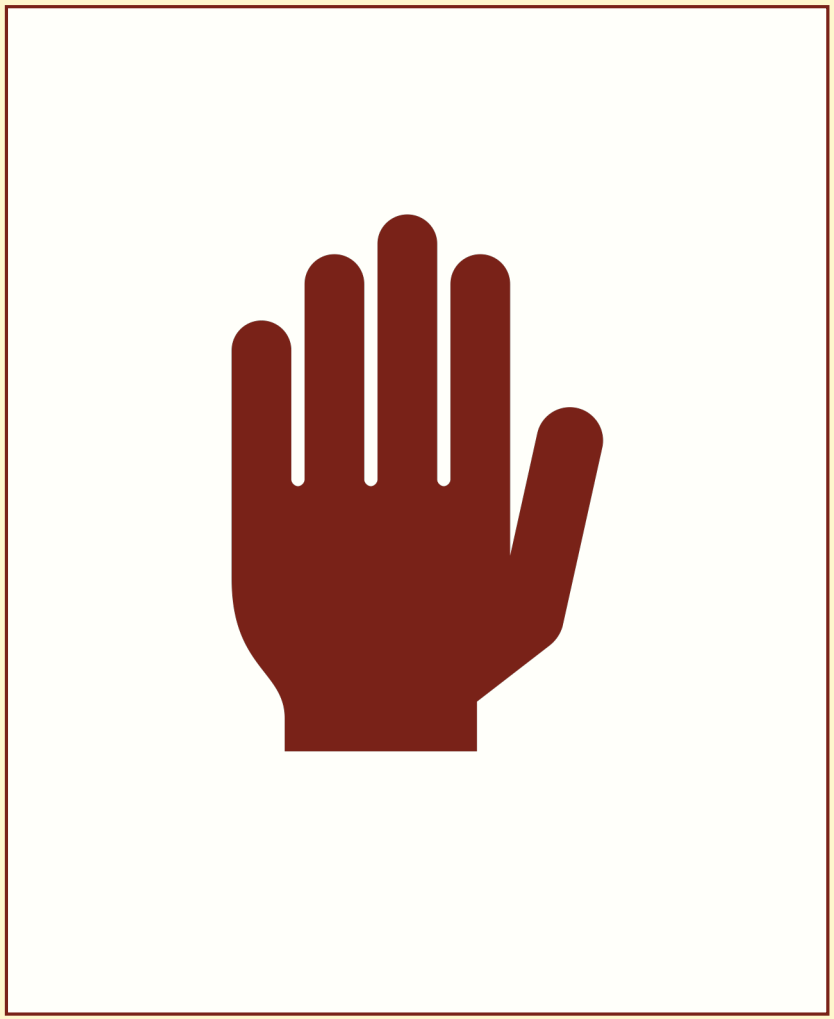


Well-being of the People of Greater Cincinnati

2024-2026



But wait, isn’t collective well-being more than population thriving, struggling, and suffering?

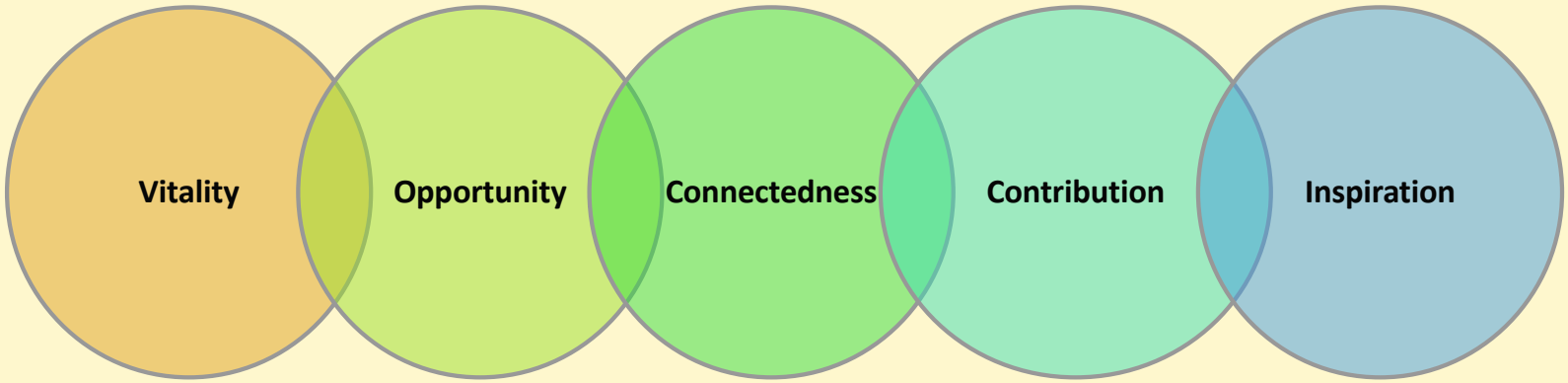


Collective WELL

2026

Collective Well-being

- Group-level construct
- Bi-directionally related to individual well-being
- Holistic assessment of how a *community* or group is doing overall
- 5 bipolar domains adapted from individual well-being theory



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Collective Well-being in Greater Cincinnati

2024-2026

Collective WELL

Vitality

40% of adults in Hamilton County reported **being in very good or excellent physical health**, down to **34%** in the structurally disadvantaged areas.

Opportunity

45% of adults in Hamilton County reported **worrying about money** in the last 7 days, up to **53%** in the structurally disadvantaged areas.

Connected-ness

22% of adults in Hamilton County reported experiencing **loneliness** a lot of the day yesterday, up to **31%** in the structurally disadvantaged areas.

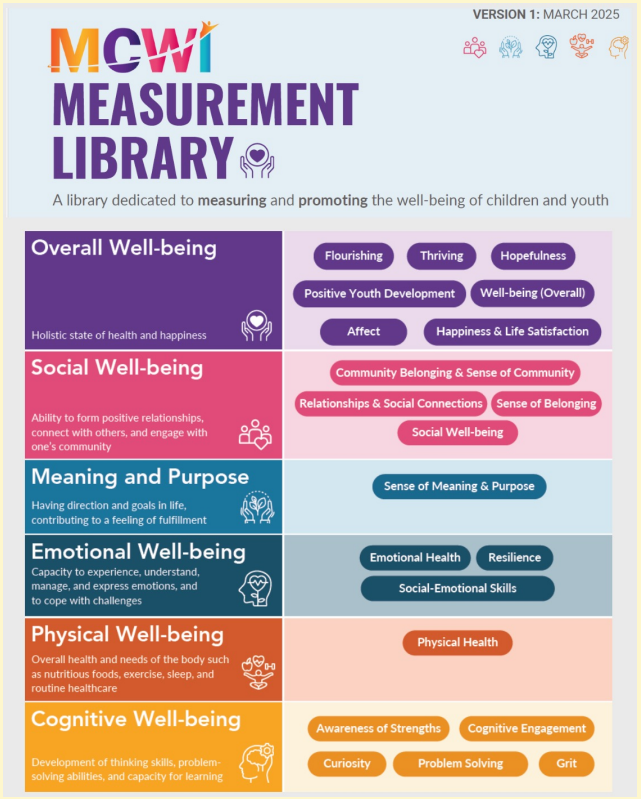
Contribution

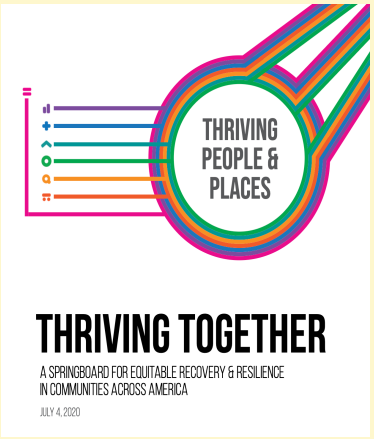
36% of adults in Hamilton County reported **having a say** in what goes on in their community, down to **27%** in the structurally disadvantaged areas.

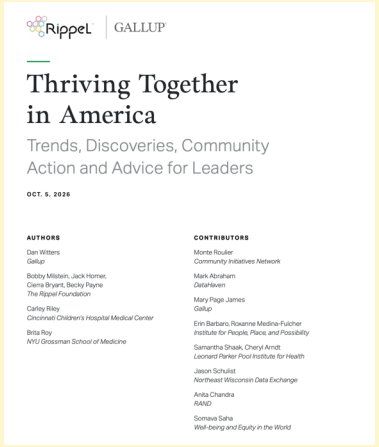
Inspiration

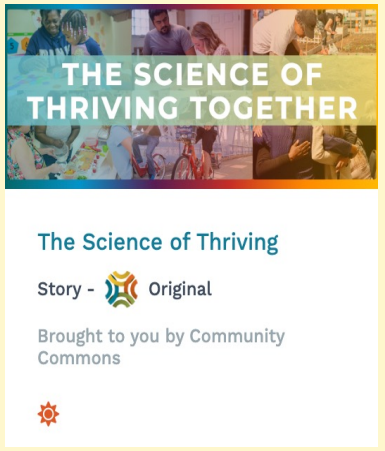
57% of adults in Hamilton County reported **using their strengths** to do what they do best every day, same at **55%** in the structurally disadvantaged areas.

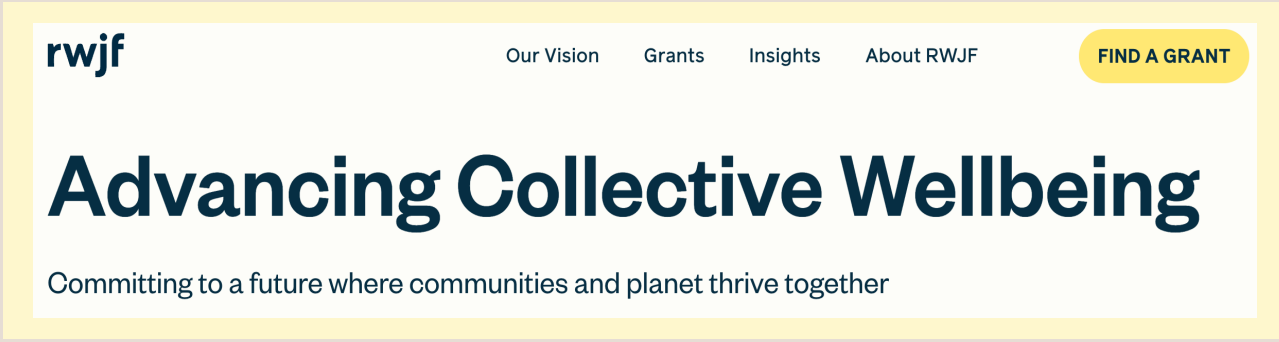
It is possible to measure what matters.



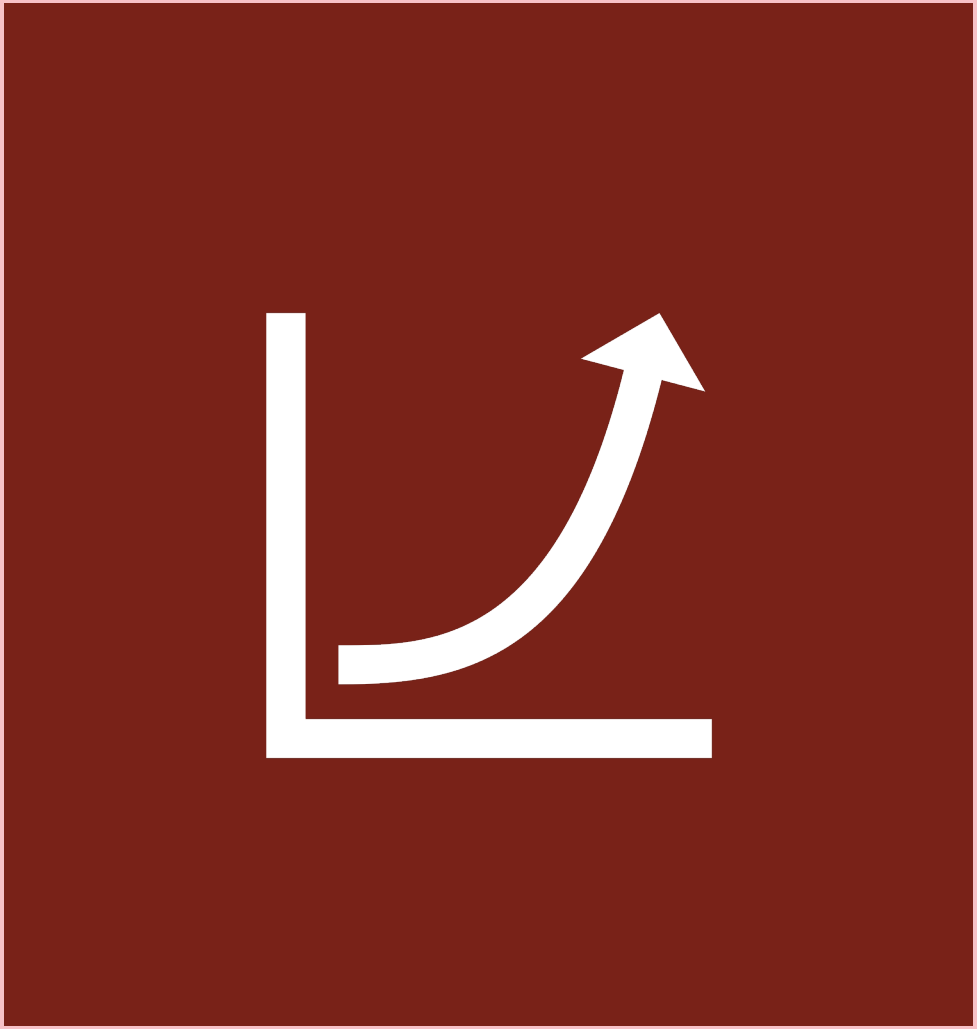




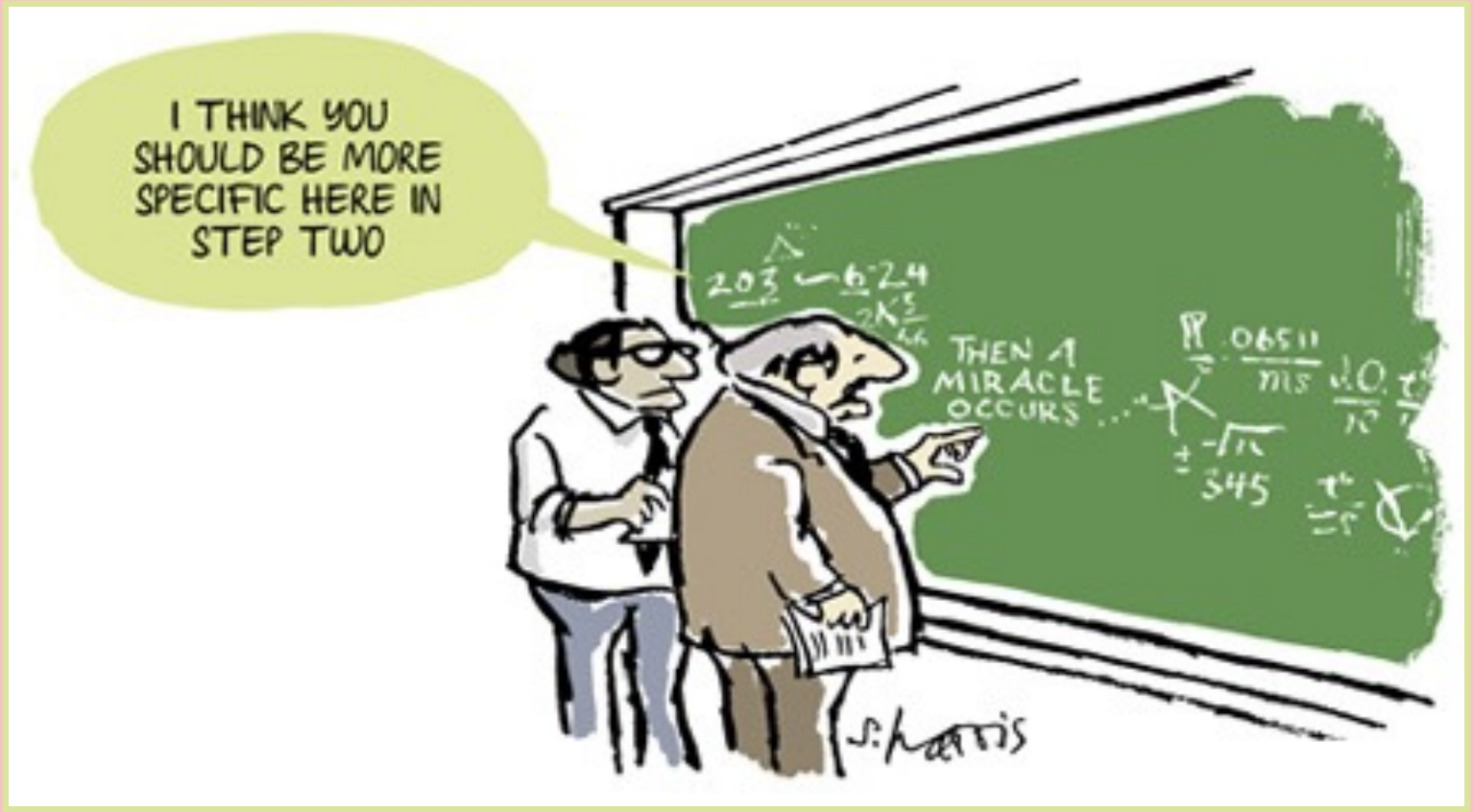




Improve together



Creating Collective Thriving



How to create a thriving community

neighborhoodtoolkit.org

Collaborative Learning System Approach

An approach to solving that is grounded in systems thinking in which engaged members have:

- ✓ Shared purpose
- ✓ Co-created knowledge & action
- ✓ Aligned incentives
- ✓ Shared data & metrics
- ✓ Practice of continuous improvement

Co-production

"An approach where families, patients, partners, providers, and community members work together, sharing influence, skills, and experience to design, own, and analyze outcomes and solutions."



Riley C et al. Equity in co-production: A guidebook for learning, reflection, and action. 2021.

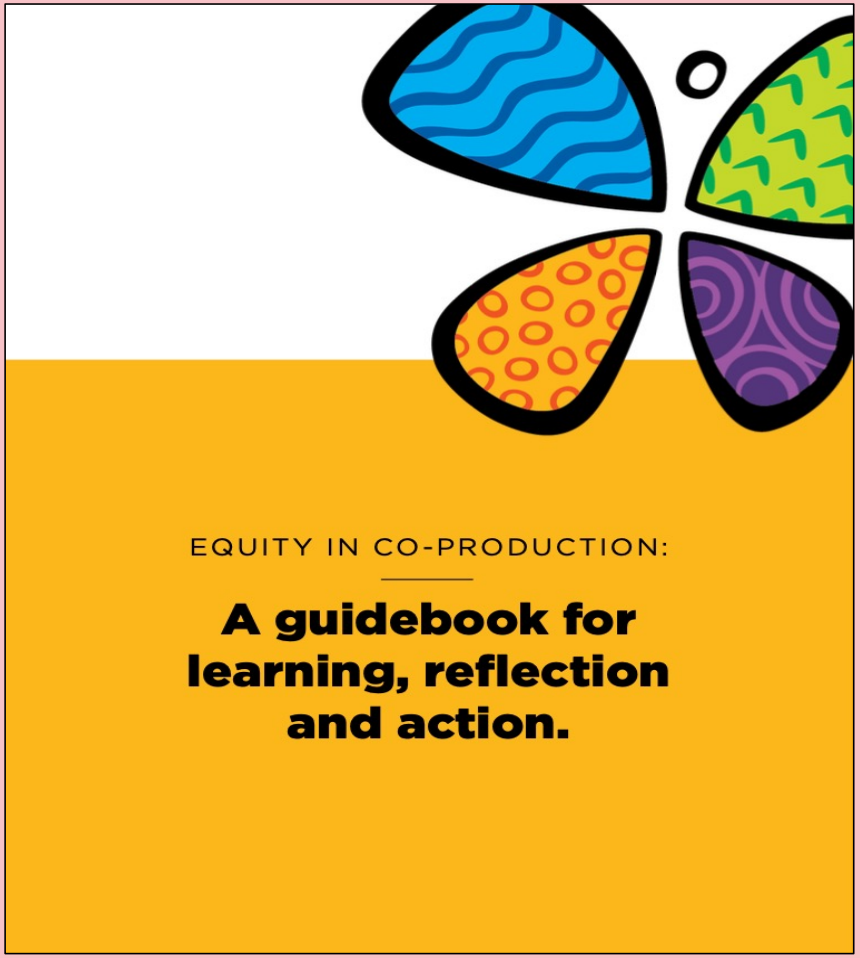
The status quo practice of current systems have been **historically designed to exclude** certain populations, namely low-income communities, communities of color, women, youth, previously incarcerated people, and queer or gender non-conforming community members.

This understanding is important because if **concerted efforts** are not made to break down existing barriers to participation, then by default marginalization occurs.

- Rosa González, Facilitating Power

Equity in Co-production

A Guidebook for Learning, Reflection, and Action



Riley C et al. Equity in co-production: A guidebook for learning, reflection, and action. 2021.

Sustain together



Reflections from the Field



Shared Purpose

Guiding Principles

Shared Data

Co-Creation

Actively Address Power

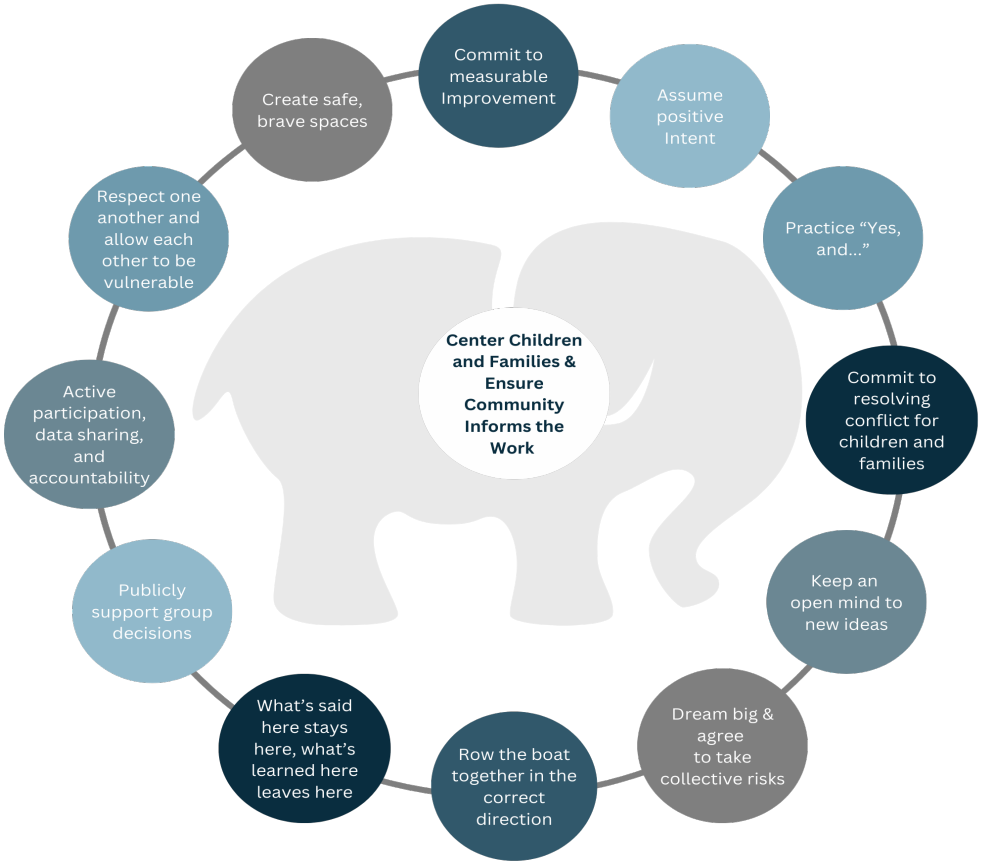
Nurtured Relationships

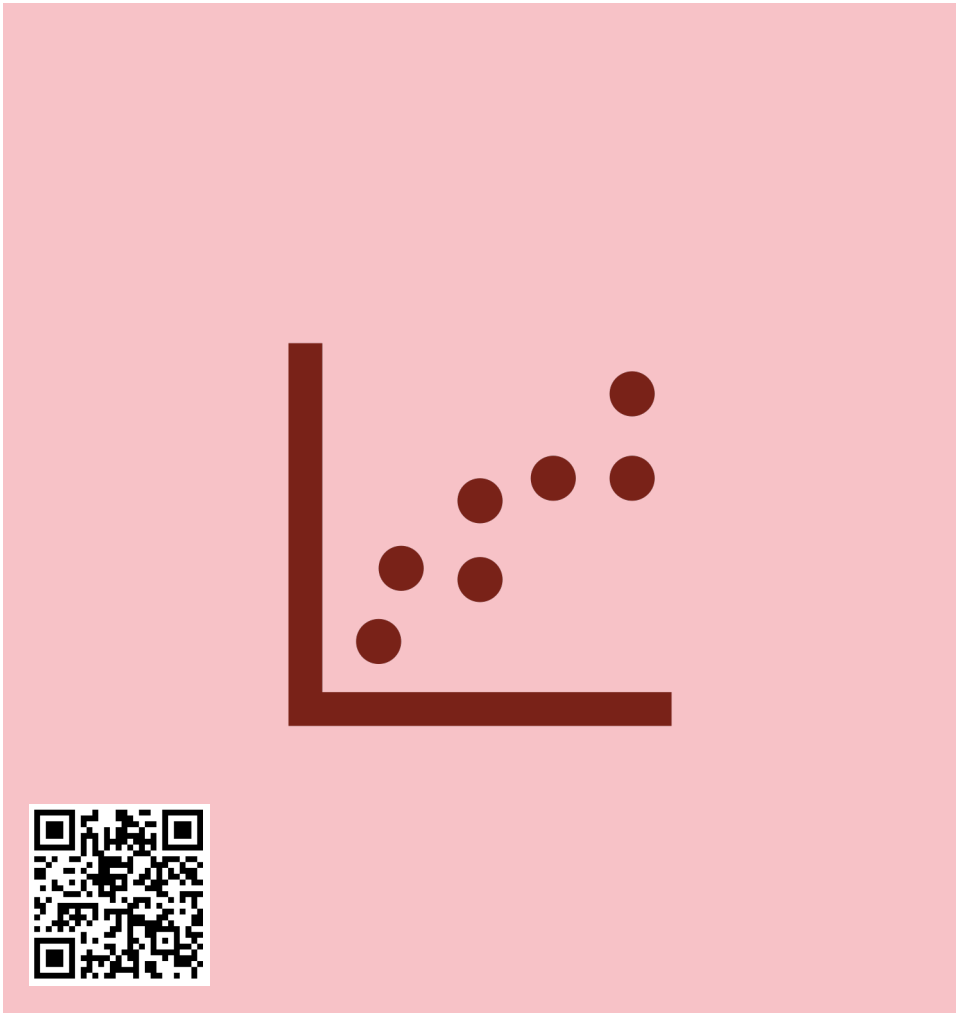
All 70,000 children in Cincinnati have the food that they need to grow, develop, learn, and thrive.

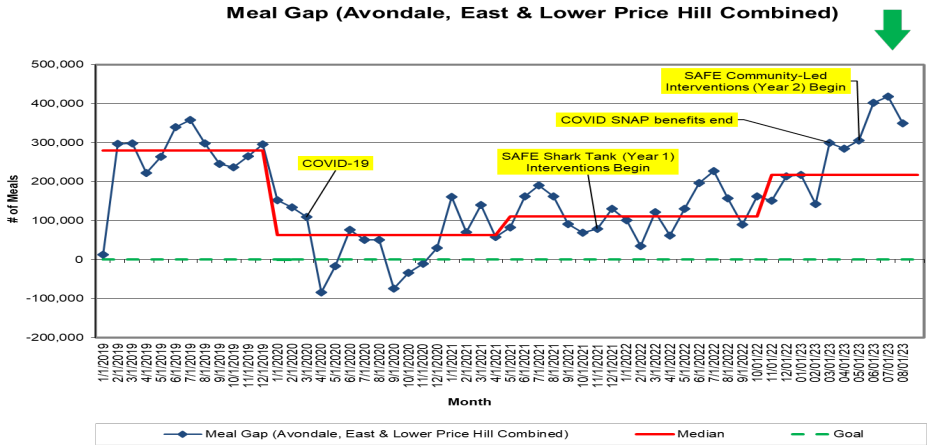
Increase the percentage of system-involved youth who are thriving to 80% by 12.31.2026.

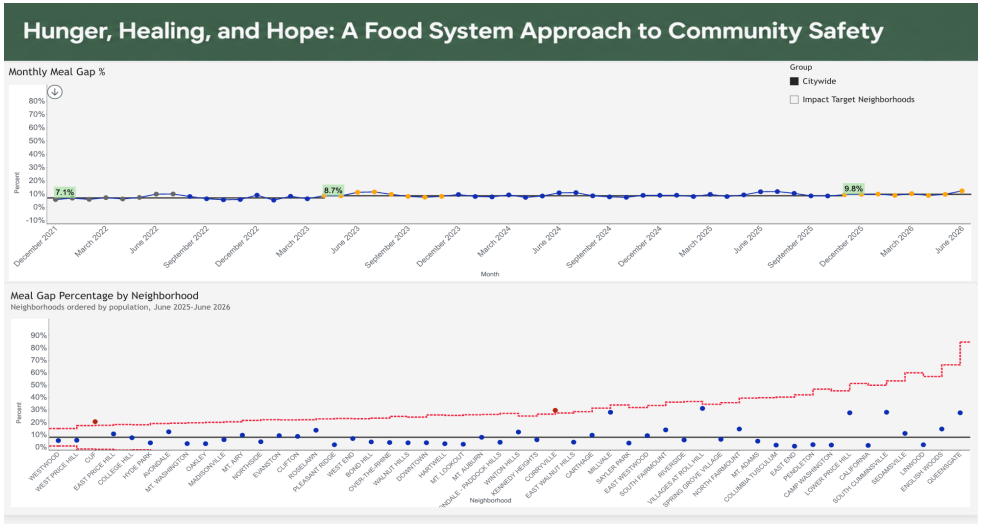
To equitably improve the health & well-being of Sunset Park community members together




Commit to measurable Improvement
Assume positive Intent
Practice "Yes, and..."
Commit to resolving conflict for children and families
Keep an open mind to new ideas
Dream big & agree to take collective risks
Row the boat together in the correct direction
What's said here stays here, what's learned here leaves here
Publicly support group decisions
Active participation, data sharing, and accountability
Respect one another and allow each other to be vulnerable
Create safe, brave spaces
Center Children and Families & Ensure Community Informs the Work




Meal Gap (Avondale, East & Lower Price Hill Combined)
SAFE Community-Led Interventions (Year 2) Begin
COVID SNAP benefits end
SAFE Shark Tank (Year 1) Interventions Begin
COVID-19
# of Meals
Month
Meal Gap (Avondale, East & Lower Price Hill Combined)
Median
Goal

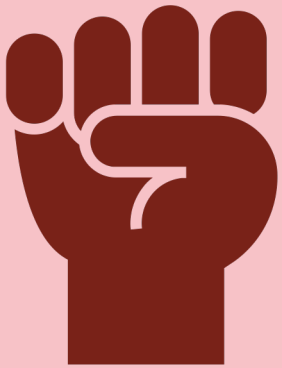

Hunger, Healing, and Hope: A Food System Approach to Community Safety
Monthly Meal Gap %
Group
Citywide
Impact Target Neighborhoods
7.1%
8.7%
9.8%
Meal Gap Percentage by Neighborhood
Neighborhoods ordered by population, June 2025-June 2026
Neighborhood



Co-Production In Practice

Co-production can play out in many ways, depending on your unique team needs—from the way your team operates to your team's goals. The following process map visualizes a representative co-production journey. While this journey isn't comprehensive or universal, it shows the care and intention we take when seeking and building relationships with individuals and organizations in the community. Importantly, we do not intend that all relationships would or should move across the entire relationship continuum. We also view this process map as a living document, always ready to be improved.





"We may [all] come to the table with solid ideas in our heads, but that can transform once walls are down, barriers are down, and people are willing to receive and be vulnerable. Share, but also receive. Honoring the perspectives at the table."

— ACT Parent Partner

Readying yourself for co-production

Practicing co-production often means working in new or different ways, with new or different folks. Adopting self-reflection and mindfulness practices will help you stay in a place of learning, rather than holding onto the feeling that you already have the answers or fear that you might make a mistake.

The truth is, we will make mistakes.

To truly invite collaboration, we have to be prepared to be accountable and vulnerable in the face of missteps and keep learning. And as Maya Angelou once said, "when we know better, we do better." Here's a few ways you can ready yourself for the co-production journey.

Gain an understanding of the root causes of inequity.

Educate yourself on the ways structural racism and white supremacist practices have shaped our nation's culture, infrastructure, and systems. As you learn, center those with firsthand experiences of inequity as the experts on issues that impact them.

Build relationships to build trust.

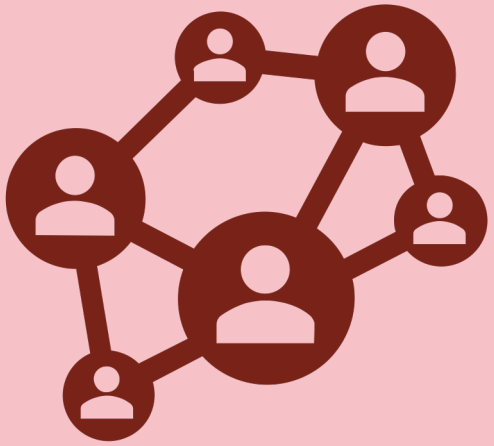
Expect to spend time getting to know those you're co-producing with, deciding how you want to work together, and understanding context before you can jump to solutions or interventions. To succeed, co-production requires partnership among equals — with mutual respect, empathic listening, appreciation for diverse perspectives, shared responsibility, and aligned expectations.

Listen, adapt, and respond to community priorities.

Expect your goals and priorities to shift based on community priorities. This may mean we need to drop our agenda, and that's okay. (Tip: Ensure community stakeholders are a part of setting priorities and planning initiatives early on!). Be ready to drop a preconceived agenda, sit with uncomfortable conversations, change plans, strategies, or even your mission, to address the needs that community partners lift up.

Share resources and relinquish power.

Power dynamics show up in whose voices hold weight, whose expertise is valued, and who is invited into decision-making (not just feedback). To do co-production equitably, we must approach planning and decision-making in ways that proactively shift who holds power 'by default'. Position those with lived experience as core team members and key decision makers throughout the change process.





Our Learning Objectives

1

Describe CWB

Well-being is a holistic, positively framed, multi-dimensional, person-centered assessment of quality of life. At the collective level, it is a group level construct that is bidirectionally associated with individual well-being.

2

Measure CWB

CWB can be measured with a small set of measures, including a simple two-item self-report measure (Cantril's Ladder). When aggregated, this measure can tell us who is thriving and who is not with and across populations.

3

Improve Together

A learning system approach with continuous co-production offers a way to solve wicked problems undermining optimal well-being and to nurture the conditions for collective thriving.

4

Sustain Together

Strategies to sustain cross-sector collaboration across the long timelines that community change requires include shared purpose, guiding principles, shared data, co-creation, actively addressed power dynamics, and nurtured relationships.

Thank you.

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