

# The pitfalls of focusing on 'Child Poverty' and 'Vulnerable Families'. Is Collective Impact the answer?

PRESENTATION FOR THE COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR RESEARCH FORUM

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## Why are you here today? Why does the 'Third Sector' exist?



- Social Change
- Make the world a better place
- Dream of a better tomorrow





## Collective Impact: A model for accelerating social change?



Collective Impact : the **'long term commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to work toward a common agenda for solving a specific/complex social problem'**  
- Kania and Kramer, 2011



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## Collective Impact

Presents itself as:

- a fundamentally different,
- more disciplined and
- higher performing approach

to achieving large-scale social change for 'wicked/complex social problems'.

Rationale:

No single organisation can create large scale social change alone...It therefore requires organisations from various sectors to coordinate their efforts and work together.



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## The 5 Conditions of Collective Impact

- 1 **Common Agenda**
  - Common understanding of the problem
  - Shared vision for change
- 2 **Shared Measurement**
  - Collecting data and measuring results
  - Focus on performance management
  - Shared accountability
- 3 **Mutually Reinforcing Activities**
  - Differentiated approaches
  - Coordination through joint plan of action
- 4 **Continuous Communication**
  - Consistent and open communication
  - Focus on building trust
- 5 **Backbone Support**
  - Separate organization(s) with staff
  - Resources and skills to convene and coordinate participating organizations

### Feasibility Study on Collective Impact: 'Making the Wellington Region the best place in New Zealand to raise a family' – Nov 2014



- Concept's origins were in a desire for social change, and a desire to address issues of inequality
- 55 interviewees – anonymous basis
- Range of 'key leaders', influential people across different sectors
- Plus people closer to the 'grassroots'.

## Visiting 'high-deprivation' areas



- High-rates of unemployment
- Inter-generational welfare-dependency
- High rates of drug and alcohol abuse
- High rates of domestic violence
- Full of state housing – cold, damp houses

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## What I found:

- *Strong sense of community*
- *People have lived here for years*
- *Everyone knows everyone and helps each other out*
- *People DO do everything for their kids*



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## What I was told:

*"No one here is in poverty. No one here needs saving...I get so much of this – you're not the first person to come in here wanting to talk to some 'high-needs families'...It's all show-pony stuff"*

*"It goes back to that there is nothing wrong here. There is an attitude of 'you haven't got what I've got, so you must be in poverty'. We don't see ourselves in poverty."*



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## What people saw as the 'real problems'



Over  
**200,000**  
raincoats  
given to kids  
since 2005




*"We have created an industry out of poverty – KidsCan, Fonterra Milk in Schools, Fruit in Schools...All of this does not require our parents to change anything; to do anything themselves."*

*"People have become accustomed to being 'service-provided to' ...If I was a hungry-broken mother, there are 53 different organisations in this area that I could go to."*

*"It's the attitudes that are actually the barriers...If you go down to WINZ there's the instant attitude of the receptionist towards people on benefits. I stay at home because then I don't have to deal with people who put me down because I'm already down enough."*

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## Some wise observations about C.I.

*"My concern about doing a collective impact thing is that it will end up as an exercise for the well-educated middle-class people who get a great deal of satisfaction out of this model...When they try to engage the [marginalised], that group will feel like stuff is being done to them. They were not part of it from the outset."*

**"There is a lesson in here about collective impact. What does it mean for them [the marginalised and hard-to-reach]? What things might they want to do?"**

*"I have mixed feelings. It is a group of great people with good intentions coming to help "us" – assuming that we want help/need help. If you really want to help, then encourage these people [“the marginalised, the hard to reach, the poor”] to have their own discussions and develop solutions."*

*"We see these things come and go but for our community very little changes. Six to seven years ago 'Public-Private Partnerships' were all the rage, now it's 'Collective Impact'...As someone who has been around for a few decades, I am really skeptical about where the next big thing is coming from."*

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## CHILD-RICH COMMUNITIES: AOTEAROA'S 'BRIGHT SPOTS' – JULY-DEC 2015



- Purpose: to explore NZ's 'Bright Spots' – local community initiatives that are making a positive difference.
- 21 community initiatives
  - 20 of 21 were in 'low-income' communities/ 'high-deprivation' areas (NZ Deprivation Index)
- Asks: What's working?
- Appreciative Inquiry approach

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## Learning 1: See 'the poor' as the greatest asset, not a problem to be fixed



- *"You can't build on broken" – Angela Blanchard, USA*
- *Well meaning people asking the wrong questions*  
*"Always see the community as resourceful. Join with them where they are at. We are not the experts...Our vision has always been to help everyone discover their potential" – Bruce Maden, Te Aroha Noa Community Services.*
- *"We're all good at doing stuff...There are as many gangs doing good stuff as there are ones doing bad." – Dennis Makalio, Mongrel Mob Rogue Porirua*

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## Learning 2: Counter the culture of disempowerment – get people to ‘dream’



*“We are working to counter about forty years of non-engagement by residents and over-reliance on outside agencies...We want people to realise we’ve got what we need – and it’s right here within our streets and neighbourhoods – our people.” – Annette Toupili, Tiakina ō Tātou Tamariki.*

*“Historically in this community people give up far too young...The way they are spoken to and treated. I can see why they [give up]...The Kaiarahi is working to instill positive beliefs. You can see that ‘give up attitude’ start to dissolve. And that is what we’re after.” – Sally Wilson, Raurimu Avenue Primary School*

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## Learning 2: Counter the culture of disempowerment – get people to ‘dream’



*“I have emphasised all along that we are here to help people fulfil their dreams. We ask – do you have a dream?” – Bruce Maden, Te Aroha Noa*

*“The hardest part is getting whānau to dream again...The ‘goals’ that the whānau set when they work with me – that is an outcome in itself.” – Leanne Karauna, Mangakino Area School Whānau Ora Navigator*

*“This way of working brings about an intergenerational change in the whole whānau because aspirations are lifted.” – Royce Dewe, Whanganui Central Baptist Kindergartens*

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## Learning 2: Counter the culture of disempowerment – get people to ‘dream’



*“People have become accustomed to being ‘service-provided to’...At Common Unity, we are not here to ‘give out’ anything to people. We believe everyone has something to give, to share. We are asking people to join us and contribute.” – Julia Milne, Common Unity Project Aotearoa*

*“The most fundamental part of our work is for people to cultivate a new belief about themselves.” – Julia Milne, Common Unity Project Aotearoa*

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## Learning 2: Counter the culture of disempowerment – get people to ‘DO’

*“What is most useful? When our community get up and do things themselves.” – Dennis Makalio*



Photo: CHRIS SKELTON/The Dominion Post

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We need to begin with some new questions:

- \*What is working?      \*What is strong?*
- \*What is right?   \*What do you love doing?*
- \*What do you dream about?*



Photo: Fairfax Media



Photo by Jono Rotman, 'Mongrel Mob Portraits', 2008



IF YOU WANNA MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE  
TAKE A LOOK AT YOURSELF AND  
THEN MAKE A CHANGE.

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## Citations/References/Disclaimers

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## Contact Michelle

I am always interested in:

- other speaking engagements to share my learnings
- work that makes a difference – please contact me to discuss my independent consulting work

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