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Non-Profits and Community Action: Analysing Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness' Theory of Change

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Founded in 1982, The Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH) is an organisation that works on the frontline to assist the needy by championing for resources, pushing for policy reforms and support to end homelessness, creating opportunities for training and skill building so that assistance providers have the best practices, and analysing and collecting state wide data to help further efforts to end homelessness. As put eloquently by their Youth Systems Coordinator, Mr. Carl Asikainen, CCEH's goal is to "make homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring" (Asikainen Interview). CCEH represents the voices of emergency service providers, transitional housing providers, community and business leaders, etc, all of whom are committed to the mission of preventing and ending this crisis. CCEH also partners up with community members and other community and youth service agencies to enhance their work in the housing sector. With years of experience in working with the people of Connecticut, CCEH has been able to build a reputation as a genuine and trustworthy ally of the homeless community and has consistently worked to resolve this crisis. They have faced numerous challenges but also achieved many successes along the way and their dedication to the cause has immensely impacted the lives of many. Our work with CCEH has involved meeting and interviewing Mr. Asikainen about the organisation's overview, understanding the work they do with their youth chapter, identifying areas that they need help with (especially in creating a stronger social media presence), creating content that disseminates information to their audiences and networks through their social medias, as well as learning and analysing their underlying theory of change. In my exploration of CCEH's work model, I see that they don't adhere to one specific theory of change but rather draw inspiration from several others to come up with their own unique theory of change. Their theory is rooted in the need for legal advocacy, education, community outreach, and community building when trying to create change. I will divide this paper into separate sections to discuss the influences of several theories on CCEH.

Women Centred Model of Change

Bringing people together to resolve issues and create necessary change and enhancing community services to meet community needs, as well as using education to increase awareness and build networks are at the core of the Women Centred model of change (Myers-Lipton et al.). CCEH has been able to use certain elements of the Women Centred model and extrapolate its ideas to fit their needs and goals, giving them tools to create a solid foundation for their own unique and customised theory of change. In the interview we conducted, Mr. Asikainen talked about CCEH's venture where they directly work with people being released from prison and who have previously stated that they have no home to go to. He specified the heightened role of community building and networking in "addressing re-entry, support and coordination for these folks" (Asikainen Interview). Mr. Asikainen is also spearheading the Youth Outreach Leadership Group that targets young adults to think about the needs of homeless youths and gets them to engage with the community. College/ high school kids reaching out and empathising with people their age in crisis makes services and opportunities for the homeless youth more accessible and relatable. CCEH also largely helps service providers by educating, training and providing networking opportunities for them so that they are capable of using limited resources effectively to end homelessness. They've actively worked with parole and probation officers, department of

correction members, shelter assistance and volunteers to better their approaches towards ending/preventing homelessness. CCEH works closely with state and federal governments to improve laws and policies surrounding housing accessibility, costs of public systems like emergency assistance, hospitals and schools, availability of resources to support the homeless community, etc. These governmental partnerships help CCEH provide better facilities to the people they are working with and for, thus bringing them closer to their goal with each reform. All of these methods used by CCEH to create change are evidence of them being influenced by the Women Centred Model of Change.

Elements of Indigenous Theory of Change

The indigenous theory of change (ITC) works as a framework for thinking about change. ITC brings forth the idea that the principles of balance, contention, sovereignty and relationships are crucial to envisioning change. As per the theory, balance is the rejection of blind democracy (one voice, one vote) and is rooted instead in people with different roles having different responsibilities and powers that need not be equal and contention is the disruption of majoritarian and unilateral worldviews through various means including self and communal education. ITC also claims that sovereignty is acknowledging people's social, cultural, spiritual and communal rights, and that relationships are the harmonious collectivity of people and ideas as well as the celebration and recognition of diversity (Tuck). As per Eve Tuck, a congruous union of these principles helps re-envision social action. Any reform can only happen through the voice of its community and hence both policy makers as well as the general public would be the biggest drivers of change as per ITC. It is to this end that the people practically affected by the issues are encouraged to conduct and help with the research through Participatory Action Research instead of calling upon academic experts like a professor or professional researcher etc. This approach uses collaborative and reflective methods of change to understand the issue (or even the world) holistically rather than monolithic ideas regurgitated by researchers (Tuck). Use of such ideas from ITC are seen in CCEH's daily workings. CCEH's team structure is based on who is most informed and capable of dealing with particular issues unlike other non-profits where we see everyone doing everything. For example, as Carl mentions, they have a specific communications department that has the most say in all things related to content creation, social media or engagement with their volunteers, workers, trustees, etc, (Asikainen Interview). This work structure could be seen as drawing from the principle of balance that allows for qualified people to have authority over certain decision making in their field of expertise. CCEH pushes for advocacy and education about the homelessness crisis to challenge the idea of meritocracy and stereotypical thinking of 'if people work hard then they won't be homeless'. This emphasis on education and challenging ideas that are now normalised resonates with ITC's principle of contention. CCEH also pushes for housing to be recognised as a human right and for their community impact team to increase collaboration and improve local systems as per the community's vision of political development. This shows that CCEH imbibes the indigenous principles of sovereignty and relationships by recognising individual and communal rights as well as increased collective building. CCEH's multi-layered work with grassroot communities, other organisations, municipalities and even the state/federal government show that their drivers of change are similar to ITC. CCEH's Youth Outreach Leadership Group, the curriculums they create for their sessions to engage with homeless people, their Homeless Management Information system and Point in Time initiatives, etc, use the PAR technique and show signs of collaborative, reflective and creative research for change.

Elements of Critical Race Theory

From their site and from our conversation with Carl, one could see that CCEH is trying to make use of structures and current policies to help the homeless community gain access to their rights (Asikainen Interview). Their work with the Department of Corrections, police and emergency service providers, prison officers and state leaders, to change policies and make information more readily available to people in crisis, after serious contemplation by affected communities of colour, indicates that CCEH draws ideas from Critical Race theory. CRT recognises that the law and legal institutions are inherently racist and are monopolised by the elite (most often white people) to further their agendas. CRT brings forth the idea that one must recognise the structural barriers and flaws within our cultural, economic and legal systems to fully understand and tackle the issue one is dealing with (racism in its case). One can do this by reforming the law to make procedures equitable and available for all, reflecting on the experiences of people of colour to examine our political structures (Delgado et al. 1-15). CCEH recognises the deinstitutionalisation of mental health hospitals and its consequences, the housing discrimination and abuse faced by people of colour, denial of housing for people with past criminal records, mandatory deposits and higher fees for the poor, reduced access to schooling, banking and much more as structural barriers in the fight to end homelessness. CCEH realises that acknowledging and understanding these barriers in the system is the only way to address homelessness as an issue holistically and to our best potential. Drawing off CRT, CCEH's work is not about eliminating discrimination while still operating under a capitalist and privatised structure and instead is about understanding how these structures affect communities and how legal advocacy, institutional reform and inclusion of marginalised voices can help societies deal with the consequences of such discrimination.

Elements of the Alinsky Model and Idealistic Theory

It's important to note that CCEH has weaknesses like every other non-profit organisation. Its model for change shows similar failings as the failings of the Alinsky model and the Idealistic theory of change. While CCEH acknowledges the structural barriers set in place for homeless people and how minority communities, especially people of colour, are twice as likely to be homeless, they do not address these issues through their work. They address the symptoms of the barriers (homelessness, overflowing shelters, etc) through policy changes, more emergency services, push for affordable housing, etc. The deep rooted issues of racism and incarceration of black and brown people, the growing divide between the poor and the rich, the stigmatisation of mental health care, increasing inequalities due to ingrained capitalist structures and ideologies, and much more, that are the grassroot reasons for millions of people not having stable housing are not part of CCEH's work agenda. The idealistic theory believes that ideology, beliefs and values are drivers of social change. In having social problems highlighted and worked on based on our value systems (that are skewed by majoritarian understandings of social needs and change), the theory ends up focusing on the surface level issues that arise. The theory tries to use development techniques and reforms to address these issues without actually finding solutions to the fundamental socio-economic and political challenges (Myers-Lipton et al.). The Alinsky model believes in one leader leading the fight for marginalised communities to get a voice in the larger public sphere. It works on the principles of direct confrontation for quick results and change in society. However, the Alinsky model fails to critique capitalism as a major cause for unrest within the working class while trying to fight for these communities, which is an aspect where CCEH falls short too (Myers-Lipton et al.). CCEH's model, the Alinsky model and the Idealistic theory all share common weaknesses of not engaging with the intrinsic problems

existing in our society and instead trying to fix important yet superficial problems by staying within the current world order.

CCEH's Theory of Change

Since CCEH acts like a mother organisation that partners up with several smaller organisations, service centres, youth groups, etc, it does not have one specific theory of change. Its unique take on envisioning change is an amalgamation of several visions, goals, ideals and principles, stemming from their 100 plus members. CCEH has built itself as an expansive network working tirelessly to end homelessness and does so with community, research, education and advocacy at its core. By proving that homelessness is not a failure and instead is the result of a broken system, CCEH has made great leaps in building trust, destigmatising homelessness and providing opportunities for the community they work with. While I may not have a complete understanding of their Theory of Change and most probably will need months and years of work with them to do so, their influences and extrapolations from actualised theories gives them a distinctive Theory of Change.

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