

Be Your Best helps set a foundation for community success

- **By Dana Merryday, for The Chronicle, issue August 28, 2021**

First of a two-part series.

Be Your Best started as a dream and has grown from a loose-knit collective into an almost formal organization about to embrace 501-c-3 status.

It is another one of those “only in Cottage Grove”-type stories that involve people seeing a need and collaborating with others in the community to make things happen. The connections across many strands led to some of the amazing results we see here. For whatever reason Cottage Grove seems to be blessed with folks who have special talents and the drive to make this a happier, healthier place.

In 2013 Amy Callahan-Tracewell was working as the director of the Cottage Grove Community Hospital Foundation at the local PeaceHealth facility. The health of the community was already on her mind. The 2008 recession was still being felt and the provisions of the Affordable Care Act were slowly being implemented.

The area of South Lane and North Douglas counties are, as in many parts of Oregon, primarily rural and sparsely populated. In addition there is a high level of poverty in the area, some of it going back generations. Some excerpts from the Lane County Community Health Center webpage describes both the needs and challenges that exist in this region:

“Two of the top 6 primary care service areas with the highest level of unmet need in Oregon are located in South Lane and North Douglas Counties – Cottage Grove and Drain/Yoncalla areas. The community’s urgent need far surpasses local provider capacity in every area, especially oral healthcare. PeaceHealth Cottage Grove Medical Center has the highest rate of emergency department use per 1000 patients for oral health-related issues in Lane County and the second-highest rate in the state.

“Overbooking of local providers results in over 4000 local patients traveling to CHCLC sites in Eugene and Springfield. About 1-in-4 Cottage Grove residents and almost 1-in-2 local families with children under age 5 live below the federal poverty level.”

In view of this overwhelming health need, Callahan-Tracewell and former local newspaper publisher Jody Rolnick, started brainstorming how to get multiple organizations and agencies to work together to solve complex problems. They discovered the Collective Impact Model while attending a multi-day workshop sponsored by United Way of Douglas County and the Ford Family Foundation. Several others from Cottage Grove attended and together they formed the backbone of “Be Your Best.”

Collective Impact is a method of attacking big societal problems like education reform, environmental restoration, or in this case, healthcare for a rural, under-served population.

“We in social service agencies are all pointing our arrows at a problem and working in isolation with our little piece of the puzzle using our own viewpoint. After becoming familiar with Collective Impact we wanted to use it to develop what resources we have in Cottage Grove and inform that process. Our aim all along was to get all the organizations who had a stake in health care to align their arrows in the same direction,” Callahan-Tracewell said.

Success in education reform in the Cincinnati area under “Strive” and a cleanup of the highly polluted Elizabeth River in Eastern Virginia were both accomplished through the Collective Impact model. This model of collaborative problem solving relies on five factors or conditions. It is not a set of predetermined answers but rather conditions that promote the emergence of a solution through the process. The five elements are: a common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support (a separate organization that manages the initiative as well as coordinating the participating agencies and organizations; BYB has served as the backbone in CG).

BYB co-creators Callahan-Tracewell and Rolnick sought to capture the spirit of their vision in a name. “An idea needs a name and we wanted something to give life to what we hoped to do. We didn’t want anything punitive but rather something people could latch on to, and that is when we hit on Be Your Best. It applied to so many levels, the right approach and locally made. We hired a graphic designer and we put the logo on bags and stickers to help spread the word,” Callahan-Tracewell said.

Of the 12 people who attended the workshop on Collective Impact, many joined in as Be Your Best coalesced into a “loose” group. Jackie Lester of South Lane School District was an early recruit, as was Samantha Duncan. “It was not a standard group. We just started meeting monthly and we connected to as many other groups and agencies as possible that were also working in health. United Way was a big supporter of using Collective Impact to improve communication,” Rolnick said.

The 2037 Cottage Grove Community Vision Plan (which coincides with the 150th anniversary of Cottage Grove’s incorporation), includes two strategy sections that touch on healthcare in the Grove. Jim Gilroy, a BYB member, reminds us that, “The 2037 Vision plan was updated at the same time BYB was forming, putting community healthcare as a top goal. This gives us leverage for grants by including the value as important to the goals of the City and community.”

BYB formed in the fall of 2013 and by March of 2014 had a cross-sector steering committee with representatives from the City of Cottage Grove, private business, the Community Development Corporation, faith-based community, Family Relief Nursery, South Lane Mental Health, PeaceHealth, United Way of Lane County, Another Way Enterprises, Sustainable Cottage Grove among others meeting monthly.

One of the realizations at that time was the need for a community-wide needs assessment and asset mapping specifically tailored to the South Lane/North Douglas area. Funding was secured and BYB helped coordinate this vital first step in looking into the healthcare needs that would

provide prenatal-to-grave care for local residents. Another idea that came out of the process was identifying the social determinants of health that affect community members. These range from affordable housing and living wages, to mental health, education, and all of the conditions that community members face as they are born, grow up in, and age here.

This type of research is essential for drawing up a Community Health Improvement Plan, which was done not only overall but by agencies such as Lane County and PeaceHealth Cottage Grove Hospital, among others.

SLSD, along with money secured through an Oregon Community Foundation donor-advised fund, supported a newly created position with the focus of community outreach to support the health of families and their children, prenatally through 20 years old (P-20). This P-20 Coordinator position was created and held by Jackie Lester, former elementary principal for SLSD.

Lester identified BYB as a key collaborator for her work. Through a partnership with SLMH, a \$100,000 grant was obtained from the Trillium Community Wellness Grant Fund administered through OCF to support a successful maternal-health project – the South Lane Family Support Collaborative. This project expanded the existing SLSD Family Resource Center, Peggy’s Primary Connection. Coordinator and PeaceHealth community health worker, Ana Maria Dudley, led the project and involved the collaboration of many organizations participating in BYB and working with new mothers and children. The South Lane Family Support Collaborative was administered through the South Lane School district and tied together the type of collaborative partnership that hallmarks BYB: some of the partners were Community Sharing, FRN, Head Start, Parent Partnership, SLMH, PeaceHealth CG Hospital, South Lane Wheels, and the Maternal Health Programs administered through Lane County Public Health, among many others.

Exciting news was announced in July, that after years of planning and working by the partners of BYB and federal, state, and county governments, some results of the Critical Impact work in the form of the first rural Community Health Center will be coming to Cottage Grove, to be housed in the LCC Building.

Referring to where BYB is right now, Samantha Duncan, BYB director, replied, “BYB is working on the 2021-25 Community Health Improvement Plan, aligning the priorities and strategies that we have identified in South Lane with the County CHIP. Our role in the progress and development of the CHC-CTE is included in the South Lane CHIP, along with other developing and ongoing projects and partnerships. This work will help us track the progress being made in our community, which we can report to the larger stakeholders such as PeaceHealth, PacificSource, and Lane County to help them build a more comprehensive picture. It will also help support requests for grant funding for our partners, as many foundations are looking at CHIP alignment in their decision making. With regard to my own experience with the CHC-CTE project, my role has been primarily convening our Be Your Best CHC-CTE community advisory group, which was formed early on in the process as a way to provide local representation within the project stakeholder group and disseminate information on the progress to the larger BYB group, collecting feedback which is

then taken back to the stakeholder group. We have focused on how the clinic and the CTE piece can best serve each of our community partners and the folks that they are serving, trying to collect as much information as possible with regard to needs, potential gaps, and eliminating barriers to access.”

See Part II: Rep. Peter DeFazio breaks big news to help the health center.

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