

Community Compass, breaking the cycle of rural Maine poverty

Overview: I have developed this small non-profit organization over the past 8 years with a dedicated crew of fellow retiree board members. Our mission is "working together, connecting those in need with opportunity; and Connecting human service and education partner organizations in breaking the cycle of poverty in our rural coastal Maine region."

Our mid-coast Maine region has huge economic disparities. Dirt roads lead back from the wealthy second home along the coast to tar paper shacks betraying deep generational poverty. Many neighbors suffer the attendant poverty risk factors of homelessness, food insecurity, lack of transportation, substance use, low educational/job training attainment, etc.

While there are a good variety of human service groups, their utilization is low due to the hard barrier of cultural gaps, social isolation, and shame. Furthermore, there is poor community awareness of these resources and little collaboration as each competes in silos for the same grants.

Our prime goal is to "reach the unreachable". Local women who know their communities and its face of local poverty are trained in resources and communication skills by our Community Compass director and board. Navigators function to find and develop trusting relationships one at a time, help the client develop personal, attainable life goals, and connect with needed resources. The prime focus is: 1) basic needs (housing, food, health care, counseling etc.); and 2) early childhood development/parenting skills (the surest if longest strategy to breaking generational poverty).

Our secondary goal is functioning as a "Big Tent" or collective impact organization pulling together 20 plus regional partner service/education/business/church/government/ etc. organizations in a Connected Community Forums and Community Advisory group to spread poverty awareness, increase volunteer engagement, and create collaboration.

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