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I come here as an unabashed admirer of your work. I have been privileged to watch the evolution of this initiative from when it was a gleam in the eye of a few individuals at the Pew Partnership to where it is possible to have this impressive gathering of people doing such promising work to improve life in local communities throughout the country.

But in speaking to you this afternoon, I want to do more than congratulate you on being selected to be part of the “Solutions” initiative, or on your accomplishments so far. I want to talk to you today about the larger context in which we all work, and what it would take to maximize our impact.

I take as the text for this homily the lead article on the front page of last Monday’s New York Times. The article, for those of you who didn’t see it, began with the observation that “blighted areas across the country are being transformed, as neighborhoods that had become frightening wastelands are showing glimmers of renaissance. From Boston to New Orleans and from Los Angeles to Miami, neighborhoods where drug and gangs controlled the streets, commandeered empty houses and terrorized residents are slowly beginning to seem safer and more livable.” The piece goes on to describe how families with children are returning to the city, and how, for the first time in years, people are sitting on their front porch, and feeling safe about letting their children walk to school.

I’m sure I wasn’t the only reader who expected to read next about projects such as those represented here, about the burgeoning community development corporations and comprehensive community initiatives and other neighborhood revitalization efforts, the new civic ventures, the new after-school and youth development and mentoring and gang prevention and job training programs, about all the many initiatives that were restoring social capital and rebuilding communities. But the article barely mentioned these exciting developments of the last decade. Instead, it propounded a very simple thesis. The headline read, “Blighted Areas are Revived as Crime Rate Falls.” Period. It all just happened, we are asked to believe in response to some mysterious drop in crime -- as though the many intentional efforts at social change in depleted neighborhoods had nothing to do with it!

About a year ago, I heard John Gardner, former secretary of HEW, tell the National Press Club that we are in the midst of writing a new chapter in the tumultuous American story of domestic problem solving. He described a wave of local innovations such as we’ve not seen in decades. He counseled his listeners, don’t pray for a burst of renewal, because local people are making it happen, from one end of this country to the other.

Now if that’s true, why does it remain such a secret? Why do most of us feel we are working within deep silos, unobserved and uncelebrated and unsupported by the world around us?

Oversimplifying only a little, I would like to propose that the reason for our lack of visibility and support and impact beyond our most immediate colleagues, lies in our inability to connect the dots. To survive, most of us are focused on the individual dots, on our own circumscribed piece of territory. We have far too few opportunities

and too few tools to connect the dots.

We are not connecting the dots that would allow us to tell our story to the wider world.

We are not connecting the dots that would allow us to discover that the strategies assuming a smooth progression from demonstrations and pilots to scale-up haven't worked.

We are not connecting the dots that would allow us to see how unrelentingly the infrastructure within which we would have to operate to reach large numbers destroys the very attributes that account for our successes.

And lastly, we are not connecting the dots that would allow us to learn systematically from past and contemporaneous experience, and thereby make our efforts more effective.

The world we work in today is one in which we think in circumscribed pieces, we fund in circumscribed pieces, we maintain accountability in circumscribed pieces, the evaluations considered most credible evaluate only circumscribed pieces, and of course we provide services as though children, families, and neighborhoods came in circumscribed pieces.

So how would the world look different if we were to connect the dots?

First, let's talk about the challenge of connecting the dots in ways that would allow us to tell our story more convincingly to the wider world.

We now know so much about what works – from theory, a convergent body of research, and front-line experience in many different disciplines. But as a nation we fail to act on the wealth of knowledge we now possess.

Among the complex reasons, are that too many of our fellow-Americans have become convinced that nothing we do together really works, especially if we do it through government. Columnist William Raspberry has written that you don't have to be meanspirited to turn your back on social problems -- you just have to believe that nothing can be done to solve them.

Another reason we don't act on what we know is that we have become very confused about what are societal responsibilities and what are personal responsibilities. Rush Limbaugh says that if you don't make it in America, it's your fault -- and many of our fellow-citizens agree. The media contribute to this individualistic perspective. In their efforts to produce compelling narratives, they put the spotlight on individual behavior, even when the damaging results they report are clearly the result of societal forces.

The convenient conclusion is that the supports that all families need -- especially the families trying to raise responsible children in tough neighborhoods -- that the challenges they face are ultimately just personal challenges, to be met through the marketplace. Tales of how French families approach the birth of a baby knowing that the needed health and home visiting and child care services will be met as a matter of course fall on deaf ears because of our individualistic beliefs about the causes of poverty and school failure. These are beliefs that make the public ambivalent about universal early childhood programs and other societal interventions that promise to improve outcomes for kids who grow up at risk. Similarly, we know that poor and minority children are hampered in their long term prospects because they take less demanding courses in high school – but we rarely learn, as we did from a report released just yesterday by the Department of Education that poor and minority children are also less likely to attend schools where advanced placement courses are even offered.

So we have to let the world know what we know, that we can improve the life trajectories even of the children and families and neighborhoods that have been left behind by America's prosperity and are surrounded by poverty and violence. We know how to make sure that every child has a caring adult in her life, a safe, and supportive and non-chaotic home and neighborhood to grow up in and a school to go to that is orderly and equipped to teach all children at high levels. But we haven't preached even what we practice! And to be credible when we tell our story to the skeptics, we have to be willing to be held accountable for producing results – results the public cares about. Trying hard is no longer good enough, says my friend David Hornbeck, Philadelphia's superintendent of schools. Rather, we must be prepared to provide realistic evidence that when we do join together to solve urgent social problems, we are indeed achieving the purposes the public values.

And we have to get much better at getting people to understand more deeply the problems that have led to so much dislocation, to so many youngsters growing up with neither the capacity nor any reason to believe they could become part of the national prosperity.

We have to be prepared to explain, to all who will listen, how it was that, beginning in the early 1970s, poverty became more concentrated and the minority poor become more isolated, as the work that could support a family became increasingly unavailable to those without school skills. What became increasingly available were guns and crack. Quite rapidly, the bonds that held families and neighborhoods together, and kept youngsters on the straight and narrow – those bonds frayed and broke. Even middle class communities became less cohesive, as more women – thru choice and in response to economic pressures – moved from the front porch and the kitchen to paid employment.

And our institutions failed to respond. They were unable to function as supporters of stressed families or as social equalizers. Our systems of child care, child welfare, education and family support were so constrained by outmoded policies, rules, and regulations that they were unable to reduce the isolation of families and the growing disparities between rich and poor. They were unable to buffer the harshest consequences of our vaunted individualism.

Even the strategies we turned to in order to bring about the needed institutional change were hopelessly outmoded. We continued to rely on failing strategies because we hadn't connected the dots that would have allowed us to discover that the progress we were looking for, that would take us from pilot programs to policy change, was simply not occurring.

For many years, beginning in the early 1960s, we had been taking what John Gardner has called the vending-machine approach to social change, which responds to problems by "inserting a coin that delivers a law (or an initiative or demonstration) that is expected to solve the problem."

Demonstrations were funded by foundations as well as with public funds because everybody believed that successful programs contained the seeds of their own replication, and that promising models would automatically spread and be sustained, once people knew they existed.

In the optimism of the time, everybody assumed that a coherent set of responses would somehow materialize. If there were signs that nothing like a coordinated system was in fact emerging, that was less important

than that categorical funding and a project mentality suited legislators and philanthropists, eager to attach visible victories to their names, to take political credit for defining a new problem and a new program to solve it. Although funding might be only at token levels, they delivered identifiable program benefits to narrowly drawn constituencies for which legislators could take credit. “Velcro-ing on,” to use Ralph Smith’s term, yet one more categorical sliver, whether or not it fit with what was already there, became particularly attractive as the chances for new universal programs and major new public spending began to dim.

The evidence that this comfortable arrangement was no longer working was initially widely ignored. Pilot programs simply came to an end when the demonstration funds ran out, as the public money for spreading what had been learned from successful demonstrations dried up, first in the late 1960s, and then with a vengeance as our deficit grew in the 70s and 80s. Both foundations and government agencies adopted "the language of 'demonstration', and 'pilot project' ... to mask their disinvestment in social programs, and to justify funding programs that were so small in scope that they couldn't be expected to have any effect."

The years that followed brought a great temptation to search out the unoccupied niches. We closed our eyes to the limited benefits we could obtain when the best we could do was to create the missing crisis nursery, to find the unrealized opportunity to support a group of alienated teens or abandoned substance abusers or illiterate young moms, or to clean up some unsightly vacant property. We scaled down our expectations and didn’t trumpet our victories for fear someone would notice and point out that we had succeeded by bending -- or even breaking -- the written and unwritten rules.

We didn’t connect the dots that would have allowed us to see how unrelentingly the infrastructure within which we would have to operate if we were to reach large numbers was destroying the very attributes that accounted for our successful demonstrations.

We know that effective programs are characterized by flexibility, comprehensiveness, responsiveness, front-line discretion, the ability to see children in the context of their families and families in the context of their neighborhood, and a high priority placed on the creation of respectful, trusting relationships.

Yet the best people on the front lines are fighting every day to do what they know works, against the pressures designed to move them in exactly the opposite direction.

The people who run successful programs will tell anyone who will listen about their constant struggle to swim upstream. They say that every day they have to be willing to break or bend the rules in order to get the job done. And they can do that -- they can do it by stealth -- while they are running pilot programs that remain small and operate at the margins. But when they attempt to scale up, they are immediately confronted by rules and regulations and mindsets that end up destroying or diluting the very attributes that made the original model successful.

If relationships are a critical ingredient of effectiveness but the system doesn’t allow staff to spend the time it takes to create and cultivate those relationships ...

If keeping children safe is the agency's purpose, but the auditor counts only whether the forms got filled out

and the required documentation was filed on time ...

Then we shouldn't be surprised if model programs get terrific results only while they're under a protective bubble and led by wizards who are willing to break all the rules because they are some combination of a Mother Teresa, a Machiavelli AND a CPA.

These, in fact, are the contradictions that are at the heart of the scale-up problem.

These are the contradictions we have to come to grips with, both to solve the scale-up problem, and to solve the marginality problem. Because we cannot ignore the challenges that cannot be solved by the private and non-profit sectors alone.

Soon after George Bush became president in 1989, and announced his Thousand Points of Light initiative, Yale historian Paul Kennedy wrote President Bush to remind him that the Yale faculty and students who gathered weekly to feed the homeless opposite the house where Bush had lived as a student, were under no illusion that the warmth of their presence or of the soup they ladled would make less necessary the housing or health care that only government could provide.

George W. Bush made the same point more recently in defining his "compassionate conservatism", when he said that there are some things, like Medicaid for poor children, in which government cannot be replaced, but must be welcomed as a partner, not a rival.

But if we know that we cannot do without government or without other large institutions, don't we have to figure out how to make them work effectively? How to apply the lessons we are learning in our protected, parallel universe, in order to re-shape the bureaucratic institutions that have the big bucks? Don't we have to figure out how to reshape the conditions under which government funding is made available?

For example, from our successful programs, we learn over and over again the importance of flexibility.

Sr. Mary Paul: No one here ever says this may be what you need, but it's not my job to help you get it.

Most people working at the front lines would like to be able to say that.

But in the real world of rigidly fragmented funding, it becomes almost impossible to respond that way.

We see it now in school reform, where marginality, incrementalism and fragmentation have so often become the norm, where "every school becomes host to (a myriad of programs), each focused on a particular problem or beneficiary, getting in each others' way ... where city children whose own lives are turbulent and unfocused, often attend schools where no two adults have the same ideas of what students are supposed to experience, and where there are so many rules to follow that no adult feels any real control over or responsibility for what children learn."

Sid Gardner, of the University of California at Fullerton, found 238 separate programs for Los Angeles students defined as being at risk. Small, circumscribed, widely dispersed and isolated projects to prevent delinquency, drug use, alcohol use, tobacco use, child abuse, teen pregnancy, gangs, and violence, "have created categorical bureaucracies in some high schools that literally line the corridors with separate offices." Of course, not only are the offices separate, so are the rules covering eligibility, and the labels assigned to participating students to

reflect their presumed deficits. Depending on which program she stumbles into, a student may be classified a learning problem, a mental health problem, a potential runaway, or a "person in need of supervision." The services she gets may depend more on the label she is assigned than her needs.

School-linked services and after-school programs -- essential as they are -- have become such a popular form of "school reform" not only because they are useful, but also because they may be readily adopted on a large scale precisely because they are "innovations that are distant from the core" of schooling. By not threatening long-held traditions of instruction, by not trying to change what teachers and students actually do when they are together in classrooms, school-linked services become attractive reform alternatives -- in contrast to innovations that require large changes in the core of educational practice.

The attributes of flexibility and coherence are undermined almost as often as are the efforts of successful programs to provide the settings that allow staff to build strong relationships based on mutual trust and respect, which often means going well beyond the boundaries of their job descriptions, and finding new ways of defining professionalism.

At a Homebuilders staff meeting I attended, a therapist told of appearing at the front door of a family in crisis, to be greeted by a mother's declaration that the one thing she didn't need in her life was one more social worker telling her what to do. What she needed, she said, was to get her house cleaned up. The Homebuilders therapist, with her special training and mind set, responded by asking the mother if she wanted to start with the kitchen. After working together for an hour, the two women were able to talk about the out-of-control teenager that had set off the family's difficulty. It was an unorthodox way of forging what the mental health professionals call a therapeutic alliance, but it worked.

To me, there are two lessons in that story: first, that this master's level psychologist was willing to expand the boundaries of her job description and her sense of professionalism to include an hour of work in the kitchen; and second, that the hour spent cleaning the kitchen would have been wasted had she not had the professional skills to take advantage of her relationship with this mother to help her address the family problems.

Dorothy Stoneman, founder of YouthBuild, says that YouthBuild encourages staff to go to funerals and hospitals, to give out their phone numbers, and to be on call 24 hours a day. "When staff simply do what they are paid to do, trainees remain agnostic or negative concerning whether the staff really care.... and can be trusted not to betray or to abandon them." Trainees learn to trust when they see staff going above and beyond the call of duty. An obvious show of caring is an important signal that this time it will be different from previous experiences characterized by excessive formality and social distance.

These are obviously tricky waters. In no sense do these new professionals operate under norms where anything goes if it feels right. The new practitioners operate within the boundaries of well-developed theory about effective practice, while pushing the constraints imposed by job descriptions and bureaucracies.

Of course it is in the context of relationships where the work of volunteers has become increasingly crucial. Extensive and systematic studies have now shown how immense the contribution of mentors and other volunteers can be. But even here we need a supportive infrastructure. The most effective mentors, it turns out, are not free-

lancers who by-pass all the structural impediments that have made it difficult to provide effective services in formal systems. The strongest conclusion of a synthesis of seven years of research on mentoring done by P/PV was that effective mentoring requires program structures that support mentors in their efforts to build trust and develop positive relationships with youth. "Most volunteers and youth cannot be simply matched and then left to their own devices." The successful programs provide the infrastructure -- including screening, training, and ongoing supervision -- to foster the development of effective sustained relationships.

Connecting the dots here means a clear focus on results. It means asking how are kids and families doing, does the neighborhood feel safer, not whether a detailed maze of rules is being followed. A focus on results becomes a way of taming bureaucracies, a way of overcoming the prevailing "gotcha" climate, in which we are so eager to eliminate the possibility that public servants will do anything wrong, that we tie their hands at the front lines and make it virtually impossible for them to do anything right.

A clear focus on results also drives both funders and program people to think more realistically about the connections between investments and outcomes, and reduces some of the long-standing confusion between the means and ends of social interventions.

The fact that many individuals and agencies are participating in a new neighborhood coalition may be the product of a great deal of effort, but is not necessarily evidence of progress toward stipulated outcomes.

There is a constant temptation to fall back on process measures as evidence of progress. What is the bottom line when there is no bottom line? asks Peter Drucker. In the scramble for evidence, process measures become substitutes for outcome measures because they provide comforting evidence of activity -- they demonstrate that something is happening. Funders, both public and philanthropic, often find it easier to move or remove the goal posts than to strengthen the players. The typical forget-about-the- goal-posts conversation takes place a few months into the implementation phase. The funder says to the grantee: "We gave you the grant of \$50,000 over two years in the hope -- and in response to your promise -- that you would reduce teen pregnancy and youth violence in this community of 20,000 families. Now you say that was really an unrealistic expectation? You may be right. But we do need some hard evidence that our grant is making some sort of difference, so let's get an evaluator to design a survey that will show how many youngsters come to your meetings and classes."

The new conversation about results may, as its most profound effect, inject a strengthened ethical core into human service systems that have often focused more on the fate of agencies than on the fate of those they mean to help. The new outcomes focus promises (or threatens, in the eyes of some) to end a conspiracy of silence between funders and program people by exposing the sham of asking human service providers, educators, and community organizations to accomplish massive tasks with wholly inadequate resources and tools.

Results-based accountability helps to make clear that dilution regularly transforms effective model efforts into ineffective replications. It helps to clarify that a single circumscribed intervention may not be sufficient to change outcomes. It helps to make the argument for adequately funding a critical mass of promising interventions, and for combining interventions that in isolation would have little effect, but that in combination could bring about

real change.

My fourth and last plea for connecting the dots would allow us to learn much more systematically from our many efforts, and thereby to make our efforts and those of others far more effective.

Our prevailing arrangements for assembling and analyzing information about what does and doesn't work, and of using this information to design and improve programs and policies and to allocate resources among them, is deeply flawed. We must develop a far broader spectrum of information about past and current experience than is conventionally considered to constitute credible knowledge.

As Dan Yankelovich and I have written -- in a collaboration set in motion at our first advisory board meeting a couple of years ago -- experiments based on randomly assigned participants have an important place in our evaluation armamentarium, but most of our most promising community-based interventions cannot, in fact, be tested like drugs. Few effective social programs are little pills or even uniform models that can be manufactured precisely to spec and administered in standardized formats. Most are sprawling, interactive efforts that require special dedication, adaptation to local circumstances, and constant mid-course corrections. They also require proactive initiatives on the part of those receiving the "treatment." The drug testing metaphor is grossly misleading. We can think rigorously about how interventions connect to outcomes, but we'll never get to the point where funding will go only to programs and policies that are proven "safe and effective" and withheld from the rest.

So we need new ways of collecting and analyzing and synthesizing information, which is surely part of what the innovative research being supported by this project is working toward.

Many new approaches are now being developed to better understand how complex programs work. What their findings lack in certainty they make up for in timeliness and in the richness of understanding that builds over time and across initiatives.

In my own efforts to connect these particular dots, I have been exploring the question of what would happen if we started the inquiry about what works without limiting ourselves to what we have learned from research that meets the traditional criteria for credible knowledge, but started from a different vantage point. I recently organized two small meetings for the purpose of asking a small group of people steeped in the research and practice of their domain (school readiness in one instance, and job readiness in the other) to put on the table their convictions about what leads to improved outcomes in that domain. I posed to them the question, what do you believe -- never mind on what basis you believe what you do, we'll get to that next -- but what does the experience and research and folk wisdom you have been exposed to and the intuitions you have amassed, lead you to conclude about what a community could most effectively do if it had decided it wanted to increase rates of school readiness or job readiness. Once we organize the conclusions, we will compare them to what we know from research and from systematically compiled practitioner experience.

The answers that surfaced in this process did indeed turn out to be different from the answers one would come up with just looking at the formal research.

For example, the school readiness group pointed up the social isolation of families with infants and young children, which emerges from both research and practice as a major risk factor for rotten outcomes for young children. But the research that has assessed interventions that have sought to reduce isolation – family support centers and services, home visiting, etc. – has typically not found improved outcomes for either parents or children. Efforts to reduce social isolation therefore don't appear on the screen when we look for proven interventions to increase rates of school readiness.

But what if the reason for that is that the efforts to intervene that we've measured have been too circumscribed? We never used the disappointing evaluation results to generate new hypotheses. We never dealt with the implications of the possibility that a high proportion of mothers didn't engage with home visitors because they were depressed, or because they were living in the midst of violence. We never dealt with the implications of the possibility that the children of these depressed mothers needed a different kind of intervention if they were not to lose ground. I suspect that our evaluation conventions, together with our categorical funding conventions, discouraged us from looking to see what would happen if we were to put together a new set of interventions, tailored in complex and evolving ways to respond to the barriers we uncovered in our efforts to help.

The pragmatic and constantly evolving knowledge base we could now create, using a more inclusive approach, has the potential of moving the whole field away from oversimplified yes/no, success/failure judgments about what programs work, toward building a richer, more complex knowledge base about strategies that are plausible, promising, or proven. Practitioners, program designers, and communities will be able to make use of the lessons learned from both research and experience to construct ever stronger theories, and ever more effective interventions. By applying intelligence and judgment to understand existing research and experience, we can construct a more usable knowledge base.

These new approaches to building a more usable knowledge base systematically utilize **multiple ways of knowing** and understanding as sources of evidence for judging what works, what is worth investing in, and for making practice, programs and policies more effective. Their conclusions are based on an **accumulation of knowledge**, rigorous analysis, and systematically applied expert judgment from a variety of diverse perspectives. They don't look only at individual pieces of intervention. Rather they identify **the pathways** that link interventions, consisting of practices, programs, and the infrastructures that support them. These in turn will be linked with interim indicators and achievements, and long-term outcomes. The findings of such a process would be made available to local communities and other stakeholders in ways that are **timely and easy to use**, and that would include an **interactive capacity**, capturing feedback to build a constantly evolving intervention knowledge base, so we could learn promptly from experience -- not just about program design, but also about implementation -- in order to bring about continuous improvement of both programs and policies.

The hope inherent in this approach, then, would be to make it possible for each local initiative – be it a neighborhood coalition or a mayor who wants to assure that a five-year-olds will be school-ready, to start with

something more than a blank slate. It would acknowledge the pre-eminence of local decision-making, encourage local initiative, imagination, and adaptation and refrain from prescribing solutions. At the same time, it would not dismiss the existence of centrally available expert knowledge that goes beyond process considerations. It would seek to make this knowledge available in ways that would not only identify promising, proven, or disproved pathways, but would ultimately be able to inform and guide choices among plausible options and option sets.

In closing, let me say that we meet at an extraordinary time. I sense this whole room is suffused with a new sense of the possible.

We have unprecedented national prosperity to build on.

We have a sense of urgency, especially around the fate of our inner cities and the fate of our children.

And we have a rich array of knowledge about what works.

As we struggle to make our institutions and our neighborhoods more supportive of healthy life and growth, I salute you for the contributions you are making to building, in Robert Kennedy's words, the communities "where children can play and adults work together and join in the pleasures and responsibilities of the place where they live." I salute you for your efforts "to re-connect the thousand invisible strands of common experience and purpose, affection and respect," which tie us to our fellows and which – ultimately -- will make America more just.

At the beginning of the 21st century, we may no longer be able to count on heroic figures to mobilize us to act, but perhaps we can be mobilized on behalf of a shared heroic idea, the idea that we're all in this together, and must share the burdens and pool some of our rich resources. We cannot allow the richest country in the world to declare bankruptcy in its civic life. We must do what it takes so that all our children will have a fair chance to succeed, and so that we can realize our vision of becoming a nation of opportunity for all.

Whether we are motivated by threats of the US becoming a second rate power, or by the fear of what happens when a society unravels, or by a sense of social justice, we must act on what we now know, so that all our children can grow up with a realistic stake in the American dream.

I wish you strength in your efforts toward that end.