

A TIME TO IMAGINE THE POSSIBILITIES

DFMCH ReCHARGED: Blue Sky II – Focus on Community Health Friday, May 1, 2015 12:30-1:30pm



Sharon Adams, MSW, Program Director and Co-Founder of Walnut Way Conservation Corporation in Milwaukee, WI

Sharon Adams is a change agent. Since founding Walnut Way Conservation Corp in 1998, she and her husband, Larry Adams, have been the stimulus behind the changes witnessed in Milwaukee's Walnut Street, North Avenue, Fond du Lac Avenue corridor, including revitalization that has resulted in \$26 million invested for over 200 new home constructions and restored vintage houses. Learn more: <http://www.walnutway.org/>

The DFMCH ReCHARGED Steering Group asked Ms. Adams to consider the following:

1. As someone doing grassroots community development, what do you expect from us as we change our name from DFM to DFMCH?
2. We understand that Aurora is becoming a partner in Walnut Way. Please tell us about how that partnership developed and what you hope will come of it.
3. What advice do you have for an interested outside party hoping to authentically engage with underserved communities or neighborhoods?

Introduction

- Sharon talked about leaving a legacy in community engagement. Pass it forward.
- She and her husband Larry, consider Walnut Way “dream work.” She jokingly she said they love it even when occasionally the dream may feel like a nightmare.
- Sharon and Larry live in the neighborhood they are helping by choice. Their neighbors challenge them every day.
- Sharon reviewed our DFMCH ReCHARGED Strategic Planning Website. She noticed that many of our practices and principles are that of Walnut Way's.

- Sharon noted that the Department of Family Medicine is doing so much already in regards to community engagement. The next step for us is to question how we can do more and what more do we do?

Presentation

Sharon's advice for our department is as follows:

1. **Expect to expend lots of energy to engage colleagues in a change process.** A change process requires building momentum.
2. **Give voice to as many perspectives as possible.**
 - a. Walnut Way created a “Quality of Life” planning process in 2008. It involved colleagues and neighbors.

- b. One major strategy identified was people wanted quality foods and good nutrition. Now, neighbors in the community are eating well due to the neighborhood garden. Nutrition is tied to culture.
 - c. Health and wellness was also an emerging strategy. With poverty in the neighborhood, statistics have shown that it can be attributed to lack of access to health care.
 - d. Walnut Way acted on what they perceived as their community health vision; individuals and collective groups that embrace, acknowledge, and practice ways for living healthy lives.
 - e. This led to the Wellness Commons which includes 20 active partners, including most health care systems in the area.
- 3. Develop a vision and pathways where resources are attractive for implementation.** The vision is only as good as the pathways with resources.
 - 4. Nurture relationships.**
 - a. Relationships need to be authentic – people need the opportunity to come to community
 - b. Walnut Way has a very good working relationship with Aurora Health Care. Sharon now serves on the Aurora/Sinai Advisory Group
 - c. Sharon again remarked on the necessity for relationships – this has led to more opportunities to help fund and support Walnut Way’s work.
 - 5. Hold yourselves accountable to the outcomes.**
 - a. One way DFM could engage would be to have a summer rotation for medical students/residents that would enable them to see the population that represents who lives in our communities.
 - b. Stay transparent. Sometimes we try things that do not work. Be honest about that. Go back, re-evaluate.
 - c. Don’t run away from what you know is the right thing to do because the money isn’t there.
 - d. Walnut Way has employed a Health Coach, whose believes that people need to “live your mission”. <http://www.walnutway.org/news/meet-our-new-health-coach>

Question and Answer

1. Tell us a story about a time when seemed like the money wasn’t there and you kept at it and new partnerships and opportunities emerged...
 - This happened with Walnut Way and “Wellness Commons.” Sharon felt they had to keep explaining the concept to foundation friends and construction groups, because there didn’t seem to be an understanding about integrated health.
 - They did not get discouraged, they figured out how to ask and answer the questions that would lead to the support. They learned to speak the language of the developers.
 - This project took six years to come to fruition. Then they received some seed money from foundations, other support from Outpost Natural Foods, and the state and federal governments.
 - Sometimes you can’t go full throttle. They had to demonstrate to a tipping point.
 - Walnut Way has since been invited to think of two more developments.
 - When the goals are clear, the money is there. You just have to find the right language to find it.
2. The Department of Family Medicine is becoming the Department of Family Medicine and Community Health. Our main purpose is to train family doctors and help prevent illness. How do you recommend that the Department embrace and be active with the business of community health?
 - To really teach community health and community engagement, put learners and faculty in communities. If our first commitment is to train family doctors, how do we train them without having family doctors in the community?
 - Consider summer rotations, foreign travel

- The Department will need to find resources to make that happen. There are projects waiting out there. We just need to look for the resources.
 - The Walnut Way neighborhood celebrates any birth in their community – medical students could be attached to this.
 - Research projects have been brought to scale in some of Walnut Way’s work, such as the Lindsay Heights Neighborhood Health Alliance. It is a free will association which provides workforce training in landscaping, etc.
 - Investment of community is supported by data and information.
 - Develop pipeline programs to increase diversity so that DFM represents people in the community
 - Create partnerships
3. When trying to engage a population, where have you found the most success in terms of approaching a group?
- There are many starting points. Don’t give up, put the resources there.
 - Walnut Way had had a man killed in their neighborhood garden. Many of the young men around were hurt and angry. They didn’t give up on them.
 - Now, some of these young men have changed their pathways and are looking for employment and going back to school.
 - Because it depends on the area in which we live, Sharon remarked that they approach people by going to schools, sometimes meeting with the parents, going door to door in the neighborhood, and sometimes the neighbors go to Sharon and Larry directly.
4. Are other neighborhoods coming to you for mentorship and transformation?
- Yes, Sharon doesn’t want to oversimplify the significance of living in a community that seems too isolated and where resources are so limited.
 - Neighbors do come and the goal is to share information and resources. It is imperative to have places where people can gather.
5. For the last two years we have been working on a project with Veterans Administration around “Whole Person Health.” Have you seen a shift over time in terms of self –care, reflection and awareness as a requirement before addressing community health?
- Yes, Walnut Way worked on an efficacy project with the Medical College of Wisconsin
 - People did feel more responsible for their own health, and in turn started to feel responsible for the whole group’s health
 - They live in very resilient community – they advocated for change, took care of themselves and others.
6. How do you “balance” your efforts to hear every voice with your efforts to move forward with action and bogged down in the “listening phase of implementation”?
- Setting timelines is a must.
 - All community engagement is a call and response. We know when we have enough responses to make a decision.
 - These projects involve risk-taking and demonstration.

Closing Remarks

- Blue Skies Landscaping is a business that Walnut Way started. This business is dedicated to employment and training of employees who may have faced barriers to employment in the past. They have been extremely successful and have won awards for installation and environmental stewardship.
- Don’t hesitate to get out there and work on community engagement....you will find the money....