

## COOPERSTOWN HUMAN SERVICE SUMMIT RECAP

### Introduction

In late November of 2019, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York, FFWA (Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies), Human Services Council (HSC), UJA-Federation of NY, United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) and Sister Paulette LoMonaco (formerly of Good Shepherd Services), with strong support from The Clark Foundation, convened leaders from over 80 New York City nonprofits that deliver, advocate for, and fund human services to participate in a human services summit in Cooperstown, New York.

The goal of this summit was to create a sector-wide advocacy action framework and policy agenda for increased funding to cover the true costs of programs and services, as well as equitable and competitive compensation for our workforce. At the summit the rallying cry of “Just Pay” emerged to describe these goals.

### Recap

(This document tries to recap/capture the flavor of the summit without implying that every idea was supported by all.)

The conversations were broad, participatory and rooted in the core belief that every individual in our society has a right to live with greater dignity and reach their highest potential, regardless of their personal circumstances. While much of the gathering was spent considering operational challenges and tactical possibilities, the group reiterated vociferously, time after time, that values must define the sector in its efforts to ensure that people have enough food, a safe and secure place to reside, a job with a living wage, quality health care, freedom from fear and danger, and a community rooted in love and support.

Integral to this self-reflection was the realization that the nonprofit human services sector has frequently failed to effectively negotiate with government appropriate program design and funding to meet the needs of (deleted “the nonprofit sector and”) the communities they serve. The public, private, nonprofit and philanthropic sectors ostensibly exist to promote self-determination, and help individuals, families, and neighborhoods in building their own future; yet all may (perhaps inadvertently) sustain and perpetuate structures that inhibit progress toward this goal. Many shared that these structures have become more concerned about compliance than compassion, inherently ignoring the voices of those they are meant to help.

While several improvements had been made recently to better finance human services in New York City<sup>i</sup>, these efforts should be considered the beginning of changes in how government does business with the nonprofit sector, and not an expectation that the underlying problems have been solved.

There was consensus that data must be collected to demonstrate the depth, breadth, positive impact and actual costs of the human services sector. The narrative presented to elected officials (as well as the general public) must be clear and compelling; and backed by concrete data and connected to community outcomes. And using that data is essential in communicating the value of our work. A recent poll conducted by Global Strategies Group showed that 75% of respondents support fully funding the nonprofit sector but at the same time said they do not have a sense of the consequences from a lack of funding, nor the reality of how changes in funding impact program quality.

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### Next Steps

Without further change by government, nonprofit organizations will continue to receive inadequate financing that places them in a weakened position in which they often merely manage the suffering of their clients and leave many without any help at all. As a result, the following conclusions emerged:

- Critical funding gaps remain even after important advances;
- Attention is needed to workforce issues: recruitment, retention and training;
- Burdensome contracting practices need attention and streamlining;
- Data must be better utilized to describe/illustrate impact and funding gaps; and
- Better communication and awareness with the general public and specific external stakeholders is needed.

The summit participants affirmed the need to develop a common agenda and campaign to build upon the human service sector's recent gains while addressing significant shortfalls that jeopardize essential programs and services.

The leaders of the umbrella groups that convened this summit reiterated this sentiment and have agreed to continue to partner in this endeavor to build this common campaign. Next steps include:

1. Developing an organizational framework to guide this campaign:
  - a. Forming a strong, staffed campaign with clear roles and responsibilities and broad representation.
  - b. Creating a real decision-making leadership structure involving individuals with proven expertise who can implement a successful campaign strategy.
  - c. Identifying leaders from diverse communities (business, labor, religious, civic, etc.) who share the values of this campaign to participate.
2. Identifying a clear and an achievable agenda with strategies and tactics to:
  - a. Set both short-term objectives (1 year) and long-term goals (3 - 5 years);
  - b. Contain an action plan to collect, analyze and use data; and
  - c. Design and implement communications strategy.

### Conclusion

Sister Paulette LoMonaco closed the meeting with the following call to action:

*“Relationships are at the heart of everything. We must share the values of transparency, partnerships, reciprocity, and not undermine one another. Instead of a scarcity mentality, we need to have a mentality of abundance – and we need to use that wisely and commit ourselves to the long game; it’s important we stick together.”*

We have a great deal of work to do and as long as we plan together to strategically organize our voices, we can build a strong campaign advocating for “Just Pay”. To this end the Steering Committee will convene a meeting later this winter to begin building this framework.

Sincerely,

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York, FPWA, Human Services Council, UJA-Federation of NY, and United Neighborhood Houses.

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<sup>1</sup>such as the indirect rate for services, accountability for lack of timely contract registration, wage increases for some direct service employees, and more city agency usage of the HHS Accelerator system.