



**Vermont Collective Impact Conference:
Moving Beyond Collaboration to Transform
Our Communities**

Late last month, Steve (our Executive Director) and I went to Fairlee for the Vermont Collective Impact Conference: Moving Beyond Collaboration to Transform Our Communities. It was a great experience,

seeing many of our friends and partners, making new connections, and benefiting from the wisdom of those who are farther along on this path.

In both the morning and afternoon sessions, we heard from Greg Hills of FSG, the consulting firm focused on lasting social change that coined the term “collective impact.” Greg lives in Boston, but he’s a local who spent some formative years in Cornish, and went across the river to preschool in Windsor. That bi-state background is at the heart of much of our work here at ReThink Health: UCRV, where we work with partners and stakeholders to co-create solutions that take into account that reality of passing from one state to the other and back again, day in and day out, as we go about the business of our lives.

Greg said many things that resonated with us, but one that really struck me was “collective impact moves at the speed of trust.” Relationship-building is key to any cross-sector collaboration, whether it employs collective impact or some other method. He also emphasized that systemic issues, like the problems with our current system for addressing health, can’t be solved in traditional ways. We need to take an asset-based approach to our work together, where everyone does “what they are good at in service of a common goal.”

Our region is rich with resources working to address issues ranging from homelessness to expanding opportunities to exercise. Within the collective impact framework, those working to address any one particular issue come together with others who feel the same passion and align their efforts toward the common goal. This alignment moves the collaborating partners from fragmented, siloed efforts toward adaptive solutions that focus on evidence as well as relationships, that incorporate both content and context expertise, and that look beyond the silver bullet to “silver buckshot” (Greg’s term, not mine). The silver buckshot metaphor recognizes that each organization contributes their unique piece to the collective goal – they aren’t all doing the same thing, but they are all aiming at the same target.

Greg also spoke of credit for results as a shared currency, where partners subordinate their organizational self-interest to the collective impact initiative. This can be difficult in a world where funders shape requests for information in terms of singular, not collective credit.

But there are some great examples of very successful collective impact initiatives in our region, such as the Vermont Farm to Plate network, that can serve as an inspiration to us all. Ellen Kahler (ED of the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund, which hosts the network) made remarks that echoed many of Greg’s themes, about leaving organizational egos at the door, entering from a place of curiosity, and bringing your passion and experience into the room. I think all of these things can lead to that speed of trust that Greg spoke of. If we can share both credit and the accountability for improving health and wellbeing in

our region, and move beyond the grant-to-grant reality that hampers collaboration by finding a way to sustainably finance our collective efforts, think of all the amazing things we could do together.