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WILSON SHEEHAN LAB FOR ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES



Summer 2022

Breaking the Cycle

How poverty's fiercest adversaries are breaking the stubborn cycle of poverty



What though the odds: breaking the cycle of poverty

DJ DiDonna
LEO Board Member

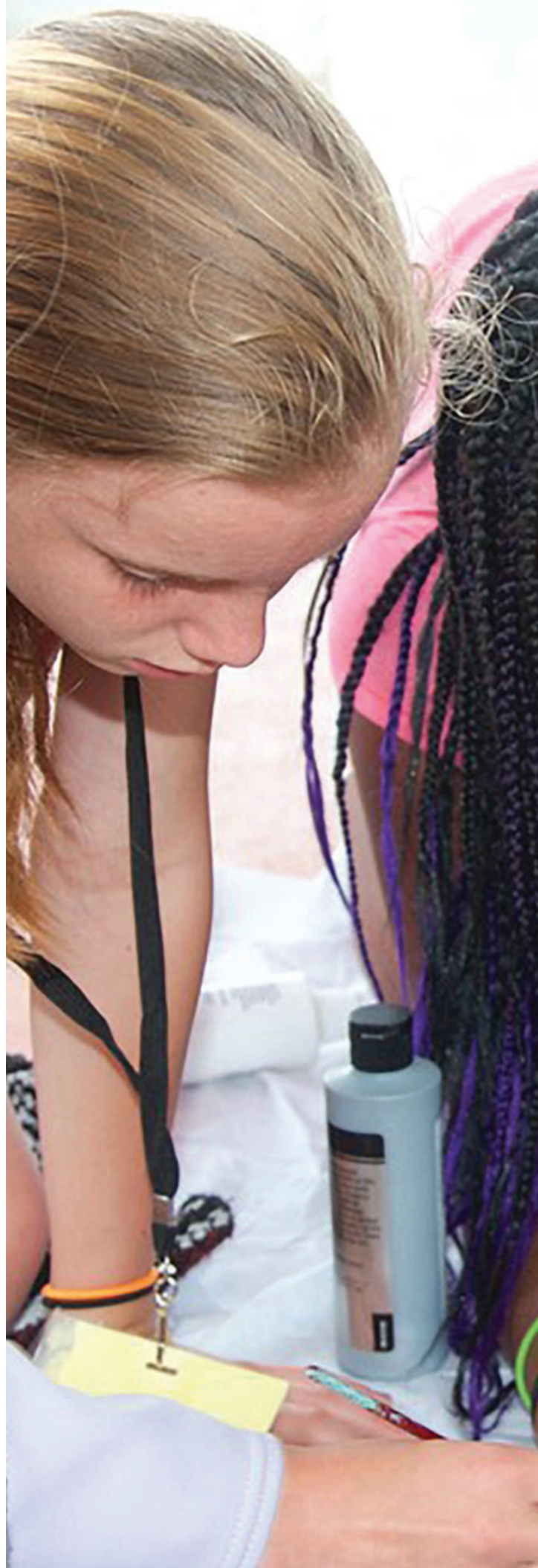
For all that we don't know about poverty and its causes, two things are clear: your likelihood of experiencing poverty is fairly predictable, and once you're there, it's hard to escape.

A landmark 2014 study from Harvard economist Raj Chetty and team found that someone's lifetime earnings can fluctuate by almost \$200,000 based on their zip code at birth. To be clear, this isn't comparing people from the richest zip codes in America to the poorest: these differences can be found even within the same city, sometimes across just a few residential blocks.

Worse, once you're experiencing poverty, it's nearly impossible to escape. Not only did the study identify vast differences in resources based on where you live, it also deflated long-held American self-conceptions around social mobility.

Taken together, poverty's gravitational pull and selective inevitability result in what's often called the "cycle of poverty." But what is the cycle of poverty, why is it cyclical, and how can it be broken?

In this issue, we'll look at the lasting impact of factors outside of peoples' control, early in life, and how a summer camp in Atlanta and a tiny house farm in Southern California are seeking to break the cycle once and for all.





But first, I'd like to back up just a little bit.

(And also take a moment to remind the reader that I'm writing this from my perspective as a curious advisor, so my tone does not speak on behalf of LEO.)

Did you internalize the humanity behind the findings I mentioned in the opening paragraph? It would be pretty understandable if you glossed over it; a quick glance at almost every anti-poverty nonprofit's mission statement references the cycle of poverty in some way or another.

Honestly, the phrase "cycle of poverty" itself is a pretty terrible way to describe what's going on here.

It's not inaccurate, it's just an impersonal abstraction for a profoundly unfair reality happening just under our noses. Somehow, within the same wealthy cities in the richest and most powerful country on the planet, a sizable portion of newborn Americans have a vastly different future than the rest of us.

Take this statistic from Chetty and his colleagues' 2016 paper on income and life expectancy:

"The richest American men live 15 years longer than the poorest men, while the richest American women live 10 years longer than the poorest women. The poorest men in the U.S. have life expectancies comparable to men in Sudan and Pakistan; the richest men in the U.S. live longer than the average man in any country."

As we can see from Chetty's findings, for those caught up in the cycle, it's truly a matter of life and death.

PHOTO: KIDZ2LEADERS

Another term for this cycle is “generational poverty,” a term core to the founding story of Atlanta-based Kidz2Leaders.

The story goes like this: after meeting three generations of incarcerated women from the same family in Georgia in 1999, Reverend Dr. Diane Parrish decided to start a summer camp for the children of inmates to try to disrupt this toxic pattern of inheritance. Over 20 years later, Camp Hope has expanded its offerings to become Kidz2Leaders, a multi-program approach that has served over 1,200 campers, siblings, parents, guardians, and relatives.

Kidz2Leaders’ (K2L) is part of LEO’s nonprofit cohort comprised entirely of organizations based in Atlanta. K2L Executive Director Christina Cummings, describes their mission as providing “stability, opportunity, and a Christian community” to the children of inmates for eight years, starting when they are between the ages of eight and ten.

Cummings and K2L are out to tackle a huge issue; there are an estimated ~2.7 million children in the U.S. whose parents have been imprisoned. Georgia has one of the highest rates of incarceration nationwide, costing the state over a billion dollars a year, and resulting in 200,000 children



CHRISTINA CUMMINGS, K2L EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

of inmates. Not only do we know that former prisoners experience an estimated 13% decrease in lifespan compared to their peers, family members of those who have been incarcerated also suffer: people with incarcerated loved ones lose 2.6 years in life expectancy than those without relatives in prison.

But K2L’s programs aim to prevent children and family members from falling into this cycle from the start. They provide year-round mentorship, training and leadership opportunities, including job opportunities for those who age out of summer camp. And they’ve seen incredible results. While children of incarcerated adults are three times more likely than their peers to be jailed in their lifetimes, 99% of K2L’s graduates have avoided prison.

It may be too early to tell how far K2L’s programs have nudged participants away from prison because incarceration rates typically peak in one’s late twenties and early thirties. But the launch of a new randomized controlled trial study with LEO on the efficacy of the program will help Christina and her team find out. Armed with rigorous results, K2L seeks to add family support, wrap-around services, and eventually construct their own building for better year-round offerings.

Another slippery slope into the cycle of poverty is the foster care system. People who spend time in the foster care system face long odds around living a stable, independent life—70% of kids in foster care experience homelessness within two years of independence.

One social entrepreneur is aiming to increase those odds by focusing on one of the most important periods in the life of someone in foster care: Dan Parziale, Notre Dame alum (2005) and Mesa Farm cofounder. According to Dan, the traditional approach to preventing homelessness among this vulnerable population is not sufficient, especially for foster care participants after they “age out” of the system, at eighteen.

Dan saw these realities first hand, through his work as a Senior Director at LA Family Housing, one of Los Angeles’ largest organizations working on housing and homelessness.

During his tenure, the State of California passed the largest measures in history to directly combat homelessness. Measure H, passed in 2017, promised more than \$3.5 billion dollars over a decade, primarily towards a “housing first” approach to get a roof over the heads of those most vulnerable to experiencing homelessness.

However, even with a team of 75 people and a budget of over \$50 million, Dan saw the housing first approach as insufficient:

“Taken together, poverty’s gravitational pull and selective inevitability result in what’s often called the “cycle of poverty.”

But what is the cycle of poverty, why is it cyclical, and how can it be broken?”

“During over five years with the organization, my team grew six-fold, along with rapid increases in our funding, while homelessness in Los Angeles County grew by 10-20x,” Parziale said. “While it’s undoubtedly important for those living on the streets, there was far too little money and programming on preventing folks from becoming homeless to begin with.”

Despite having more money to combat

Prevention Call Center Study with Catholic Charities Chicago for more evidence on this approach and to better understand the success of Emergency Financial Assistance programs in preventing people from experiencing homelessness.)

In 2020, Dan left his role to build Mesa Farms in Ojai, located in a beautiful valley north of Los Angeles, along with fellow resident and local entrepreneur

PHOTO: KIDZ2LEADERS

Programs like K2L and Mesa are targeting the populations *most likely* to end up experiencing poverty in their lives: those involved with the criminal justice and foster care systems. Children with incarcerated parents are six times more likely to become incarcerated themselves. And over 20 percent of the *children* of those in the foster care system will end up homeless. Whether or not they can succeed, and if that success can scale more broadly, remains to be seen.

But there’s reason for optimism. Raj Chetty’s study also showed that the geographic impacts on income could be overcome...by moving.

Moving from a low income to a high income environment had transformational impacts on those able to do so, especially for those who moved at an early age. Importantly, Chetty’s work highlighted the success of housing choice vouchers—a government program designed to enable people to transcend their geography of birth. Armed with Chetty’s team’s evidence, policy-makers can now expand and target that intervention more confidently going forward.

Both Mesa and K2L understand the importance of gathering this evidence to figure out what’s working. Together with LEO, they are determined to help individuals fight their way out of the circle of poverty. As we’ve learned, this is not an isolated fight. They are fighting against the gravitational pull of poverty, homelessness, and incarceration on their children, and generations to come. ●



the problem than ever before, Dan grew pessimistic that additional dollars could ever catch up to the growth of the problem. As LA Family Housing improved their ability to target those who were most likely to become homeless, Dan began to see the critical ethical—and financial—need to *prevent* people from falling into the cycle of homelessness in the first place. (See LEO’s recent Homelessness

Kyle Thompson. Mesa targets “transition aged youth,” those from 18-24 who have spent time in the foster care system. Their vision is to build resilience among their participants using a holistic, wellness, and work-focused approach. As recipients of state and county funding, Mesa will provide housing as well as counseling, employment, and other wrap-around services.



Up at night

Heather Reynolds
LEO Managing Director



Dear Friends,

Recently, LEO held one of our regular partner training workshops. These workshops are set up to help us build strong relationships with our newest service provider partners and to launch the research design process well with each organization. They have become one of my favorite parts of my work. Often, this workshop is the first time we finally meet face-to-face with the organizations we have been talking to, often for over a year and usually through one Zoom meeting after another, about their hopes and dreams for their missions and how evidence building will help accelerate those missions. I love these gatherings because they give us dedicated time to pour into these incredible partners, help them understand the ins and outs of building causal evidence, begin the process of designing their research studies, and discuss the culture and capacity that they will continue to build to allow a randomized controlled trial to work within their already busy lives.

At LEO, we have a set of values we embrace. Two of those values look a bit wonky next to one another. The first, rigor, is probably something you would expect to see with a serious research shop. This value comes from our equally unwavering commitment to both human dignity and excellence in our research methods. Not all evidence is created equal, and we conduct rigorous research so that we will get rigorous evidence, causal evidence that allows us to measure the outcomes attributable to the program in question. We have prioritized this sort of evidence building because we believe it will help us make the biggest strides towards improving outcomes for people in poverty.

While rigor is a value we won't compromise on, rigor alone can feel cold. But I'll be shocked if any of our partners described the LEO team as "cold." Why? Because we embrace a second value, humility. We strive to balance our rigor with respect, because we believe that research should serve people—not the other way around. Humility comes in many forms at LEO—site visits to our partners so we can understand their work more deeply; lots of pivoting because of the urgent, daily issues that service providers face and that impact our



**Research is good fun.
Working together-kick butt.
Evidence is coooooool.**

Award-winning haiku from Quest April 2022

PHOTO: BILL AND SHANA DANCING
DURING QUEST GAME



**Collaboration.
Impacting generations.
Research makes the change.**

Award-winning haiku from Quest April 2022





shared research work; and a commitment to creatively figuring out how to make research manageable for an organization on the front lines of serving people in poverty. We work hard to build relationships with our provider partners—not just because we’re nice people, but because we believe that putting our partners front and center in this work is the best way to conduct meaningful research.

To demonstrate LEO humility at its extreme, one of my favorite activities at our partner training workshop comes after dinner on the first day—a “beloved” game called Quest. Quest is one part scavenger hunt, one part creative expression, and it gives our partners and researchers the opportunity to work together to win the oh-so-important title of Quest Champion. Picture lots of running around, solving puzzles, dressing Barbie dolls (you had to be there!), and poetry slams. If our partners don’t feel the warmth of our researchers before this moment, they feel it by the end of this game. Quest has our researchers literally bowing down to service providers, doing ballerina twirls, writing haiku, and sampling the latest pop hit to perform a song about research.

These Quest moments are the most precious to observe because our researchers and providers form bonds over laughter and fun in a way that makes them come together as one team. Probably my favorite moment from our last workshop was when the team from Friends of the Children (go check out their website -OR- page 10 of this issue of *Illuminate* to learn more about their incredible mission) performed “Data’s Alive, Data’s Alive” to the tune of the infamous “Staying Alive.” Wait—it gets better. Our LEO researcher Patrick Turner burst onto the scene singing in his best high-pitch soprano, “You can tell by the way I work, I am a LEO man...” A lot more “humility” than “rigor” in that very moment, but one that solidified a working relationship that will last for years.

We must solve intergenerational poverty. It is not okay for a mom’s poverty to become her daughter’s poverty, or a dad’s incarceration to become his son’s life sentence too. LEO is solving the lack of rigor in the poverty fighting space. And our partners are teaching us how to break the cycle of researchers flying in and out of social service work. They are teaching us what it means to humbly walk in solidarity with them. I believe that we can turn the tide on poverty in our nation. Why? Because every day we see organizations doing the hard work to rigorously serve their communities. And every day we see researchers at LEO humbly sharing their superpowers to bring this rigor to the real world. •

Rigorously and humbly yours,
Heather

PHOTO: HEATHER TALKING TO WILL AND SHANA

Calling poverty's fiercest adversaries

Fran Gallagher

LEO Project Development Manager

Meet our newest LEO partners! We're thrilled to announce that we have accepted seven innovative organizations into our next cohort.

What does it mean to break the cycle of poverty? Poverty is complex and multifaceted, so while there's no nice and neat answer, there is space for many solutions. Our partners are occupying these spaces, fiercely fighting to break these many cycles in the system of poverty and help their communities.

Join us in welcoming the newest LEO partners prepping to build evidence around the ways they are **breaking the cycles** that create and perpetuate poverty.

Catholic Charities West Virginia is breaking the cycle of **hospital readmissions** for low-income adults, especially those with chronic diseases, who are particularly vulnerable to readmittance for *non-medical, life reasons* that could be prevented with the proper support. Catholic Charities is studying the impact of their Hospital Transition Program, which provides critical care and support to patients in the 90 days after hospital discharge. A social worker develops relationships



with the patients and works with them upon discharge to manage their health care, communicate effectively with their physicians, and connect to other community resources.

CSH Ohio is breaking the cycle of **housing instability and recidivism**



for people leaving the criminal justice system. CSH Ohio provides permanent supportive housing to medium-high risk individuals who have behavioral health needs and are exiting the state prison. The goal of the program is to create housing stability for these individuals while also providing them with the support they need to flourish in society.



Abode is breaking the cycle of **housing instability**. They are experimenting with the idea of providing direct cash transfers to clients while they are in Rapid Re-Housing (RRH), particularly as the housing subsidy tapers off. Existing research shows that RRH provides





BY THE NUMBERS

7 organizations 10 states 1000's of lives impacted each year

temporary housing stability, but that it doesn't last. Participants often fall back into homelessness because they don't have the resources to maintain their housing when the next shock comes. Abode's goal is to improve long-term housing stability by providing extra support and stabilization resources.



Corner to Corner is empowering Black female entrepreneurs by giving them the tools they need

to plan, launch, and grow their own small business. Their work aims to directly address the racial wealth gap in Nashville that has kept many Black families disproportionately in poverty. They are breaking the cycle of **economic disparity** while creating a culture of business ownership. Entrepreneurs participate in a 10-week course called The Academy where they learn alongside peers and community leaders. Graduates also have access to ongoing programming support through Academy Amplified.

Friends of the Children is breaking the cycle of **generational poverty and child welfare involvement** with an innovative 2Gen approach to supporting youth and their caregivers. Friends of the Children works with vulnerable children (ages 4-6) and pairs them with a professional mentor who stays with them through high school

FRIENDS of the CHILDREN

graduation. These children are often involved or at risk of involvement with the child welfare system. Friends of the Children realized that supporting the caregiver is a critical component of supporting the child. They developed their 2Gen model to intentionally wrap around the family to prevent engagement with child welfare and increase stability.

Jiseki is breaking the cycle of **poverty** by using text-based technology to connect low-income individuals and families to resources in their local community. Their belief is that the resources exist, but navigating the system is complicated and can be a barrier to actually getting help. Their technology provides a one-stop-shop for people trying to get help with a variety of needs such as documentation, finding a job, or meeting with a primary care provider.



25% of their class academically, Thread weaves a new social fabric by connecting students with an extended family of volunteers from the community. Each student is matched with a group of up to five volunteers who do anything from packing lunches, tutoring, providing rides, and connecting with other resources in the community. Thread's goal is to help kids graduate from high school and continue on a path to self-sufficiency.

Stay tuned! These organizations began working on their research design at the end of April and will be launching their studies later this year. •



Thread is breaking the cycle of **low graduation rates** in Baltimore by supporting high school students for 10 years starting their freshman year. Targeting freshmen in the bottom

What the experts say

Brendan Perry

LEO Project Design Manager

The phone rings at ARC Recovery Services, a recovery housing operator in Akron, Ohio. The Felony Drug Court is on the other line requesting that ARC house provide services to Lacy, an Ohioan mother with substance use disorder. Lacy just completed treatment but unfortunately relapsed on heroin, overdosing twice in the previous three days. Fortunately, a bed has just opened at ARC and they're able to offer Lacy recovery housing immediately.

ARC is one of several Ohio Recovery Housing operators who receive calls like this every day. But capacity is limited and referred clients battling substance use disorders cannot always be served when the phone rings.

As of 2020, Ohio has the fourth highest overdose death rate and the third most deaths of any U.S. state (CDC). There is a tremendous need to break the cycle of substance abuse and create a community of recovery. This is the mission of Ohio Recovery Housing (ORH). ORH was established in 2014 to organize the network of Ohio recovery housing operators, like ARC, and maintain high standards for these communities.

To be eligible for ORH recovery housing, one must be recovering from substance abuse and/or exiting a treatment program and be willing to live in a drug-free environment. The standard

“In the midst of the opioid epidemic, it is very important to create evidence on what works to help those who are recovering from substance use disorders.”

ORH social model of recovery includes safe, clean, and affordable housing; drug and alcohol free living spaces; a formal recovery plan; and peer support services. While each operator functions slightly differently, each of their group housing facilities share these key components and are held to a high standard of quality care.

The research team at LEO, consisting of William Evans, Adrienne Sabety, Mary Kate Batistich, and Eileen Mostyn, is working with 10 ORH operators to evaluate this recovery housing model through a quasi-experimental study. This design will identify the impact of access to recovery housing for those with

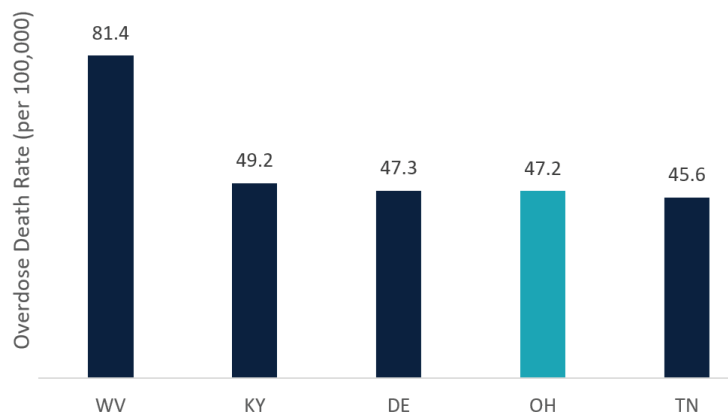




substance use disorders by exploiting the quasi-random variation in the availability of recovery housing beds at each of the operator locations. The research team will be able to isolate the impact of the program by comparing outcomes for those who were interested in and eligible for recovery housing when a slot was available and those interested and eligible for recovery housing when a slot was not available.

“In the midst of the opioid epidemic, it is very important to create evidence on what works to help those who are recovering from substance use

Highest Drug Overdose Mortality by State



disorders. Ohio in particular has been profoundly affected by this crisis, and the evidence created by this study has the potential to help us understand what kinds of programs are effective in supporting people in recovery. The recovery housing operators with whom we’re partnering for this study are incredibly committed to helping those in their community, and we’re very grateful to be working with them to create evidence in this area.” - Eileen Mostyn

The team at ORH is committed to quality and eager to understand how their standardized model impacts recovery and other long-term outcomes like housing stability, employment, health care utilization, and interaction with the criminal justice system.

“Through client success stories and internal data collection, we have seen the positive impact of the social model of recovery housing. However, we are excited about this project with LEO because it will allow us to rigorously quantify the impact of offering recovery housing on long-term outcomes,” says Danielle Gray, Executive Director of ORH. “Our hope is that the results of this study will not only illuminate the impact of this program and

demonstrate the need for expanded recovery housing, but also help to reduce the stigma around people in recovery and show that communities should embrace recovery housing.”

The research team will be accessing long-term outcome data through participant surveys (for both those who receive recovery housing and those who do not) and administrative data already collected by the state.

For ORH tenants like Lacy, recovery housing offers more than just a bed or an alternative to homelessness. Recovery housing provides a community and a support network throughout their recovery journey. When Lacy arrived at ARC, she was in crisis and was unhappy about being told where to live and what to do. However, when Lacy graduated from ARC, she and her family had fully integrated into the recovery community. Lacy returned as a volunteer, eventually becoming a state-certified peer support before joining the ARC team as administrative assistant. Today, Lacy celebrates over four years with ARC, working each day to help others through recovery and contributing to the ORH community. •

Forming the future

Bridget Schippers (ND '24)

Undergraduate Marketing & Communications Assistant

LEO was a natural fit for undergraduate intern and recent Notre Dame grad, Greg Miller. During his sophomore year, Greg became involved in housing policy and advocacy with the Economic Justice Clinic at Notre Dame Law School. That's how he met a new LEO faculty member, Professor Rob Collinson, who happened to be in need of a research assistant. Greg has been working directly with Rob on housing-related LEO projects ever since. They've been able to explore everything from eviction costs to the effects of affordable housing tax credits.

"I'm deeply interested in how to give equal opportunity within our country, and I think we're far from that. I also think that traditional welfare programs have been ineffective in achieving their ends," explained Greg. Greg worked extensively to advocate for tenant rights in the South Bend community with a nonprofit he co-founded called the South Bend Tenant Association, and saw firsthand people waiting decades to get a housing voucher. So, through LEO, he did projects related to how to best design housing voucher waiting lists.

"I've interacted with tenants who are in this cycle of paying rent every month,

but struggling to pay rent. They have little means left to pay for food or anything else. Then I see them get evicted and that's the end for them. And that's the end for their family as well."

LEO is dedicated to breaking that cycle. "Recently, I was interacting with a tenant who has two children and for three months was facing homelessness," said Greg, "And we finally got her stably housed, but we saw the ways in which she was fearful of her children becoming homeless. Those children don't have equal opportunity, and I want to create equal opportunity. But I also see the ways in which we can't just allocate resources to poverty randomly and arbitrarily. We have to do it in a set way that is going to actually be the most helpful." Economics is a primary way to answer these questions.

For many families, the repercussions of falling into poverty continue for years to come. It's not just those immediately facing homelessness affected, but also

their children. LEO's mission is all about disrupting that generational cycle.

Greg himself is a testament to people's ability to overcome these cycles. "I come from an extremely low-income background. We didn't have a car, internet, a dryer. It definitely made me aware of the inequalities that exist and the ways in which growing up low-income makes it much more difficult to make it to a top tier university like the University of Notre Dame. Or to even make it to some sort of stable life. But, more importantly, I saw the ways in which that cycle of just trying to pay rent every week was a form of anxiety. I grew up in a mobile home, which is partially what inspired my thesis."

While he has worked on a wide variety of projects with Rob, for the past few months Greg has been working on his senior year thesis on rent stabilization in mobile home communities.

"Basically, what happens is people own their mobile home, and not the land underneath. But they're not actually mobile, so now we're starting to see a huge increase in institutional investors buying mobile home parks and increasing the price. Since the homes are not mobile and often cost around \$10,000 to move, the low-income tenants who own these homes are stuck with the impossible decision of either stomaching unreasonable rent hikes or abandoning their biggest asset, their home."

With the help of LEO's access to data, Greg has been able to analyze California jurisdictions that implemented rent stabilization mobile home communities. These programs currently have little economic research. "We know a lot about rent control, but



GREG MILLER, RECENT NOTRE DAME GRADUATE



mobile homes operate very differently than apartment complexes where landlords own both the land and the building.”

For Greg, LEO’s experiment-style research is the best way to test different theories about what actually helps people, what doesn’t, and what

has the potential to help people the most: “It’s all about allocating our resources effectively to combat poverty, and that includes the mission that LEO is trying to fulfill.”

Greg’s work with breaking the cycle of housing instability will continue after graduation. He will be working for

the Office of Policy Development and Research at the Department of Housing and Urban Development—a decision impacted by his research on housing policy at LEO. •

Future learnings

Blanca Garcia
LEO Research Associate

Bad things tend to happen in threes. Unless you're poor. When you're poor, a single misstep or stroke of bad luck can lead to a domino effect of misfortune that is difficult to stop and even more difficult to overcome. A broken-down car becomes a missed shift, a lost job, an overdraft fee, and in some cases, even an eviction. "Anyone who has ever struggled with poverty knows how extremely expensive it is to be poor," said renowned writer James Baldwin. Anyone who is poor, or serves the poor, can tell you he's right.

Catholic Charities (CC) Dallas knows this reality. As an organization that provides aid and services to the underprivileged or down-on-their-luck families, they know a one-time service is unlikely to be a long-term solution. Instead, CC Dallas provides wrap-around services through their Financial Stability and Career Services (FSCS) program and has been for more than 10 years.

Patrick Turner, LEO research faculty, studies the impact of FSCS. "When finances are tight, it is really tough to manage money across short-term needs, long-term savings, and being able to set aside money for goals like homeownership or getting a car," said Patrick. "These challenges may compound if lack of stable housing, reliable transportation, or other shocks

affect a person's ability to consistently work and earn an income."

For this reason, participants in the program can receive anything from housing assistance, matching savings, food donations, vocational training, and more. Families and recipients are drawn into the program by different challenges, but once enrolled, they are each assigned a coach and complete an assessment of their finances. With their coach, recipients set financial goals for themselves that they work towards over the course of several months.

"Some people come in because they are behind on rent, others have no income and are looking for a job", said CC Dallas Chief Services Officer Jari Mema. Regardless of what they come in for, participants leave the program better off. Like Amy. Amy was referred to FSCS after her apartment building caught fire. With no savings or rental insurance, Amy was left without a place to live and no funds to stay in a hotel. She was left with nothing but her job. Amy was being served through CC Dallas's disaster program. They helped find her an apartment and were paying her rent while she got back on her feet. During that time, Amy joined FSCS to help her budget for her new apartment. FSCS also helped Amy land a better job making more money. While receiving services, Amy was able to start a savings account and saved upwards of \$2,000. After facing a trying life event, Amy walked away with a better job, more income, better money-management skills, and the security of having emergency savings. Now, Amy volunteers at the food pantry and pays forward the support she received.

Amy was given temporary support until she could thrive on her own. However, not all FSCS clients can make ends meet even after budgeting and cutting expenses. "A single mom can't make it without subsidies," said Jari. In



PATRICK TURNER, LEO RESEARCH FACULTY

these cases, FSCS finds government subsidies that clients are eligible to receive, so they can get to a place where they are spending less than they make.

"We use all the programs that are available that people don't know exist, but [FSCS] knows about," said Jari. FSCS encourages all clients to visit food pantries and use all resources available to them to cut expenses and begin saving. "When [clients] are offered more than one service, they are more likely to succeed and financially thrive," said Jari.

FSCS has now partnered with LEO to measure just how successful clients are after completing the program. Clients are randomized to determine who receives services in order to measure the impact the program has on clients' finances. Patrick and his team have started to survey study participants one-year after they enrolled in the study. "Getting to look at the data and start to see how folks' experiences have changed because of a program is always the best part," said Patrick, "the culmination of much work on CCD's side." •

POWERING
SERVICE
WITH
RESEARCH
TO END
POVERTY



A force for good

Initiative on Solving Homelessness

LEO and the Pulte Family Charitable Foundation are joining forces to engage in rigorous evidence building and identify effective homelessness solutions that move people out of poverty. We've invited seven innovative organizations from across the country to be a part of this initiative:

- Catholic Charities; Dallas
- Catholic Charities; Northern Nevada
- Center for the Homeless; South Bend
- Family Promise; New Jersey, Michigan, and Washington
- Solutions for Change; San Diego
- St. Vincent de Paul; Phoenix
- The Lord's Place; Florida

This summer, these partners and LEO will collaborate to identify problems and brainstorm solutions to transform the homeless services sector. Then in the fall, they will start phase 2 of the process, focused on research design and implementation.



Dissemination to Policymakers



Members of the LEO team have been working with policymakers in multiple Senate and House offices to discuss:

- **With Goodwill of Central and Southern Indiana:** Shared insights from the research study of the Nurse Family Partnership (NFP), a nurse home visitation program for first-time mothers, to inform policymakers as they consider ways to enhance the federally funded Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program.
- **AmeriCorps Seniors project:** We shared progress on LEO's efforts with our AmeriCorps Seniors partners to build rigorous evidence around the Senior Companion Program, which pairs volunteers with elderly and homebound Americans in their community. The hope is that both parties benefit from the budding friendship and measures of health and self-sufficiency get a boost as a result.
- **Projects in King County, Washington:** LEO updated policymakers on several active research studies in partnership with King County, Washington that address transportation, housing stability & COVID, homelessness prevention, and criminal justice to help inform their decisions.

"Evidence Matters" Series

LEO teamed up with our partners in King County, Washington to present our online webinar series, "Evidence Matters." Last fall, we started strong with the *What is Impact Evaluation?* event on how government and service providers can use impact evaluations to deepen the positive outcomes of their work. We built on our success with additional sessions of our *Building Great Research-Provider Partnerships* subseries including *Part I: Preparing for Evaluation* and *Part II: After the Evaluation*. We're excited to start this summer with the newest addition to the series: *The Power of Learning Agendas*.



Fundraising Successes

The **Smith Richardson Foundation** renewed its support of LEO's research with a \$600,000 center-based grant that will go a long way in helping LEO build more evidence, share our discoveries with key stakeholders, and achieve the goals in our 10-year strategic plan. Flexible funding from supporters like the Smith Richardson Foundation has helped LEO build the team and capacity to work closely with front-line service providers across the country to build evidence around their poverty programs.

The **Raskob Foundation for Catholic Activities** recently invested \$50,000 in LEO's work to build a culture of evidence in the Catholic social services sector. The Raskob Foundation's grant award will allow LEO to move the needle on the way Catholic nonprofits view evidence building and its role to better serve low-income families.

Longtime LEO partner, **J-PAL North America**, recently awarded funding for LEO's study evaluating the impact of comprehensive, wrap-around services on high school completion in two large school districts. The program strives to provide the necessary support for students to overcome obstacles and increase their likelihood of high school graduation, post-secondary education, and employment. This \$50,000 investment is the third grant J-PAL has awarded LEO over the last year and another example of the ongoing support that makes LEO's work possible.

LEO Scholars Program in Growth Mode

Notre Dame students have a desire to serve those experiencing poverty, and LEO provides them the chance to apply what they've learned in the classroom to our anti-poverty research. Since 2012, LEO has employed 76



undergraduate scholars who assist in creating evidence and work closely with our research teams and service provider partners. We now want to make the LEO Scholars program a deeper experience while significantly increasing the number of participants. Growing the number of undergraduate students who engage with LEO's work is a key part of our efforts to make LEO a top resource for domestic poverty solutions.

Bringing Together Homelessness Research in Seattle

LEO has strong community partners in the Pacific Northwest, like King County (Seattle) Metro who we worked with to study the impact of interventions like the Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Initiative and Transit Subsidy Income-Based Fares. This summer, we're returning to Seattle to launch a new location-based cohort centered around housing and homelessness prevention starting with our July workshop—a key component of our partnership process where cohort members are paired with their research teams for impact evaluation training and preparation. Bringing together



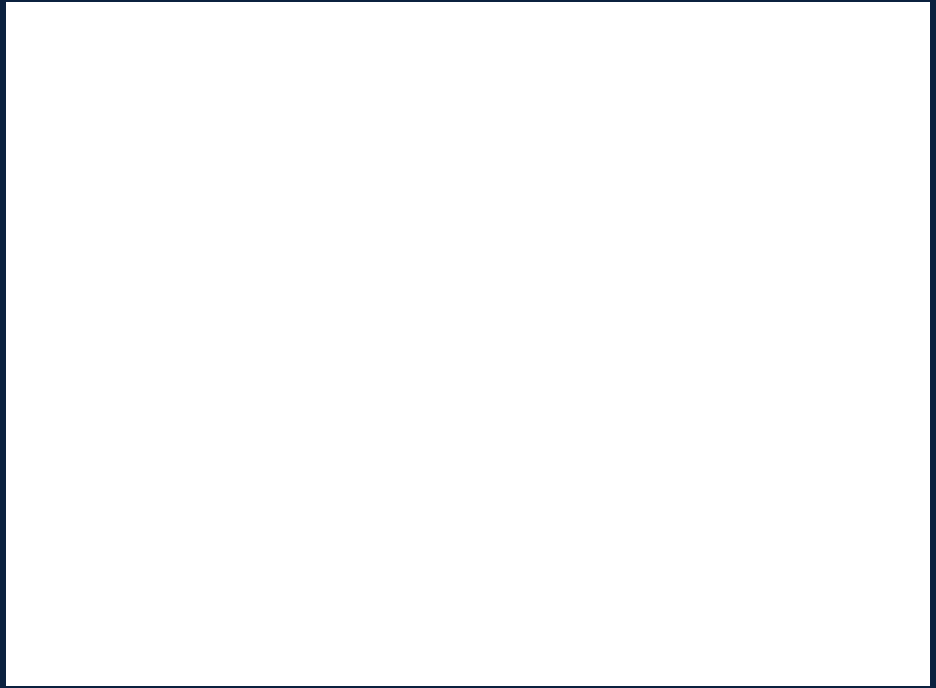
these like-minded groups helps them build a powerful support network so they can lean on and learn from each other throughout the research process. ●





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“Taken together, poverty’s gravitational pull and selective inevitability result in what’s often called the ‘cycle of poverty.’ But what is the cycle of poverty, why is it cyclical, and how can it be broken?”

[What then though the odds, page 1](#)



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