



Commitments in Action: Beech Brook’s Innovative Police-Assisted Referral (PAR) Program is the Epitome of Partnering with Purpose

Impact is not about what you do—how many people you serve, how long you’ve been in existence, or how far your service area reaches. It’s about the positive change you achieve and whether or not it lasts.

This statement, which has long stood as an introduction to the **Alliance for Strong Families and Communities’ Commitments of High-Impact Nonprofit Organizations**, speaks to the value of innovation. Organizations that achieve lasting change are often the ones that are willing to step back, view the problems they are trying to solve holistically, and be willing build solutions that may deviate from past norms.

These successful organizations also tend to recognize the value in bringing new voices and new ideas to the table when creating innovative solutions. After all, there’s perhaps no better way to create lasting change for a community than by working together, as a community, with shared vision and purpose.

Beech Brook is a leading behavioral health organization that works to achieve better outcomes and brighter futures for children and families in Ohio. The organization believes all children deserve the chance to grow up in safe and healthy families with the support they need to reach their full potential.

Programming at Beech Brook spans a variety of services ranging from child abuse prevention,

education and early intervention to community and home-based treatment programs for at-risk children and families. With their diverse portfolio of trauma-informed services and earned reputation as a trusted and responsive partner, Beech Brook helps improve the lives of over **14,000** community members each year.

As Beech Brook’s programming has evolved over time, the organization has made a conscious effort to hone in how to address issues when they are small as a means to mitigate the negative impact on the community of unaddressed issues becoming too large.

“The whole idea of our community-based programming is to always move further upstream, so that we can prevent problems from happening in the first place instead of waiting for them to become big problems before they are addressed,” said Tom Royer, President and CEO of Beech Brook. “We’re always trying to get closer and closer to the root causes of problems instead of letting them languish and addressing them further down river.”

One complex problem facing the Northeast Ohio community over the last decade has been a disconnect between community members’ perceptions of law enforcement, the services they are equipped to provide, and the services many community members actually needed to prevent those little problems from spiraling into bigger issues.



Partnering with Purpose

The Alliance's Commitments of High-Impact Nonprofit Organizations provides a wide-ranging tool kit for organizations battling complex problems such as this, and for Beech Brook, a long-time member of the Alliance, two commitments in particular helped guide the organization down a path towards meaningful change. The Alliance encourages its members to **"Partner with Purpose"** and **"Innovate with Enterprise,"** two critical themes Beech Brook took to heart in building a unique and community-driven framework to drive change in Northeast Ohio.

The result was the innovative and award-winning **Police-Assisted Referral (PAR) Program**, which brought together a diverse group of invested constituents including social services, law enforcement, community leaders and academia to reimagine law enforcement's role in promoting safe and healthy communities. With input from leaders at **Beech Brook**, the **Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority Police Department (CMHAPD)**, **Case Western Reserve University**, the **Partnership for a Safer Cleveland**, and **Frontline**, another behavioral health agency, the program seeks to equip police officers to be not just first responders, but social responders as well.

Mark I. Singer, PhD, a professor of Child and Family Welfare at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, helped lead the charge in developing the PAR program, which was largely informed by his significant experience studying police interactions with the community.



"We were seeing that 80%-90% of a police officer's time was spent in non-arrest situations, and we began to recognize that there's not actually anything on a police officer's duty belt to address what they're doing 80% of the time," Singer said. "We started thinking about what could be done to address this discrepancy and we came up with the whole notion of having a referral card that an officer could give with the officer's name on the card, and on the back of the card it would say that help is on the way. Within 24-48 hours, that family would be contacted by a social service agency like Beech Brook that is part of the PAR program."

Ron Robinson, the PAR Program Coordinator, leads a team that takes over where the CMHAPD officers leave off, ensuring that community members are linked with the appropriate social service agencies and feel supported and empowered to address the underlying issues that led to police involvement in the first place.

"We try to make sure every person receives a warm handoff to the help they need, because often we find that if you just give someone a generic referral to go to someplace it will end up in the trash, but if you walk the client through and make those personal connections with other agencies as well, it's more likely to have an impact," Robinson said. "It also gives them a different twist on what police officers are able to do, seeing those interactions lead to something positive."



According to Singer, the results of the program have really been twofold. First and foremost, it's fundamentally changed the dynamic of many police interactions in the community. Singer's research into PAR's success has shown that **93%** of individuals who are given a PAR referral card by a police officer found the officer to be respectful and helpful, while **91%** found the referral card itself helpful. Additionally, **43%** of program participants have reported having an improved opinion of law enforcement following their PAR experience.

"The nature of the calls to the police has slowly changed," Royer said. "We started noticing that neighbors weren't calling on the police to come arrest someone, but to say 'Hey, come and help my neighbor. I think he's struggling.' I think that's really indicative of the changing nature of the relationship between the community and the police, and I think that's really the biggest success of the program."

Additionally, the program has helped reshape police officers' perception of the social services sector and the actual needs of many of the community members they are responding to.

"As we've continued to train officers in the program, you start to reach a tipping point, where it becomes self-sustaining," Royer added. "Once these officers start seeing the victories and the wins and the good that the program is doing, it becomes a self-reinforcing cycle. Most police officers get into their field of work because they want to help people, but as Dr. Singer mentioned there was no tool on their tool belt to actually help people in many of these situations. We've given them that tool, and I think they feel really good about it and their job satisfaction is going up."

The success of the PAR program has been recognized by the **U.S. Department of Justice's Community-Oriented Policing Services (COPS)** and **Attorney General's Office** for its role in reshaping community-police interactions in Northeast Ohio. Those accolades are a testament to Beech Brook's successful implementation of those two Alliance Commitments – Partnering with Purpose and Innovating with Enterprise.

"The fact that we've been able to maintain and sustain our commitment to PAR for over a decade is miraculous," Royer said. "It's really a testament to the partnerships we've built. We've faced countless challenges, but nobody's walked away from the table. Everybody has remained committed to the program and to delivering this service regardless of what barriers get in our way."



Commitments in Action Celebration



About the Commitments

The Alliance for Strong Families and Communities' **Commitments of High-Impact Nonprofit Organizations** is a framework designed to deliver foundational direction to community-based organizations in achieving impact. By building capacity in the Commitments, organizations can achieve lasting, meaningful change with children, families, and communities.

The Commitments in Action Celebration elevates the stories of the organizations whose ingenuity, innovation, and vision, as part of the **Strategy Counts initiative**, helped the Alliance to establish the Commitments framework.

Next Steps

Learn more about the Commitments on the Alliance's website. Then, implement the **Commitments Assessment Tool** to gain insight into your organization and benchmark your current state. This will help you to prioritize areas for improvement and customize your Alliance membership experience.

The tool is unique because it evaluates not just operational practices, but the culture and values that distinguish and drive human-serving organizations.

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