



CENTER FOR RELIGION AND CIVIC CULTURE  
CECIL MURRAY CENTER FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

# Reimagining **IMPACT**

*An Evaluation of the  
Avanath/CORCDC Partnership*

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# Introduction

This study examines the social impact of community service organizations that are affiliated with church groups in Southern California. In our work with many such faith-based groups, we have found that, while they all share a commitment to improving the lives of the people they serve, most do not collect data to measure the effectiveness of their programming. This is problematic for the following reasons:

- 1) Funders increasingly demand evidence-based programming.
- 2) There are no recognized standard measures for the community impact of faith-based service groups.
- 3) Smaller faith-based service groups, particularly those in low-income neighborhoods, have difficulty creating the organizational structures and capacity to receive resources from funders.
- 4) Funds typically go to large faith-based service groups that have name recognition and more organizational capacity, neglecting the important work done by smaller faith-based groups, especially in communities that are under-resourced.

Another key problem is that those faith-based groups that do collect evaluation and impact data tend to focus their data analysis primarily on inputs and outputs rather than outcomes (Lupton 2015). Examples of input and output measurements are:

- The amount of budget dollars devoted to a program;
- The number of staff devoted to a program;
- The number of participants/graduates in a program; and
- The number of people served (housed, fed, given clothing, etc.).

Examples of outcome measurements are:

- How did the lives of the participants improve?
- Were there changes in the behavior of the participants as a result of their participation?
- In what ways does the program improve the community in which it is located?
- In what ways has the organization improved in its capacity to fulfill its mission?

The measurement of outcomes in addition to inputs and outputs has several advantages as a gauge of a given program's social impact (Lupton 2015). First, outcome-based measurements encourage programs to focus on tangible, achievable goals rather than sweeping general goals like "eliminating poverty" or "empowering the neighborhood." Second, measuring outcomes allows the organization to evaluate whether it is achieving proposed goals, and therefore enables the organization to work to improve its impact over time. Third, outcome-based assessment creates accountability to those funding the organization, and thus increases the likelihood that a successful organization will continue to be funded in the future, ensuring greater organizational and programmatic stability.

In sum, the purpose of this case study is to explore ways of measuring the social impact of community-based organizations that can then be used to evaluate the effectiveness of a given organization's programming. This will also enable the organization to show evidence to outside constituents and funders that the organization's social impact goals are being realized.

## The Avanath/CORCDC Partnership

# Northpointe Apartments in Long Beach

Avanath is a privately held real estate corporation founded in 2008 by Daryl J. Carter. The stated objectives of Avanath are “to generate attractive, risk-adjusted returns for its investors and partners” and “to positively impact communities and the environment.” Avanath’s specialty is developing affordable multi-family housing developments in urban areas for low- to moderate-income families. Avanath’s portfolio includes investments in 39 affordable housing developments in 11 states. Avanath has developed affordable housing units throughout California, including four multi-family and four senior resident communities.

A unique aspect of Avanath’s investment in low- and moderate-income housing is its partnership with faith-based community organizations on their properties. Avanath has partnered on multiple properties with Christ Our Redeemer Community Development Corporation (CORCDC). CORCDC was founded in 2000 as a ministry of Christ Our Redeemer AME Church in Irvine. The mission of CORCDC is “economically empowering impoverished communities by forming partnerships with public and private sectors.” CORCDC provides services in the areas of education, financial literacy, affordable housing and civic engagement.<sup>1</sup>

In its community development collaborations, Avanath capital provides the affordable housing units, and CORCDC provides social services in those affordable housing communities, including financial literacy workshops, health and wellness seminars, after-school programming, youth mentorship programs and civic engagement activities, including town hall meetings with local officials on Avanath properties. In the senior resident communities, CORCDC provides a variety of services, including physical fitness classes, arts and crafts, social events and classes

designed to promote brain health. A unique aspect of this partnership is that CORCDC is not merely a service provider; the organization actually owns a percentage of the properties, giving it a financial stake in the success of the partnership.

One of CORCDC/Avanath’s signature affordable housing developments is Northpointe Apartments, a 528-unit affordable housing apartment complex in North Long Beach, California. This apartment complex houses more than 2,000 low- and moderate-income residents. When Avanath closed escrow on the property in 2013, the tenant turnover rate was 19 percent with an average tenancy term of 72 months, and the development had a significant gang problem. In 2017, the turnover rate was 11 percent with an average tenancy rate of 84 months, suggesting that conditions had significantly changed for residents. As noted above, as part of the Avanath/CORCDC partnership at Northpointe, CORCDC provides a number of social services in the complex. One such service is an after-school tutoring program that is provided by another sub-contracted community service group based in Long Beach, Success in Challenges (SIC).

SIC was founded in 2002 by Rev. O. Leon Wood, Jr., a former gang member turned pastor from Long Beach. Its mission is “to provide community youth and adults with safe, interactive programs that promote good citizenship, character development, creativity and discipline, designed to inspire them to face life’s challenges with enthusiasm and dignity.” Rev. Wood and SIC have a long history in Long Beach, including operating a six-week summer reading enrichment program that is part of the national Children’s Defense Fund Freedom Schools Program.

CORCDC hired SIC for its cultural competencies and social capital in the city of Long Beach, as well as its experience in working with at-risk Long Beach youth. One of SIC’s primary initiatives is the after-school program at Northpointe. The program provides homework assistance every day, a healthy snack and four enrichment activities including: arts and crafts, performing arts, mentoring, and sports and recreation. The children rotate to a different club every day according to their

<sup>1</sup> *At the time of this case study, Christ Our Redeemer’s pastor, Rev. Mark Whitlock, also served as executive director of the Cecil Murray Center for Community Engagement, which is part of the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture.*

grade level. Operating from mid-afternoon until 6pm, Monday through Friday, the program is free and open to all of the children that live in the Northpointe Apartment Homes.

The stated goals for individual students in the SIC after-school program are:

1. Increasing academic achievement;
2. Increasing cultural awareness;
3. Character development/leadership ability; and
4. Increasing parental involvement.

To measure the impact of the SIC after-school program on academic achievement, character development and parental involvement, CORCDC—in consultation with the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture—began collecting data during each session of the after-school program to measure the impact of the program on individual students. This data collection lasted for a total of nine weeks in the first quarter of 2017. Twenty of the most consistently attending individual students were selected to participate in the evaluation.

SIC staff monitored these 20 selected children on the following measures:

1. **ATTENDANCE.** Every day the staff recorded whether each of the 20 selected children was present in the after-school program.
2. **HOMEWORK COMPLETION.** Each day the staff recorded whether each of the 20 selected children completed all the school homework assigned to them for that particular day.
3. **FOCUS AND DISCIPLINE.** Each day the staff recorded whether any of the 20 selected children were given disciplinary consequences by staff for being disruptive. These disciplinary consequences might include: a) speaking to the disruptive children about their behavior; b) giving them a time-out or moving them to a different location; c) sending the disruptive child home; or d) calling the child's parent/guardian to discuss the disruptive behavior.
4. **PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT.** Each week the staff recorded the number of interactions during that particular week that a staff person had with a participant's parents, including one-on-one meetings, phone calls, group meetings, parents' volunteering or attendance at field trips.



IMPACT MEASURE

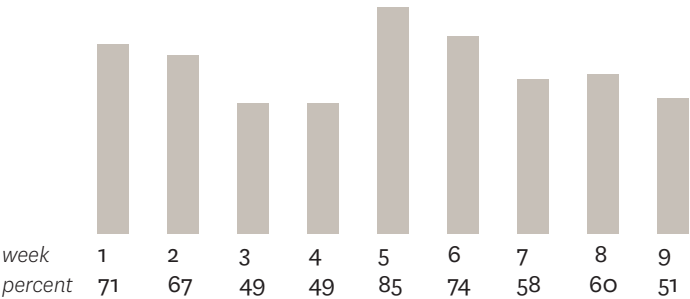
RATES OF HOMEWORK COMPLETION

Table 1 below shows that, during the nine-week period of data collection, an average of 62 percent of the 20 selected children in the after-school program completed their school homework during the time set aside for tutoring on any given day. The table also shows that the average percentage of children completing their school homework fluctuated from week to week. For example, on week three, an average of 49 percent of the selected children finished their homework on any given day that week, while an average of 85 percent of the selected children finished their homework on any given day during week five. This may have reflected fluctuating volumes of homework given

by teachers from week to week, or perhaps fluctuating levels of motivation among the children from week to week.

This measure shows that students are in fact completing homework at a reasonable rate during the after-school homework time. National statistics for homework completion vary according to location and income-level, though a completion rate of 50 percent may serve as a rough national average, to which we can compare the completion rates at Northpointe. Ideally, the students should be able to complete their homework during the homework time, so this measure could serve as a baseline for improvement.

Table 2  
Homework Completion During  
“Success in Challenges” After-School Program



Average percentage of children completing school homework on any given day, by week

Average for All Nine Weeks: 62%

IMPACT MEASURE

FOCUS, DISCIPLINE AND BEHAVIOR

On average each child in the SIC after-school program received 2.7 disciplinary consequences on any given day during the after-school program. Disciplinary consequences include being spoken to about disruptive behavior, put in a time-out, sent home for the day or a call to the child’s parents. These behavioral consequences were heavily skewed toward a small number of older children (6th to 8th graders), who received a higher percentage of the disciplinary actions on any given day. In fact, the median number of disciplinary consequences given to a child on any given day was .33, which reveals the extent to which the number of consequences is skewed toward a small number of children.

Our ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis found that the more often a child attended the SIC after school program, the less likely they were to receive a disciplinary consequence on any given day. Specifically, for every additional day per week a child attended, the average number of disciplinary consequences he or she received on any given day dropped by 1.45. This suggests that repeated attendance at the SIC after-school program is developing the children’s capacity to focus on their work without being disruptive, as the more they attend the program, the less likely they are to engage in disruptive behavior.





#### IMPACT MEASURE

##### PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Over the course of the nine weeks in which data were collected, SIC leaders made a total of 142 contacts with parents or guardians of the 20 selected children, including one-on-one meetings, phone calls, group meetings or instances in which a parent volunteered or attended field trips. The average number of parent contacts per week per child was .85. In other words, over the course of nine weeks, the parents of the 20 selected children had contact with SIC staff an average of 7.7 times.

This parental investment in the after-school programs in which their children are enrolled, according to social

research, has significant benefits. Benefits include a higher likelihood of parents' encouraging and monitoring their child's progress in school as well as "network closure" (a sociological term that refers to a network of adults in a child's life who know and regularly communicate with each other), which encompasses monitoring the child's behavior, providing role models and encouraging the child to succeed (Smith 2003). We can conclude that SIC is achieving the goal of connecting with parents through building relationships and inviting them to invest in SIC's programming as volunteers.

# Measuring the Social Impact of Civic Engagement Programs

Civic engagement refers to citizens working together to improve the quality of life in a community. This collective action to address issues of public concern includes engaging local, state and national governmental entities that affect the living conditions in a community. Historically, low-income communities have low levels of civic engagement, including low voter turnout during elections, which limits residents' capacity to engage the governmental entities that affect their communities. One of the goals of many faith-based nonprofit organizations is to engage residents in the political process in order to improve the conditions of their communities.

In addition to providing after-school programming through "Success in Challenges" at Northpointe Apartments, CORCDC also provides civic engagement activities to encourage Northpointe residents to participate in the political process. These activities include voter registration drives, hosting Long Beach 8th District community meetings at the apartments and holding meetings with the North Division Chief of the Long Beach Police Department at the site to address the concerns of the residents. Since CORCDC has been at the property, they have held three voter registration drives and 16 community meetings at which different community leaders have spoken to residents about a variety of civic topics. The goal of these activities is to encourage residents to participate in the political process to make improvements in their community. Avanath and CORCDC reached out the 8th District Long Beach City Councilman Al Austin to promote their vision of Northpointe as a site of community engagement before the complex was bought and redeveloped by Avanath.

According to Councilman Austin:

A conversation we had prior to the purchase of Northpointe and the partnership of Avanath and COR—and something that I have sought out to do as part of my mission as a city council member—is to include all members of the community in the decision-making process. Northpointe is so far from City Hall, I think it is important to reach out and bring City Hall to the residents. That's why we try to have a presence there and hold the events there.

This commitment to engaging residents in collective action for community improvement is central to CORCDC's and Avanath's vision for Northpointe.





#### IMPACT MEASURE

### INCREASE IN VOTER TURNOUT

With more than 2,000 residents, Northpointe makes up a large majority of the voters in the voting precinct in which it is located. We examined public records to analyze voter turnout in that precinct. In the 2012 general election (before CORCDC began its civic engagement activities), this precinct had a registered voter turnout rate of 44 percent. In the 2016 general election, after the community engagement activities of CORCDC had been implemented for 22 months, this precinct had a voter turnout rate of more than 50 percent—rates that are comparable to other low- to moderate-income precincts, though lower than Los Angeles County as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

While it is impossible to directly measure the percentage of this voter turnout increase that can be attributed to the CORCDC programs, it is reasonable to suggest that the civic engagement activities of CORCDC contributed to the increase in voter turnout, since Northpointe makes up a large majority of the voters in the precinct, and efforts at improving voter turnout are one of the primary activities of CORCDC.

#### IMPACT MEASURE

### INFLUENCING NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENTS

CORCDC civic engagement activities at Northpointe have influenced the residents at Northpointe to get involved in the city of Long Beach's plans for improvements in the neighborhood. For example, residents are involved in the planning of Phase 2 of the development of Davenport Park, within walking distance of the Northpointe complex. On the grounds of a formerly abandoned and condemned industrial site, the city completed Phase 1 of the park (11.5 acres) with funds from the Long Beach Redevelopment Agency in 2006. The park currently consists of a soccer field, two half-court basketball courts, a playground, walking trail, picnic area, restroom facility and parking lot. Phase 2 of the park project, which includes an additional 5.6 acres of the site that remains undeveloped, is still in the process of being planned.

Northpointe residents are actively involved in advocating for and planning Phase 2 of the project. According to Councilman Austin:

Part of the strategy that we've used in terms of highlighting the need for the park is highlighting the investment that has taken place with Avanath in the Northpointe apartments and profiling the community there. There are a lot of youth in that complex. We use it as a selling point as to why the park project is so important...The residents were involved in that and we actually held the park planning meetings at Northpointe so we got the residents involved in that process of putting a plan in place and creating a community vision in place for the park.

This influence shows the practical impact of CORCDC's civic engagement activities at Northpointe and how the relationship between the residents and the City Councilman has led to community improvements.

According to Councilman Austin, the success of Avanath's Northpointe property has also garnered attention from the City Council. Northpointe is seen as a model for future development of low- to moderate-income housing in Long Beach. Austin said:

We are working on a plan called Long Beach 2040, looking at our city and our housing stock, you know 20 or 30 years from now and what type of housing we are looking to have, and the Northpointe property shows us how density leads to economic development opportunities for commercial properties in the area. Our economic development team is constantly pitching to developers to look at that site [Northpointe] to think about opportunities for the future.

The above quotation suggests that Northpointe is having an indirect social impact on Long Beach by serving as an example of a successful low-income housing community that is influencing plans for future housing developments in the city.

<sup>2</sup> Voter turnout for general elections in Los Angeles County was 71 percent in 2012 and 69.5 percent in 2016.

# Conclusion

This case shows the potential advantages of partnerships between faith-based community service organizations and private, for-profit low-income housing developers. Because of the high density and common community space in a large housing complex, the organization can maximize its impact among residents by promoting social interaction and community engagement programming to all residents in a particular complex.

Indeed, according to a 20-year resident of Northpointe, there has been a “100 percent improvement to the community,” including the attention to the gang problem and the overall condition of the property as compared to the previous ownership. Despite obvious improvement, there are also lingering issues, including some remaining gang activity and a growing homeless population adjacent to the Northpointe property. Yet, the influence of the Avanath/CORCDC partnership remains clear. One resident expressed that through the encouragement of Rev. Woods of SIC, she had returned to school to earn her masters degree, and the COR financial literacy program had inspired her toward home ownership. Despite the ongoing and inevitable issues that arise in an improving neighborhood, the total environment of Northpointe has been improved significantly.

Providing services on the Northpointe property was an essential component of the project’s success. Parents of children in the complex getting to know each other through their involvement in the after-school program creates “network closure” (Smith 2003) in which parents can look out for and monitor each other’s children. In addition, children have easy access to academic mentors and a safe space to complete their homework.



The civic engagement activities of CORCDC clearly have created a more engaged citizenry in the Northpointe complex. The residents are more likely to vote in elections and are actually influencing decisions made by the city to improve the neighborhood in which it is located. Furthermore, the City of Long Beach sees Northpointe as a positive model for low-income, high-density housing, and the city is using it to plan future investments in similar housing developments. Thus, Northpointe is having a social impact far beyond its own residents.

We conclude that this specific partnership of a for-profit developer, a faith-based community organization and a city government is a potent mix for creating positive social impact in a low-income, at-risk community. This case has the potential to be used by other cities as a model to draw together similar partners on similar projects to improve the lives of all city residents.

## References

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## About the Author

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