ACCOUNTABILITY FOR CHANGE

BY JONATHAN LANCASTER

Most organizations were founded by people who were passionate about a specific cause; they rally people around an issue to make a difference. Our communities need these organizations to point a finger at problems that may have been overlooked. A lot of times, there seems to be a struggle to move beyond the inspiring idea. There can be a comradery around talking about issues; we plan lunches, dinners and events around poverty, crime, education gaps, and infrastructure problems. A lot of money is spent on events and organizations that are good at explaining an issue, but there is often a lack of accountability about solving the issue.

There are complicated problems that do not have simple, quick solutions, but a lot of the issues facing our communities have tangible solutions that organizations should be held accountable for addressing. The reason I got into the nonprofit space was that I wanted to work for an organization that held itself accountable for the change they set out to create. Over the last four years of working at We Will Go, we have taken a step back and said, what is a measurable change we want to see in our community? We began to ask hard questions like, “Does this program really help people or do we just like the idea?”

If we are not careful, we can fall in love with the way we solve a problem and lose sight of actually solving the problem. What if organizations were better known by people in the community impacted by the program rather than by donors that liked the proposed solution? We realized that we were going to have to stop doing certain programs to focus on creating a measurable impact.

For well over a decade, We Will Go took clothing donations and gave out clothes to those in need. This in itself is not a bad thing, but we ran this alongside our food pantry. We stepped back and said, what is the biggest need and where are we spending the greatest amount of time? The greater identified need was groceries for families, but sorting and processing clothing took up most of our time. We decided to take a big step and stop taking clothing donations. When we last gave out clothes in 2020, we provided food for 7,500 people. Last year in 2023, we provided groceries for over 20,000 people and processed over 334,000 pounds of food. In three years, we saw a 267% increase in the number of people served, and last year we moved into a grocery store because we outgrew our space.
I still remember the impact of my first mission trip. Seeing children sleeping in crowded rooms painted bright orange and red, and adults rushing to me and my dad, forced me to see a different way of life. I remember asking my dad questions about why children were unsafe or alone and who was going to help them when we were gone. My dad was kind and told me that was a job for missionaries or social workers. Something about what he said resonated with me.

I wanted to work at We Will Go because I too wanted to help children like these. I wanted to be a part of the solution. ‘Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’ Matthew 25:40

Because of your support, we are able to form relationships and see transformation in our community. One relationship was formed with a student that was born into a low-income family and needed someone to care. I remember being taken aback when we went to her home and her caretaker was barely able to lift her head to greet us. Standing in that small house, I realized this student had little support, help, or encouragement in her life. Years of struggles, attempts to succeed, and times of pain passed with this student continuing to come to our programs. When she was on the brink of dropping out of homecoming court, We Will Go was there. By turning the upstairs classroom into a salon and putting together a shopping trip, our staff took time to make her dream possible.

Now as a bright and motivated high school senior, she has applied to be a Camp Counselor at We Will Go after she graduates. We are grateful for your support that has made this possible, and we are excited for her to have the opportunity to teach and mentor students who are where she once was. I was most proud to hear her say that she, “Has faith and confidence in God...and believes in Him, even when it is really hard to.” Her faith challenges the way I see my neighbors and her story reminds me of the way Christ calls us to be a neighbor.