



Economic Mobility - “Look To The Playground For Success”

Recent studies show that the solution to achieving Economic Mobility may have been hiding in plain sight all along. The Beatles were right: “We get by with a little help from our friends.”

Drawing on a massive dataset of 72.2 million Facebook users aged 25 to 44, Harvard’s Raj Chetty and his team studied how social networks influence economic success. They found the most significant factor for gaining upward mobility is friendships. (links below) Specifically, friendships established across diverse economic groups through activity or joining an organization.

The solution seems simple, but we will have to refocus our efforts by providing safe spaces that promote a sense of belonging. Unfortunately, many places where people of different economic strata once forged friendships have been shuttered. We have demolished our bowling alleys, gutted after-school activities, siloed in our churches, backed away from civic engagement, and fenced off our playgrounds. The big question is not only “Where do the Children Play?” but “How are they playing?” We learned that when it comes to education, FaceTime is no substitute for real-time, and now we have data proving the lack of together-time restricts people’s ability to advance economically.

SAGA is asking our partners to evaluate their programs to see if they maximize the opportunity for interaction among the various economic strata of the community. Our grantee’s interest in engaging on this issue has been encouraging, and it fits with our Convene, Collaborate, and Create campaign. One of our core objectives is to have lasting impact and achieving upward mobility would do just that.

We don’t claim to have all the answers, but along with our grantees, we will continue to ask the tough questions. Are we building barriers, or are we breaking them down? SAGA is proud to have facilitated the gifting of over 6,000 backpacks this year. However, the solution to ending generational poverty is not found in how many meals we provide, the number of backpacks we give away, or the headcount of the people we serve. Let’s advance Economic Mobility using the facts we know and the friends we make. We welcome your ideas and want to collaborate with you to pilot them, even if it’s just one playground at a time.

Kindest regards,

David Bartoshuk
President, SAGA Foundation
David@SAGAFoundation.org
www.SAGAFoundation.org

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2022/08/02/7-key-takeaways-from-chettys-new-research-on-friendship-and-economic-mobility/>
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/08/01/upshot/rich-poor-friendships.html>
<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/01/briefing/economic-ladder-rich-poor-americans.html?login=email&auth=login-email>
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