Farewell Comments to Board of Directors & Staff

By John A. Begala, Executive Director

December, 2014

Whatever good we have done as an organization these past 16 years has been the result of many people working in concert—members of the Board, giving their time, treasure and expertise, and members of the staff applying their knowledge and passion to creating a better world for others.

I have often quoted Bill Burges, who observed that The Center for Community Solutions’ successful mode of operation is a “star system.” This is true in this way: we provide a rare organizational culture where bright people with vision for a better, more decent world can seek to make big changes. Many of them come to CCS relatively early in their careers and go on to play even larger roles in Greater Cleveland and beyond: Bob Eckardt, Eric Fingerhut, Lori McClung, David Ellis, Gretchen Kunkel, Georgia Anetzberger, Jane Fumich, Debra Lewis Curlee, Ken Slenkovich—and, indeed, John Corlett…the list is a long and impressive one. Their brilliance, and their illustrious post-CCS careers, obscure something equally wonderful about the organization: it is a place where some people can make a career: Joe Ahern, Roz Kaleal, Ken Slenkovich, and Rosie Black have between them worked here over 100 years. This too is rare in this world—and I think it is one of the things that makes the “star system” possible…part of our organization’s alchemy. Will it continue to be so, or will it end as retirements occur in the decade ahead? If the latter, what will take the place of their constancy and institutional memory? I don’t know—and it will be up to those of you who carry on to find the answer.

We live in a time when corporations are considered people, money is considered speech, and those who say so are considered “originalists” in their interpretation of our Constitution.

It is also a time when the party of Jefferson will incur permanent, rolling debt for their latest whims, and the party of Hamilton agitates for a balanced national budget.

This is not Lewis Carroll or George R.R. Martin fantasy—this is our reality.

If there is a central theme to my work at Community Solutions, it has been to give shape to, and moor, an organization that can, from the quality and integrity of its work, stand firmly amid streams of brutal inequality, tumult, and popular madness as a landmark for those caught in their torrents. That is awfully grand for a small organization like this, let alone one that has as its mission the health and social fabric of one little corner of one state in a vast nation and an incomprehensibly large and complex world.

So be it. Patch together enough of these and a traveler might occasionally find a safe and dry haven.

The Center for Community Solutions has for a decade and a half been my yeoman farm—sharecropper though I am. I am pleased to pass along my share of its healthy fields to those who will be working them in the years ahead.
Lots of Hard Work Lies Ahead...

By John R. Corlett, President & Executive Director

January, 2015

For the past several years, wherever I have worked, I have kept a photograph in my office of my grandmother and great aunt as young girls distributing milk in Cleveland’s Tremont neighborhood in 1921. I like the photograph because it illustrates my family connection to Cleveland, but I also like it because it illustrates a value I was taught while growing up: that those who have much have a responsibility to help those who have little. It’s that multi-generational connection to Cleveland and family tradition of helping others that bring me back to The Center for Community Solutions to serve as the 15th President and Executive Director in its 101-year history.

I want to thank the CCS Board of Directors for providing me with the opportunity to lead this organization, and I want to thank previous Executive Director John Begala and the CCS staff for being so gracious and for welcoming me back into the CCS fold. I will be spending a great deal of time over the next several weeks connecting with existing and potential community partners in Northeast Ohio and across the state. I want to hear their ideas (and yours) about the work that we are doing and the work that we should be doing. I am also grateful for the continued funding partnerships we have with United Way of Greater Cleveland, The George Gund Foundation, the Saint Luke’s Foundation, the Cleveland Foundation, the Mt. Sinai Health Care Foundation, The McGregor Foundation, and others.

In the months ahead I will be working with our Board and Public Policy Team to support passage of a two-year state budget that includes sufficient revenues to provide vital services to vulnerable Ohioans. Priority number one will be supporting Governor John Kasich’s efforts to continue the Medicaid extension that was authorized by the State Controlling Board last year. On January 1, Ohio marked the one-year anniversary of extended Medicaid coverage. The program rollout has gone very smoothly with little or no reports of patients having trouble signing up or accessing care, or of newly insured patients filling up emergency rooms. Ohio’s hospitals and other health care providers are reporting sharply reduced charity care, which means that doctors, nurses, and other providers are able to offer the care that their patients need.

The continued extension of Medicaid has positive implications for a variety of issues, including reducing prison recidivism, expanding access to behavioral health services, cutting down on the transmission of HIV/AIDS, improving health outcomes, and stimulating the state’s economy. Community Solutions will meet with key legislative leaders as well as members of the Northeast Ohio delegation to make the case for why maintaining Medicaid coverage is essential to Ohio’s future.

At the same time, I’m interested in taking an in-depth look at a number of Medicaid policy questions. First, as a former State Medicaid Director, I am always interested in how we can reduce program expenditures in ways that improve quality while not harming beneficiaries. We will look at how other states are incorporating patient engagement and/or personal responsibility provisions into their Medicaid programs. These provisions are often included in coverage purchased through the private market but are largely absent from Medicaid. It’s also likely that Ohio’s Hospital Care Assurance Program will need to be updated as the number of uninsured patients continues to drop due to the Medicaid extension. This program has been vital to safety net hospitals like Cuyahoga County’s own MetroHealth System, but funds are now being shifted to other providers as a result of state policy changes. CCS should be a resource to Northeast Ohio advocates and providers who want to learn more about various facets of the Medicaid program, or who want to explore various policy options. Ohio’s Medicaid program has become a model of innovation, and the extension of Medicaid to previously uninsured adults provides a great opportunity to make progress on a number of important issues.

Of course there are other important policy issues that will be considered as part of the state budget, like services for older adults and persons with disabilities, adult protective services, and reducing hunger in Ohio. Community Solutions is working on analyses of the state’s substance abuse treatment system as well as Ohio’s system for caring for those with developmental disabilities. With these and other tools, we will look for ways to translate our research into action and positive change. Enhancing the knowledge and capacity of Ohio’s health and human service advocates is a major interest of mine.
Locally, Community Solutions is excited about working with new Cuyahoga County Executive Armond Budish and Cuyahoga County Council President Dan Brady. CCS wants to be a resource to the new leadership as they consider health and human service issues in the year ahead. I was pleased to attend the swearing-in ceremonies for both the Cuyahoga County Council and the County Executive. I was even more pleased to hear Executive Budish talk about the struggles that so many Cuyahoga County residents face living in poverty. He promised that a goal of his administration will be “to create a seamless pathway from poverty to prosperity.” This is a goal that Community Solutions can enthusiastically support. He will be aided greatly in this task by his choice of Sharon Sobol Jordan, the former president and CEO of the Centers for Families and Children, to be his Chief of Staff. Her human service experience will be a tremendous asset to the new administration.

Lots of hard work lies ahead, but if we work together in a non-partisan and cooperative manner, we can figure out solutions to some of our most vexing health, social, and economic problems. That’s the mission of The Center for Community Solutions, and that’s why I’m here. I hope you will join me and become a part of our work.

Embarking on the Next 100 Years

The Center for Community Solutions is an organization in Northeast Ohio that has served people in our region and across the state in numerous roles for more than 100 years: As a community planner, facilitator, funder and fundraiser, organizer, incubator, service provider and evaluator, advocate, researcher, analyst…and the list goes on. Hundreds of people have played important roles as members of our staff, board members, and in other volunteer capacities over that rich history. We are proud to be among that group. We thank all of those who went before us, all of those who serve with us, and all of those who support the work of our organization. We look forward to continued success in the coming year and invite your ideas, suggestions, and participation.
In 2014, Community Solutions began its second hundred years of community service. Major activities by work area included:

The Board of Directors and Administration provided oversight to programs and operations, thereby ensuring integrity to the mission and financial stability. They monitored progress on program priorities and engaged in the thoughtful, critical process of selecting a new president and executive director, as well as a new Board Chair, to take the helm in 2015. (See “Farewell” from John A. Begala, who retired as executive director at the end of 2014, and “Lots of Hard Work Lies Ahead” from John R. Corlett, new president and executive director.)

The Research team provided specialized data for a variety of groups to inform their decision-making processes. This included work for the Cuyahoga County Board of Health, United Way of Greater Cleveland, Wayne-Holmes Mental Health and Recovery Services Board, Akron Community Foundation, and Legal Aid Society of Greater Cleveland. They gave special attention to innovation of their data presentation through infographics, fact sheets, and other tools; obtaining and successfully fulfilling paid consulting work; and producing informative publications and presentations which were broadly shared and well-received by a widespread audience.

Through the Public Policy team, CCS continued a long tradition of producing timely, reliable analyses to inform nonprofit leaders and influence policy makers. In October, the team released a groundbreaking report on the fiscal cost of Ohio’s aging population. Aging Ohio is the first major report to analyze both tax and spending effects of demographic change on the state budget. In the spring, the team updated the budget primer, Financing Ohio’s Future: Human Services in Changing Times, a valuable resource for advocates in understanding funding sources, program structure, and policy issues. State Budgeting Matters was published bi-monthly, covering topics such as the Mid-Biennium Review, the MyCare pilot program, and the future of the Ryan White program. The team also took the lead in organizing six sessions of the Human Services Institute, Northeast Ohio’s longest-running educational event on health, social, and economic issues. Nearly 1,000 people attended. Guest speakers included Isabel Sawhill, The Brookings Institution; Ta-Nehisi Coates, The Atlantic (Annual Eugene H. Freedheim Lecture-Columbus); Barbara O’Brien, National Campaign for Grade Level Reading (Annual W. T. McCullough Lecture-Cleveland); Dr. Otis Brawley, American Cancer Society (Annual W. T. McCullough Lecture-Columbus); Thomas Dubois, Instituto del Progreso Latino, Chicago; and a panel discussion on Medicaid Expansion: Progress, Opportunities, Worries (Annual Eugene H. Freedheim Lecture-Columbus).

The Health team increased its advocacy activities for long-acting reversible contraceptive (LARC) access to reduce unintended pregnancy and teen births in Ohio. The team also contributed to several print and electronic reports and videos on topics ranging from Body Mass Index (BMI), to the Ryan White HIV/AIDS program, and the need for better data and information from Ohio health systems to inform policy and program. Through the AIDS Funding Collaborative, the team coordinated planning for the Campaign to End AIDS national HIV advocacy summit, held in Cleveland, and allocated over $300,000 in grants to support
HIV/AIDS prevention and capacity building needs in Cuyahoga County. The team also successfully coordinated efforts of the Advocates for Youth and the Collaborative for Comprehensive School Aged Health projects and grew the AFC’s AmeriCorps team, which brings young people to Cleveland for a year of service in area safety-net organizations like The MetroHealth System, Nueva Luz Urban Resource Center, and Care Alliance Health Center.

The **Communications** team continued to work with other teams in expanding the use of electronic tools to ensure that data, information, and analyses are clear, understandable, and user-friendly.

**Printed & Electronic Tools**

A primary role of Community Solutions is providing data, information, and analysis in the form of decision support tools to public officials, nonprofit leaders and their teams, funders, advocates, students, and others with an interest in health, social, and economic issues. In 2014, a number of printed and electronic tools were created and widely disseminated. All of them may be found on the Publications 2014 page of our Website: www.CommunitySolutions.com.

After featuring 31 weekly individual interviews, in the fall, the High On Ohio video series evolved into monthly mini-documentaries on issues of concern around the state; topics included Ohio’s opiate epidemic, elder abuse services, HIV/AIDS, and Northeast Ohioans struggling with poverty. A new tool—animated videos—was added to our collection of resources. Four debuted throughout the year, including *The Ohio 100*, which explores the demographic, economic, and geographic characteristics of 100 representative Ohioans.

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**5 Things You Need to Know This Week**

Two weekly electronic newsletters—“5 Things You Need to Know This Week” and “Weekly Briefing”—provide alerts about CCS work, as well as news from the human services world around us to over 5,000 people across the state. In November, the annual Anisfield-Wolf Memorial Award—$20,000 for outstanding service—was presented to Ohio Guidestone, and nine MTV: Most Treasured Volunteer Awards were presented at the Celebration of Human Services.

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**The Center for Community Solutions**

identifies community issues, analyzes and explains them, and proposes nonpartisan recommendations to improve the lives of Ohioans.
Funders & Partners, 2014
We appreciate the support of our work from funders and partners.

Advocates for Youth
Akron Community Foundation
Alcohol, Drug Addiction, and Mental Health Services Board of Cuyahoga County
Benjamin Rose Institute on Aging
Brush Foundation
The City of Cleveland
The Cleveland Foundation
Cuyahoga County
Cuyahoga County Department of Senior and Adult Services
East End Neighborhood House
The George Gund Foundation
Health Policy Institute of Ohio
Interact for Health
The Literacy Cooperative of Greater Cleveland
Lorain Community Foundation
The McGregor Foundation
Medical Mutual of Ohio (Sponsor: MTV Awards)
The Mt. Sinai Health Care Foundation
The Portage Foundation
The Raymond John Wean Foundation
Saint Luke’s Foundation
Sherwick Foundation
Summit County Department of Job and Family Services
Summit County Public Health
United Way of Greater Cleveland
United Way of Medina County
Wayne-Holmes Mental Health and Recovery Services Board
Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging
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*Left during 2014
Staff, 2014

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*Left during 2014

Photo: December, 2014