

# The Gaps.

KRISTIN O'MALLEY, PRESIDENT AND CEO



Life's full of gaps. Historical gaps. Geographical gaps. Scientific gaps. Market gaps. Age gaps. Gender gaps. Even credibility gaps. In the summer of 1969, a store loaded with Levi's and LP records popped up in Ingleside, San Francisco to fill another gap--in the teen market. That Gap, short for "generation gap," became one of the largest specialty retailers in the United States.

In community foundation work, we're also focused on gaps. These are the not-so-good gaps: UNMET NEEDS. Our job is to bridge them, fill them, stop them. But first we need to identify them. And, there's no handy Gap App for that.

Over the past year and a half, the need to expand access to essential programs and services, especially for vulnerable and underserved populations who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, has never been more apparent. When we created the Strategic Emergency Response Fund (SERF) in 2020, we started funneling resources to nonprofit organizations we had partnered with in the past, strong organizations throughout the region that could scale up and adapt quickly to meet a wide range of critical community needs: food, housing, utilities, childcare, healthcare.

Then we started looking for the gaps:

*What parts of our community are not being well served? Why?*

*What are some of the barriers to access?*

*How can we be a stronger partner to help fill the gaps?*

The answers are rarely simple or straight-forward. However, one proven avenue is to expand our partnerships and support organizations that are filling in the gaps.

## EXPANDING PARTNERSHIPS

[Catholic Social Services of Fall River](#) provides programming and services on Cape Cod. However, the organization traditionally focused its direct financial assistance program to immigrant clients at their off-Cape sites. That changed at the outset of the pandemic. When the need here became apparent, they used their existing partnerships and connections to quickly expand the program to the Cape and Islands. Because of their ability to adapt to meet the needs of our local community, they became a strong partner for COVID-19 relief funding. Initially, we allocated \$125,000 in SERF funding to this initiative. Later, we allocated an additional \$120,000 from a state funding source that focused on supporting historically underserved communities. To date, Catholic Social Services has provided direct financial assistance for food, housing, and other needs to over 950 individuals on Cape Cod. Most of those who have benefitted do not qualify for federal assistance. Most have annual incomes between \$15K-\$25K. Most do not speak English or have limited language skills. Many recipients lost their jobs during the pandemic and were struggling to buy groceries and pay rent. These resources were literally a lifeline, and Catholic Social Services' organizational agility made it possible for us, and others, to get them to the people who needed them most.

[The Health Ministry, Inc.](#) became another new ally in the Gap War. The Hyannis-based organization provides a myriad of free programs and services to more than 500 members of the Cape's Brazilian community. Most of the households the Health Ministry serves do not speak English and do not have transportation, barriers that make it difficult for them to know what resources are available and, in turn, to access them. The Health Ministry works to bridge that gap. The Ministry has also ensured members receive accurate information about COVID-19, health protocols, and vaccinations. Because the organization supports itself entirely through private donations and fundraisers, the pandemic has impacted operating revenue dramatically. We allocated \$15,000 in SERF funding to support their critical work during this challenging time.

### **FUNDING CAPACITY-BUILDING INITIATIVES**

Forging new partnerships is one way to increase access and impact. Funding capacity-building initiatives to "build a better box" is another. Our nonprofit leaders are equally "obsessed with the gaps" and look for ways to take their own organizations to the next level of operational, programmatic, financial, or organizational maturity. [WE CAN](#) is one of them. We recently awarded this tried-and-true partner a \$24,680 Targeted Capacity Building Grant to plan, implement, and execute a new hybrid (virtual and in-person) service delivery model for their legal, work support, and financial empowerment programs for low-and moderate-income women. The hybrid model will reduce waitlists for high demand programs and internal capacity strains. It will also allow participants to navigate around work schedules, transportation, childcare, and other barriers to access.

### **ACTING STRATEGICALLY AND DELIBERATELY**

In 2021, we have distributed \$3.9 million in grants to nonprofits from all Foundation funds to date. This includes \$1.2 million from our Strategic Emergency Response Fund for pandemic relief. We are a force to be reckoned with; we are also a work in progress. To increase and expand access to programs and services, especially for vulnerable and underserved populations across Cape Cod, we must continue to listen, learn, evolve, and act. These strategic and deliverable action steps include:

- Forging and nurturing strong partnerships across the nonprofit sector.
- Redefining what partnerships look like and acknowledging "one size" does not fit all.
- Building partnerships based on trust, transparency, dialogue, and mutual learning.
- Refining our grantmaking policies, practices, and applications to reduce barriers to access and deploy resources where they are needed the most.
- Investing in nonprofit capacity-building initiatives that expand impact.

Our final action step is to share what we learn with others. That's what these columns and our virtual community forums are intended to do. Inform. Inspire. Unite. Without a community of supporters, there are huge gaps in our work. Our work is driven by shared knowledge, shared visions, and shared actions. It is fueled with every resource we have at our disposal. Naturally, this includes funding. But money doesn't solve problems. People do. Thank you for being one of them.