Community Resilience Guild - Fellows Program:
Connecting GC Grad Talent with Local Need & Opportunity
-- Concept Note --

Purpose:
The Fellows Program seeks to connect high achieving graduates from Goshen College to the work of local initiatives and organizations in order to support the individual and collective impact of this work in and for the community. This program will offer selected Fellows:

1) An opportunity to partner with and offer their time, knowledge, and skills to local initiatives;
2) A structured learning environment with respected professionals to coach and mentor them in their work to ensure quality in services provided and to maximize their own learning through critical reflection; and
3) A modest stipend to cover basic needs.

The program is developing through the Community Resilience Guild, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization formed to support individuals, organizations, and networks in their efforts to affect positive change in Goshen and the surrounding region. The organization provides office space, training, and general oversight through co-founders Phil Metzler and Philip Thomas. Fellows work with a network of experts and elders on tap through the CRG to serve specific initiatives.

Assumptions:
- ❖ Opportunities exist to support the work of local initiatives and organizations and to leverage the individual and collective effectiveness of this work in and for the community;
- ❖ Connecting the talent of top graduates from Goshen College with these local opportunities through our Fellows Program can offer an effective and economical way of providing work and services;
- ❖ Some of the top achievers at Goshen College have interest in this type of Fellows Program because it provides an opportunity to gain meaningful experience that serves to ground and deepen their recently acquired knowledge and skills by connecting to and working with concrete local initiatives.

Background:
In the fall of 2015, Goshen College graduates Twila Albrecht and Ellie Schertz began actively prototyping components of a program for connecting recent graduates to meaningful work in the community with support from the Community Resilience Guild. Since then, the CRG has supported four additional Fellows, and Twila has returned to continue supporting several CRG projects. Fellows have used their time with the CRG to make community connections, gain diverse experience, and explore vocational opportunities. With their unique capacities and availability, as well as their access to experts through the CRG, Fellows have served challenging unmet needs in the community and found meaningful employment beyond the program.

As shown in the following table, CRG Fellows have served a variety of organizations and initiatives by performing activities related to mapping, research, communication, assessment, and supporting general organizational needs.

Fellows Program Engagement with Community Partners

Organization	Outputs
Goshen College	Created, promoted, and supervised Internships for current students through the CRG
Elkhart County Family Engagement Network	Qualitative research and support for the Early Childhood Learning System in Elkhart County
City of Goshen	Goshen Environmental Perspectives Assessment
Goshen Parks Department, Goshen College	Ongoing facilitation support for the development and implementation of internships for GC students with the Goshen Parks Department
Common Good Card	Community education and outreach; member engagement; and promotional videos
Horizon Education Alliance	Stakeholder mapping associated with HEA and the Elkhart County education system.
FarmLab	Research and stakeholder interviews supporting the FarmLab Feasibility Study
Community Relations Commission	Research, quantitative analysis, and report generation for CRC Community Vision Survey
Mennonite Central Committee Great Lakes	Research and stakeholder interview support for internal program review
Elkhart County Foodshed Initiative	Communications support, website design, and local food stakeholder assessments
Goshen Community Gardens	Network building support and research for local community gardens
Goshen Farmers Market	Share the Bounty Week leadership, market staffing, and communications support

Types of support Fellows could provide:
Based on the experience of Fellows to date, and previous collaboration and interviews with community partners, we envision Fellows providing the following types of services and support:

- ❖ **Assessments and Research:** Leading processes of participatory action research that: convene stakeholders working on similar issues; identify and articulate current challenges; and develop strategies for addressing them. The focus of this kind of research is first and foremost on producing actions that seek to achieve concrete changes while also ensuring a process of systematic inquiry that results in learning and enhanced institutional capacities for sustaining the work.

❖ **Mapping:** Working with stakeholders to understand the systems in which they work -- "connecting the dots" -- which may include:
   o identifying different stakeholders working on common causes;
   o organizing, and making readily accessible resources that exist - developing resource guides; and
   o examining and making visible relationships between issues -- how they impact one another (circular causality) -- to enable broader and deeper understanding of key dynamics within a given system.

❖ **Process design and facilitation:** Designing events and processes for bringing together stakeholders working on similar or related issues to explore possibilities for networking and collaboration (see Community Gardens example below).

❖ **Identifying and catalyzing new and emerging initiatives:** Where opportunities are detected to support new initiatives, we seek to facilitate funding and provide platforms for innovation -- sandboxes of collaboration and experimentation that we sometimes refer to as "prototyping labs".

❖ **Strategic communications:** Conducting stakeholder interviews to help organizations communicate their work more effectively; and crafting stories in order to raise the profile of the work, increase public awareness, and make visible areas of potential connections.

❖ **Capacity Building**: Promoting trainings and capacity building processes that seek to strengthen individual and institutional capacities.

❖ **Supporting organizational needs:** We seek to be responsive to other needs detected within organizations or initiatives.

In providing these services, Fellows will primarily seek to contribute to activities or functions that organizations, and the community as a whole, recognize the value of, but generally lack the resources or capacity to carry out alone. Where the CRG identifies strategic gaps in broader community systems, Fellows may help convene stakeholders to explore opportunities for developing shared understanding and collaboration.

Fellows may also devote time and energy to internal CRG programs and activities designed to make community information and resources more accessible to the broader community. Examples of this work include:

❖ **The Goshen Guide:** A local wikipedia, resource guide, and media platform developed to help connect the dots in Goshen by mapping ideas, associations, and places held in common.

❖ **Goshen Funded:** An innovative crowdfunding and communications platform enabling groups, non-profits, businesses, and individuals to seek community support. It combines online giving, social media, and e-commerce technologies to make the process of fundraising easier and more effective.

Family Engagement & the Early Childhood System of Elkhart County
In their work as CRG Fellows, Maria Thomas and Twila Albrecht have helped community leaders explore the early childhood landscape in Elkhart County in collaboration with The Early Childhood Learning Systems (ECLS) Network. Through the CRG, Fellows have supported stakeholder mapping and interviews, participatory action research, and the facilitation of events and processes designed to build shared understanding and catalyze collaboration.

In 2015, The ECLS Network emerged in its earliest form as the Parent Engagement Network (PEN). The PEN came together around the shared vision that "All Elkhart County children have a warm and responsive parent/caregiver engaged in their child's learning journey." Horizon Education Alliance (HEA) provides backbone support to the Network through Don Jantzi, Coordinator of HEA Parent and Child Engagement. Philip Thomas, Master Consultant and Coach at D3 Associates and CRG Board Member, has volunteered his time and expertise to support the Network and oversee the connection between the Fellows Program and the Network's initiatives.

The PEN identified the following question as key to broadening the scope of their vision and collaboration: "What factors limit or enable growth and learning for Elkhart County children 0-8 years old, outside the K-12 (formal) systems?" From this question came the desire to map the early childhood system of Elkhart County to find out what is limiting or enabling early childhood development; to know who is doing what and with whom, and; to understand the current system, how it operates, and what it is producing.

Seeking to "connect the dots," Maria supported the Network as they named key stakeholders, conducted interviews, analyzed data, and crafted a report that reflected a sampling of the voices in the early childhood landscape of Elkhart County.

In 2018, PEN renamed themselves the Family Engagement Network (FEN). Continuing their efforts to identify factors that enable or inhibit family engagement, they identified a group of participants who are passionate about family engagement to serve as co-researchers in a Participatory Action Research (PAR) process.

What is emerging now is a PAR process that seeks to explore, in more detail, the nature of the engagement challenge as directly experienced by the organizations participating in this endeavor. Twila, with support from Don and Philip, will co-facilitate this next phase of inquiry for the FEN as it develops.

By naming this intention, the FEN has identified other emerging initiatives that embody this collective interest of working collaboratively to address issues and opportunities around family engagement. They've also discovered that recent graduates can provide energy and time for this exploration, helping the community strengthen current initiatives and improve collaboration at a low cost to organizations.

This example illustrates one way the Fellows Program can provide a "sandbox" for graduates and community leaders to collaborate and learn from each other through meaningful and practical initiatives.