10-19-2018

University College Community Development Experts to Create Shared Data System in Newport

Juan Siliezar
Roger Williams University

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.rwu.edu/weekatroger_featured_news

Part of the Higher Education Commons, and the Online and Distance Education Commons

Recommended Citation
Siliezar, Juan, "University College Community Development Experts to Create Shared Data System in Newport" (2018). Featured News Story. 218.
https://docs.rwu.edu/weekatroger_featured_news/218

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Week at Roger at DOCS@RWU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Featured News Story by an authorized administrator of DOCS@RWU. For more information, please contact mwu@rwu.edu.
University College Community Development Experts to Create Shared Data System in Newport

University College faculty and student pair will work with a consortium of public and private partners in Newport to develop the system.

UC’s Community Development Program Director Taino Palermo, Ed.D., and Mikey Davis, a graduate student in the community development program, will build the data management system for Newport Working Cities Challenge.

October 19, 2018 | By Juan Siliezar

PROVIDENCE, R.I.– Data has rapidly become one of the most powerful tools community-based organizations can use to make decisions and demonstrate results. But despite an increased demand to collect and analyze data effectively, organizations often lack the support or expertise needed to do so.

To help address this gap in Newport, Rhode Island, a faculty member and a graduate student from the University College at Roger Williams University are working with the Newport Working Cities Challenge – a consortium of over 40 public and private partners – to create a shared data management system that will help the group track how people interact with their services across the community.

UC’s Community Development Program Director Taino Palermo, Ed.D., and Mikey Davis, a graduate student in the community development program will build the system.

The system they plan to build will help the Newport Working Cities Challenge team see what impact community-based organizations are having in areas such as childcare, food stability and career training. By tracking and analyzing what services residents are using and how they are using them, the group will be able to determine what needs remain to be met at a broader scale.

Understanding this will play a crucial role in the consortium’s main goal of improving the lives of Newport residents living in poverty, especially residents from the city’s North End neighborhood which has a poverty rate that is more than 300 percent higher than the rest of the city.

“The utility of such a practice would completely reframe how communities measure need and impact of services and programs,” said Palermo, the project’s lead researcher. “A data system like this can be a model to scale across other communities to develop place-based data sharing practices. It also gives University College the opportunity to
conduct graduate-level community development research that is directly addressing a need amongst community-based organizations.”

While many of the partner agencies in the Newport Working Cities Challenge – which is led by the Boys and Girls Club of Newport County – track data, it is often not easily accessible for other organizations to view, said Mikey Davis, the project’s data consultant. He hopes the shared system will help organizations act more like a network and help them work together to benefit community members.

For example, if a childcare organization was working with a parent who was struggling with food stability and seeking employment, the childcare organization not only would be able to refer the parent to a food pantry and an employment service provider, but those organizations would already know the specific needs of the parent before they even arrive through the information sharing.

“My hope is that this project will improve how organizations talk to each other through the data sharing process,” Davis said. “One of the barriers that a lot of organizations face is that they are collecting data in different ways. It would be beneficial for other organizations to access that information so they could improve their programs and offer better outcomes for their clients and the community members they serve.”

In the next few weeks, Palermo and Davis plan to tour the community and the partner agencies in the Newport Working Cities Challenge. They also plan to conduct a baseline assessment of the data systems the organizations currently use. By the end of December, they hope to deliver the data management system, along with a final report on their findings and recommendations.

The Newport Working Cities Challenge is part of a regional initiative to help small cities in New England improve the lives of their low-income residents. It is funded by a $400,000 grant from the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston. Newport is one of three cities in Rhode Island to be awarded a Working Cities Challenge grant. The two other cities are Providence and Cranston.

Palermo and Davis’ data analysis and management project is being funded by a $10,000 grant from the Rhode Island Foundation that was awarded to the Newport Working Cities Challenge. The Newport Working Cities Challenge team is allocating this grant to Davis to allow him to perform his work as the project’s data consultant.

The team chose Palermo and Davis because of their combined expertise in working with community-based organizations. Palermo brings years of experience working with nonprofits and understands first-hand the issues they face when working with data. Davis has experience analyzing large sets of data and managing complex databases as an AmeriCorps VISTA at different organizations. Along with that experience, his research thesis is focused on how community-based organizations use data science.

“Professor Palermo and the students, staff, and faculty at University College bring an authentic experience to their work building bridges between the families surviving in poverty and how they experience institutions, and the institutions providing services,” said Kathryn Cantwell, initiative director for the Newport Working Cities Challenge. “Their expertise to coalesce best practices, technology and academic theory is exactly the combination our City of Newport requires to implement systems change to align education and workforce development for families to acquire and maintain long-term employment.”

ACADEMICS   ALUMNI   SCHOOL OF CONTINUING STUDIES