

In June, the Case Foundation released a new report "*To Be Fearless*", which discusses what they believe are five elements to a fearless approach in solving the world's most pressing issues. The Full Frame Initiative (FFI) was highlighted as an example of the "Reach beyond your bubble" principle, and FFI's founder, Katya Fels Smyth, was invited to write a guest blog for the *Be Fearless* web site.



Jeannie had platinum hair when she could afford dye, leopard print shirts years before they became fashionable, stilettos (Jeannie is largely responsible for my ability to run up and down stairs in high heels), a temper that flashed fast, and language salty enough to fund the FCC for decades. She loved her kids and her grandkids; she called her mother every week. She was generous when she couldn't afford to be and fierce when she needed to be. Jeannie was homeless; Jeannie was in a violent relationship; Jeannie was involved in many systems.

When I think about Reach Beyond Your Bubble, I get a little stuck because it seems the opportunity (or constraint) of thinking in field bubbles or sector bubbles is one of privilege. Jeannie didn't see her homelessness as distinct from domestic violence. Her medical issues weren't divorced from her relationship with her kids. But she interacted constantly with systems that were keeping the bubbles in place, attempting to align, coordinate, integrate and connect services and issues, like the bubbles and tubes of hamster Habitrails.

The bubbles and structures of our fields are often a big part of what needs to change. They can damn us to refine, rather than transform, existing practice. We are incentivized, trained, and nudged to sharpen our expertise in and get better at addressing youth violence or homelessness or prisoner re-entry.

The irony is that what we *really* need to understand is what is happening on the rare occasions when things are effective at the intersections of issues, where Jeannie and hundreds of thousands of others live.

The way to do this is to be agnostic as to "issue" but laser focused on people. Then we find something surprising and entirely common sense: the programs and people most effective at supporting lasting change for people at the deep end of the deep end have independently arrived at a remarkably resonant way of working—like a common DNA. The Full Frame Initiative (FFI) began as an effort to map this DNA, and what resulted we call the Full Frame Approach.

This Approach is the connection among organizations that seem so different. For example, The Center for Family Life in Sunset Park, a program of SCO Family of Services, is a Brooklyn neighborhood-based

organization helping kids and families address community poverty and violence. In the process, they and the residents of Sunset Park are transforming their schools and their neighborhood. Missouri's reformed juvenile justice system, recognized for extraordinary results in reducing recidivism, has its sights on helping youth become productive, hopeful citizens. They have increased high school and GED graduation rates by over 80 percent in the past several years and are starting to track how many young people attend college.

There still is space for expertise—about treating juvenile offenders, about economic development in immigrant gateway communities, about supporting trauma survivors struggling with addiction and homelessness. But the shared DNA is there.

FFI is building a Network of these and other positive outliers. We convene them, connect them, and support spaces for genuine exchange across fields. I've seen a youth organization get a new perspective on evaluation of a relationship-based approach from a homeless organization, and an organization working with trauma survivors learn how to help survivors expand their social network from an organization applying community organizing principles to homelessness prevention.

Peer learning is great. Social change comes from something else.

Collectively demonstrating the common DNA among some of the most effective interventions across our country has a power profoundly greater than what any organization can do on its own: to demonstrate that this way of working isn't an aberration. That creates a new sense of what's possible and is a powerful advocacy tool.

Of course, it's gets a little messy around the edges. For example, are we creating a new bubble based on who our partners are? The organizations that are in our small but growing Full Frame Network share a philosophy—reified in practice—that may not reflect the norms of any given field, but that matches up better with Jeannie's life than most of what's out there. It's not everyone. And we're finding that a lot more people and programs share this philosophy than are encouraged to act on it—they are constrained by their bubbles. Supporting their transformation is a next step for us.

Check out what we've found and be in touch. Even more important, ask yourself what's your bubble (we've all got 'em) and what it would take to genuinely move beyond it.

*Katya Fels Smyth is the Founder and CEO of the Full Frame Initiative, a nonprofit working nationally to increase the likelihood that people who are failed by mainstream services have access to interventions that work. She's also a mom and spouse. She can be reached at [katya@fullframeinitiative.org](mailto:katya@fullframeinitiative.org).*