

Sewall Foundation Integrated Well-Being Forum
Jay Espy's Opening Remarks
September 18, 2015

I add my thanks to Carol's for your willingness to spend this day with us.

As your agenda states, what we hope will emerge from this day is that all of us will have a better understanding of what in the heck the Sewall Foundation is talking about! Seriously, we do hope all of us will leave here today with a better understanding of the Foundation's commitment to building connections and supporting the mutual well-being of people and the environment – and of the ways folks, in various communities, are approaching this work and what we're learning from those experiences.

We also hope that the day will help build connections and relationships between people from different places, doing different work and having different perspectives but whose visions and goals might be mutually supportive. This is something we heard people ask for as we traveled the state last fall describing our new program and it's also something a lot of people mentioned in their grant proposals this year. Many people came up to us after last fall's meetings and said they wish we'd created more time for people in the room to meet each other and hear each other's stories. So we hope today starts a process for deeper learning and sharing.

Our focus today is on the Integration component of our Healthy People Healthy Places program and not specifically Systems Change for Meeting Basic Human Needs. However, we invited our Basic Human Needs grantees to attend today because we know that the whole and healthy vision we hold cannot be achieved if Basic Human Needs are not being met. We also believe that Integrated work is part of the solution to meeting Basic Human Needs. And, perhaps most importantly, those of you who are working with people struggling to meet their basic needs have a knowledge and perspective that many of us working in other endeavors may not have. Your voice is essential if we are to collectively achieve the kind of inclusiveness we strive for.

At the Sewall Foundation, we have a hypothesis - one that is not yet proven - so we are gathering evidence, trying to learn what is accurate, what holds promise, what needs adjustment and what might be off base. When Peter Forbes and Danyelle O'Hara met with many of our grantees two years ago - with many of you - this hypothesis seemed to resonate. So, informed by their learning from our grantees, we moved forward and established the Healthy People Healthy Places program. Our first grant round was completed this spring and it is through this program that the work of the organizations represented here today was funded.

So what exactly is this hypothesis and what have we learned so far. Simply stated (and, please know that I recognize this concept is not really simple. In fact, I confuse myself frequently when I think about it or try to explain it), but stated as simply as I can, we believe that the well-being of people and the environment are inextricably linked. People cannot live in an unhealthy environment or be disconnected from their physical and/or social surroundings and

be healthy. Likewise, the environment cannot be healthy if people are hurting - physically, emotionally, economically. Further, it is our belief that none of us can truly care about our environment or each other if we don't understand one another or the environment around us. And we cannot understand our environment or one another if we don't have a direct and meaningful relationship with the land, water and resources that give us sustenance and the diverse array of people who we all rely on to meet our mutual needs. In short, I guess we are saying that we believe each of us is part of all of us and each of us is responsible to all that goes on around us.

In developing our hypothesis, we took cues from two parallel movements: Environmentalism, with its emphasis on living in better alignment with natural ecological systems so that we can move away from stewarding the world toward depletion due to over-extraction and pollution and toward abundance through wise and careful use of resources, and Social Justice with its emphasis on moving from a society depleted due to structural unfairness that causes some to thrive while others suffer to one that is abundant where all people are afforded the opportunity to meet their full potential.

Now I know this is not easy stuff! And we certainly don't have the answers. So, we're here to learn, to find out what seems to be working, what isn't working, what might work, and what resources and strategies might be needed to give this concept a chance to move from theory to reality.

During our first grant round we learned a few things.

We learned that you all are remarkably creative - and many of you have been thinking and acting in ways that align with this hypothesis for a very long time. Capturing and sharing your stories is something we've learned will be beneficial to all of us going forward.

We also learned that this concept seems to be more intuitively aligned with some areas of endeavor than others - for instance, in public health, food, farming, forestry, fisheries and economic development. But how does it apply to someone struggling with substance abuse, chronic homelessness, or lack of skilled training? My guess is that there are connections but they will be harder to identify and act upon. Which leads to a third learning.

Seeing connections, building relationships, adjusting patterns of behavior all takes time and resources, especially when our plates are already so full in the moment. As Mark Swann and I discussed recently, he has his hands full meeting the needs of his clients day to day. With funding cuts, a growing population to serve and the rising pitch of public debate about welfare reform, how can he surface for air? I suspect this scenario sounds familiar to many of you. We're learning that help with capacity building at many different levels is needed.

I am hopeful that today gives us an opportunity to begin to learn together, to share, connect and think. We are so grateful to you for taking the time to be here. Yea, I know, the funder asks so you go, but you really didn't have to be here today so I thank you.