

COMMUNITY SERVICES LEAGUE | INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI



When future First Lady Bess Wallace Truman and her Bible study group set out to establish the Community Services League in 1916, a donation of food and fuel might well have included hay for horses and coal for home heating. Over its lifespan of nearly a century, the organization's services have expanded dramatically to include mentoring, computer classes, job training, and resume writing.

The core mission remains the same: neighbors helping neighbors in need. But in 2007, Community Services League had reached its capacity to meet those needs.

"We did not have a good process for receiving donations and distributing them to where they were needed," CSL board member Katherine Barton shared. "In fact, our resources building on Maple Street became a hindrance to our business."

The board and staff realized that a new facility was needed, and they set out to raise the funds required. By the spring of 2009 they had gifts and pledges totaling \$750,000, but very few prospects for the remaining \$2 million they needed. The campaign had not stalled entirely, but much of the momentum had been lost. It was at this time that Community Services League partnered with Hartsook.

Hartsook President and CEO Matt Beem initiated a strategic approach, identifying the number and level of gifts needed to reach the \$2.75 million goal. Prior to Hartsook's counsel, Community Services League had not realized fully the necessity of including major gifts as part of their solicitation efforts. Once they began thinking in terms of high-dollar donors, immediately the goal appeared more attainable.

"They had already enlisted an advisory council for the campaign, but they had no real volunteer structure," said Matt Beem. "So within the first 90 to 120 days, we formally recruited a working cabinet of about a dozen people. That, along with great staff leadership, was the key to this campaign's success."

Katherine Barton served as the Campaign Chair and quickly recognized the value added by the Hartsook team, which included Executive Vice President Norma Murphy. Norma assisted with foundation research and proposal writing that led to a grant from the Hall Family Foundation. But it wasn't an easy sell. The program officer's first response was that the Hall Family Foundation did not fund capital projects. The Hartsook team helped Community Services League position the proposal to demonstrate that the grant would build the capacity of the Work Express program, and that the capital improvements were essential to the nonprofit's ability to deliver the program to the community.



“This was the largest gift that has ever been made in the 95-year history of the Community Services League,” said Katherine. “I believe that relationships made all the difference: Matt Beem’s relationships with individuals at the Hall Family Foundation, my own, and others who were familiar with individuals serving as principals at the foundation.”

Relationships were an essential part of involving individuals in the campaign as well. Matt encouraged the staff and volunteers to look at those who had made gifts in the past, and bring them in to see Community Services League in action.

“That was especially interesting when we invited them to see the old facility, and then took them to the new facility under construction to see how it would improve services for our constituents across the county,” said Katherine. “The Hartsook team has been very good at helping us build those relationships, and we continue to utilize this strategy.”

By following Hartsook’s recommendations, Community Services League received the largest ever contribution from an individual. A member of the campaign cabinet brought an individual in to learn about the new Community Services League facility and the organization’s plans for the future. Through continued conversations, several lunch meetings, and a few tours of the new campus, eventually the individual made a \$100,000 contribution to Community Services League’s capital campaign.



“One of the biggest benefits of partnering with Hartsook is the way they help both staff and volunteer leadership understand the big picture and think in different directions,” said Doug Cowan, CSL President and CEO, who was Director of Development at the time of the campaign. “Instead of communicating in terms of a capital campaign, it became a campaign for programmatic expansion.”

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Now, potential donors can see clearly how the new building allows Community Services League to expand its programs and serve more people with greater efficiency and a more meaningful impact.

Community Services League has enlisted Hartsook’s services in other areas as well. Senior Vice President Janell Johnson helped leverage the organization’s campaign success to increase annual gifts, and Senior Executive Vice President Karin Cox helped develop a strategic plan to make the most of the heightened visibility that resulted from the campaign.

Thanks to their partnership with Hartsook, Community Services League has broadened the awareness of their impact on the community far beyond those individuals who made gifts to the campaign. The Community Services League team understands that, in addition to reaching its initial goal, the capital campaign set the stage for the organization’s next phase of fundraising, and a new century of neighbors helping neighbors in their community.

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