

## The parts of Systemic Social Change: Community Shares' Definition

Please don't hesitate to call or email Shelley if you have any questions about this section:  
shelley@communitysharestn.org, 865-522-1604

**What is "collective action"?** Creating social change takes patience, energy, time, and resources. It takes more than just individuals; it takes a collective action by a collective group of people. Community Shares defines collective action as a group of people combining their resources, knowledge and efforts to work towards a shared goal. The greater the number of people taking action together, the more power they have and the more likely it is that they will win the changes that they want. Collective action includes connecting people who have the same problems with each other so they can then work together on their shared problem.

**What if my organization is an environmental organization or animal rights-- how to I show the people most affected by the problem working to fix it?** One of Community Shares' values is that the people most affected by a problem are a part of the work to create solutions and strategies. In one of the questions, we asked you to tell us who is most affected by the problem your group addresses. In the social change section, we want you to share with us how the people from that question are involved in your work. What we want to ensure is that organizations are including those most affected by a problem in determining the solution. If you have questions about this issue, please call or email.

**What do you mean by "systemic or institutional change"?** We mean that the change that your organization brings about has to change the "system" that has created the injustice you are addressing, not just make things better for individuals. Another way to think about this is to ask yourself whether the change you are making will bring about justice for more than one person at a time -- will the next person in the same situation have to fight the same fight again, or have you fixed the problem for the next people? Some people find the following parable a helpful way to think about systemic change:

While everyone's work is important and valuable, CS chooses to have member groups who go "upstream" to stop the babies from getting in the river in the first place. Below are some examples:

**My organization changes people and that will eventually change society. Does that meet the Community Shares definition of systemic social change?** Not necessarily. There are many organizations whose work makes the world better and kinder. Remember the parable above about the babies in the river. While everyone's work is important and valuable, CS chooses to have member groups who go "upstream" to stop the babies from getting in the river in the first place. Two different organizations can have the same issue focus, but one group might work in a way that helps one person at a time, while another organization works to change the law or the rules that create the injustice they work to resolve.