



## The Challenge

America was built on the values of inclusion, belonging, and empowerment, with the belief that every person could pursue their dreams. And yet, the social fabric across America is thin, with increasing levels of distrust, exclusion, and isolation. Rather than looking to our neighbors for community, we look at our phones. And yet, the online personas and communities we build cannot solve the opportunity, integration, and well-being gaps we're facing.

## The Solution

We need inclusive spaces in our communities, where neighbors build relationships across lines of difference. We need vibrant hubs of activity, where neighbors develop enough human and social capital to overcome ever-changing societal challenges and prosper. Together.

We believe this can be accomplished through local arts and sports-based programs. Portland Community Squash serves as a model for this next wave of American community centers, addressing the opportunity, integration, and well-being gaps through three pillars:

1. Access: Removing barriers to reflect the city's population
2. Equity: Preparing all members to thrive with opportunities, relationships, and skills
3. Cohesion: Uniting and empowering a multi-cultural and multi-generational community

## Our Theory of Change

In Summer 2022, Portland Community Squash teamed up with Dr. Meredith Whitley of Adelphi University to articulate the work happening on the ground. The result: a locally-driven, evidence-based Theory of Change that is informed by a set of human and social capital academic frameworks:

Human Capital refers to the skills, experiences, and health possessed by an individual or population. Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and Systems Theory of Development through Sport (Whitley, Massey, & Wilkison, 2018) guide human capital development at PCS.

Social Capital refers to the networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular community, enabling that community to function effectively. Communicate Bond Belong Theory (Hall & Davis, 2017) and Social Capital Theory (Putnam, 2000) guide social capital development at PCS.

The Theory of Change makes our work more effective and efficient by aligning interventions and outcomes. In fact, we're challenging the notion that community centers must choose between depth (fewer members, greater impact) and breadth (more members, less impact). Instead, we prepare and empower members (in the guided phase) to take charge of their own growth and development (in the self-guided phase). This two-phased approach allows Portland Community Squash to retain more members over years and generations, yet not sacrifice the quality or quantity of support and services offered to them. In essence, we are able to maximize human and social capital development at Portland Community Squash for the least amount of financial capital.

We know this is a work in progress, so we also created a systematic and rigorous evaluation plan. We use multiple metrics to track whether we are above, approaching, or below goal for each intervention, precondition, and outcome, allowing us to continuously monitor our strengths and weaknesses. We hope our commitment to transparency, along with the progress we've made so far, provides a model for others in arts and sports-based programs to join us in creating the next wave of American community centers.

We are fortunate to have support for this Theory of Change, and our community center more broadly, from some of the country's most renowned community development thought leaders:

"Since I published 'Bowling Alone' in 2000, the best researchers in the social sciences have proven that social capital is essential for upward social mobility and a successful democracy. We're in need of a 'quiet revolution' of small organizations ready to create an upswing in civic engagement and social connection. By centering human and social capital in their Theory of Change, the small staff at Portland Community Squash make a compelling case that local arts and sports based programs can grow into powerful community centers. I'm pleased that I was able to meet the inspiring staff of Portland Community Squash and learn about their activities and their dreams."

- Dr. Robert Putnam, Malkin Research Professor of Public Policy at Harvard

"At a time when our country is riddled with division and despair, Portland Community Squash (PCS) is an inspiring example of how focused grassroots efforts pull people together. Sport, arts, and education activities that promote the involvement of youth and their families play a major role in reducing despair, restoring vibrancy to communities, and generating hope for the future. PCS offers life changing opportunities for young people from all backgrounds to acquire and develop skills and friendships, as well as build new social contacts and community networks for themselves and their parents. The PCS model is now being scaled up around the country. It provides important lessons on how to achieve concrete results through long-term sustained investment in the next generation's well-being and education, and by emphasizing diversity and inclusion."

- Drs. Carol Graham and Fiona Hill, Senior Fellows at the Brookings Institution

Explore the Theory of Change at [pcsquash.com/theory-of-change](https://pcsquash.com/theory-of-change)

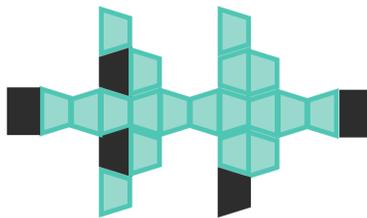


Read the Theory of Change from left to right and click on **text** for more information. Look below to learn more about the academic frameworks that help explain the change process envisioned by PCS.



**Askar Azeez**

Askar continues to participate in guided programs since 2017. He started coming to PCS independently in 2021. His entire family participates in the community.



**Roberto Meza**

Roberto started playing in adult leagues and enrolled his son into the youth programs. Now the two battle all the time on court and attend lots of social events together. Roberto also volunteers around the facility.

