



Joshua Franzos

EMPOWER CITIZENS TO CARE

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One of the things we need to do is create common ground between different groups. It is easy for successful people to live in places where they are insulated from the problems of others who have structural barriers to equity. We need to be aware of those problems.

I went to a talk Bill Gates gave years ago about diseases around the world. He said, “Imagine if you could live with randomly selected neighbors from people around the world. We would understand that not all problems are distributed in homogeneous bunches.” So, imagine if every street in Pittsburgh were made up of residents of every neighborhood in Pittsburgh; that would create empathy and knowledge in solving problems.

CREATE Lab’s high-tech tools are really about creating that local “community of we” by helping everyone in our communities become not only aware but also a full participant in the challenges and successes that we see throughout the community.

Technology, when used by local citizens, can invert power relationships, enabling those that are not normally in positions of power to have boosted voice, powerful narratives, and thereby positions of respect, dignity and power. This, I believe, is a critical path to creating an empathic “we” community that can further the vision of the entire Pittsburgh region.

I remember the head of the World Economic Forum describing to me his theory of impact and action. He said, “We need people to truly care.” Every technology the CREATE Lab produces is about empowering local citizens to care, not by simply informing them through a one-way vehicle, but by giving them the tools to share their feelings and their opinions and their citizen science discoveries. This helps them build in themselves an ever-stronger muscle for caring in an activated and authentic manner about all of Pittsburgh.

— Interviewed by Cristina Rouvalis