

Are You "All In?"

How Collaboration and Collective Action can Cultivate a Safe and Healthy Community

Your community is your church, your neighbors, your job, your family, and your friends. But these are not the structures that allow a community to exist and thrive.

What a community is actually built on is much less abstract: housing that people can afford, food that people can access, streets that people can feel safe on. Anyone who cares for their community, who wants to see it succeed and flourish, has to start investing in these elements – and be willing to understand everyone's story and perspective to do so.

That is the goal of All In for Milford, an alliance of neighbors, community leaders, and local organizations that strive to make Milford a city where everyone has a place to live and food to eat – where everyone's voice is heard, and everyone can thrive.

"It was clear that not everyone was having even these basic human needs met," said Jamie Rude, one of All-In's leaders. "As people who care deeply for our community, we decided it was on us to do something about it – to invest our time, resources and energy – ensuring that our 'small city with a big heart' is the best it can be."

While there is no shortage of people and organizations in Milford who are deeply

invested in their communities, many of them either have a limited perspective or specific agenda – working in silos to solve individual problems, and not assessing the holistic nature of how everything from city planning to food waste can prevent Milford from serving its citizens.

All In for Milford, like its name suggests, asks members to bridge these barriers and look at the whole picture, viewing an investment in the community as something that should be an investment in *every* part of the community.

"Most people don't realize they have neighbors who are struggling," said Therese Eke, another All-In leader. "We realized that if we could bring people together, we could start working on solutions."

Initiatives that All-In has spearheaded include common-sense regulation tweaks around Accessory Dwelling Units (sometimes known as "in-law suites" or "granny flats"), organizing food drives



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for local families facing food insecurity, and forging new partnerships between businesses and advocates in town.

But it is *how* All In for Milford pursues these goals that sets the group apart, and hopefully can help the city redefine their understanding of what investing in your community means.

A large portion of All-In's work is done through straightforward one-on-one meetings and regular community gatherings that allow people to share stories, concerns, and perspectives on urgent challenges facing Milford. While the group also works directly with elected officials and participates in community events, it is relationships that really matter in the end.

"When people are invested in getting to know each other, it's so much



easier for them to see how they're all invested in this city – even when they have very different perspectives or backgrounds," said Jesse Williams, another All-In member.

And ensuring that you are really hearing the stories of everyone in the community is even more important. While many people in the town are able to enjoy its amenities and comforts, hundreds of Milford families face daily anxieties over where they will sleep or what they will eat in a given week. As housing and food costs continue to rise, it is more important than ever to learn about – and get invested in – the success of all our neighbors.

"That is what being 'All In' really means," said Eke. "That's the Milford we're working to create."