Our View: Embrace homegrown solutions to Rockford’s challenges
(An edited excerpt from)
By The Editorial Board, August 28, 2017

Sometimes, potential solutions to our community’s most pressing challenges are closer than we think.

That was our conclusion after reading two stories published in Sunday’s Register Star. Inside the paper was the story of a faith-based initiative that aims to match older adult mentors with at-risk youths.

The program is an outgrowth of One Body Collaboratives, a nonprofit that aligns faith communities to help address community challenges.

Compassionate Impacts is the brainchild of One Body’s founder, social entrepreneur Al Barsema. The idea is to put adult mentors together with at-risk youngsters. The program is expected to launch in the next few weeks.

Compassionate Impacts is in the running for a $50,000 grant to be awarded by Encore.org, a nonprofit that aims to tap the talents of millions of older adults seeing “encore” careers.

We like the idea behind Compassionate Impacts, which has the potential to create networks of support for young people who otherwise might find themselves on the outside of society looking in.

This newspaper kicked up a storm earlier this month with a data-driven story that reported on the resegregation of Rockford Public Schools. In a nutshell, the story found that black children are concentrated in the district’s worst-performing schools.

Critics accused us of disrespecting the school district and race-baiting. Others pulled out the “just trying to sell papers” trope. More thoughtful types appreciated the eye-opening nature of the reporting. Unaccounted for in much of the blowback was the message of the editorial that accompanied the story, which boiled down to this: Responsibility for the educational achievement of the children who live here lies with the entire community — not solely with Rockford Public Schools. It’s the community as a whole that must devise a seamless fabric of support that nurtures children from cradle to graduation.

That’s why it’s important to pay attention to, and root for the success of, Compassionate Impacts. It may not be his intent, but Barsema may be pointing the way to a solution to what’s arguably Rockford’s most serious challenge — the under-education of a large proportion of the children who live here.

It becomes clearer with each passing day that the state and federal governments are not reliable partners when it comes to solving local problems. Fortunately, we’ve got big thinkers like Al Barsema who understand that the best solutions just might be homegrown.