



# Building Neighborhood Capacity for Strong Families and Safe Children

A *MAKING CONNECTIONS* PEER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE MATCH BETWEEN  
MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN AND LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

PEER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE LEADS TO ACTION

*Part of a Series from the  
Technical Assistance Resource  
Center of the Annie E. Casey  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
SETTING THE CONTEXT FOR THE MATCH.....	4
THE CONSULTATION.....	6
LESSONS LEARNED.....	7
PARTICIPANTS REFLECTIONS AND NEXT STEPS .....	18
WHAT IS <i>MAKING CONNECTIONS</i> ?.....	21
WHAT ARE PEER MATCHES? .....	22

# Building Neighborhood Capacity for Strong Families and Safe Children

## Milwaukee and Louisville Peer Match

### Louisville, Kentucky

May 25-27, 2004

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#### INTRODUCTION

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Through the *Making Connections* initiative, the Annie E. Casey Foundation is working with Milwaukee, Wisconsin and other communities across the country to improve outcomes for children and families living in tough neighborhoods. One of the aims of *Making Connections* is to link neighborhood residents with economic opportunities, enhance social networks, and improve services and supports that can help families grow stronger and achieve what they want for their children.

As part of the initiative, the Foundation offers participating sites access to technical assistance that can help them reach their goals for strengthening families and neighborhoods. Peer matches are a powerful form of technical assistance that allows different communities with shared goals to come together to capitalize on the practical knowledge gained and the innovative strategies used by each community to achieve success in advancing their own efforts.

On May 25-27, 2004, a team from Milwaukee, Wisconsin traveled to Louisville (Jefferson County), Kentucky, to participate in a technical assistance peer match. The purpose of the peer match was to share ideas about promoting better child welfare outcomes through a "community partnerships" approach, and to learn about other efforts to integrate multiple child and family services and initiatives at Neighborhood Place sites across Louisville. The Community Partnerships for Protecting Children (CPPC), an initiative started by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, and is operating in Louisville and 50 other communities around the country, was of particular interest to the Milwaukee team. They viewed the goals and approach of community partnerships as highly consistent and complementary to the *Making Connection* initiative goals--including family economic success, family access to high quality services and their connection to a strong network of supports.

*Making Connections* - Milwaukee wanted to use the knowledge gained from this peer match to advance its efforts to integrate child welfare, economic support services, behavioral health, and other services at the neighborhood level on behalf of its residents. This report summarizes the results of that consultation, highlights the main lessons learned and the next action steps identified by the Milwaukee team to help move their agenda forward.

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## SETTING THE CONTEXT FOR THE MATCH

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As the title of this report suggests, *Making Connections* - Milwaukee (MC-M) is embarking on an exciting effort aimed at “building neighborhood capacity for strong families and safe children” that brings together the community partnerships approach to child welfare and the work being done by *Making Connections* to promote the economic success of families through connecting them with high quality services and a strong network of supports. In Wisconsin, several groups are currently working to create systems change that would lead to better integration of child welfare and economic support (W-2) services. Wisconsin was recently awarded a National Governor’s Association (NGA) grant to plan for the integration of these services. The Child Welfare Philanthropy Group (CWPG) has been working over the past few years to formulate child welfare funding guidelines for local foundations. The CWPG is pushing towards economic opportunities for families and is working closely with the NGA effort. The Wisconsin Association of Family & Children’s Agencies (WAFCA) is integrally involved with both the CWPG and the NGA in working toward systems change.

Many of these efforts are being conducted at the state or community-wide level and their future course is still uncertain. In the meantime, *Making Connections* Milwaukee (MCM) is interested in pressing forward on the fast track to integrate child welfare, W-2 and behavioral health services at the neighborhood level. MCM has already achieved significant momentum in developing a community partnership approach to child welfare and services integration by recruiting a number of key stakeholders in the CPPC planning efforts, including representatives of the W-2 agency (Maximus), the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare, the Milwaukee County Behavioral Services Division, a number of advocates and service providers, and a small group of residents who are being trained to actively participate in the planning process.

As a next step in this process, MC-M requested help from the Technical Resource Assistance Center (TARC) of the Annie E. Casey Foundation to conduct a peer match with Louisville, Kentucky. Louisville (Jefferson County) is also a *Making Connections* site, and a community where a successful integrated services model – Neighborhood Place – has operated for the past ten years. Nested within Neighborhood Place are two initiatives that focus on improving the outcomes of children and families who are at-risk of entering or are served by the public child welfare system--Community Partnerships for Protecting Children and Family to Family (another initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation).

Neighborhood Place was established following the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 (KERA), which mandated that public schools accept partial responsibility for ensuring children come to school ready to learn. When it became clear that implementing school-based family resource centers was not sufficient to handle the volume of families needing help, the public school system, major public sector human services providers and community representatives came together to plan a new, more accessible and “seamless” system of delivering services within Jefferson County. Their efforts started with a pilot site, First Neighborhood Place, which opened in 1993.

Today, it has grown into a network of eight Neighborhood Places, along with three satellite sites, serving a geographic area that, in 1993, contained approximately 5000 children living below the federal poverty line. The core services at each Neighborhood Place include health care, mental health, juvenile services, school related services, financial and housing assistance, job placement assistance and child and adult welfare services.

### Community Partnerships for Protecting Children Initiative

Since it was started in 1996 by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, the Community Partnership for Protecting Children Initiative has made concerted efforts to change fundamental thinking about how society protects children and to reform our nation's child welfare system. The community partnership approach starts from the premise that no single factor is responsible for child abuse and neglect, and therefore that no one public agency can safeguard children. Children's safety depends on strong families, and strong families depend on connections with a broad range of people, organizations, and community institutions.

The community partnership initiative began in four cities – St. Louis, Missouri; Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Jacksonville, Florida; and Louisville, Kentucky. Today there are close to 80 partnerships in communities across the country. Each site implements the community partnership approach that involves four key, interwoven strategies:

- Individualized, Family-Centered Practice
- Neighborhood Network
- CPS Policy, Practice And Culture Change
- Share Decision Making

The principles underlying the community partnership approach include:

- Families are stronger when all members, including caregivers, are safe from abuse;
- There is no substitute for strong families to ensure that children and youth grow up to be capable adults;
- Families need supportive communities to help them be strong;
- Children can best be kept safe when families, friends, residents, and organizations work together as partners;
- Children should stay with their own families, whenever possible;
- Services and supports need to be available earlier, before crises occur and must be closely linked to the communities in which families live;
- Government alone, through the public child protective services (CPS) agency, cannot keep children safe from abuse and neglect;
- Efforts to reduce abuse and neglect must be closely linked to broader community initiatives and priorities;
- All families should receive high-quality services, with no disparities among racial, ethnic, religious, or socioeconomic groups;
- Each community must shape the strategies and network of services based on its own resources, needs, and cultures. In other words, residents of different communities will come up with different ways of putting these principles into action.

For more information about the Community Partnerships for Protecting Children Initiative visit:

<http://www.cssp.org/center/>

### The *Family to Family* Initiative (F2F)

*Family to Family* is an initiative developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in consultation with community leaders and child welfare practitioners nationwide, to confront the serious challenges faced by child welfare systems in the United States. F2F includes principles, strategies, and tools for:

- strengthening the network of families available to care for abused and neglected children in their own communities;
- building partnerships with at-risk neighborhoods toward that end; and
- tracking outcomes for children and families, so that child welfare systems can better learn from their experiences.

There are four core strategies at the heart of Family to Family:

- Recruitment, Training, and Support of Resource Families (Foster and Relative Families)
- Building Community Partnerships
- Team Decision-Making
- Self-Evaluation

F2F was designed in 1992 and has now been field tested in communities across the country, including Alabama, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Maryland. Several counties in California including Los Angeles County are in the early stages of implementation of the initiative. New York City has also adopted the neighborhood and family-centered principles of *Family to Family* as an integral part of its reform effort. New sites joining *Family to Family* include Illinois, San Francisco, Oregon, Kentucky, Michigan, North Carolina, and Colorado.

States participating in the *Family to Family* Initiative are asked to commit themselves to achieving the following outcomes:

- A reduction in the number of children served in institutional and congregate care.
- A shift of resources from congregate and institutional care to family foster care and family-centered services across all child and family-serving systems.
- A decrease in the lengths of stay in out-of-home placement.
- An increase in the number of planned reunifications.
- A decrease in the number of re-entries into care.
- A reduction in the number of placement moves experienced by children in care.
- An increase in the number of siblings placed together.
- A reduction in the total number of children served away from their own families.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation and *Family to Family* grantees together developed a set of tools to help others build a neighborhood-based family foster care system. These tools are available on the Family to Family website. For more information visit <http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/familytofamily>

**Learning Objectives:** The peer match was built around four learning objectives, which were identified in advance in preliminary conference calls between the Milwaukee team members and peer consultants from Louisville:

- Gain a deeper understanding of how child welfare services can be enhanced by public agencies working in partnership with community residents and community-based organizations.
- Develop a deeper understanding of how integration of neighborhood-based services can be effective in achieving child safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes.
- Share key principles for effective community, neighborhood, and family engagement practices, based on experience to date.
- Share lessons learned about integration of multiple neighborhood-based initiatives focused on strengthening families and keeping children safe.

The lead contacts for the Milwaukee team were Dick Theado and Dick Buschmann, both of whom serve as consultants to *Making Connections* Milwaukee. They brought together a team of 11 additional people to participate in the peer match that included community residents, administrators from behavioral health, child welfare, and welfare departments; as well as nonprofit providers and advocacy community leaders.

The lead contacts for the Louisville peer consultant team were Jackie Stamps (the Director of Community Partnerships) and Larry Michalczyk (a consultant) both of the Cabinet for Health and Family Services. They brought together a large and powerful peer consultant team consisting of professionals and community members who have been collaborating on Neighborhood Place, and the Community Partnerships for Protecting Children and Family to Family initiatives. Jean McIntosh and Clare Anderson from the Center for the Study of Social Policy facilitated the exchange, and Mary Zemler-Wu drafted this summary report.

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## THE CONSULTATION

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The peer match, which took place from May 25-27, 2004 in Louisville, Kentucky, began with a reception and dinner where participants had an opportunity to informally get to know one another and provide an overview of each of their efforts. The first evening was also an opportunity for Louisville to share information about the governance structure of Neighborhood Place.

The second day began at the Barret Neighborhood Place in Louisville, where participants toured the facilities and learned about the Neighborhood Place system. Morning discussions revealed the structure and thinking behind the city's efforts to integrate three initiatives: *Making Connections* (MC), Family to Family (F2F), and Community Partnerships for the Protection of Children (CPPC). These initiatives, in concert with Neighborhood Place, serve as Jefferson county's overall approach to serving and supporting its residents. Peer consultants offered an overview of the supports they provide to families, including a detailed look at their practice model for family team meetings. Over a working lunch, a panel of community residents shared their perspectives on sustaining "community voice" and resident involvement. Next the Milwaukee team toured Ujima, a second Neighborhood Place site, and attended a roundtable discussion about the evolution of the Neighborhood Places from the perspectives of a range of community partners (some having worked together on the Neighborhood Place concept for over a decade), including the local schools and police.

During the third and final day of the match, Louisville presented data affirming the good results for families served and pointing to areas where more work is needed. The Milwaukee team spent the remainder of the morning developing an action plan for their first year. In the afternoon, the team split into three groups—visiting either Wesley House, a neighborhood service provider; Safe Place, a temporary shelter for teens who are having trouble at home; or Family Solutions Training, a curriculum used with all Neighborhood Place staff.



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## LESSONS LEARNED

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### **Lesson 1: The agency alone cannot do this. Partners came together around a shared vision.**

#### ***An Evolutionary Roadmap***

Today, residents of the City of Louisville, Kentucky (Jefferson County) can access health, mental health, juvenile, school-related, housing, child protection, and welfare services at any of eight regionally located “one-stop” Neighborhood Place centers. Over 400 staff from these public agencies are out-based to Neighborhood Places. Ninety percent (90%) of Neighborhood Place consumers report they would return or recommend Neighborhood Place to a friend.

Present reality stands in sharp contrast to the challenges faced by the executive leadership of the major family-serving public agencies in the early 1990s. At that time, Louisville was struggling with a high poverty rate, the child protection service agency’s staff had huge caseloads and was “raising children in foster care without permanency or family connections.” The public school system had recently settled class action litigation with a promise to increase the availability of social services in the public schools. An urgent need for solutions brought the leadership group together for weekly meetings; they soon dubbed their Friday morning group the “Breakfast Club,” which has continued for more than ten years.

Their original vision of integrated service provision in the schools soon grew into an even larger challenge. Larry Michalszyk, a founding member of the Breakfast Club, describes the group’s “ah-hah moment,” when they realized that unless services were more accessible, the idea of integrating would fail. The idea of Neighborhood Place centers was born when the Breakfast Club went out to the community and asked residents, as consumers of services—or clients--how agencies could make services user-friendly. At the suggestion of a community resident, the idea of Neighborhood Places—integrated service centers in the highest-poverty areas—was born.

In 1993, the first Neighborhood Place opened its doors. Now, Louisville (Jefferson County) is served by eight Neighborhood Places, which comprehensively covers the city. Each Neighborhood Place serves a region with approximately the same number of children and families living in poverty. Neighborhood Place Ujima, meaning “joint work and responsibility” in Swahili, was established in a refurbished firing range that was abandoned by a school’s ROTC program. At present, the Neighborhood Places are set in a variety of locations, including an old hospital and school buildings. Three have even built their own spaces to house their service providers including Neighborhood Place South Central, the last Neighborhood Place awaiting a permanent space.

#### ***Lessons to Fledgling Collaborations***

The Breakfast Club members originally agreed to a set of principles—without which they do not believe the Neighborhood Places would exist today. The two most important principles were: 1) an agreement to come back to the table, no matter the conflict, and 2) a certainty that their solutions were stronger together than apart. The leadership group agreed to deal with any and all issues together, inside the room. The same principles that have effectively served the Breakfast Club have also provided the collaborative base for their staff members. As leaders, the behaviors they model working together—

willingness to persist and communicate at all times—is also an expectation and example for front line staff as they interact across agencies as well as with families.

Through their early years together, the “Breakfast Club” also learned about starting a new collaboration:

- **Time and sustained energy are required.** As the Neighborhood Places were created, each participating services agency put a person to work on the project. This leader was not “the top dog” but a person who could devote significant attention to the work and have the authority to make decisions and speak on behalf of their agency. As these leaders came together, their weekly meetings became a necessity—their camaraderie, agendas, and problem-solving could not have been completed in quarterly or even monthly gatherings.
- **Everyone has a role to play.** “Players” were those agencies with sufficient size and interest to divide their staff among the eight Neighborhood Places. The many public and private agencies that could not agree to a presence in all eight regions could still be “partners” and provide services in all or some of Neighborhood Places.
- **Leaving egos at the door is essential.** As agencies co-located, an early disagreement surfaced around space. Because clinicians needed privacy to see clients, some administrators needed to give up private offices to accommodate them, despite the administrators’ higher organizational rank. Without this flexibility, the integration could not have succeeded.
- **Be participatory not directive.** A member of the original Breakfast Club had a strong vision for the Neighborhood Places. Unfortunately, community members felt forced into the vision, rather than invited to contribute to a joint vision. Soon, the group had adversaries where it once had allies.
- **Apologize for mistakes.** Fortunately, as soon as the community began to use its voice to express dissatisfaction, the Breakfast Club realized their error, and apologized immediately and visibly. Their humility gained them much good will.
- **Demonstrate commitment.** The Breakfast Club members and operational leaders in the new Neighborhood Places attended, and still attend many, many community events to establish their presence and shared interest in the communities where they operate.
- **Manage the politics.** Early on, there were skeptics in Louisville regarding the feasibility of Neighborhood Place. The Breakfast Club developed a conscious strategy to get the leaders from these groups involved early. They now recognize these groups as essential to the successes that Neighborhood Places have achieved.
- **Get started without all the answers, let solutions evolve.** At early planning retreats, none of the agencies wanted to give up their staff to do the job. Further, despite much discussion, no one could answer the question of who would be in charge. After much talk with no answers, the Breakfast Club decided to build a team via co-location rather than formal authority. Years later, after significant experience working together, the participating agencies were able to officially distribute power into a governance structure. But for many years, the collaboration operated successfully on “a handshake” and agreement to keep working together to make it work.

**Lesson 2: "Community partnerships are the way we do business."  
Delivering "blended" supports helps families progress toward self-sufficiency.**

Early persistence around the idea of collaboration has evolved into a complete new service delivery model for the public human service providers in Louisville. Their Neighborhood Place model's mission statement explains: *Neighborhood Place works with communities to provide blended and accessible health, education, employment and human services that support children and families in their progress toward self-sufficiency.*

The team that developed the mission statement notes that each word in it is meaningful. They work "with" communities, not for people. They also provide "blended" services, still allowing for partner agencies to bring a unique culture and perspective to their approach.

***Accessing Services in the Neighborhoods***

The boundaries of the Neighborhood Places are set geographically yet they remain flexible. Individuals typically choose which center they prefer to use based on location or available services (the service array varies slightly from center to center depending on community needs). Although TANF intake is based on home address, for all other services clients may go to the Neighborhood Place near their home, work, or another accessible location. A website helps individuals find the Neighborhood Place in their area.

Families begin their relationship with a Neighborhood Place in a variety of ways. Some are simply walk-in clients. Many come to access one of the partner agencies, but find help from others during their visit. After signing a shared consent form, the client's information can be shared across agencies.

A large proportion of the clients enter the Neighborhood Places as part of the child protection services agency's multiple response system: when cases do not meet the criteria for substantiated child abuse or neglect, they can be classified as "in need of services." The families are referred to a liaison in the Neighborhood Place, who provides outreach. While other agencies previously avoided taking clients who were referred by child protection, the Neighborhood Place partners now work together to make a concentrated effort to keep as low as possible the number of children who must come into state custody and out-of-home placement from their area.

When a family accesses Neighborhood Place services, and there are no child protection concerns, the family can choose their "primary" service provider, who acts as the case manager to get other agencies and providers involved in the family's team. Most often, this is the case manager within the agency where the family originally sought services. If active child protection concerns are the reason a family has come to the Neighborhood Place, the child protection worker always takes a lead role in case management. When child protection workers are phasing out a case, and court-involvement is coming to an end, transitioning the case to another case manager at a sister agency within the Neighborhood Place system is typically a part of "aftercare" services.

***Intake Forms***

Self-assessment forms replace traditional "intake" at the Neighborhood Places. All of the agencies came together to develop a shared format, which includes nine demographic questions and 17 assessment questions. The style of the questions is purposefully open to broad interpretation, such as,

"I am concerned about a child who is having trouble attending or doing well in school," or "I would like to talk to someone about stress or family problems." The goal of such questions is to broaden the dialogue with new clients, helping people to open up about concerns without immediately needing to take the risk of revealing highly personal information about themselves or their families. (The intake form: <http://www.neighborhoodpl.org/images/npinta~1.pdf>)

The self-assessment form is completed in a scan-able format—filling in the bubbles with #2 pencils. The idea, like the Neighborhood Places, grew from a legacy of providing services in the schools. The approach allows for easy-to-generate monthly compilations of the frequency of needs at each Neighborhood Place.

### ***Family Team Meetings***

Family team meetings are the backbone of the service delivery model in the Neighborhood Places, which grow out of the Community Partnerships for Protecting Children initiative. The commitment to family team meetings is built on underlying vision and values that:

- Groups make better decisions than individuals.
- Families are experts on themselves.
- Families can participate in decision making and will respect the decisions if they are included.
- Engaged families make better plans and greater progress.

Family team meetings have been used in the Louisville child protection agency for a number of years to more genuinely engage families in the decision making process. This year, the Neighborhood Place Managing Board agreed that family team meetings are the right way to do business with families and implemented a policy to this effect. Now, multiple agencies are changing the way they relate to and support families. (The policy: <http://www.neighborhoodpl.org/programs.htm>)

Family team meetings typically include the family and their case manager, who is trained to facilitate the meeting. They also invite formal and informal family supports, service providers, and potential service providers. If the family team meeting is called because of child protection concerns and may result in an out-of-home placement or a change in placement for a child, a specially trained facilitator is also present, (See Facilitated Staffing below).

During family team meetings, the team creates a written action plan, based on discussion of the family's strengths and concerns. The plan includes goals and expectations from everyone on the team that will lead to improved child safety. Everyone who attends gets a copy of the plan and a summary of the meeting. The meeting results are tracked in a database. At subsequent meetings, the team provides updates on its work and progress since the last meeting and then moves into planning for the next period.

Family team meetings give Neighborhood Place clients access to a range of supportive services. Family team meetings are also a way to access a "targeted assessment", which utilizes specially trained assessors to work with families to identify a response to or treatment program for learning problems, substance abuse, mental health problems, or incidents of domestic violence. If none of the existing services meets a family's specific needs, family team meetings are also a venue to access flexible funds and creative thinking for non-traditional services.

### ***Facilitated Staffing***

Facilitated staffing is used before any worker can place a child into out-of-home care or prior to any placement change. They soon also will be required prior to a child's reunification with his or her family. The strategy grows out of the Family to Family initiative's "Team Decision Making" approach. In these meetings, as in other family team meetings, everyone is invited to share their opinion and have the opinion heard and valued. However, for families involved with the court system over critical child safety and stability, the child protection worker makes a final recommendation, and the Judge makes a final ruling.

Since court involvement and the possibility of out-of-home placement make the quality and consistency of family team meetings particularly important, a specially-trained facilitator hosts the meeting. Because the facilitators are dedicated to the work full-time and do not carry a caseload, they have time prior to a staffing meeting to make contact with all of the parties involved. The first call is to the present caregiver, typically the mother, to get a sense of her potential service needs and ask who she would like to attend the staffing meeting. Subsequently, the facilitator conducts interviews with other family members who will participate in the meeting and invites appropriate service providers. In the meeting, the facilitator sets ground rules, invites the family to tell their story in their own words, and invites the group to identify and build on the family's strengths. Throughout the meeting, the facilitator serves as a neutral party, helping the family and service providers to sort, prioritize, and integrate their involvement.

Because facilitated staffing meetings were added to the service mix after family team meetings were already in place, some staff questioned whether the facilitators would add value to the process or simply add another layer of meetings. However, there is evidence that the facilitated staffing meetings have resulted in fewer children being placed in traditional foster care. Since March 2002, the percent of children who either stay at home safely or are placed in the temporary custody of a relative has risen from 33% to nearly 48%. For those families that cannot remain safely together, the facilitated staffing meetings ensure that families understand why their children have been removed and what is happening to them.

### **Lesson 3: "We're becoming more sophisticated." Structures and supports evolved to support the collaboration.**

#### **The Collaboration Continuum**

The Amherst Wilder Foundation developed a conceptual model of collaboration as a continuum, which begins with coordination, moves to collaboration, and ends with integration. As the Neighborhood Place partners have moved along this continuum—and grow ever closer to full integration—they have experienced many successes and struggles. They discussed the following topics, as the key structures and supports that have been critical to their development:

#### ***Confidentiality***

A barrier to interagency work that is often cited is confidentiality. Louisville was no exception. Although the task was very hard to accomplish, the Breakfast Club members worked with the attorneys in each of their agencies over the course of a year to help them understand what the collaboration was going to accomplish. They were at last able to develop a confidentiality agreement, which clients sign when they receive services at a Neighborhood Place. The document helped the staff to relax and feel confident that they were appropriately maintaining confidentiality while still sharing information as part of the team. Moreover, the document set sufficiently high standards for confidentiality that even when reviewed in

light of new HIPPA regulations, the legal team felt that no changes were needed. (The form can be downloaded at: <http://www.neighborhoodpl.org/images/releaseform.pdf>)

### ***Family Solutions Training***

An early decision that has served the partners well was a commitment to cross-training. As the staff came together to serve families, they perceived a need for a common language and structure to their work with clients. Together, they selected “Family Solutions” training. The training is built around the concept of family team meetings and builds staff skills in four areas: 1) working in partnership with families, 2) focusing on everyday life events, 3) promoting prevention skills, and 4) developing an individualized course of action (ICA) for each family/client. The Neighborhood Place partner agencies have been very pleased with this training—which is aligned with their practice principles. Still, they maintain that the process of being trained together is as important a “take-away” as any particular content learned from the curriculum.

### ***Governance Structure***

Although the governance structure of the Neighborhood Place system took four years to establish, today the partners have extensive by-laws to guide their operations. While they were able to function without this formal structure in the early years of their partnership—and, in fact, could only reach agreement after significant time was spent working together and building trust with one another—their official structure now serves them well. As the early Breakfast Club leaders point out, the by-laws have become important as Neighborhood Place evolves. As new generations assume leadership, they turn to the governance documents to understand the vision of the Neighborhood Place system. While the membership of the original “Breakfast Club” has changed over time, the work carries on, with the governance structure providing a foundation to the partners’ working relationships. (For more on the governance structure: <http://www.neighborhoodpl.org/governingbodies.htm>)

- *The Managing Board*
  - Composition: 14 voting members, including one representative from each of the six partner agencies and one elected member from each of the eight Community Councils
  - Charge: Adopts community-wide goals for the network of Neighborhood Places, assures ongoing collaboration among multiple agencies, establishes policies and acts on recommended changes to by-laws, and establishes desired outcomes to evaluate the effectiveness and consistency in the Neighborhood Place centers.
- *The Operations Committee*
  - Composition: An evolution of the “Breakfast Club,” which now includes partner agency representatives and the administrators of the Neighborhood Place centers.
  - Charge: Provide a forum for addressing day-to-day operational issues that cut across all Neighborhood Place locations and report concerns/results to the Managing Board.
- *Special Committees of the Managing Board*

The Managing Board has established several “special committees,” where it turns for assistance with and answers to the many of the critical decisions it faces. The current committees and responsibilities are:

- The Outcomes/Trends Committee, which collects, analyzes, and reports on data;
  - The Communications Committee, which develops mechanisms for internal and external reporting to Neighborhood Place consistencies;
  - The FOCUS Committee, which plans for interagency training needs; and
  - The Community Assessment and Planning Project Planning Group, which provides a forum to identify strengths, resources, and potential as well as needs, gaps, and barriers to service delivery.
  - Other committees are developed to address concerns as they are needed. Months back, for example, when head lice became epidemic and children were being referred to the Child Protection system because of recurrences, a temporary task force came together to create solutions. In fact, collaboration is such a routine expectation, the strategy has spread to the state level. Child welfare officials have developed local and statewide service collaboration groups to bring together CPS and community mental health on behalf of the population of emotionally disturbed children.
- *The Community Councils*
    - Composition: One Council at each Neighborhood Place, each including 15-21 people; two-thirds of the members must reside in the service area, the other third must work in the area, and one-third must have received or currently be receiving services in the Neighborhood Place.
    - Charge: As “Advocates of the Community” and “Ambassadors in the Community,” Council members reflect the thinking of the community as a whole, interpret community assessment findings for use in planning, encourage the use of Neighborhood Place services to meet families’ needs, and support community members as they interact with Neighborhood Place sites. They are “Partners in Leadership,” helping to set the direction for the Neighborhood Place and ensure it remains true to its mission. They also help to interview and select administrators at the Neighborhood Place sites and in the partner agencies.
  - *The CPPC Steering Committee*
    - Composition: Representatives from each of the agencies that participate in the Community Partnerships for Protecting Children initiative and community members who share a passion for strengthening families and involving the entire community in keeping children safe; includes 37 people (17 agency representatives and 20 community members) and reports to the Neighborhood Place Managing Board.
    - Charge: The Steering Committee is responsible for organizing the community and the service providers into a neighborhood network that ensures that keeping children safe is everybody’s business. This committee tracks data on family support and child protection issues and makes informed decisions related to providing services and supports to families at-risk of becoming involved with the public child welfare agency or are served by child protective services.

### *Financing*

When the first Neighborhood Place opened, the school district provided the space and utilities to make it functional. Each partner contributed staff and an overhead fee (\$1,500 per full-time staff person for staff-associated costs and \$4,000 per full-time staff person toward general operating expenses) for the

basic office upkeep, including supplies. Initially, there was also startup money available from the Kentucky Educational Reform Act to use funds for social services as long as the link to improved educational outcomes could be made.

The partners in Neighborhood Place have been highly creative regarding funding and continue to operate all eight centers without a dedicated line-item in the city, county, or state budget. Costs for Neighborhood Place Administrator positions are borne by the county government and public schools. These leadership positions were initially converted from existing open staff positions in the partner agencies. All other costs are borne by the separate agencies. While they struggled with early questions about competition and equity, they now consider the services “traded” between partner agencies to be a financial wash. In fiscal matters, as with practice, the message of collaboration has become widespread.

The Neighborhood Place system has succeeded in its goal to be virtually cost-neutral, but after more than ten years of collaboration, maintaining sufficient funding is still a year-by-year juggling act. For example, the community mental health system operates on a fee-for-service structure. Because the Neighborhood Place sites cannot independently generate enough billing volume for providers to sustain themselves, individualized treatment options are housed in other locations. Still, they have created a strategy to run prevention programs through every Neighborhood Place—targeting youth who engage in high-risk behaviors and are in danger of moving from experimentation with drugs and alcohol to addiction, and helping pregnant mothers who reduce drug and tobacco use to make a Healthy Journey for Two.

### *Community Mandate*

The mandate to work together is not codified legislatively, although the partner agencies have developed policies and procedures to support their shared operations. But after more than a decade of operation, Neighborhood Place sites could not simply dissolve; the mandate now comes from a large body of staff and community advocates who expect that a partnership is the best way to do business—they have seen that it makes a difference in the results for individual families and the agencies that serve them.

### **Lesson 4: “The heart of the agency is outside of its bricks and mortar.” Involved residents are essential at Neighborhood Place.**

As Community Council members, volunteers, and service recipients, residents are the most important part of the Neighborhood Place centers. Some of the services they have developed to meet the needs in their own communities include:

**Talk Shops.** Run by volunteer residents in the Neighborhood Places, Talk Shops are 10-week sessions for small groups to convene to discuss and learn about a topic. The topics range from first-time parenting with infants to raising grandchildren as a grandparent.

**Baby Stores.** As one of the new Neighborhood Place sites was being developed and built, a resident suggested including a “Baby Store.” Neighborhood Place South Central now includes just such a place, where residents can shop for discounted items they need for their families. Staff and Community Council members give out “cash” for the Baby Stores as an incentive to bring residents into the Neighborhood Place.



**Cluster Groups.** Residents who are foster parents, adoptive parents, and kinship care providers run a network of support groups. These groups include educational programs as well as respite care. In some cases, birth and foster parents even come to joint groups to get parent support together. Many groups run a matching program to provide new caregivers with a mentor. Often, the groups do the recruitment of these new foster and adoptive caregivers themselves.

**Nontraditional Service Providers.** Getting residents involved also allows public agencies to tap into—and build upon—existing work in the communities. A church in Louisville was already running several family-focused and youth-serving programs. When they learned about the child welfare agency's needs, they started a supervised visitation program in their church basement to provide local families with a normal, happy atmosphere to get together outside of the agency.

For agencies looking to get and keep more residents involved in leading efforts such as these, the active residents of Louisville offered the following ideas:

- **Invite us to participate.** Asking them to make a small commitment often resulted in residents making a larger commitment over time.
- **Share the workload.** When an agency feels overburdened, this is the best time for residents to come into the decision-making process to identify new strategies and more efficient ways of work.
- **Teach transferable leadership skills.** Residents who see how the things they are learning as part of the Community Council help them in other areas of their lives are more likely to continue coming back. For example, residents describe using their newly enhanced advocacy skills to help their own families.
- **Explain how efforts can help keep children safe.** Many residents have their own goals for the families and neighborhoods. If the child welfare agency does a good job explaining what they need, residents are often happy to fit their own efforts alongside the agency's structure and goals.

**Use time effectively.** People with busy lives do not have time to meet for the sake of meeting. Council gatherings must be structured and efficient—and linked to achieving results. As one resident describes, the meetings must move from talk to action.

- **Provide high quality services.** When current and former service recipients feel that Neighborhood Place helped them, they want to give back. As one resident described, she felt honored when she was asked to join the Council, knowing they had done good work with her and her family.
- **Share data and invite community analysis.** When residents view data collected by public agencies, their interpretations can differ markedly from that of statisticians. Rather than question who's right and who's wrong, such differences signal the need to dig deeper and further analyze traditional (and sometimes stereotypical) judgments.

- **Lead with the mission.** When the Council is doing its job well, the heart of an agency is truly out in the community—not inside the bricks and mortar. If an agency lives this mission, finding residents who are passionate about their community is no real challenge.

**Lesson 5: “They are different doors to the same reform.”**

**Multiple initiatives come together to strengthen children, families, and communities.**

The Neighborhood Place administrators have made strategic use of multiple initiatives designed to strengthen families and keep children safe. Community Partnerships for Protecting Children (CPPC) joined Ujima in 1996 and expanded to the other seven sites by 2002. The local staff turns to CPPC for help with prevention and early intervention strategies. A special CPPC Steering Committee reports to the managing board. Family to Family (F2F), which like CPPC has a strong service intervention message, came to Jefferson County and the entire state of Kentucky in 2000. F2F also helped the Neighborhood Places take a closer look at their children in out-of-home care—including foster and relative care placements.

Louisville’s child welfare agency has applied the similar goals and activities of CPPC and F2F at the community-level. Through this practical application, they have defined their own practice model around “Five Key Strategies for Success with Families:”

1. **Family-Centered Practice** includes the use of preventive services, the multiple response system, family team meetings, individualized assessments, and case plans.
2. **Building Community Partnerships and Neighborhood Networks** includes geographically assigning workers to neighborhoods, allowing access to services through the Neighborhood Places, embracing formal and informal neighborhood resources, and engaging community residents in forums and Community Councils to continually improve services.
3. **Recruitment and Retention of Foster and Adoptive Parents** includes work by community liaisons to support the neighborhood’s recruitment efforts and assist in cluster groups and other support services. This strategy is now expanding to include kinship care providers as well.
4. **Shared Decision Making** includes assessing needs and service gaps, then including residents in decision-making at every level (Community Council, CPPC Steering Committees, and Managing Board).
5. **Self-evaluation** includes routinely sharing data in an understandable context and format, for use in identifying and addressing problems.

*Making Connections* is the newest resource to the reform. Building on the existing work of both CPPC and F2F, *Making Connections* community organizers identified “Reduced CPS placements” as one of their key goals. The initiative has been a great help to the ongoing work of the Neighborhood Places, providing extensive training for residents to help develop leadership skills. *Making Connections* has also helped the Neighborhood Places to recognize a broader range of partners in their collaboration—and helped those partners do a better job of recognizing each other. Now, Louisville residents recognize and declare that area business and “Kool-Aid houses” where children stop by to say hello and get a drink are partners working toward the same goal—a neighborhood that is safe and desirable for residents to live, work, and play.

**Lesson 6: “Achieving results is more likely together than alone.”**  
**Outcomes improve with collaboration.**

Using data to understand performance and make strategic decisions is central to the Neighborhood Place collaboration. The Managing Board turns to the Outcomes and Trends Committee with critical data questions. The Committee also shares data with each of the Community Councils, gathering their input and analysis. This sharing of data among the partners and with the community has helped to:

- **Reduce isolation and build trust.** The Managing Board considers it a success that Neighborhood Places are having data conversations with residents. Sharing information publicly is a departure from the prior method of doing business and demonstrates the agency's commitment to reducing their isolation and seeking support from the community. Further, sharing data is a good tool for building the community's trust in the agency. Residents soak up the information and provide a fresh perspective—in fact, sharing data in advance of opening the Neighborhood Places is one of the critical factors the Breakfast Club members cite to explain their success in developing Neighborhood Place and partnering with residents.
- **Engage residents in dialogue.** Although the agencies usually have the data, the residents often have the most detailed background for analysis. For example, recent data revealed different rates of substantiation for child abuse and neglect across the Neighborhood Place zones. Residents were able to explore questions of whether real differences in the neighborhoods or different decision-making standards in the staff were behind the discrepant rates.
- **Identify priorities and deploy resources effectively.** When *Family to Family* was first launched in Louisville, facilitators and community liaisons were deployed first to the neighborhoods with the greatest numbers and highest rates of removals from home.

While using data has been of great help in the Neighborhood Place development, its leaders caution that data collection and analysis can be a real challenge. To those following in their footsteps, they suggest taking active steps to avoid two major barriers that continue to impede their use of data in Louisville. First, their partner agencies do not have a shared data system, and the data they collect in their respective systems is not captured in ways that is conducive to integration. Second, the boundaries of the eight geographic Neighborhood Places do not strictly follow census tracks or zip codes—rather they followed local, natural neighborhood boundaries. As such, matching data to Neighborhood Place boundaries remains a struggle.

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## PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS AND NEXT STEPS

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As they prepared to return to Milwaukee, participants set aside time over a working lunch to identify the most important knowledge gained and to plan their next steps. Participants found the peer match to be very helpful in providing them with a vision, explaining operational details, and creating a sense of team among their diverse group. They returned home with a sense of enthusiasm and new-found energy, knowing they had, “A helluva lotta work to do!”

Their “take-away” learning included the following:

- **Progress, Not Just Process**—While it is easy to get absorbed thinking about A to B to C, the goal is to keep focused on the whole of A to Z.
- **Tracking and Outcomes**—Data need to be used as a management and decision-making tool, including outcomes not just process and satisfaction. In order to succeed in this, the data must address the question, “Are we getting/delivering what the residents need and want? How many people can say their lives are better?”

Their priorities for the return to Milwaukee included:

- **Creating a Clear Vision**—While inspired by the work in Louisville, the Milwaukee team felt the partners involved and structure of service “hubs” in their area would be significantly different. The participants shared a sense of need and urgency to come together to think critically about what their model will look like. Key questions will be: What is the overarching mission? What outcomes will improve? How will outcomes be tracked?
- **Planning a Strategy for Success**—In addition to a more clearly defined plan, the short- and long-term process, structure, and funding for creating the “hubs” remains critical. The Milwaukee participants will come together to make strategic decisions about how to build the most solid foundation for sustained impact: One community at a time? The whole city? With what funds? At the same time, they were clear about the need to move forward, even in the face of barriers and without getting everything just right first.
- **Enrolling Leaders/Involving Partners**—Developing support for the initiative among their top policymakers and leaders was an important lesson from Louisville. Identifying those leaders, both in the government agencies that will be involved and in the contracted agencies, who play a large role in Milwaukee social services, will be an early step. These needs must be paired with a strategy for engaging those who carry out policies as well as those who work directly with residents. Remaining “in-touch” with all three levels will be key. The team will start by “pre-educating” their superiors, peers, and staff about the match.
- **Engaging Residents**—While the Milwaukee team was proud of their work thus far, including residents in early decision-making and in the peer match, they recognized a need to make resident involvement and the development of resident advisory groups a greater initial focus. Two next steps include work to develop the Community Councils and efforts to hear residents’ needs and expectations for the emerging hubs. Over time, the goal is to develop a new

definition of “community organizing” that includes energetic capacity building, providing leadership training, and banishing old stereotypes of how “residents” are seen.

- **Developing Partnerships**—Given the large roll that a host of small non-profits play in Milwaukee, the team identified the need to involve these local institutions as strong partners (even if they will not be “players” in every community). They also identified other large institutions they would like to approach to become core partners in the developing “hubs.”
- **Convening to discuss Family Team Meeting Models**—Milwaukee has several sources of knowledge about variations on the family team meeting model, as well as experienced practitioners across several agencies. The team will convene those who participate in coordinated care planning, service coordination team meetings, and Family Team Meetings to explore how to share efforts.
- **Selecting “Hub” Locations**—The team generated early ideas for the location of their initial “hub.” They committed to discussing their ideas with public agency partners and community agencies in the intended neighborhood. They will remember that in a climate of shrinking budgets, a capital project may make partners nervous. They also committed to thinking further about how the design of their initial hub will set expectations that impact the design and implementation of subsequent locations.

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## WHAT IS *MAKING CONNECTIONS*

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*Making Connections* is the Annie E. Casey Foundation's initiative to improve outcomes for some of the nation's most vulnerable children and families. The initiative is conducted through deep and durable partnerships with selected cities and neighborhoods across the United States (for more information, visit [www.aecf.org/mc](http://www.aecf.org/mc)).

Several core ideas underlie *Making Connections*:

- *Making Connections* is based on the recognition that the greatest number of American children who suffer from “rotten outcomes” live in city neighborhoods that are in many ways cut off—disconnected—from the mainstream opportunities of American life. Thus, *Making Connections* is “place-based”—it focuses on specific neighborhoods in specific cities.
- *Making Connections* has a simple theory: that children do better when they grow up in strong families, and families do better when they live in supportive neighborhoods. Thus, *Making Connections* strategies are aimed at helping families obtain what they need to be strong, and helping neighborhoods gain the resources they need in order to support families well.
- *Making Connections* focuses on three major types of “connections” that help families grow stronger and achieve what they want for their children. The first of these is helping families connect to **economic opportunities** and to jobs that provide income, assets, and an economic future. Research and experience suggest that this type of connection is unlikely without two others: strong connections to the **social networks** of kin, neighborhood groups, and other informal ties that sustain families when times get tough, and to high-quality, **effective services and supports** that help families reach their goals.

*Making Connections* focuses on improving results for children and families in tough neighborhoods. Core results that *Making Connections* communities are mobilizing around include:

- Families have increased earnings and income;
- Families have increased levels of assets;
- Families, youth, and neighborhoods increase their participation in civic life;
- Families and neighborhoods have strong informal supports and networks;
- Families have access to quality services and supports; and
- Children are healthy and ready to succeed in school.

A key task in ensuring the success of *Making Connections* is making available the learning and technical assistance that the participating sites need to move forward with their work. One of the ways that the Foundation provides this kind of support is by making peer matches available.

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## WHAT ARE PEER MATCHES?

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Since 1995, as part of a broader effort to rely more intentionally on the experience of people working in the field, the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) began working with several partners and funders to develop and offer a rather intensive form of peer technical assistance known as peer matches. Peer matches are structured opportunities for teams of people from two or more jurisdictions who are working on a similar issue to exchange experiences and practical knowledge toward resolving a particular challenge that has been identified in advance.

The rationale behind peer matches is straightforward. Often, the people best able to provide hands-on help are the “doers” themselves—people from states and communities who have successfully addressed a problem or created an effective new policy or strategy. These are the people who have an acute sense of what has and hasn’t worked, and why and why not. They have developed good tools and strategies they can share. And they are usually eager to help others because of a strong sense of shared mission. But while good peer matches are informal, they are never casual, using a carefully designed process and structure to focus the common interests, roles, and goodwill that exist among peers on producing meaningful change for a community.

Peer matches are a resource and time-intensive strategy. Careful consideration of when, where, and how to use this approach is, therefore, always warranted. Experience has shown that careful preparation and execution of the matches are critical factors for their success. This approach tends to work best when the following conditions are in place:

- A specific problem or issue has been identified, and the people looking for help are at a key decision point with respect to the design or implementation of a state or community strategy;
- Stakeholders are invested in and have a high degree of ownership in solving a problem;
- The timing is right—e.g., a decision or action that will affect the community’s family strengthening agenda is going to be taken and/or someone needs to be convinced to take action; and
- A reasonably small number of people have the authority and ability to act on what they learn in the match.

To date, CSSP has brokered more than 60 peer matches on topics ranging from creating resident-led community development corporations and governance structures, to establishing multilingual homeownership assistance centers, to building integrated services models. As illustrated in the case summaries that are part of this series, peer matches help spread good policies and practice, build relationships among different stakeholders who may not always have a chance to work together, and enable people to put changes in place that improve results for children, families, and neighborhoods.





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