



Community Change

LESSONS FROM MAKING CONNECTIONS



ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report draws on findings and descriptions from previous Casey publications, especially the work of consultant Leila Fiester. For more information about this report and the Casey Foundation's community-change work, contact Strategic Communications, media@aecf.org; 410.547.6600.

ABOUT THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private philanthropy that creates a brighter future for the nation's children by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit www.aecf.org.

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Foreword

This reflection on the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Making Connections initiative is inspired by the candor that is part of the Casey brand. It keeps faith with our founder Jim Casey's insistence that "constructive dissatisfaction" drives continuous improvement. Furthermore, the distillation and dissemination of lessons learned is a return-on-investment-enhancing activity for Casey and for the field.

That said, truth-telling is no less complicated for Casey than for others in philanthropy. *The Path of Most Resistance*, one of the most widely regarded Casey publications, was published in 1995 as a reflection on our New Futures community-change initiative. It was released only after months of agonizing about whether admitting that our efforts had fallen short of our aspirations could have a chilling or worse effect on the field. The post-publication pushback came from an unexpected source — those closest to the work. In 1998, *The Eye of the Storm* offered an alternative appraisal seen through the eyes of two of the Foundation's most respected colleagues — Don Crary and Otis Johnson. And then in 2001, *Change That Abides*, a retrospective by Andrew Hahn and his Brandeis colleagues, presented a significantly more hopeful appraisal than its predecessors.

Those reflections underscore Casey-style openness as embracing stories grown through experience as well as distilled from data; stories told through the lenses of those entrusted with stewardship of Casey's resources and those with loyalties elsewhere; those with views forged by proximity and those with the gift of distance.

Making Connections is no exception. In 2008, Stephen Goldsmith and Bob Watt interviewed key influentials in Making Connections communities and concluded that although "Casey's approach may not have achieved the Foundation's highest aspirations...it helped to establish the capacities and relationships needed to solve tough problems." Leila Fiester's *Measuring Change While Changing Measures*, a case study for the 2010 Evaluation Roundtable Teaching Forum, observed that by its end, Making Connections had "returned to its origin as the demonstration project...rather than an 'initiative' in its own right." More importantly, Making Connections' Diarist Project will allow others to reach their own conclusions from the archived documents containing the contemporaneous recounting of the work in Making Connections communities.

This monograph invites the reader to grapple with some of the lessons derived from leaning into the tough work of place-based change for vulnerable communities. As such, it represents and celebrates an important Casey tradition.

Ralph Smith
Senior Vice President
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MAKING CONNECTIONS was the Annie E. Casey Foundation's signature place-based, community-change initiative of the 2000s. It sought to build on previous work and launch an effort focused firmly on the framework of family strengthening. The Foundation started Making Connections in 22 places, focusing eventually on first 10, then seven sites. We invested in the initiative for more than 10 years and spent more than \$500 million. | This effort led to a range of innovations in the field and both started and strengthened many local initiatives. Making Connections' positive outcomes are still influencing Casey and the broader field. In many notable cases, the programs and partnerships created during the initiative continue to thrive. | Assessments of Making Connections have already produced a variety of lessons on program development, implementation, evaluation and other topics, with valuable implications for practitioners, public policymakers, funders and others involved in community development. (The References section on page 23 lists several reports that chronicle aspects of Making Connections.) This report takes a step back and outlines key findings from the initiative that can provide guidance to those involved with community-change efforts in the future. | These principles can serve as guideposts at an exciting time in the community-change field. Many smart and promising initiatives are underway, fueled by foundations, nonprofits and others in the private sector. The federal government is also making important investments at the neighborhood and community levels. And learning communities of local leaders and state and local officials are actively sharing information and hard-won insights. The principles and strategies in this report can help inform and sustain these efforts and those to come in a field with so much to contribute to the strengthening and success of families living in disinvested communities.

OVERVIEW

OF MAKING CONNECTIONS

Launched in 1999, Making Connections was the demonstration project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Neighborhood Transformation/Family Development initiative, which was intended to influence public policy and civic leadership in the community development realm. Making Connections was a prime example of a comprehensive community initiative and was one of the most ambitious examples of a community-building approach in the 2000s that emphasized improvements focused on both people and place.

In the preceding decades, the field of community development had become largely focused on redeveloping physical assets, with little attention paid to the families and residents who were most affected. Prior initiatives had generally lacked a comprehensive approach to strengthening an entire community and failed to build sustainable partnerships with major investors or the systems that provide resources and services to low-income communities.

Making Connections adopted a different approach, based on the understanding that children's futures were shaped in part by where they lived. It explicitly focused on community change within a local place and grew from the premise that children do well when they have healthy, supportive, economically secure families, and that families do better when they live in neighborhoods with a range of opportunities, including services, resources and support networks. Other community-change visions focused either on improving residents' economic

prospects or revitalizing the neighborhood. Making Connections made it a goal to strengthen the community, which in turn would strengthen and support families. Making Connections also set out to restore equity of opportunity in the targeted communities by improving conditions in communities of color that had been buffeted by disinvestment, a lack of social resources and high concentrations of poverty.

IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of Making Connections began in 22 cities in 2000. The initial cities were selected based on criteria including data on child and family need, Casey's prior work and relationships in the city, each city's demonstrated accomplishment in community-change efforts and evidence of local leadership or a strong potential interest in this initiative. Casey did not fund or work with only one organization; rather, Casey created local site teams made up of Foundation staff, consultants and staff from local

partners, including community foundations, nonprofits and public agencies. Sites were led by a senior Casey staff member and a local coordinator. That approach changed over time, and at the end of the initiative, sites were being led by local management entities.

At most sites, Foundation staff and the local team selected neighborhoods to work in — areas with populations ranging from 15,000 to 30,000. (San Antonio opted to work in a larger area with about 138,000 residents, and Camden did not identify a target neighborhood.)

Sites reached out to engage city officials, residents, grassroots organizations and larger nonprofits, beginning with extensive one-on-one and group discussions of family-strengthening principles and local priorities. These led to more structured studies of possible action, for example, through "family circles," an adaptation of the "study circles" methodology; small grants programs to support community dialogues or small-scale neighborhood projects; community-mapping efforts to assess community assets and needs; and larger community meetings.

In 2002, Casey chose 10 sites that would fully implement Making Connections. As Casey staff and site

leaders translated concepts of family strengthening into action, the Foundation introduced what became a central component of Making Connections: a focus on improving results for children and families and using them as benchmarks to guide investments and activities. The Foundation and site leaders agreed on a set of key results, including increased employment and earnings; development of family assets; ensuring that young children are healthy and ready to succeed in school; increased community engagement and civic participation; and connecting communities and residents with the services and networks they need to become stronger.

Sites had the most success with employment and asset-development strategies. To boost employment, sites developed “neighborhood pipelines” to connect residents from the Making Connections neighborhoods to employers with entry-level jobs, usually in health care, construction or other service industries. In some instances, sites created Centers for Working Families to offer a range of employment-related services in one convenient location. All sites launched a tax preparation campaign focused on the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which generated significant resources for neighborhood residents — and

helped to spark EITC campaigns throughout Making Connections cities. As employment and asset-development and -protection strategies became stronger, sites also addressed employment issues for specific resident populations, including ex-offenders, immigrants and refugees, and residents with extremely low literacy skills. Some took on other asset-development strategies by improving access to financial services and working to ease predatory lending, as well as making small business loans more available. By 2008, the Making Connections initiative had reduced the number of full-fledged sites from 10 to seven.

Sites focused intently on ensuring that residents and communities were actively engaged in Making Connections. One common method was to support community ambassadors who could engage other members of the community — *promotoras* in Hispanic areas or “walkers-and-talkers” in others. Resident leadership programs also helped to increase residents’ involvement.

As part of Making Connections’ goal of ensuring that young children were healthy and ready for school, between 2003 and 2005 many sites focused on improving the quality of

child care to help children entering kindergarten be ready to succeed in school — reflecting the fact that the majority of young children in Making Connections neighborhoods did not have child care in licensed settings. As the initiative progressed, attention turned more directly to ensuring that early health services were in place for all neighborhood children, including developmental screenings and access to a primary care “medical home” — a place where a child receives regular, family-centered health care. Casey also focused on the interventions needed in classrooms and in extended learning time (after-school and summer programs) to improve the reading proficiency of students completing third grade. Eight sites partnered with schools to focus on improving grade-level reading outcomes for all students. Significant gains were made in some sites, although not all.

Finally, all sites worked to strengthen city and state policies affecting neighborhood residents and local public service systems. Denver, for example, worked to change Colorado’s school funding formula. Oakland advocated for community benefits agreements on new developments affecting the Making Connections neighborhood and worked to actually shape real estate



MAKING CONNECTIONS SITES

The initiative began with 22 sites:

Atlanta	Baltimore
Boston	Camden
Denver	Des Moines
Detroit	District of Columbia
Hartford	Indianapolis
Louisville	Miami
Milwaukee	New Orleans
Oakland	Philadelphia
Providence	San Antonio
San Diego	Savannah
Seattle	St. Louis

In 2002–03, Casey settled on the following 10 sites that had the most potential to implement the full Making Connections’ agenda. By 2008, the number of full-fledged sites was reduced to seven, which are highlighted below.

- Denver
- Des Moines
- Hartford
- Indianapolis
- Louisville
- Milwaukee
- Oakland
- Providence
- San Antonio
- Seattle

development in the area’s major business corridor.

In addition to grants, Casey provided extensive technical assistance and made social investments, including certificates of deposits in local community financial institutions and program-related investments — below-market-rate loans for community investment opportunities related to Making Connections’ priorities. And the Foundation worked with sites to help them gain federal funding through such programs as the Second Chance Act and the Food Stamp Employment and Training program.

Making Connections achieved results related to employment, asset development and its goal of ensuring the health and school readiness of young children, as shown on page 4.

In the end, Making Connections did not achieve the desired population-level change in its neighborhoods. But the initiative launched a range of efforts and strategies that are still operating today. For example, a network of Centers for Working Families is in place in Indianapolis and other areas of Indiana. In Providence, Making Connections led to the creation of a strategy for bolstering child-family success. In Louisville and other

cities, foreclosure mitigation efforts developed during Making Connections are still in place.

Making Connections also laid the groundwork within the Casey Foundation and beyond for two important initiatives and a new strategy that are helping to reshape the national dialogue on education and family issues. The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading helps communities and policymakers promote school readiness and high-quality teaching, tackle chronic absence and improve summer learning, as well as engage parents as their children’s first teachers. The second national initiative, Attendance Works, promotes awareness of the important role that school attendance plays in achieving academic success starting with school entry. The initiative works to ensure that every district in the country not only tracks chronic absence data beginning in kindergarten or ideally earlier, but also partners with families and community agencies to intervene when attendance is a problem for children or particular schools. Finally, the Making Connections initiative helped cement the notion that a “two-generation” strategy is critical to community change — a strategy that addresses the needs and challenges facing both children and parents simultaneously.

Making Connections: Achieving Results in Two Focus Areas

INCREASING EARNINGS AND INCOME

14,926

people placed in jobs at all sites.

Job placements per site ranged from

942 to 4,494

All sites included the
hardest-to-employ residents.

1,169,981

Number of federal tax returns
prepared for residents.

Returns generated
\$545 million in EITC claims
and **\$208** million in
child tax credits.

10,600+

households (at seven sites)
had established
savings, checking
and/or
individual development
accounts.

CHILDREN HEALTHY AND PREPARED TO SUCCEED IN SCHOOL

1,558 to 1,999

Increase of enrolled
preschoolers (across sites)
between 2005–07.

7 of 8

In seven of eight focus schools,
levels of third-grade reading proficiency
improved.

The number of children with
access to medical services through
a medical home increased at
several sites.

BUILDING ON THE WORK OF MAKING CONNECTIONS

The Casey Foundation has carefully considered the track record of the Making Connections initiative and the important lessons it helped generate. That assessment has led to the following six recommendations — key ideas and strategies that can help inform and strengthen the community-change work of both the Foundation and the broader field.



Focus on Two-Generation, Place-Based Community Change

Making Connections began with an initial focus on strengthening families by promoting economic success, cultivating social networks and introducing trusted, high-quality services. It was a challenge to accomplish each of those under the umbrella of family strengthening, as most services addressed the needs of children or adults but were not typically family-centered.

The initiative had success developing and implementing specific family-strengthening components, some of which have been taken to scale in important ways. Early in Making Connections, for example, Milwaukee and Camden piloted EITC campaigns that attempted to strengthen and expand free tax preparation as one aspect of family economic success. Many Making Connections sites took up these campaigns and Casey became a major investor in strengthening

the national tax preparation movement with such partners as United Way and the Center for Economic Progress. Other strong innovations included the creation of workforce pipelines, the development of sector partnerships to capitalize on emerging employment opportunities, the use of federal nutrition funding to provide workforce development, the creation of Centers for Working Families offering bundled services, new approaches to helping homeowners avoid foreclosure and an array of community development investments.

Over time, Making Connections expanded its approach to focus services on having children be healthy and ready for school, to complement the services being offered to improve adults' economic standing. This approach evolved to include building high-quality early education centers and community schools, ensuring children had health care, providing wraparound services and activities, enriching instructional approaches, providing professional development and

coaching to teachers and fostering parent leadership in schools.

A number of sites took the next step to develop interventions that combined these two sets of services and resources into a unified effort geared to helping an entire family at the same time — a two-generation strategy. By the end of Making Connections no site had fully developed this new approach, but the potential and challenges for a two-generation strategy were becoming clear.

The family-strengthening approach connected children and adults to existing services; the two-generation operational model built on the theory that providing a customized and integrated set of services for both children and parents simultaneously was more likely to help each family succeed. But this two-generation approach went beyond delivering services. It also required engagement of families and the broader community in determining what kinds of resources and services would be most helpful to their children. It became clear that parent engagement in shaping the contours of a local initiative must be a hallmark of an effective two-generation, place-based strategy.

many of atlanta's most vulnerable families live in five of the city's oldest neighborhoods located just south of downtown, in Neighborhood Planning Unit V. These neighborhoods are home to a once-thriving African-American community that has suffered from property disinvestment, population decrease and general economic decline for many years. Atlanta was an original Making Connections site but not one of the sites where it was fully implemented. Today, as a Casey civic site, this area of Atlanta is a place where the Foundation has a long-term commitment to improving the futures of at-risk children and their families. The Civic Site works with a diverse group of partners to bring about success in three areas — education, family economic success and neighborhood transformation — in a targeted community with about 15,000 residents. The Civic Site is seeking to make progress on a range of indicators for that population, including the number of children enrolled in prekindergarten programs, household income and the percent of adults registered to vote.

Since its beginnings as a Making Connections site, the Atlanta Civic Site has developed a two-generation approach to its efforts. The work there began with a focus on parents, but it soon emerged that the issues confronting those parents were tightly tied to issues facing their children. For example, parents who were working or going to school could be sidetracked by a lack of good, reliable child care.

Over time, the Atlanta site expanded its focus to address the needs of both parents and their kids. It now invests in a strategy that combines high-achieving schools, jobs and access to economic benefits, public safety and opportunities for families to improve their communities. Residents of the area served can take advantage of an integrated Center for Working Families, which provides a set of support services. Their children can attend a well-run neighborhood learning complex that includes a high-quality early education center and a K-5 school, with wraparound health and human services available to them.





“Our approach is to provide very integrated services,” says Gail Hayes, the director of the Atlanta Civic Site. “It’s working with a young family to find out what the parents need, what the kids need, and having the parents in the driver’s seat to obtain those services.”

Today, the Casey Foundation is more firmly committed than ever to the two-generation approach and has made it the keystone of its ongoing economic opportunity and place-based, community-change efforts. There is still much to be learned about designing and implementing effective two-generation approaches, especially regarding the right set of economic opportunity services for parents; the mix of services geared to children, parenting and other adult-focused efforts; the role of stable and supportive housing and communities; and required policy changes.

2

Recognize the Specific Challenges Facing Each Community

As Making Connections began, the Casey Foundation had an understanding of the personal, community and structural factors that contribute to persistent poverty. It offered both promising on-the-ground interventions within neighborhoods and a larger policy effort to reform public and private systems.

But it is fair to say that Casey discovered other new and emerging

dimensions of poverty in Making Connections sites as the initiative unfolded. Indeed, many people’s economic distress deepened over the life of Making Connections, including young families and men of color, especially former offenders facing multiple barriers who returned to inner-city neighborhoods. The 2000 Census underscored the changing demographics of many neighborhoods in terms of immigration and language access. Complicating all of the work was the onset of the worst recession in decades, which cut employment opportunities in many communities.

It also became clear that public systems often did not work in unison with one another and were generally not targeting specific neighborhoods or providing neighborhood-focused interventions. Nonprofit providers, when they existed at all, lacked the capacity they needed. And although millions of dollars were spent in various funding streams, many neighborhoods lacked the organizational infrastructure needed to build an effective and coordinated set of services.

The end result was that working in smaller neighborhoods with populations of between 15,000 and



30,000, Casey and its partners were unable to “close the gap” by improving economic and educational opportunities and bringing them up to par with those of the rest of the country.

Making Connections led to a major improvement in data collection in the field of community change: a three-stage, longitudinal survey of families and neighborhoods that also revealed information about conditions in the communities for the purposes of program design, evaluation and building knowledge. In particular, the survey showed in clear numbers the high level of housing and education mobility experienced by residents and highlighted the high rate of change in household composition, fueled by economic insecurity and family circumstances.

Among its findings, the survey showed that between survey waves (approximately three years), 80 percent of children changed to a new school with only 20 percent remaining at the same school. While many of those were typical “promotional” school changes, a significant number were non-promotional school changes brought on by other factors. (Student mobility also increased due to school closings and reorganizations, brought on by such factors as school system budget crises.) Such

student change can hinder efforts to improve educational outcomes for low-income populations, by contributing to higher absence rates and a lack of instructional continuity.

On the housing front, the survey found that nearly 50 percent of residential units in Making Connections communities turned over to a new household or became vacant over each three-year period, although the turnover rates varied from neighborhood to neighborhood. Overall, rates of residential instability were highest in neighborhoods with high concentrations of rental and multifamily housing, high poverty rates and low levels of collective efficacy. Families with children tended to move more often. On average, 57 percent of households with children moved at least once within three years, and among the families that moved, 43 percent moved more than once within three years. These moves often led to families ending up in worse housing and lower-performing schools and made it difficult to deliver services and build stronger communities. It became clear that many of the communities had a subgroup of extremely fragile families that required interventions beyond what Making Connections was able to offer. Many went through eviction or foreclosure, while others simply

lost their ability to pay for housing and ended up moving in with relatives or friends.

These additional factors affecting people in poverty challenged Making Connections’ design assumptions and priorities and other place-based efforts, including assumptions about the population size of neighborhoods for effective engagement, mobility strategies and system reform. Some Making Connections sites, notably White Center (near Seattle), Oakland and Louisville, adjusted their work to respond to the high level of resident mobility, and worked on foreclosures or made investments in new affordable housing.

In the future, place-based community change should be more explicit in its support for strategies to prevent and respond to high mobility. That may well include a direct focus on improving housing options, assistance with foreclosure and eviction challenges, and improvements to the physical landscape of communities. Similarly, place-based initiatives can anticipate that residential instability may be eased through resident engagement and improved safety. Having mixed-income development also has the potential to lower neighborhood residential instability.

3

Understand the Complexity of Managing and Measuring Community Change

Making Connections began by offering ideas rather than blueprints and opted for a staff-driven start-up process rather than relying on local organizations. This approach fostered openness and creativity as programs were launched, but over time the initiative gravitated toward a more standard program design and set of results.

Making Connections made some mistakes at the outset that could have been avoided or minimized. Casey did not complete the preliminary theory of change and results measures, chose not to engage an outside evaluator and did not fully appreciate what would be required at the neighborhood level to generate the anticipated changes. Making Connections could have done more in the beginning to define long-term results, anticipate and build skills among a diverse set of Casey and site-based leaders, and establish better data-collection requirements. Looking back, Making Connections should have better defined what would be required to launch and sustain a site. That is, what sorts of skills and resources were required

in each site, and what were the economic conditions within each site that would affect the initiative's goals? The process of selecting sites did not adequately take into account those requirements and what sites had to have in place to be successful.

The initiative's leaders learned that managing the complexity of community change required both skills and flexibility to adjust at each stage of the initiative and to respond to emerging opportunities. Making Connections did successfully build the capacity of sites for achieving success, and such work will likely be required of future initiatives. Community-change efforts must also be open to reassessing their approach and strategy and forging new partnerships when warranted. Making Connections also demonstrated the importance of having skilled leaders on the ground, and the initiative switched from having Foundation-staff-led sites to having site teams led by local coordinators, whose skills became a critical factor in determining a site's success.

Making Connections demonstrated the effectiveness of using data and results-based accountability for designing and implementing effective interventions, and that should be a key component of any

community-change effort seeking to deal with complex issues. Casey invested substantial resources in technical assistance and in building a learning community among sites, including supporting the development of a large cohort of skilled resident leaders. Such learning communities can benefit greatly from a candid exploration of the mistakes that are made.

Working to change communities presents enormous challenges for both local practitioners and national investors. While a goal should be encouraging organic, entrepreneurial growth at the local level, achieving that while meeting the demands of implementation protocols and required evaluations leads inevitably to tension and challenges. Bringing in other investors and perspectives enhances sustainability but may add new complexities.

Place-based community change is complex and extremely difficult, maybe impossible, to manage from afar. Because of that, Casey is focusing its recently launched Family-Centered Community Change strategy on being a strategic investor that joins local efforts already underway with local leadership. The effort is working in three cities that have several key attributes for successful



Building a Network to Sustain Results in Louisville

louisville built partnerships with a range of institutions, including Jefferson Community and Technical College, the University of Louisville, Spalding University, Jefferson County Public Schools, Metro Government, the Community Foundation of Louisville and other local funders.¹

Making Connections Louisville developed and deployed an internationally recognized network organizing strategy to strengthen families in high-poverty neighborhoods. About 5,000 people and dozens of partner organizations are members of the network and have committed to building community capacity and generating better outcomes for children and families. After beginning in four neighborhoods, the network has expanded to work in six core neighborhoods and is active across the metro area.

Now incorporated as the Network Center for Community Change (NC3), Louisville has helped what was formerly Making Connections Louisville establish itself as an effective partner in local work to increase family access to jobs, improve educational outcomes throughout the educational pipeline, improve civic leadership and organizational capacity, strengthen neighborhoods and foster asset-protection strategies. Its work has included:

Development of employment opportunities for neighborhood residents With the region's Workforce Investment Board, community colleges, resident organizers, business leaders and other partners, Making Connections Louisville established job pipelines connecting residents from the initiative neighborhoods to about 20 network employers, including hospitals and other prominent businesses, with the goal of placing them in jobs that provide benefits and opportunities for career advancement. Close to 1,500 residents were placed in jobs.

Establishment of strong partnerships to help families build and protect assets Early in the initiative, Making Connections was a founding partner of the Louisville Asset Building Coalition and its EITC campaign — supported by city government, Metro United Way and numerous local banks — which returned more than \$32 million in tax credits to more than 25,000 residents from 2001 to 2009.

Use of data to inform and influence public policy Making Connections started a local approach of using timely data to help local and state policymakers develop strategies that respond effectively to the increasingly precarious financial conditions of low-income families, and NC3 has continued that approach with many partners, helping it become a “way of doing business” in Louisville. NC3 has become nationally known for its community engagement mapping strategy, which grew out of Making Connections’ focus on data and uses residents to gather data to highlight local housing conditions and issues. Such data have helped support the network’s ongoing policy work.

Sustained engagement in city and statewide agendas to strengthen families and communities Making Connections Louisville joined with the city’s philanthropic leadership to advance the Greater Louisville Project, a broad-based initiative to accelerate the region’s revitalization through “deep drivers” of change: educational attainment, increasing family work and earnings, and strong urban core neighborhoods.

Dana Jackson, NC3’s executive director, says Making Connections laid the foundation for the organization’s vital ongoing work. “The network is a very important and necessary thing in our town, and NC3 wouldn’t exist without the work of Making Connections,” Jackson says. “It really is a movement. It’s a diverse collection of people who are doing the hard work for change in some of Louisville’s toughest neighborhoods.”



“It really is a movement. It’s a diverse collection of people who are doing the hard work for change in some of Louisville’s toughest neighborhoods.”

neighborhood transformation, such as a partnership of local organizations and public agencies; high-quality education, health and other support services for children; robust job training and financial education programs for adults; actively engaged parents and residents; and access to affordable housing to promote residential stability. This approach holds promise but will no doubt present its own management challenges.

4

Promote Resident and Parent Engagement

As Casey had attempted in previous initiatives, Making Connections was determined to engage families and residents in the effort and make sure they remained centrally involved throughout. The goals included building stronger communities and better connections among residents, and creating or strengthening resources that could improve conditions for both children and parents. Casey considered this community building a matter of equity for the selected sites, which were largely minority and had high rates of poverty. The Making Connections sites used several tools to start and

sustain community engagement and build social connections and assistance, among them:

- Small grants that gave residents funding to help them join Making Connections projects and take on resident engagement responsibilities themselves.
- Family Circles, which gave residents opportunities to shape Making Connections programs to meet on-the-ground needs.
- Leadership training, which bolstered the skills of residents and helped them to take on more responsibilities in their community and, in some cases, in city-wide leadership positions.
- Community organizing to advocate for policy and systems change — an approach used in Denver, Oakland and Providence.

Strategies varied from site to site. In San Antonio, local residents had a major voice throughout the initiative, through small group meetings, family councils and potluck dinners, among other things. Focus groups — in English and Spanish — brought more than 200 residents together to help shape the initiative's effort to improve reading in the early grades. During that

process, it emerged that parents also wanted English classes for themselves, as well as GED courses and adult basic education, so they could become better advocates for their children and improve their job prospects. Leadership training classes helped parents learn how to serve on the PTA board and the board of the Head Start center.

“We take it for granted that people know how to serve on a committee,” says Dennis Campa, who worked for the city of San Antonio and played an important role in the Making Connections initiative there. “But in most cases, the parents who got involved had never been part of a decision-making body.” Over time, as residents gained experience in leadership positions they took on more responsibility — going to college and, in a few cases, going on to serve on the school board or the city council. Campa, who now works for the Casey Foundation, says the community engagement work was critical. “It’s hard work, but if you’re looking to make substantive change, the outcomes won’t be as enduring if the residents don’t buy in.”

Building parent and resident leadership during Making Connections was not easy. Well-meaning nonprofits often saw themselves as the



gatekeepers to residents but failed to truly invest in their leadership or take their ideas to heart. Other funders and stakeholders needed to be convinced that resident engagement was not just a Foundation-driven option, but an essential part of reforming institutions and practices that would help achieve and sustain local priorities. It took sustained advocacy and leading by example to show that parent and resident leadership was critical for bridging the gaps and disconnections related to race, ethnicity, gender and power.

But Making Connections achieved its resident engagement goal from beginning to end, designing and implementing scores of ways of doing effective resident engagement and connecting with thousands of residents over the life of the initiative. In many cases, residents themselves came together to design and lead neighborhood projects.

In the end, resident leaders played many leadership roles in the initiative, and the results were seen in the transformation of residents' lives and through local "ownership" of the initiative's activities. In some cases, resident leaders joined boards of education, became staff of community organizations and were elected to political office. As

important, many institutions that shape the lives of children and families developed new ways to engage residents as a regular part of doing business.

Place-based community change depends upon constituent voices and stakeholders to keep the process and investments accountable for attaining ambitious results for kids and families. Making Connections created a cadre of resident leaders in all of its sites who accepted the strategy and advocated for these results.

Sustaining resident and parent engagement is important. Successful family-strengthening efforts must help parents develop the skills and confidence they need to succeed while providing appropriate and family-centered services and resources. This cannot fully happen unless parents are involved in program decision making and have their voices heard and acted upon. This does not occur in most neighborhoods, even with the most well-meaning community-based organizations. But it must, as designing and implementing successful two-generation approaches require parental trust and involvement.

Looking ahead, it is important to consider who will support

resident and parent leadership on an ongoing basis — a key question for place-based community change. Grassroots leadership is not something you just do in the planning or initial phases of a project. It must be infused permanently throughout initiatives and it cannot succeed without adequate ongoing resources.

The Casey Foundation developed a new appreciation for the challenge of balancing core principles — being faithful to an initiative's goals while being genuinely responsive to the community's desires — while maintaining a focus on accountability. Moving forward, community-change efforts must recognize that working toward these key principles will inevitably lead to conflicts, so initiatives must be ready to respond with necessary adjustments.

5

Develop Effective Ways to Harness and Learn from Data

Making Connections began with a strong commitment to collecting high-quality data and, more importantly, learning from it and using it to guide programming and policy-focused work. A data-driven

neighbors in indianapolis learned that by working together they could strengthen their own community. Through its resident engagement work, Making Connections helped foster countless steps forward for local communities, which demonstrate in the aggregate enormous progress.²

Making Connections Indianapolis developed three often overlapping pathways to support residents' work. They gave residents access to information and data about their communities and provided resources such as grants to pay for their work. They provided residents with leadership training, both formal classes and informal mentoring, and helped residents build strong community relationships, often through the use of Study Circles.

"When I moved onto my street, nobody knew each other," says Jerry Keys, a construction worker and house painter when he first partnered with Making Connections Indianapolis. Keys wanted to stir neighborhood activism but did not get very far alone. Then, his neighbor Elizabeth Ryan trained to facilitate a Study Circle on their block.

Their first meeting provided a much needed icebreaker. There had been tension on the block between renters and owners, and some of the more established residents had soured on trying to improve things. As residents got to know each other, however, their comfort grew and they found some common ground. They were all concerned about resident turnover, vacant units and the house on their corner, which had long been a site for drugs and prostitution.

When the owner petitioned to change zoning, so it could legally break up the house into four units, the Study Circle had its first call to action. Keys organized the community's opposition effort by circulating a petition against the zoning change. The neighbors got their city council representative involved and, with his help, the zoning change was denied. By working together, the residents discovered that they had power.





The Woodlawn Study Circle went on to identify and resolve more problems, such as having more streetlights turned on and maintaining funds to keep them on. “It seems the more you get accomplished the more you want to accomplish,” says Elizabeth Ryan.

approach was the right one, and a lot of the people working in the sites embraced it, adopting data-driven decision making and results-based accountability. Yet, Making Connections, like other community-change efforts, did not develop persuasive evidence about the effectiveness of community change.

Making Connections provided funding for data collection and analysis, supported technical assistance services and created local learning partnerships that were focused on data collection, outcomes and evaluations. Sites worked to break down “silos” that stymied efforts to integrate data and see a

fuller picture of local conditions. In Milwaukee, for example, Making Connections brought various partners together to share data, track common measures and use the information to guide continuous improvement. The detailed data collection in the sites also revealed inequities in aspects of services and opportunities based on residents’ race or ethnicity, which allowed Making Connections to take steps to address them.

Casey encouraged sites to engage residents in data-related activities, such as neighborhood “summits” at which measures of the initiative’s progress were shared. Over time,

the Casey Foundation took steps to establish standardized goals and measurements for the sites to track and report.

It is important to recognize that during Making Connections, adopting and understanding a data-driven approach was not enough by itself to dramatically improve results on the ground or affect major change within relevant public and private systems. A basic problem was defining a feasible level of change related to important results like jobs or school readiness.

Casey consultants have carefully reviewed the use of data in Making Connections and have come up with several key lessons. Data-collection work must be closely connected to the work taking place in the community and relevant to practitioners. Likewise, initiatives must strive to create a broad learning culture about data within a community, rather than simply supporting monitoring and reporting by various providers.

Future community-change initiatives must do more to take higher-quality data and results and translate them into effective strategies. This will require fresh thinking and disciplined attention to results. A key aspect of such strategies will

be to align the resources of multiple stakeholders so they are invested more efficiently to achieve common and agreed-upon results. Casey's new community-change efforts will look for data-collection capacities at the outset and will assess site readiness based in part on the site's potential for evidence building.

Additionally, Making Connections' focus on two-generation strategies reinforced the need to produce and use affordable, sustainable data that teach us about the lives of both children and parents — ranging from data on health status, educational attainment, employment, finances, housing or other areas in a family's life. Such integrated data can reveal some of the interrelated factors that are critical in a family's well-being, whether it is a parent's unemployment status or whether or not a child has health insurance.

Based on the Making Connections' experience, Casey has begun supporting the development of integrated databases that pull together individualized information from many different public agencies to create a rich and comprehensive picture of children and family outcomes that can be tracked over time. These multiagency integrated data systems can be used to track

a range of key measures and help us understand the interplay among factors that affect families' economic well-being.

Casey is working with other national partners — including the MacArthur Foundation, the National League of Cities and the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership — as well as public and nonprofit agencies, endeavoring to expand and accelerate the development of integrated data systems that support two-generation work. This kind of data system will be increasingly critical in future community-change initiatives to enhance their ability to collect family cohort data.

6

Redefine Success for Place-Based Community Change

Efforts to improve high-poverty neighborhoods have existed since the birth of settlement houses in the late 19th century. It is a natural strategy. Neighborhoods are where families reside and where the many factors that contribute to quality of life are felt.

These efforts have included many generations of place-based community change that tried to improve the physical, social, economic and political circumstances of neighborhoods and their residents. Making Connections followed in that line of community-change work. It began by defining success as “closing the gap” in terms of life prospects for children in the Making Connections sites as compared to those of children growing up in the rest of the country. The initiative sought to do this not by funneling services to every child in those communities but by offering a set of interventions that improved the ability of each community to strengthen itself and create connections to educational and economic opportunities.

The reality, though, is that these major investments, including Making Connections, have not been able to show evidence that a specific population is improving together in a place. Indeed, even poverty dispersion programs that seek to relocate people living in concentrated poverty have had only modest and mixed results.

“Most [comprehensive community-change initiatives] can show improvements in the well-being of individual residents who



participated in programs in their target neighborhoods,” notes Anne C. Kubisch, former director of the Roundtable on Community Change at The Aspen Institute.³ “Some produced physical change in their neighborhoods through housing production and rehabilitation, some reduced crime, and a few also sparked commercial development....[F]ew (if any) have been able to demonstrate population-level changes in child and family well-being or rates of poverty.”

As noted earlier, Making Connections did achieve important successes and helped foster impressive programs, initiatives and policies. In one aspect, it provided direct benefits to residents through such things as job programs and tax preparation services. More broadly, Making Connections helped neighborhoods build their capacity for change and contributed to a demonstrable improvement in the quality of life in them.

Many factors contributed to the lack of success of achieving improvements for large populations within the sites, including the intractability of poverty, a lack of sustained and sufficient investment, and the complexity of the many systems that have a role in attempting to ease poverty.

Making Connections’ effort to close the gap in employment and education for struggling low-income residents ran headfirst into the reality that the gap was more profound than expected, and the resources available to address it were inadequate. And, as mentioned earlier, low-income neighborhoods typically have high levels of resident mobility — people moving in and out — which complicates efforts to achieve results within a population of residents.

Overall, many community-change efforts, including Making Connections, have been excessively comprehensive and set goals that outstripped the resources available. It is important to note that many of Making Connections’ economic and educational interventions did not occur until late in the life of the initiative and did not have enough time to reach full impact. And many stakeholders never bought into the vision of achieving change on a community-wide level,





which meant they did not seriously attempt it through policy and systems change.

The lack of results at the population level for Making Connections and other initiatives should not deter future place-based community change. But it should suggest a reassessment of what is realistic.

We need to do a better job at defining success for place-based community change and the models and strategies that will produce significant, positive impacts for kids and families — and the pace at which change can occur. Defining success may involve strengthening community engagement or unifying and solidifying public and private systems as stepping-stones to achievement. It may also include promoting local ownership of the ongoing change efforts and ensuring that local entities have the resources and ability to maintain the effort.

Success can mean developing a strong local community-change infrastructure, with leaders who have coalesced around a unified approach and a specific set of results. That infrastructure could include neighborhood-based approaches such as the Centers for Working Families model. And it may include citywide programmatic

and policy responses such as the Center for Driver's License Recovery and Employability, which Making Connections helped create in Milwaukee as a response to the large numbers of low-income residents who lacked a license — often a prime requirement for landing and remaining in many jobs. Today, the center remains an important component of the citywide workforce system.

In its new Family-Centered Community Change investments, Casey will be working with partners in small neighborhoods for the explicit purpose of building knowledge about the viability of two-generation approaches. Other community-change efforts are looking more closely at the intersection of places and public and private systems as a way to catalyze durable change.

These kinds of efforts and innovations are critically important. They can be sustained over time, leading to new connections, new funding and programmatic approaches, and changes in the ways public and private systems do business. Smaller, locally focused approaches developed as part of community-change efforts can be nurtured and expanded over time to achieve broader results.

The lesson of redefining success should not be considered a directive to aim low; rather it is a prescription for ensuring that goals are realistic, meaningful — and achievable. More simply: Rather than trying to do everything, be articulate about what you are doing, and do it well. The Making Connections' experience makes clear that one important indicator of success is the establishment of strong community-focused entities or initiatives that are sustainable and can continue to work for population-level changes.

the white center community on the southeastern boundary of Seattle is a place where Casey has worked for more than a decade to demonstrate that when families are strong, outcomes for even the most disadvantaged children will substantially improve.⁴ Key stakeholders have included Boeing Corporation, United Way of King County, Highline Public Schools, the Washington Department of Social and Health Services, Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, Impact Capital, Neighborhood House, the King County Housing Authority, and Trusted Advocates and other resident leaders.

Among its accomplishments, Making Connections has:

Helped found the White Center Community Development Association (WCCDA) In 2001, White Center’s residents united to found the WCCDA to preserve and revitalize their community. Today, WCCDA pursues family development, neighborhood revitalization and community building, and it works across all sectors to attract new investment, promote economic self-sufficiency and strengthen White Center’s social and civic fabric. With the support of Making Connections, the WCCDA built its capacity to engage public/private sector stakeholders and resident leaders in results-driven strategic planning, use of good data, regional and state-level policy advocacy and robust civic engagement. In the final phase of Making Connections, WCCDA served as the local entity responsible for coordinating and sustaining the initiative.

Built support for authentic resident engagement and leadership as central to family-strengthening and community revitalization efforts Making Connections helped support and strengthen the inherent leadership and advocacy skills of the community’s diverse population. Starting with formation of a resident leadership council and a series of community summits, Making Connections helped mobilize diverse voices and leaders in White Center.



Created well-focused and influential civic partnerships Early in the process, Making Connections convened a group of major stakeholders, known as the Partners Group, whose continued support of this work has helped build credibility and leverage substantial resources for the initiative and the community.

Prioritized attention to school success Support from the Casey Foundation and Making Connections for the Community Schools Collaborative helped make White Center Heights Elementary, opened in 2003, the neighborhood's first full-fledged community school. In 2005, following two years of improved fourth-grade reading and math scores at White Center Heights, the model was expanded to three other elementary schools and now is applied at the middle and high school levels.

Opened opportunities for the neighborhood, such as the partnership with the White Center Early Learning Initiative (WCELI) In part because of the community capacity built by Making Connections and local partners, White Center was selected as one of two demonstration sites for the state's eight-year, \$80 million Thrive by Five school readiness campaign supported by the Gates Foundation and other funders. More than 500 residents attended forums and engaged in initiative planning to assure that WCELI would be accountable to the community and result in better academic outcomes for children. This initiative came to a close when the state changed its strategy for supporting early learning efforts, but during its operation it focused community resources on the essential ingredients for early learning success.

Helped leverage federal Food Stamp Employment and Training (FSET) funding to strengthen job training and placement efforts Making Connections played a key role in the state of Washington's developing and implementing a new approach to FSET funding, which leveraged more than \$8 million in new federal funds and made community-based organizations and community colleges key partners in the effort, so that residents get the training and related resources they need.

Established a countywide EITC Campaign A campaign began in 2002 to provide free tax preparation and asset-building services and returned millions of dollars in refunds to White Center residents — and many others in the region — thanks to partnerships with community-based organizations that deepened outreach to low-income families. The campaign is now led by the United Way of King County.



LOOKING AHEAD

The lessons of the Making Connections initiative will continue to play a role in community-change efforts moving forward. That is certainly true within the Casey Foundation, which has taken the lessons of Making Connections to heart. The Foundation's efforts are now focused tightly on a two-generation strategy, recognizing the need to address the needs of both parents and children to reach the goal of strengthening families and communities.

Casey's **civic sites** in Atlanta and Baltimore remain committed to a two-generation approach. In Baltimore, for example, Casey has been a major supporter of a new community school and early learning center, now under construction in an area of East Baltimore where the Foundation has focused its work. Those, as well as other efforts geared to children, are coupled with a range of resources for parents and families, including workforce training and financial counseling. In Atlanta, the Civic Site is supporting families through services for parents — at the Center for Working Families — and for children, at an early learning center and school.

As noted previously, the Casey Foundation has also launched its **Family-Centered Community Change** strategy, an effort to build evidence about the impacts of the place-based, two-generation approach. Initially, Casey will make grants in Buffalo, Columbus and San Antonio, working in

low-income neighborhoods with key institutions and partnerships.

The effort will provide programs for children that focus on healthy development, growth and education, and services for adults that concentrate on parenting, job skills and financial security. The three selected cities have several attributes that are seen as key to successful neighborhood transformation, such as the presence of an established partnership of local organizations and public agencies; high-quality education, health and other support services for children; job training and financial education programs for adults; actively engaged parents and residents; and access to affordable housing to promote residential stability. This focus on good, affordable housing was informed by Making Connections, in which housing instability was a key issue that emerged over time. Recognizing the complexity of managing community-change initiatives from afar, Casey will collaborate with its local partners to design, pilot and

plan for the broader implementation of programs and strategies geared toward families with young children within the communities they serve. This approach will allow Casey to undertake a more focused and transparent strategy of community-change work that aligns with its core mission of strengthening families.

Nationally, we have seen the launch or expansion of several important initiatives that are building, in part, on the lessons of Making Connections.

The **Promise Neighborhoods** program, a signature initiative of the Obama administration's Department of Education, began in 2010 to build on the success of such efforts as the Harlem Children's Zone, a program that focuses on resources for children at every developmental stage — and their families. The program nurtures efforts centered on strong schools and providing coordinated health, social, community and educational resources from infancy until young people move into college and careers. The program has drawn strong interest from communities across the country, demonstrating the appeal of a wide-ranging focus on children and families. Promise Neighborhoods' focus on results

for children and families and its emphasis on investing in community capacity building incorporated many of the lessons from Making Connections.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's **Choice Neighborhoods** initiative also recognizes the value of both community engagement and a two-generation approach to community development. The program makes grants to transform distressed neighborhoods into sustainable mixed-income neighborhoods. Its approach links housing improvements with appropriate services, schools, public assets, transportation and access to jobs. Choice Neighborhoods grants are intended to support high-quality educational opportunities, including early childhood education. The program partners with public housing authorities as well as local governments, non-profits and for-profit developers in undertaking comprehensive local planning with residents and the community.

And important new research is broadening our view of the issues confronting low-income families. Researchers at Harvard University and other institutions, for example, are documenting how prolonged and severe stress affects people in

poverty, especially the social and emotional development of children. Such findings should inform future community-change efforts.

We are also witnessing a new generation of place-based philanthropic initiatives in struggling neighborhoods, led by such foundations as the Skillman Foundation in Detroit, the Jacobs Foundation in San Diego and the California Endowment. These foundations are playing a critical role in planning, shaping and implementing important community-change efforts. They have learned firsthand about the need to analyze, learn and adapt as these efforts move forward, and they should continue to help the broader field learn and grow. The Casey Foundation urges its philanthropic colleagues to renew their commitment to place-based poverty alleviation efforts that build on the knowledge learned through Making Connections.



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NOTES

1. Information about the Making Connections Louisville site in this section relies on this Casey Foundation report: *Investment Summary: Making Connections Louisville*, 2009.
2. This section includes material from the Annie E. Casey Foundation's draft evaluation report, *Residents Matter!* 2010, by Josefa Beyers, Cynthia Cunningham and Alexis Kirch.
3. *Voices from the Field: Lessons and Challenges from Two Decades of Community Change Efforts*, 2012, The Aspen Institute, p. 15.
4. Information about the Making Connections Seattle site in this section relies on this Casey Foundation report: *Investment Summary: Making Connections White Center/Seattle*, 2009.

