
# RESIDENTS ENGAGED in Strengthening Families and Neighborhoods

A GUIDE TO KEY IDEAS, EFFECTIVE APPROACHES,
AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE RESOURCES FOR
MAKING CONNECTIONS CITIES AND SITE TEAMS

*part of a series from the Technical Assistance/Resource Center of The Annie E. Casey Foundation*

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A list of Technical Assistance/Resource Center Resource Guides appears on the inside back cover.

***The Annie E. Casey Foundation***

*The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for vulnerable children and families in the United States. It was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, one of the founders of United Parcel Service, and his siblings, who named the foundation in honor of their mother.*

*Headquartered in Baltimore, the Foundation is the largest private foundation in the nation dedicated solely to the needs of vulnerable children and families, with assets of more than $3 billion. The Foundation's grants are intended to help states, cities, and neighborhoods improve the life chances of the millions of American children at risk of poor educational, economic, social, and health outcomes. For more information, visit the Foundation's website at www.aecf.org.*

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# preface to family strengthening resource guides

*Children do well when their families do well, and families do better when they live in supportive neighborhoods.*

This simple premise underlies *Making Connections*, the centerpiece of a 10- to 15-year commitment by the Annie E. Casey Foundation to improving the life chances of vulnerable children by helping to strengthen their families and neighborhoods. The Foundation is working in 22 American cities to promote neighborhood-scale programs, policies, and activities that contribute to stable, capable families.

*Making Connections* seeks to help families raise healthy, confident, and successful children by tapping the skills, strengths, leadership, and resilience that exist in even the toughest neighborhoods. The initiative is founded on the belief that families and their children can succeed if the people who live, work, and hold positions of influence in distressed neighborhoods make family success a priority—and if there are deliberate and sustained efforts within the broader community and at the state level not only to connect isolated families to essential resources, opportunities, and supports, but also to improve the material conditions of the neighborhood.

The Foundation is dedicated to helping selected communities engage residents, civic groups, public and private sector leadership, and faith-based organizations in efforts to transform the toughest neighborhoods into family-supportive environments. *Making Connections* seeks to enable residents in these neighborhoods to live, work, play, earn decent wages, and interact with family, friends, neighbors, and social institutions in a safe, congenial, and enriching environment.

In order to improve the health, safety, educational success, and overall well-being of children, *Making Connections* is a long-term campaign aimed at helping selected cities build alliances and mobilize constituencies at the neighborhood level.

*Making Connections* has identified three kinds of connections essential to strengthening families:

- **Economic opportunities** that enable parents to secure adequate incomes and accumulate savings, thus assuring their families the basic necessities of food, clothing, shelter, and health care. To meet this need, communities must address job development, employment training, wage supplements, and asset-building strategies—all of which help ensure predictable incomes, which in turn bolster healthy child development.
- **Social networks** in the community, including friends, neighbors, relatives, mentors, community organizations, and faith-based institutions that provide neighbor-to-neighbor support and help family members feel more confident and less isolated.
- **Services and supports**, both formal and informal, public and private, which provide preventive as

**MAKING CONNECTIONS CITIES**

| | |
|---|---|
| Atlanta | Milwaukee |
| Baltimore | New Orleans |
| Boston | Oakland |
| Camden | Philadelphia |
| Denver | Providence |
| Des Moines | San Antonio |
| Detroit | San Diego |
| Hartford | Savannah |
| Indianapolis | Seattle |
| Louisville | St. Louis |
| Miami | Washington, D.C. |

well as ongoing assistance, and are accessible, affordable, neighborhood based, family centered, and culturally appropriate. These might include high-quality schools, health care, housing assistance, and affordable child care.

**How will we know when Making Connections goals have been achieved?**

*Making Connections* will have succeeded in a city when community leaders and residents have built a local movement on behalf of families that has the power and momentum to accomplish the following:

- Build on existing efforts and spur neighborhood-scale, family strengthening strategies that reduce family isolation by increasing their connections to critical economic opportunities, strong social networks, and accessible supports and services.
- Use these neighborhood-scale initiatives to rethink, revamp, and redirect policies, practices, and resources on a citywide scale to improve the odds that all families succeed.

As this movement grows, it will enable each city to know it is succeeding in a number of other ways:

- When parents have the means, confidence, and competence to provide for their families economically, physically, and emotionally;
- When residents have people to talk to and places to go for help, support, and camaraderie;
- When families feel safe in their homes and in their neighborhoods;
- When children are healthy, succeed in school, and go on to college or a job after high school;
- When communities offer the resources families need to pass on a legacy of literacy and opportunity to their children.

**What do we mean by "family strengthening"?**

Family strengthening policies, practices, and activities recognize the family as the fundamental influence in children's lives. These policies and practices both reinforce parental roles and messages and reflect, represent, and accommodate families' interests. Family strengthening means giving parents the necessary opportunities, relationships, networks, and supports to raise their children successfully, which includes involving parents as decision-makers in how their communities meet family needs.

A family's major responsibility is to provide an optimal environment for the care and healthy development of its members, particularly its children. Although basic physical needs—housing, food, clothing, safety, and health—are essential, children also need a warm emotional climate, a stimulating intellectual environment, and reliable adult relationships to thrive.

Threats to a family's ability to manage its responsibilities come from many sources: externally generated crises, such as a job or housing loss, or internal crises, such as child abuse or estrangement among family members. Unexpected events, such as the birth of a child with a disability or a teen's substance abuse problems, or more common events, like new jobs, marriages, deaths, and household moves, precipitate potentially destabilizing changes. The family's ongoing stability hinges on its ability to sustain itself through these disruptions. To help families cope effectively with crises and normal life events, communities need a variety of resources, including adequate and accessible services for children at all stages of their development, effective supportive services for families, and a critical mass of healthy families who can effectively support their neighbors.

Family strengthening policies and practices consider the whole family, not just individual family members. Often, agency protocols and programs

create tensions inadvertently when their focus excludes family needs. A striking example is a well-intentioned nutrition program arranged to ensure that homeless children were fed breakfast, lunch, and dinner at school. The children's parents and other siblings had no source of food, however, and the program participants had no opportunity to share meals with the rest of their families. Once the program leaders recognized the problem, parents and siblings were included in the school mealtimes, and the program designers learned to reconsider their strategies. Similarly, many welfare-to-work programs report difficulties in job retention because of family stresses—stresses often resulting from the jobs themselves. When a family member finds work, family rituals, logistical patterns, roles, and responsibilities change. More successful programs consider these disruptions ahead of time and develop ways to help the family cope.

#### What do we mean by "strengthening neighborhoods"?

Families must be helped to thrive within the context of their neighborhoods and broader communities. Job development, for example, should be coordinated with specific local or regional businesses, and community economic development should build on the resources of each unique neighborhood. Connecting families to economic opportunities can have a ripple effect: Just living in a neighborhood where a substantial number of families work can reinforce positive expectations for the children in the neighborhood.

*Making Connections* recognizes that the informal social networks that are most important to people (their friends, neighbors, faith communities, and clubs) almost always exist at the neighborhood level. Time and time again, these natural helping networks prove most important to families' abilities to raise their children successfully. One component of strengthening neighborhoods is thus to invest in the social capital provided by neighborhood-based networks. At the same time, *Making Connections* seeks to widen the networks that families have at their disposal, thereby broadening their aspirations, attitudes, and opportunities. Linking families to broader networks both within and outside their own neighborhoods promises to open up new possibilities for children and parents alike.

Finally, strengthening neighborhoods means placing formal public services in neighborhoods, and making them comfortable rather than intimidating for families. This requires redefining the jobs of public workers so that professionals from several separate mainline systems—as well as natural helpers or informal caregivers—work together in teams and are deployed to specific neighborhoods to take the necessary steps to help families succeed.

#### The Technical Assistance/Resource Center

The Foundation's Technical Assistance/Resource Center (TARC) seeks to connect people in the 22 cities to powerful ideas, skillful people and organizations, examples of what works in other communities, and opportunities to develop leadership skills in their own neighborhoods. It provides assistance to the 22 *Making Connections* cities on a range of topics, from building alliances that lead to stronger families in healthier, more stable communities, to diverse strategies that community leaders may pursue in terms of jobs, housing, safety, schools, and health care. TARC responds to the sites' priorities through a "help desk" approach, which seeks to meet sites' requests for assistance, and "peer consultation," where colleagues who have successfully addressed a particular problem help their peers in other communities to frame and solve a similar issue. In this way, *Making Connections* cities can capitalize on the practical knowledge that emerges from on-the-ground innovators.

One component of the Foundation's technical assistance strategy is a set of Resource Guides, including this one. The Resource Guides articulate the Foundation's perspective about issues pertaining to *Making Connections* sites, as well as summarize trends in the field, highlight effective examples, and point to people, organizations, and materials that can provide additional help. The Resource Guides are intended first for Foundation staff, in order to create a common fund of knowledge across a broad range of issues. Second, the guides are intended for residents and other leaders in *Making Connections* cities who may want to learn more about specific subjects.

The precise number of Resource Guides will fluctuate as demand changes, but approximately 15 guides will be produced by the end of 2001 (see the inside back cover for a list). All guides will address topics aimed at both supporting individual families and strengthening neighborhoods. The guides fall into four categories: (1) Economic Opportunities for Families, (2) Enhancing Social Networks, (3) Building High-Quality Services and Supports, and (4) Techniques for Advancing a Family Strengthening Agenda in Neighborhoods.

The guides in the first three categories address substantive areas in which activities can directly lead to better outcomes for children and families as well as strengthen neighborhoods. The first Economic Opportunity Resource Guide, on jobs, for example, provides information about how to connect low-income residents to regional and local labor markets, allowing families to provide for their basic necessities and contributing to family stability. Simultaneously, successful jobs initiatives fortify the neighborhoods in which they operate, making them more attractive places to live and providing strong incentives for younger residents to participate in the labor force.

Likewise, the Resource Guides in the second and third categories were chosen because they affect both individual families and their neighborhoods. For instance, the guide on housing is intended to help communities provide affordable housing to low-income families, which in turn leads to enhanced housing stock and more desirable neighborhoods. The guide on child care seeks to help communities develop plans for increasing the supply of affordable, quality child care—especially the notoriously hard-to-find care for infants and school-age children, and care during nontraditional work hours. Achieving this goal not only would improve the developmental preparation of young children, but it also would help stabilize parental employment, enhance the viability of neighborhood enterprises, and promote safer, better-connected communities.

The guides in the last category address techniques for advancing neighborhood-based family strengthening work, such as how to develop a communications strategy and how to use data and maintain accountability for specific outcomes.

Additional guides may be developed as new requests for assistance surface from the sites. We view these guides not as an end in themselves, but as a first step in posing and answering some of the most difficult questions we face about how to help families in the toughest neighborhoods. Toward this end, we welcome readers' comments and thoughts on any of the subjects included in these guides.

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# executive summary

Resident engagement is based on a simple and straightforward notion: that residents should have the most to say about what happens in their lives and in their neighborhoods. The Annie E. Casey Foundation's *Making Connections* initiative is dedicated to helping families in low-income neighborhoods connect to a range of supports and opportunities and to develop stronger voices about what happens in their neighborhoods. Residents are at the center of this work, supported by and aligned with others—faith communities, schools, community organizations, elected officials, human service agencies—whose commitment is also essential to transforming tough neighborhoods. The Foundation's role is to help build upon residents' wisdom, knowledge, and talents, equipping them to act on their own behalf and to bring about the changes they desire in their families and neighborhoods.

The **Introduction** describes two types of resident engagement activities and lays out a framework for thinking about families along a continuum from "isolated" to "connected." The framework recognizes that many families are already well-connected to other residents and institutions but that there are always some families in every neighborhood who have minimal supportive social relationships or connections to formal or informal community organizations. The goal for these latter families is for them to connect to a variety of supportive networks aimed at helping them meet their own basic needs, from housing, to jobs, to essential relationships within the community. Another type of activity, "collective action," describes what happens when groups of residents organize or work together to effect change within their immediate neighborhood or community—or even at the city and state level. This framework spans the entire range of families—from those who are not connected to their neighbors or any community networks to those families who seek out and nurture relationships with family and neighbors and with organized religious and social groups. All families, we believe, can contribute to the aims of *Making Connections*. Different outreach and engagement strategies can help families reach this goal.

**Potential Requests, Opportunities, and Challenges** anticipates some of the questions and requests that residents might have, from how to multiply and sustain family engagement and leadership over time, to how they will know when they are on the right track. As site teams become familiar with the multitude of resources, assets, and stakeholders in each site, they will discover a wealth of informal and formal leadership that already exists in the community. This section offers some ideas for ways to recognize the opportunities for nurturing existing family leadership. However promising these opportunities for improvement may seem, site teams will face formidable challenges, including resident skepticism and the difficult task of helping residents seek out and secure funding for community projects. Shifting from a token or nominal parent representation—we use the term "parent" here to include grandparents, other kin, or guardians who provide a parenting role for youth—to full involvement in decision-making will require dedication from site teams working together with neighborhood residents, and plenty of hard work.

**Promising Approaches and Resources** provides descriptions of innovative models for developing and enhancing resident engagement and family leadership. The section is organized into four categories:

*A. Family Engagement Strategies* gives examples of neighbors helping neighbors, including strategies that help connect residents with each other by linking, assisting, and supporting one another. Community dialogues and citizen voices provide approaches for connecting citizens to decisions and policies that affect their children, their families, and their neighborhoods. Other outreach strategies are described: engagement opportunities, family recreation, education and cultural activities, and neighborhood projects led by residents.

*B. Family-Friendly Places* outlines how to develop spaces in a neighborhood that welcome families: places where children go to learn and play (schools, preschools, child care, and recreation centers); places where families go for assistance (family resource centers or community service centers); and places where families spend part of their time (faith communities, community centers, or clubs). All can play important roles in providing opportunities for family leadership to grow.

*C. Family Leadership Development* strategies include programs to support families in meeting their basic needs as well as in their collective actions to undertake broader neighborhood projects. Parent leadership training, community organizing, and advocacy that is focused on family issues are all part of the landscape here.

*D. Putting It All Together* explores what a community might look like when a combination of these and other approaches becomes the accepted way of doing business. This section highlights a range of leadership opportunities that support and strengthen families to create a holistic approach to personal and neighborhood transformation.

These four categories of promising approaches describe efforts whereby residents have taken leadership roles in individual and small-scale collective action projects. They do not include examples from the larger field of community organizing where residents get involved in political and social movements on a bigger scale. This is an important body of activity in its own right. It is a component of many *Making Connections* activities, and it will be discussed in a separate Resource Guide. This guide focuses, instead, on how residents assume leadership roles for the betterment of their own families and how they build stronger relationships among small groups of neighborhood residents.

The **Resources** section lists organizations that can provide additional information, advice, and direct assistance on how residents become engaged in a personal and neighborhood transformation agenda.

# introduction

*Making Connections* is an initiative aimed at strengthening families by connecting them to their own sources of power. Families—parents, their children, and their network of relatives and friends—are the most important stakeholders in *Making Connections*. The initiative envisions families taking charge of shaping their own agendas, bringing other residents into the group, and, ultimately, putting in place strategies for achieving their own goals and monitoring the results. In *Making Connections*, residents' and families' interests are aligned with those of other neighborhood and citywide stakeholders to strengthen families and improve their neighborhoods.

The central question for *Making Connections* is: "How do we connect families to each other and to a family strengthening agenda in a given neighborhood?" *Making Connections* is not about doing something for residents but about creating a partnership with residents to develop an agenda that they design. It is not about making backroom deals with agencies and professionals on behalf of low-income residents; instead, it aims to establish an open dialogue with residents and professionals together and with family members as equal partners in setting a neighborhood agenda.

when it works

## RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT

From its inception, the Mutual Assistance Network (MAN) in the Del Paso Heights neighborhood of Sacramento, California, has relied heavily on the leadership and engagement of residents. Where many local collaborative efforts struggle to generate desired levels of resident involvement, MAN—a nonprofit community organization—is succeeding impressively.

MAN's approach to resident engagement rests on four key principles: start small and build what neighborhood people want using their capabilities, continually build capacity to take advantage of strategic opportunities as they arise, focus on a defined geographic area, and do everything with high levels of resident involvement in key decision-making roles.

These principles are bearing fruit, as residents are involved in every level of activity at MAN. Residents take the lead in a neighborhood food distribution program, in working and managing neighborhood gardens where over 100 families grow enough food to feed their families and even sell leftovers, in a dropout prevention program for students, and so on and so on. In fact, one-half of the organization's board of directors is comprised of neighborhood residents—including two positions for youth. Typically, residents comprise seventy percent of MAN's staff.

In Del Paso Heights, resident engagement extends beyond participation in MAN's activities. Residents also serve on a number of county and city advisory committees. And when an issue of importance to the community arises (public transportation, welfare reform, housing, and economic revitalization), residents are often on the front lines offering insightful, resident-centered definitions of the issues and innovative solutions. In sum, the Mutual Assistance Network is a good example where a community-based organization has successfully engaged and empowered residents to work together to improve their lives and their neighbors' lives.

Residents need to participate in setting the agenda from the very beginning rather than being brought in later to react to a preconceived agenda. Foundation staff and local agency representatives should listen carefully to parents' concerns and thoughts rather than try to tell residents what they should want.

> *Our first goal was to have an ESL (English as a second language) class for the parents at the school. It began in September, four days a week. Our second goal was to get the school to provide room for parents to gather together and meet. We met with the principal and she agreed to do it, so we opened our Parents' Room. Our third goal was to organize a kermis (a mini-carnival/cultural affair). We wanted to recruit more parents, let others know about our work, and let families have fun together. We held the kermis in June. After we accomplished our three goals, we set a new one—to learn better how to involve more parents.*—Member of a Parent Action Team, Talcott School, Chicago

What do we mean by "resident engagement"? The term is widely used to describe an array of efforts aimed at connecting families to informal networks of support, to formal services and programs, and to a variety of community-based activities. Different initiatives and communities define resident engagement differently, and use different standards for measuring success. Since *Making Connections* has specific aims, it is important to examine what exactly we mean by "resident engagement."

**First, it is important to note that engagement by definition constitutes a promise**. The Foundation is offering its word as a promise of committed involvement in the lives of residents and neighborhoods. Whether our promise is explicit or tacit, we agree to be present at a specified time and place and we bind ourselves with our pledge to be actively involved. This commitment is carried out over time. Ours is not a casual, fleeting engagement; it is meant to be long-lasting and significant. In communities that are often the victims of lofty promises by zealous do-gooders, we must not underestimate the importance of our promises.

**Second, resident engagement is about mutual participation in the dynamics of power and influence**. And while this participation is mutual, everyone does not participate in exactly the same way. Residents must be able to attract and hold influence and professionals must be willing to be influenced. If we are to be joined, interlocked, or engaged with one another for the cause of stronger families and transformed neighborhoods, true relinquishing of power by professionals and embracing of influence by residents is imperative. In a very real sense, professionals accustomed to exercising influence over residents must learn to take a supportive back seat to the aims and directions of residents as residents define their own agenda for improving their lives.

**And third, resident engagement is an ongoing process**. It requires commitment and work. There are no easy solutions and quick fixes. It is the collective work of both the people in the neighborhoods and those who live outside the neighborhoods but are committed to neighborhood aims. Resident engagement is the hard and rewarding work of interlocking residents' commitments, leadership, and efforts with the promised support and lasting participation of other stakeholders.

Figure One on page 11 shows one way of thinking about different *levels of engagement* that may exist in any neighborhood. The outer circle represents residents who are mostly isolated from others in their neighborhood and beyond. These are families who rarely venture out of their homes, who have few friends or relatives in the area, or who may not belong to any organization or spiritual group. They might be newly arrived immigrants who speak little or no English, people with mental health or substance

## guiding PRINCIPLES for RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT

It is important that Foundation staff and consultants practice these principles when working with residents in *Making Connections* sites:

- Primary responsibility for the development and well-being of children lies with the family. All neighborhood efforts should support the creation of optimal conditions for families to carry out this vital task.
- Families and neighborhood residents are either already competent or have the capacity to become competent to make positive changes in their own lives and their neighborhoods. With adequate knowledge, skills, and resources, residents can recognize the wealth of talents in their neighborhood, mobilize resources, and find solutions to their own problems.
- Relationships between *Making Connections* site teams and resident families are based on equality and respect, recognizing that all partners in the process have something to give as well as to receive.
- Supporting individual family needs and caring for one's own children come first. We can expect parents to attend to the broader needs of their neighbors only after their children's needs are met.
- If we expect parents to participate meaningfully in a neighborhood initiative, we need to provide ample logistical supports, such as child care, translation services, transportation, and economic compensation. We also need to provide safe spaces where parents are comfortable expressing their most personal feelings and thoughts.
- Community change requires participation from everyone. Everyone matters and everyone should have a chance to be a part of the process: children and youth; adults and the elderly; the quiet and the outspoken; people of all races, languages, sexual orientations, and faiths.
- Developing and sustaining community change takes a long time and ongoing efforts to involve residents at multiple levels of leadership. Neighborhood institutions, service agencies, informal networks, and families themselves can all provide opportunities for participation and leadership in long-term change.



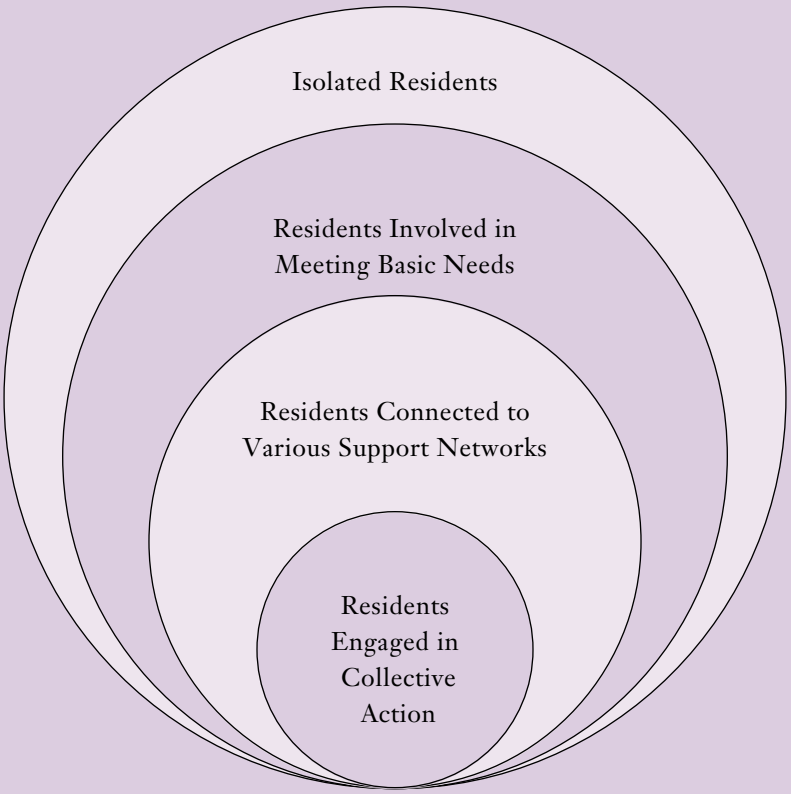
abuse problems who shun contact with outsiders, or even parents who work at night and must sleep during the day. One of *Making Connections* goals is to engage these isolated families and connect them to a range of other individuals, groups, and networks.

The second circle represents residents who are involved in activities aimed at helping meet their basic family needs. These are individual families seeking to provide for the basic necessities of life—food, shelter, health care, education, and jobs—as well as the less tangible but equally important needs such as supportive social relationships and time to spend together as families. These families are working hard to obtain stable housing, decent jobs, financial management skills, and the capacity to provide a

thinking about

## RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT

FIGURE ONE




more nurturing environment for their children. Their engagement with other people and with formal services or organizations is primarily focused on the needs of their families.

The third circle in Figure One represents families who are more fully connected to economic opportunity, to the services they need, and to various support networks, from networks of family and friends to relationships with community groups. Families in this circle call on others when they need advice, support, a babysitter, or simply someone to talk to, and provide the same kind of support to others. Families see themselves as leaders in their own families and networks.

Finally, the inner circle represents residents engaged in "collective action"—when residents work together to improve conditions on a particular block, in the local school or neighborhood, or even within the city or state. Projects such as organizing crime-fighting block groups, park cleanups, school improvement campaigns, and launching new community health clinics fall into this category. These residents are deeply committed to larger community issues that transcend their own personal family life, and many are actively engaged with others in attempts to bring about change. Some may already be leaders in neighborhood affairs, as members of community boards, or in other leadership positions.

One of *Making Connections*' central goals is to help as many families as possible move toward participation in collective action. But we also know that families with overwhelming personal needs find it

difficult to join with others in addressing larger neighborhood issues. The goal of resident engagement is to provide many opportunities for individual families' increasing connection to a range of supports while simultaneously providing opportunities for collective action.

Multiple circles are used in Figure One to indicate that the engagement process is not necessarily linear or sequential. People move back and forth from one circle to another. Residents will get involved in one activity or another because of their particular circumstances at a given point and then change when their needs change. Families who face eviction, who suddenly find themselves out of work, or whose children are in trouble with the law, for example, may retreat for a time from connections with others while they focus on their own needs, then return later to involvement in their neighborhood.

The levels of engagement are also interrelated. Resident leaders often serve as mentors to families just beginning to be involved in neighborhood action. Extended family members reach out to others in their families when they are in need. A primary focus of *Making Connections* is to expand this kind of community connection. Encouraging an already-engaged family to coach a more isolated family is a strategy that is doubly useful: It gives the isolated family a role model to emulate while helping to build leadership skills in the more connected family. But it should also be noted that despite the greatest outreach efforts, there will always be families who retreat from connection with others because of problems such as domestic violence or substance abuse. As a result, the pool of very isolated families may change but not necessarily dwindle. Building a community "culture of connection" is essential to providing as many opportunities as possible for families to get connected when they need to be.

> *One of the questions was, "Who's the leader in your house?" And I started to think about it, and it was me. I'm the one who makes sure the kids are in school. I'm the one who makes sure they have their shots, the bills are paid, food's on the table, and they are safe. So that changed my whole life. It was a real awakening for me. My self-esteem was very, very low. I didn't think that I would be able to do any activities that didn't revolve around school, the kids, and getting back in the house. Once I found out that I was the one in control of my life and my surroundings, I started to take those small steps to look out to my neighborhood.* —Parent, Community Organizing and Family Issues, Chicago

Why are resident engagement and leadership development activities important? Why should families in the toughest neighborhoods trust yet another group of do-gooders that appears with promises of change?

Frankly, they shouldn't trust rhetoric alone. Unless *Making Connections* teams hold to a definition and to consistent examples of resident engagement that honor engagement promises in word and action, place residents squarely in major leadership roles, and demonstrate meaningful partnerships, the Foundation cannot legitimately ask residents to engage in an agenda that would not be their own.

Outsiders have arrived in neighborhoods before, made pledges, and then left when the resources dwindled. Residents have been labeled, written about, and studied, yet problems continue to escalate. Enthusiasm for the possibility of a better life often wanes when changes do not materialize and the underlying conditions in the neighborhood remain the same. No wonder most residents are skeptical of yet another neighborhood change initiative.

Gaining residents' trust and helping them become the natural leaders of this effort will be one of the most daunting challenges of the work—but also the

most rewarding. If families are not allowed to define their own goals, set their own agendas, or decide upon the changes needed in their neighborhood, the work of outsiders may well be irrelevant. In the past, too many community initiatives have presumed that a particular neighborhood needed a specific service (more affordable child care or an after-school program, for example), without involving residents in the decisions, only to discover later that something else (like greater participation in designing the new neighborhood school) would have been more helpful. We don't want to repeat the same mistakes.

*This is the first time that anyone has asked me my opinion about anything of any importance.*—Boston parent, Dudley Street visioning process

We also want to be sure that we are building a greater capacity to sustain neighborhood change in the long term. Ultimately, when Foundation site teams and technical assistance experts leave the community, families should have acquired the skills to continue to make known their goals, to mobilize new resources when old ones are depleted, and to multiply and sustain their contributions to their neighborhood over time. Every investment to support the development of leadership in families will yield not only stronger families but, most important, will also seed the ground for a future generation of leaders.

# potential requests, opportunities, and challenges

### A. WHAT ISSUES MIGHT NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTS AND LEADERS RAISE ABOUT RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT?

Site teams should prepare for several questions from people in *Making Connections* neighborhoods:

- **How ready are Foundation staff to partner with families in each site?**

Before we launch our efforts to support families in the *Making Connections* initiative, we are challenged to first examine our own personal beliefs. For a moment, reflect on your own perceptions and biases by answering the following questions:

- What do I believe about families in *Making Connections* neighborhoods?
- What have I been told about them, and how has it influenced my thinking?
- Do I really believe these families can make it?
- How much do I know about their strengths and resilience?
- And perhaps most important, can I view families as true leaders and actively support their right to decide upon the changes they want for themselves and their neighborhoods, even if I don't agree fully with their decisions? Why does my agreement with families' decisions matter?
- If I cannot view families as true leaders, actively support their decisions, and support families even when we disagree, should I be involved in *Making Connections?* What current thinking and attitudes do I need to overcome, if any?

Foundation staff and consultants must believe in families' capacities before they can facilitate resident empowerment. Perhaps the most significant shift in neighborhood transformation lies not in the residents and neighborhoods themselves, but in our professions' view of them and in our notions of how to help them build on their natural leadership skills. As one community leader aptly put it: "People have skills and gifts. They make decisions every day. Partners don't train partners—you work with them."

- **How do we multiply and sustain family engagement over time?**

Engagement strategies (which are illustrated in the Promising Approaches and Resources section of this guide) include formal and informal approaches, ranging from door-to-door canvassing to neighborhood meetings and cultural events. Using residents to reach out to other residents can be an effective way of engaging families in meeting basic needs and collective action. Meetings are most successful when scheduling, location, and transportation issues are considered; when child care is provided; when stipends are offered to offset the expenses that families incur while participating; and when there is plenty of food and time to socialize. Meetings should also offer a safe space for open conversations so that people feel free to express their inner thoughts and hopes. Finally, opportunities for concrete involvement and action should be discussed. According to Enrique Orozco, program manager at the Urban Children's Coalition in Denver, providing support to parents is key to their engagement: "It is essential that parents are not forced to neglect their family responsibilities and that they have full understanding of the purpose of the group and their role in it."

- **How do we connect family engagement and leadership development to community organizing?**

Community organizing has been successful in building decent and affordable housing, pushing out drug

## building a PARTNERSHIP with parents

A meeting of residents with public and private agency staff in Seattle illustrates the type of resident engagement envisioned in *Making Connections.* Eight parents from the Latino community and ten professionals from the county mental health facility, school district, and several community-based organizations participated in a two-day meeting that began a dialogue about engaging residents in *Making Connections* neighborhoods. At earlier meetings, discussions had taken place about increasing the role of residents in the planning and implementation of a *Making Connections* neighborhood agenda. A few professionals and parents expressed interest in a model of a professional-natural helper partnership from Miami and wanted an opportunity to explore how to do the same in Seattle, beginning in the Latino community. The two-day meeting was convened to examine how this might work in Seattle.

From the start, professional staff were asked not to try to provide all the answers themselves or to move the agenda in a preordained direction, but rather to listen carefully to residents' concerns and impart information only to help the residents form their own agenda. The meeting was conducted in Spanish, with interpreters helping the non-Spanish-speaking professionals participate in the discussion. Parents shared their hopes for their community and what they wanted to see happen over the next two days. They talked about the lack of child care and transportation in their neighborhood, and reported that important meetings were usually scheduled only during the day, when parents worked, and meetings and materials were often only in English. Parents said they were expected to put in many hours as volunteers, yet professionals were paid to participate.

On the second day of the meeting, parents and professionals agreed they wanted to pursue a parent-professional partnership based on the experiences of the Miami model. The group put together a plan for the next steps, which included funding for the supports that allow parent participation in all planning and implementation efforts, including stipends, child care, transportation, evening meetings, interpreters, and translation of materials. The parents came away from the meeting feeling very good about what was accomplished. They commented that they felt a part of something and were not alone in their efforts. They also said they felt good about seeing their ideas form the basis for the plan they developed. The professionals likewise commented that the meeting went well. They appreciated the parents' input and commitment and felt that the resulting plan would be a good one for both groups.

dealers, revitalizing the local economy, and improving schools—all of which have had positive effects on families. However, traditional community organizing efforts have sometimes not had participation from large numbers of parents and family members because support for their participation is inadequate. As a result, these efforts sometimes neglect important issues for families. The emergence of family-focused community building around the country shows that the long-overdue marriage between family development and community organizing is not only possible but can have very successful results. For example, as a community works to remodel affordable housing, it may also rehabilitate a facility to house a family

## how do we know we are ON THE RIGHT TRACK?

The following indicators may be useful ways to tell if families are engaged:

- More families—especially the most isolated—are being engaged in dialogue and are finding connections to the resources, new friends, neighbors, opportunities, and supports they need to rear healthy children.
- Residents influence the allocation and investment of resources in their communities.
- Families lead and partner with staff to mobilize residents around concrete actions on issues that matter to them.
- Supports for family involvement (e.g., child care, transportation, stipends to compensate them for their time) become the norm in community programs and in public agencies.
- Healthy and active relationships between neighborhood organizations and government agencies exist.
- Parents serve in multiple leadership roles.
- Children are well cared for while parents are taking on new leadership roles.
- Youth participate in community-organizing efforts and in projects they create.
- A spirit of community is emerging, demonstrated by group efforts (collective action) to organize and celebrate being a part of the neighborhood.



resource center and a child care center. Or a group of residents trying to strengthen children's academic performance may also work to make the school a family-friendly environment where the entire family can receive a variety of supports.

### What levels of decision-making should we expect parents to be involved in?

Parents should be involved in all levels of decision-making, from those that affect the smallest units of their neighborhood, to those that have an impact on their larger community, the city, the state, and even the nation. Resident leaders should be expected to play many different roles from the informal role of advisor, as they help other families meet their basic needs, to more formal representation on boards and councils in their community, to lead partners in decision-making and acting as the dominant force in the planning, implementation, and governance of local, state, and national programs.

There are many ways for residents to make connections in their neighborhood without agreeing to any "formal" participation in committees, decision-making, or leadership. Often, residents will be interested in being good neighbors or receiving some assistance themselves, such as bartering for child care, a ride to the grocery store, or shoveling snow. *Making Connections* is as much about being a good neighbor as it is about being a leader. Neighborhood associations or community centers could help to start a child care exchange, a grandparent support group, or even a Time Dollar project. This type of engagement is all about families helping families.

### B. WHAT ARE THE TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES ON WHICH SITES CAN BUILD?

Hundreds of families undoubtedly have the potential to become leaders in their neighborhoods. Yet, identifying natural leaders in the community and opportunities for nurturing family involvement and parent leadership requires systematic "treasure hunting." Site teams and community leaders may need to visit schools and child care centers, spend time in the waiting room of the community clinic and at the WIC distribution center, sponsor a "family talk" lunch at the community center, talk to the grocer at the Mom and Pop corner store, and hang out on the basketball court with teenagers. It is a labor-intensive job, but it promises to yield dozens of names of people who might be willing to commit to a resident-driven, neighborhood improvement agenda.

Residents can also be found in the community-based organizations where dedicated staff members work with families every day. These are the people who work extra hours transporting parents to and from meetings, who carry snacks in their cars for hungry children, who stay without supper until a meeting is over, who take time to translate for parents during meetings and discussions held in a different language (which includes translating professional jargon). These people may be willing to participate in the neighborhood venture, and they can surely identify residents who are natural leaders.

*Sharing your observations of a family's strengths and resources can be a first step in fostering that family's ability to do the same. When you see a diamond, let the diamond know; otherwise, the diamond may think it's just another rock.*—Ted Bowman, trainer-educator

Many families possess skills and abilities that go underutilized by service agencies and professionals. They are full of talents and gifts waiting to be noticed and are in need of roles where they can shine as leaders. Look for the support they give each other, their resourcefulness in finding and securing what they need, their enormous reservoir of survival skills, and their artistic and culinary talents.

Once residents agree to talk, site teams and community leaders may want to ask them a series of questions designed to elicit their views on what needs to change and what resources are available in their neighborhood. For example:

- What changes would you want to see in your neighborhood?
- What efforts have you and your neighbors made to help your families and your community?
- What are the biggest barriers and difficulties you see every day?
- Where do you find help when you need it?
- How do you want to be involved in neighborhood change?
- What skills and talents do you bring to this effort?
- What supports do you need to organize other parents?

A number of sites may begin programs of families helping families. Some neighbors may be interested in participating in a bartering program or in another way of trading their time and talents. Others might be interested in occasional get-togethers—support groups—to talk about raising children. Neighborhood newsletters offer another way for residents to connect to their own activities, resources, and opportunities.

Small-grant programs provide further opportunities and support for resident engagement. In these programs, residents are encouraged to think about and plan for neighborhood improvements—such as community gardens, parks, bus stop shelters, speed bumps, celebrations, basketball courts, urban playgrounds, or other projects that make the neighborhood a more thriving place to live in.

### C. WHAT CHALLENGES MIGHT SITES FACE?

**Fear and mistrust** are the first barriers that need to be overcome in any resident engagement strategy. Residents will need to feel safe when speaking their minds, especially in the early stages of *Making Connections*, when people may be suspicious of the Foundation's intentions. In the course of initial dialogues, families will decide if joining the initiative is worth their time. People cannot be pressured to follow a timetable. Each person will join when he or she feels ready. The door should always remain open.

**The deficit mentality**. Perhaps worse than the persistent poverty and economic disinvestment characterizing *Making Connections* neighborhoods is the legacy of dependency on formal systems that require families to show deficits in order to receive needed services and resources. *Making Connections* site teams will have to work hard to counteract the pervasive deficit thinking about poor families and their neighborhoods, a mentality reflected in labels of families as "at-risk," "dysfunctional," and "needy," and of their neighborhoods as "drug- and crime-ridden." Years of viewing communities through the "deficit lens" has done vast damage to families, who have internalized these views and often believe themselves to be less capable than they are. Many children, youth, and parents have internalized the "I am worthless" mindset and don't have hope for their own futures.

**Paternalistic attitudes**. *Making Connections* teams can start off on the wrong foot if residents perceive their behavior as paternalistic. Their behavior should always encourage residents to take power. Site teams should not try to provide the correct answers or find solutions for people; rather they should offer resources and supports that provide maximum opportunities for residents to see themselves as competent and able to interact effectively with others. This requires a balance between providing enough structure and information, so that residents are not frustrated by a lack of guidance, and making ample room for residents to take on considerable responsibility and control.

minefields, road blocks, wrong turns

### MISSED OPPORTUNITIES,

Site teams should be on the lookout for any of the following elements:

- token parent representation at decision-making tables or a lack of meaningful roles for parents;
- inadequate and inflexible funding to support parent participation;
- the "I am the expert" professional syndrome that puts parents off and stifles their creativity;
- too many meetings without concrete results that members can point to;
- too many time demands on parent leaders and a lack of attention and support for their personal and family needs;
- logistical and technological barriers to parent participation: lack of credit cards (for travel), telephone, fax, or e-mail; the need for special physical supports; child care for special needs children, etc.; and
- reliance upon professional jargon during meetings that prevents parents from participating fully in board meetings, seminars, and strategic planning meetings.

Some of the biggest challenges for site teams will be upholding the residents' right to decide their own destiny instead of cutting deals behind the scenes when no family voices are present, encouraging and facilitating family involvement and leadership while balancing attention and support for parents' primary responsibilities within their own families, and letting go of their own fears and assumptions so that they can connect with families in *Making Connections* neighborhoods.

**Inadequate funding**. Getting residents engaged in *Making Connections* will depend greatly on the extent to which they can gain access to a share of funding resources. Money that comes to neighborhoods to fund services and projects almost always goes to established agencies that have the fiscal and staff infrastructure to manage resources. Residents are rarely invited to apply for funds or encouraged to find a fiscal umbrella among existing community organizations so that they can realistically develop projects and see them through.

This practice has had vast disempowering consequences. Funds have been kept in the hands of a few organizations, some of which have monopolized the market of grants for years and have therefore blocked access to emerging groups in the community. Furthermore, it is unusual for neighborhood families—the main beneficiaries of those grant funds and other resources—to be invited to participate in decisions regarding the use of those funds, and they rarely receive reports on how the funds have been used to make their lives better. Every year, hundreds of thousands of grant dollars are awarded to community agencies in neighborhoods across the country. Much of the funding leaves the targeted neighborhoods because hired staff do not live in the area and services are purchased outside the community. In addition, these practices perpetuate the belief that resident families are not capable of creative solutions to their own problems, and are not smart enough to manage resources.

> *Often parents share their stories; they bare their souls. People cry, they come to their feet, they want to save the poor parent, but all too often the parents get nothing from it. Parents need to leave with something. Parents need to have a game plan. They need to know what they want from the experience, they should have a card, and they should network. Parents should be paid for their time, and paid equitably. After all, parents are the glue for a lot of people's work. People love you, but what does that get you? What are the benefits for being a parent leader? Who is willing to pay a parent leader a real salary? People need to attach resources to these conversations.*
> —Michelle Gaither McDonald, co-director, Hartford Parent Network

**Competing groups of residents**. The prospect of the Annie E. Casey Foundation grants may fuel competition among community-based organizations in *Making Connections* neighborhoods. Long-held turf struggles to control resources may surface immediately or over time. Effectively communicating the intent of the initiative may help stakeholders to understand that collaboration and family involvement are nonnegotiable goals. If competition surfaces, the best approach for site teams may be to support families in building a solid foundation of agreements on how they can work collaboratively among themselves, what to do about conflicts, and how to handle turf issues as they arise.

Supporting and sustaining resident leadership can be a highly demanding, even taxing, endeavor. There may be resistance from professionals and other stakeholders who must become more flexible in scheduling and who must slow down the pace of decision-making to make room for families as equal partners. *Making Connections* site teams and families will have to assess their progress frequently in order to pick up loose ends, strengthen weak areas, identify new resources, celebrate successes, and reaffirm commitments to family engagement in the neighborhood transformation process.

# promising approaches and resources

This section contains information about strategies, tools, and examples in which families are engaged in efforts aimed at meeting their basic needs. It tells about people, places, and programs that have influenced the way families mobilize to make decisions affecting their family and neighborhood life. Illustrative programs offer strategies for resident engagement, creating family-friendly places, and leadership training and organizing.

It is important to note, however, that no single example or strategy alone can transform a neighborhood. Rather, individual communities will require a creative mix of approaches aimed at increasing family engagement and leadership. Although this guide provides interesting and useful examples, families in each *Making Connections* site will need encouragement and support to create their own unique assortment of promising approaches and resources, many of which may already exist in some form in their own neighborhoods. Nevertheless, the fact that there are many more excellent examples of families who took responsibility for change than this guide can describe confirms that significant changes can happen when individuals take action and when families come together to collectively improve conditions in their neighborhood.



## A. FAMILY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

In many communities families are engaged as leaders and principal partners in the effort to strengthen families and neighborhoods for the ultimate benefit of children and youth. The success or failure of these outreach strategies has depended, to a great extent, on whether they are culturally appropriate and responsive to the needs and issues that families care about the most. The models described below fall into five categories: (1) neighbors helping neighbors; (2) building and hearing a collective community voice; (3) outreach strategies; (4) family recreation, education, and social activities; and (5) special collective action on neighborhood projects.

### 1. Neighbors Helping Neighbors

*The Idea*

One of the most important ways to strengthen families is to strengthen the connections they have to networks of friends, kin, role models, mentors, faith-based institutions, and other positive social relationships. Connecting families means encouraging the linkages that help provide neighbor-to-neighbor support and mutual aid, making people feel less isolated and alone. Sometimes this occurs informally. But there are also some emerging technologies, such as the Time Dollar program, that create an ongoing structure that is understandable, respectful, and fair to the families who choose to participate.

*What to Look Out For*

Time Dollar programs are useful in strengthening families and residents in low-income neighborhoods, but they do require resources to design, implement, and sustain. Initially, there may be less participation than desired, so the number and choice of products and services that can be purchased must be allowed to grow as the program is nurtured.

*The Idea in Practice*

At **Abriendo Puertas**—Opening Doors—a nonprofit neighborhood organization in Miami, Florida, Time Dollars is more than a currency system. It is also a way to nurture and support families. Begun in 1998, the Time Dollar program and its parent coordinator, Flor Morales, have discovered

the strengths and gifts that many neighborhood residents have to offer. When they offer their skills and talents to other neighborhood residents, they receive Time Dollars in exchange. Time Dollars can be exchanged for a wide variety of goods and services, including food, carpentry, electrical work, babysitting, cooking, training (for example, in English as a second language or computer classes), immigration legal services, or even ballet lessons.

Time Dollars often mean the difference between a full-fledged economic crisis and survival. When a young, single, pregnant woman arrived at Abriendo Puertas with nothing to her name, volunteers came forward with everything the baby would need at birth. When the baby arrived and began to thrive, the new mom was able to volunteer her own time and earned Time Dollars to repay others for their kindness.

By transferring some of their Time Dollars to others, participants are able to provide for their own needs and care for others as well. When the eldest volunteer at Abriendo Puertas became ill and could not provide for herself, others stepped in to support her. They each earned Time Dollars with their various skills, and then donated them to her so she would be able to buy food and have it delivered to her home where she was confined.

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For more information about Time Dollar programs in general:

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### 2. Community Dialogue and Citizen Voices

*The Idea*

By creating a context where ordinary residents and citizens believe their voices and their opinions matter, decision-making and advocacy for change become a richer, more informed process. When there is a belief that they can, in fact, impact their own well-being and future, residents are willing to become more informed and engaged in issues that affect them. Many neighborhood families will be willing to trade off their investment in time and effort—and it is a trade-off—for a say in decisions and policies that shape and affect their families and neighborhood. Community organizers have spent decades helping citizens to have a voice, but there are still many neighborhood residents who haven't been involved, or don't yet believe they can make a difference. Tools and technologies such as study circles, deliberative polling, and Community Living Rooms can be used for soliciting the voices and collective opinions of neighborhood leaders and residents.

A study circle—sometimes called a Family Circle—is a simple process for small-group deliberation. Study circles turn the traditional top-down approach to problem solving on its head by getting neighborhood residents involved from the very beginning. Study circles get people to talk about their important issues, consider them from everyone's angle and come to their own conclusions and

solutions. These small groups—of about eight to ten participants—have facilitated discussions, usually sponsored by a host agency, organization, or church in the neighborhood. They are family friendly in offering child care, transportation, food, and, sometimes, stipends to support resident participation. Study circles are time-limited—they will often meet weekly or biweekly for four to six gatherings, so participants know their total time commitment. Study circles were developed by the Topsfield Foundation, a private nonpartisan foundation dedicated to advancing deliberate democracy and improving the quality of public life in the United States. Beginning in 1989, the foundation began to help communities organize study circles as a way of involving citizens to make a difference in their communities. The foundation also created the Study Circles Resource Center to provide hands-on assistance and learning materials. The foundation has assisted dozens of communities in organizing their study circles and hearing the citizen's voice. By using the study circle approach, neighbors are able to move from talk to action because they

- build understanding among residents from different backgrounds or with different opinions;
- give people the chance to look at a range of views and come up with their own creative solutions;
- create ways and opportunities for neighbors to interact with other key stakeholders, including police officers, teachers, elected officials, and government administrators; and
- help residents gain a sense of ownership in their neighborhoods, including its assets and challenges, as well as the solutions to important issues they have identified.

A study circle is small-group democracy in action. Real people who face real problems every day work together in honest, open, and respectful ways to look at how specific issues are impacting them, and how they might tackle the issues together. In addition to solving neighborhood problems with neighborhood-driven solutions, study circles can

- link residents to services and supports;
- provide information about neighborhood resources;
- build bridges among residents and with other stakeholders (law enforcement, community-based organizations, churches, civic clubs); and
- help build confidence, ownership, pride, and leadership capacity in neighborhood residents.

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*The Idea in Practice*

Residents from two diverse areas of Indianapolis, Indiana, have piloted the concept of study circles—called **Family Circles in Indianapolis**—to help participants become better connected to each other and to services and resources they need. Residents are invited to come to a gathering to talk about a particular subject. A total of seven Family Circles (several in each area of the city) have been hosted by two organizations. Holding several circles in each area helps to create a critical mass for change, and broadens the connections across several neighborhoods. One set of circles—including a group of youths—was held and hosted in a public-housing community, while the other gathered participants through a community center host. The results of these two groups of Family Circle pilots have encouraged the city to plan for more in the future.

## a CREATIVE mix

A creative mix of informal and formal conversations about outreach strategies for families can be held in familiar places such as child care centers, family resource centers, and churches. Typically, families share a meal while children are cared for. Holding dialogues with families helps to achieve several goals: to learn about the skills, gifts, and talents that families have; to learn what is important to families, what changes they want in their lives and in their neighborhoods, and how they can be involved in creating change; and to exchange perspectives, find a shared vision, and develop strategies for collaboration. Dialogues with families emphasize the similarities between people and thus challenge racial, class, and educational barriers.

*Community asset mapping* is an excellent vehicle for resident empowerment. Residents are trained to reach out to families and to search for their strengths, talents, resources, and skills. As the process unfolds, deficit perceptions that residents may have about themselves tend to shift, creating pathways for neighborhood transformation. *Door-to-door canvassing*, a common marketing-research device, is another way to reach out to neighborhood families and engage them in community projects. Residents are trained in communication and interview techniques and carry a "tool bag" of useful information to help connect families to resources.

- *Community facilitators*, also called community organizers, help to start a dialogue and involve families in envisioning the kinds of changes and future they want for themselves and their neighborhood. Although facilitators are often hired from outside the community, they should have experience in engaging residents in a planning process.
- *Neighborhood coordinators*, also called neighborhood links, are residents who have been hired because they are trusted natural helpers in the neighborhood. They have a broad range of roles, from linking families to needed services, to providing safe homes for children and youth, to organizing block activities, to constituency building for family rights and neighborhood safety, to acting as city council family advocates. They know the families on their block, and they have the trust of community residents.
- *Community outreach workers* are excellent bridge builders and are usually hired by community-based organizations for specific purposes, such as finding families to participate in certain programs. Community outreach workers are most successful when they are hired from within the community and are assigned a specific target area, so that they can build long-term relationships with families.
- *Caring residents and natural helpers* can be found throughout every neighborhood. They are the essential people who care deeply for children and families and are willing to go to great lengths to help others. Natural helpers mobilize resources and organize informal helping networks that may lead to family organizations over time. They are especially good at approaching the hardest to reach. In order to be more effective in caring for families, natural helpers need access to resources and quality supports.

Family Circles in Indianapolis have produced several positive outcomes:

- Residents built friendships with each other.
- Younger participants learned about local history and culture from older residents.
- People found others who cared about the same issues.
- Neighbors felt ownership for and pride in taking on new projects to improve their own lives.
- Participants realized they had skills to offer.
- New potential neighborhood leaders and followers emerged.
- Neighborhood residents were able to connect with services and supports they hadn't realized existed.
- Neighborhood facilitators were trained.

In Indianapolis, facilitation is done by a team of two: One is a neighbor, trained in facilitation skills prior to the beginning of the Family Circle; the other is a "resource broker," usually from the host organization, able to help connect participants to resources they need, take notes, and attend to the details of organizing the circle.

The Family Circle concept has shown such promise that the mayor's office and a broad range of stakeholders expanded the circles throughout the city, in time for a late fall Summit on Family Strengthening. The information gathered from the Family Circles will provide the basis for further discussion about moving ahead with a framework for achieving specific results after the summit.

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### Des Moines Neighborhood Circles

In Des Moines, a *Making Connections* site, a group of 12 residents in the near Northside neighborhood came together to pilot a neighborhood circle. Made up of about equal numbers of men and women, African-Americans and whites, the group met at the Neighborhood Finance Center to identify what could be done to improve their neighborhood. Each group meeting began with a social time around a meal with parents and children; child care was then provided while the parents met.

At the end of the four-week period, participants identified three priority needs they wanted to pursue: (1) more structured and supervised youth activities, especially at one particular park in the summer; (2) a parent resource center that can provide day care and sick-child care; and (3) a better list of resources and services available to residents, especially for newcomers to the neighborhood. In addition, participants started specific projects: they began a program to help neighbors clean up their yards, they joined efforts already under way to secure a grocery store for the neighborhood, and they pressed the city to clean up vacant lots in the neighborhood.

Some of the participants had initially been skeptical about the value of the neighborhood circle because they had seen too many projects come and go without any lasting results. But by the end of the process, all the participants gave an enthusiastic endorsement of the program. Residents said they

## lessons LEARNED

Experience with study circles suggests a number of lessons that may be useful to other communities:

- **One-to-one recruiting works best**. Using personal recruitment—whether it be staff from community organizations or other residents or service providers who talk to residents—helps attract residents, especially more isolated ones, to attend a study circle. As one participant put it: "I can go out and recruit, because once I've been through it, I can tell you about it. Besides, word of mouth has always been the best advertising anyway."
- **Circles need supports**. Circles require multiple types of supports such as stipends, food, and child care. Residents in Indianapolis, for example, found that stipends worked to initially attract residents and especially youth to the Family Circles. Although it was not the stipends that kept residents coming to the meetings, they were an initial attraction.
- **Study circles work for both new and long-time residents**. Participants noted that circles have value for long-time residents and newcomers. Both groups of residents discovered new resources that their families could use. Both groups met people they didn't know. Even long-time residents noted surprise when they learned about programs for their children, the history of their neighborhood, and the views of other neighbors.
- **Resident facilitators add value and build leadership**. Indianapolis used co-facilitators for their Family Circles. A resident and a staff person from the host organization worked as a team. The resident served as the hands-on meeting facilitator to attend to the needs of the group and to make sure that all voices were heard. The staff person coordinated the logistics of meetings, including taking notes, arranging child care and food, calling members who missed a meeting, etc. Participants liked the role of resident facilitators and felt it was empowering.
- **Study circles sustain momentum and generate action**. Study circles create lots of enthusiasm and excitement with residents. This requires sustained follow-up in order to take advantage of the momentum. In Indianapolis, a two-month lull between meetings meant that they had to go back and re-create the initial enthusiasm.
- **Study circles need provisions for non-English-speaking residents**. Supporting residents whose first language is not English requires very specific supports such as translators. It calls for a different way to keep the process moving and a way for individuals to make their concerns known. For example, Seattle used translators at study circle meetings. The language issues forced the community team and the facilitators to do more preparation between meetings. This preparation helped many participants voice concerns to the study circle that otherwise might have been neglected. Another option is to conduct single-language groups—for example, one Latino, one Cambodian, and one Vietnamese—to ensure that all participants have a voice and can read the meeting materials.

made connections with each other, many for the first time, and learned about other activities going on in the neighborhood. They also made new friends. And most important, they came away with some tangible activities that are improving conditions visibly in their neighborhood.

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### Seattle Study Circles

In Seattle, another *Making Connections* site, residents and community leaders from two neighborhoods in south Seattle came together to talk about how to make things better for families and other residents. The two neighborhoods have a high concentration of immigrant populations, with school children who speak 93 different languages. Residents include Oromo, Cambodian, Somali, and Eritrean immigrants as well as African Americans.

The goals of the study circles were to create long-term relationships among residents, and learn about family strengthening opportunities in the two neighborhoods. The groups met monthly at community centers and usually included dinner. Each group had $25,000 with which to conduct family strengthening projects of their choice. They began cooking and sewing classes for women in the Eritrean community, they bought a van for the Oromo community's after-school program, they began a literacy program for Somalians who are not literate in their first language, they started a parenting class in Vietnamese taught by a Vietnamese teacher who designed the class based on what the parents wanted to learn, and they established several ESL classes.

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### Community Living Rooms

Residents in the culturally and racially diverse Phillips neighborhood of Minneapolis are among the poorest in the state. They are often isolated from the services and supports they need, and sometimes isolated from their neighbors too. But Freeport West, a community-building organization in the neighborhood, has developed **Community Living Rooms** (CLRs) to connect families to social networks and to each other. Freeport West, founded to help individuals, families, and neighborhoods, has demonstrated that residents are eager to make connections with each other to find advice, help, information, and support. The concept was funded initially by the McKnight Foundation; about 30 CLRs operate now.

CLRs are informal gatherings where parents and residents meet to engage in various activities and talk about their lives. Often a meal is offered. Groups choose the topics, but the CLRs are also a substitute source of "old-fashioned fence talking." In the process of these gatherings, some support groups have begun to form—groups that are helping families find housing, child care, jobs, and other resources.

Freeport West began CLRs by identifying natural, usually informal, neighborhood leaders. These leaders become the "community guides" who host and facilitate meetings. The guides receive a stipend for hosting the group, providing refreshments, and participating in a peer support system. New guides receive support and assistance from coaches, who were among the earliest guides. The guides also provide

advice to Freeport West on program direction, and help ensure that the staff have a close connection to the neighborhoods.

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### 3. Outreach to Neighborhood Families

*The Idea*

The purposes of all outreach activities are to establish trusting relationships with residents and to engage them in a concerted effort to build upon their own strengths, thereby increasing the social capital available in their neighborhood for the well-being of children and families. The goal is to ensure that every family in the neighborhood is constantly reached, informed, invited, and encouraged to grow personally and become actively involved in neighborhood affairs.

Communities that have developed successful outreach strategies depend upon residents as well as professional staff who understand the relationships among residents, the social fabric of the neighborhood, and the community culture. These people generally knock on doors, taking the time to connect with and relate to families, whether that means sharing a meal or joining regular home and child care routines. Residents are approached on their own turf—in familiar and trusted places—and on their own time. Outreach workers or lay persons prioritize family needs, listening to parent concerns and offering information while also taking time to play with young children and engage older youth. Once a connection has been made, family members are encouraged to come to a gathering and participate in a series of open-ended dialogues where residents can shape their own concerns and plans.

*Staff members from a community organization in Albuquerque, New Mexico, launched an outreach effort by knocking on doors throughout the neighborhood and asking, "How can we help you?" They visited families several times, developed relationships with them, and, in the process, established trust. As a result, eight families came together to talk about their concerns, and through a process of lengthy discussions, they developed a preschool program that allowed them to work cooperatively to help set program policies, guidelines, and goals.* —Maria Chavez, advocate, Albuquerque

Outreach strategies generally involve a mix of informal and formal approaches. Informal outreach is initiated by neighbors who are interested in helping children and making the neighborhood safer. These informal efforts often evolve into full organizing efforts led by residents. Formal outreach usually begins with a set of goals, defined geographical boundaries, trained outreach volunteers or hired workers, a specific set of activities, a timetable in which to carry them out, and tools for collecting data and tracking results. Often, the purpose of formal outreach is to win the trust and establish program credibility with families. When it succeeds, families themselves informally carry on the outreach by informing and inviting others to participate. This "grapevine" effect is one of the most powerful ways to get families involved in programs and neighborhood activities. Generic examples of neighborhood outreach strategies are described in the box on page 23.

*What to Look Out For*

Whether one or one hundred families have been contacted in a particular neighborhood, the real work begins with sustaining and nurturing new relationships. For example, if information and data are solicited from residents and later tabulated to get a

clearer picture of neighborhood needs and assets, then results should be shared with every participant:

- If families express a desire to help, then opportunities should be made available quickly.
- If families request help and are connected to resources, then someone should follow up to find out if the recommended resources were useful.
- If some parents are not ready to get involved, they should be kept informed of developments and should also understand that their participation is welcome at any time.

*The Idea in Practice*

In the Belmont neighborhood of Washington, D.C., gunshots, violence, and drug dealing were routine in in 1991. The situation reached a crisis after a nonfatal shooting that involved two young teens. Valerie Gibson, the mother of the boy who fired the gun, was horrified. She reached out to her friend, Rita Bright, who shared her anxiety about the number of young boys in the neighborhood who were involved in dangerous and illegal activities. Not only were the boys destroying their own lives, the women realized, but they had also become a threat to their younger brothers. Valerie Gibson and Rita Bright proceeded to organize an unparalleled effort to reach the young boys involved in the violence—by involving their mothers first.

They began by following the young men on their routes through the neighborhood, in order to find out both where they lived and where they were selling drugs. The two women talked and prayed with other mothers, many of whom were not ready to accept the fact that their sons were involved in the drug trade. Slowly, they persuaded other mothers to join them, if for no other reason than to find out the truth about their sons.

A number of these concerned women soon formed a support group called **Mothers Against Violent Acts** (MAVA). They knew that "lock-ups" and "put-outs" were not the answer to violence, and that in order to save their younger sons, they had to save their older brothers first. Over the next few years, MAVA members stood on corners with the young men and prayed for them to turn their lives around. They also handed out fliers telling the drug purchasers to stop endangering their sons. The women continued to pray, took down license plate numbers, and eventually helped to chase the drug purchasers out of their neighborhood.

As a result of their mothers' persistence, 20 of the young men ultimately created their own group, My Brother-Big Brother, dedicating themselves to being positive role models for their younger brothers. The young men planned the program, set their own rules, and began working with and tutoring their siblings. A half-dozen of the young men went back to school. Eight of them are now part of a project called PEERS (Positive Experiences Establishing Responsible Students), and many more want to become mentors. Rita Bright has recently established the Belmont Community Care Center to address the needs of young men and their families in the area.

*We are successful with the young men because we stick by them if they are trying to change. We recruit their leaders first. They define and control their work; they make their own rules on how they are going to operate. Now they have responsibility and respect. All of our mothers are so proud to see their boys tutoring their younger brothers and being leaders in the neighborhood. We are hosting a "Cinderfella Ball" to celebrate their contributions.*—Rita Bright, MAVA, Washington, D.C.

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In **Los Medanosonas,** a neighborhood in San Francisco's East Bay, drive-by shootings and drug trafficking were common. And in Port Chicago, families were isolated from one another. Resident Lilya Valladolid made a difference in her community when she decided to reach out and engage residents in both neighborhoods.

In Los Medanosonas, families live in apartments primarily owned by the Housing Authority. As the mother of a young son, Lilya Valladolid believed that most parents, afraid to send their children out to play, wanted to put an end to the frequent drive-by shootings. Nevertheless, getting people to come to one meeting with the police was difficult, and getting them to keep coming required persistence and creativity. She offered incentives to participating families. They earned stars that they could save and trade in for trips to cultural events and entertainment. Although she knew that some parents came just for the incentives, others came because they cared about improving the neighborhood.

After six months of working with police, the parents developed a neighborhood watch program. They now serve as block captains, calling in license plates and reporting suspicious activities. Some of the parents lobbied successfully for fences, a recreation center, and even a mentoring program to help keep young people safe and out of trouble. Police also agreed to reassign an officer to patrol Los Medanosonas regularly rather than sending an officer only after receiving a call. As a result of the partnership between parents and the police, there has not been a drive-by shooting in Los Medanosonas since January 1998.

Lilya Valladolid used a different outreach approach in Port Chicago, where more families are homeowners. She went door to door, listening to residents talk about the changes they desired for the neighborhood and how they believed that those changes should take place. "The parents were not complacent, but they did not know their neighbors. And trust was a real problem," she says.

In addition to organizing ESL classes, she held seminars twice a week on topics such as health, relationships, schools, and gangs. Parents could bring their children, and refreshments were available. As parents got to know each other and began discussing issues and solutions, they formed a network with their own officers and began working in partnership with a local Family Stress Center to solve problems that threatened the well-being of Port Chicago's children and families.

*Parents always have ideas about how things could change, especially about how they can help and how others can help them. Don't give up. Keep going, and try different strategies. Work with them. Don't do it for them. People can do a lot more for you than you can do for them. Be partners.*—Lilya Valladolid, Family Support, Oakland

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### 4. Family Recreation, Education, and Social Activities

*The Idea*

Sometimes families are more likely to come to picnics or street festivals—instead of community meetings—because they are fun and offer a social outlet. Consequently, neighborhood-based recreation, education, and cultural activities can provide useful opportunities for engaging and mobilizing families while simultaneously achieving important family and neighborhood development goals. Organizers can use these events to recruit families for a longer term effort to plan a community agenda around family needs.

Social and recreational activities build a sense of belonging among families in a community and offer residents opportunities to relax with their children, have fun with other families, and expand social support networks. Social activities also can strengthen family cultural identity and ethnic pride, and multicultural events help bridge understanding among diverse groups of families. These activities might include potluck dinners, holiday celebrations, sports events, craft nights, cultural festivals, movie and pizza nights, picnics, special group trips, family nights out, camping, fashion shows, and bingo games. Families that take leadership roles in developing these activities have the opportunity to learn event-planning and organizational skills.

Hosting adult educational activities is another means of engaging residents, especially when child care is provided. Educational activities strengthen parents' self esteem—a basic ingredient for effective parenting, personal growth, and increased employment skills. Activities might include reading clubs, family literacy classes, ethnic cooking, stress management, yoga, or fitness and aerobics, as well as safety and first aid, GED, AIDS awareness, driver education, career development, financial management, business planning, computer literacy, and conflict resolution and mediation.

Recreation and social activities designed specifically for children and youth are also a good way to attract family members. Activities can be organized around parents and youth, such as theater clubs, sports teams, support groups, rap groups, art or mural projects, leadership training, computer classes, science projects, peer mentoring, martial arts, dance and aerobics, or entrepreneurial skills workshops. All provide ways to engage family members in building valuable skills and capacities to improve family life in a neighborhood.

*What to Look Out For*

It is important to involve residents in the planning and execution of any group activity designed to bring them together. When staff organize activities without involving families in their planning, a learning opportunity is lost; too often, when paid staff leave the neighborhood, the activity disappears along with them. Including children and families in planning and implementing activities is a powerful leadership learning tool and is a way to build intergenerational ownership for community programs. It eliminates reliance on outside "experts" and creates economic opportunities for residents to become purveyors of their own services, as for instance when parents are hired as staff and when neighborhood businesses supply printing, copy services, food, cleaning, space, decorations, and other services.

*The Idea in Practice*

Theresa Morris, a resident of the **St. Thomas-Irish Channel Consortium** in New Orleans, realized that the key to enrolling more community residents in literacy classes was to work with their children first. She created story time for children ages six to ten, which soon began drawing large crowds. They listened to stories, learned how to apply for library cards and borrow books, and were invited on field trips. She also invited parents, many of whom participated in the story hour and trips, and asked if they could volunteer in the program.

At first, many parents were embarrassed to admit that they could not read or had never completed school. As parents gradually grew more comfortable with her, she asked them about their plans for the future and how they envisioned achieving those goals. Some parents wanted to know about services in the neighborhood, some needed help with filing documents, others were interested in learning how to use the Internet. "Literacy is in everything," says

Theresa Morris. "You need to have lots of programs under your sleeve so you can be helpful."

When parents request help with reading, she enrolls them in the YMCA literacy program that is part of the St. Thomas-Irish Channel Consortium, taking care to assess their reading skills so that they can work at their own levels. Because achieving higher reading levels and successfully obtaining a high school equivalency degree take a great deal of time and determination, she sticks by her students, doing whatever it takes to help them to attain their goals. As parents have gained confidence, they have also become more involved in their children's education and the local schools. Last fall, several adult students produced their own book, called *Parents as Positive Teachers*, which provides information about local resources for children and families.

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### 5. Neighborhood Projects, Mini-Grants, and Parent Council Funds

*The Idea*

A powerful way for families to become involved in a broad, neighborhood-based family strengthening agenda is to support projects originated by the residents themselves, such as playground cleanups, block safety associations, weekly family evenings, job banks, shopping clubs, or after-school programs. Promoting the funding of resident-led projects and involving residents in raising funds to support them is another effective strategy for engaging residents and building their capacity for leadership. Parents who are already organized into parent councils, parent advisory groups, and neighborhood associations may want funds to help promote and expand their advocacy and leadership efforts. Youth will need access to scholarships, and residents will require revolving loans to support their micro-enterprises.

*What to Look Out For*

Although families usually have a wealth of creative ideas and projects that they would like to work on, they rarely have access to the necessary tools, information, technical support, and funding. Small groups of concerned neighbors simply do not have the resources that well-established community and county agencies have. To build residents' capacity to participate in and sustain a neighborhood agenda over time, some residents will need help in learning how to set clear goals and priorities, develop implementation plans and timelines, write grant proposals, prepare and monitor budgets, evaluate results, prepare reports, and develop management skills.

*The Idea in Practice*

Residents from Cleveland Arms, Hilltop Village, Moncrieff Village, Washington Heights, and Palm Terrace housing communities in Jacksonville, Florida, were invited to apply to a Call for Great Ideas, a mini-grant program sponsored by Jacksonville's **Community Partnership for the Protection of Children.** The partnership is a collaborative initiative funded in part by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation and the Florida Department of Children and Families. The Call for Great Ideas plan asked for projects that would help ensure that all children are safe by reducing stress in families and thereby reducing the potential for child abuse and neglect as well as domestic violence. Any resident could apply by completing a simple grant application. A local agency acted as the pass-through agent, and the only requirement was that projects revolve around making children safer and families

stronger. Groups from the five communities gathered to generate ideas for projects and complete the grant application. Residents prioritized their lists of creative ideas, submitted applications, and, ultimately, each community received a $5000 grant to implement one of their projects, which ranged from a Friday Night Movie Fest to building a playground for tots. Building upon the success of the first year, the foundation doubled the grant funding for the second year of the project. Residents not only learned many valuable skills through the application process, but they proved fully capable of executing their plans and engaging a wider range of parents, youth, and children in the process.

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## B. FAMILY-FRIENDLY PLACES

Traditionally, families could always go to the home of a caring neighbor or to their place of worship for help and support. Socioeconomic, political, and environmental forces have eroded families' natural support networks, however, and there is a great need for places in the community that restore, strengthen, and sustain the fabric of family and neighborhood life. Family-friendly places, therefore, are locations in neighborhoods whose overall aim is to enhance the family's ability to function optimally and to promote personal growth. In essence, a family-friendly place is any location in the community that welcomes, nurtures, and supports families through access to a wide array of concrete services and supports.

Family-friendly places offer family members a safe gathering place where they do not have to demonstrate a deficit in order to access the resources they desire. They are usually drop-in sites where parents can meet with other parents while children play safely, where families can expand their social networks, and where parents can exchange valuable information and resources. They are places where families can practice a range of skills, including leadership in personal, family, employment, and community affairs.

The following examples of family-friendly places have been arranged into three categories: (1) schools, preschools, and child care facilities; (2) community centers and family resource centers; and (3) faith communities, civic clubs, and neighborhood associations.

Family-friendly places

- welcome all families in the neighborhood;
- nurture parent and caretaker capacities to care well for children;
- support family participation at all levels of decision-making;
- combine a continuum of services and supports for individual families that includes promotion and prevention activities and access to treatment services when needed;
- promote culturally relevant activities for families and dialogue among different cultures;
- provide child care and youth development activities while parents learn or practice leadership skills;
- offer emergency supports twenty-four hours per day, seven days per week;
- involve natural helpers as partners and provide ongoing support for their efforts;
- provide opportunities for social networking and intergenerational learning;

- recognize that fun should be a regular part of activities;
- support parent-led initiatives by providing space, staff, and resources;
- are open days and evenings on weekdays, and part time on weekends;
- allow families to drop in any time without an appointment;
- use a collaborative model to create and make accessible a rich array of resources to families; and
- provide on-site employment opportunities for participants.

### 1. Schools, Preschools, and Child Care Facilities

*The Idea*

Schools and child care facilities are among the most effective vehicles for family development activities. Parents can be involved in their children's education in some or all of the following ways: as teachers, as school supporters, as advocates, and as decision-makers. As *teachers*, parents teach their toddlers the skills they will need to start school and be prepared to learn; parents read to children and help them with homework, science fair projects, and special reports. Some schools help parents become good teachers at home through special parenting classes, skill-building sessions, and informal events that build their confidence.

As *school supporters*, parents attend parent-teacher conferences, watch their children perform in school events, join the PTA or PTO, work in the classroom, tutor students, or help supervise field trips. They get involved in what is happening at their children's schools, sending a signal to their children that school is important and their children are important. This raises children's confidence and inspires them to work hard in school. Some schools ask parents to sign a contract at the beginning of the school year where they agree, for example, to attend at least two parent-teacher conferences and volunteer at least 18 hours in the school during the year.

As *advocates*, parents speak for and act on behalf of their children. Parents may act as advocates for their own children or they may act for all children in their school community, as when they insist that students not be split into high and low tracks. Several communities are trying to help parents become more effective advocates through workshops and parent-mentoring programs. The Right Question Project in Cambridge, Massachusetts, for example, trains parents to ask teachers and other school officials about their child's progress in school and to take specific action steps if they don't get good answers. Another example is found in New York City where ACORN, (the Association for Community Reform Now) helped parents to pressure community school districts to open smaller schools, end student tracking, make needed repairs, and divide funds fairly among students. As a result, two new elementary schools were opened, and committees of parents and teachers now make the hiring decisions for school directors and teaching staff.

The final level of parent involvement is as *decision-makers*. Beyond just making recommendations, influencing a program, or managing a small school fund, some schools give parents real decision-making authority. Some schools, for instance, allow parents to decide what program is best for their child and help develop their child's personal learning plan annually. In Chicago, elected local school councils—made up at least 50 percent of parents—at every public school in the city pick the principal and set the overall policies for the school. In these cases, decisions are made jointly, and parents feel a sense of ownership in what they have created for their children's education.

While there are many examples of communities helping parents act as teachers and supporters, fewer help parents become effective advocates and decision-makers. To fully utilize parents' potential, school staff need to view parents as experts about their own children—with valuable knowledge and skills. Families need to feel entirely welcome at their child's school at any time, and they need to be involved in everything from the school's vision and design to its procedures and relationships with the wider community.

Communities can create family-friendly places in schools and child care centers, giving parents a space of their own to drop in, host activities, learn skills, and meet with other parents. Parents should be included in program design, invited to offer feedback on educational and child care matters, and offered ample opportunities to contribute to daily educational activities. Friendly schools and child care centers should promote a practice of families helping families when situations call for extra supports, like taking a tot to the day care center when a new baby is born, serving as a safe place for latchkey children, or mentoring an adolescent who is failing a grade. They should provide families with access to social services, adult education, family counseling, parent-child activities, parenting skills sessions, and parent support groups. When parents are involved in their child's education and development, everyone gains: children, the schools, parents, the neighborhood, and the broader community of taxpayers.

Opportunities for making schools and child care centers more responsive to families include

- funding a team of school-parent liaisons to reach out and establish meaningful links between parents and their children's schools;
- supporting parents' own advocacy efforts to create friendlier environments;
- creating a series of school or day care and home dialogues;
- providing PTAs with parent leadership training to increase parents' effectiveness in communicating with teachers and advocating for children;
- providing principals and teachers with opportunities to visit and talk to peers who have successfully created home-school partnerships and have turned their schools into family-friendly places; and
- funding teacher-parent partnership projects.

> *After the workshop we went into classrooms, did some volunteer work, and helped the teachers. It was more than bulletin boards and grading papers; it was about five-to-one contact with students who needed the extra push or extra help. And teachers started to feel comfortable with parents. Teachers were just as worried about parents being in the school as parents were worried about the teachers. We started building relationships there, along with respect and trust.—Community Organizing and Family Issues: A Progress Report from Interviews with Parent Leaders*, by Kris Smock, Northwestern University

### *What to Look Out For*

Although neighborhood leaders can help to make schools and child care centers the kinds of places that encourage activities that strengthen families and develop leadership skills, relationships between school and home are generally poor. Many parents report feeling unwelcome at school and only relate to educators when they are notified about problems with their children. Schools are often disconnected from many families' daily struggles and do not know the best way to develop partnerships with parents. Improving the relationship between home and school requires substantial work as well as strategic investments.

*When parents in communities develop a sense of being able to advocate for themselves, the interaction with schools as well as other community groups changes substantially.*—Luz Santana, Right Question Project, Cambridge, Massachusetts

*The Idea in Practice*

The **Valeska Hinton Early Childhood Center** in Peoria, Illinois, was designed specifically to include and support parents as partners in their children's education. While some schools seek parent involvement in order to improve their children's education, the center encourages parents' personal and professional development by offering both day and evening GED preparation, adult basic education, literacy classes, job skills training, nutrition, first aid, and parenting classes. Parents may come to the center with their children on the school bus; parents also have lockers, a lounge, and a toy-lending library. Family support associates, who provide before- and after-school child care, are the principal outreach workers for the center, making home visits to encourage parent involvement and informing parents about what the center has to offer.

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The **Charter Oak School** in West Hartford, Connecticut, is an example of a school-community partnership that has successfully involved parents in their children's schooling. In the late 1980s, some of the teachers in this school informed their principal that in order to be effective at teaching, they needed counselors to work with them, their students, and the children's families. The principal listened and by 1991 had opened a family resource center in the school—one of 60 such centers funded by the Connecticut Department of Education. The center first opened in a small basement room of the school. Because of its popularity among parents, it was moved to a classroom and then later to a double classroom, where it continues to be a large part of the school today. The center, staffed by a parent educator, offers preschool activities, breakfasts, in-school and after-school activities for children and parents, play groups and home visits, ESL classes, and an orientation program for new families, many of whom have only recently arrived in this country and do not speak English.

*You can't blame parents for working to put food on the table. If you want them to be involved, you need to be on the phone with them constantly, giving them opportunities. At first, parents may put up a wall between the school and the family. But if a mother comes to a play group with her toddler, for example, it builds up her comfort zone in the school. She'll discuss things with the parent educator, which builds a bridge for talking with the teachers and being present in the classroom and on field trips.*—Therese Horn, teacher, Charter Oak School

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The **Parent Services Project** (PSP) sites operate in eight states and have a network of over 25,000 families. One of the first, the Fairfax-San Anselmo Children's Center, a family-friendly child care center, was founded on the belief that child care is a family matter. Since it opened in 1973, the center has worked conscientiously both to forge partnerships with parents regarding the care of their children and to engage the entire family in the activities of the center. "We see ourselves as serving families,

not just children," says Lisa Lee, Associate Director of the Fairfax PSP. "It is about respect. We believe that families should have the ultimate say about the care of their children."

*Depending on the cultural mores of the families at the center, orientations can be meetings with formal presentations and questions and answers. At other PSP sites, we have scavenger hunts that send parents into classrooms and meeting rooms, looking for items, opening up closets, looking at materials. We want parents to have a good idea of what their children do, where they will be, what else goes on at the center, and how families can participate in the activities.*—Lisa Lee, Fairfax PSP

PSP centers work intentionally to make families feel at home, supported in their role as parents and family leaders, and valued as important members of the PSP community. Pictures of the children and their parents greet everyone who enters. When a family enrolls a child in the program, staff members take time to learn what the family wants for their child and how they want to participate in the program. Registration forms are clear, respectful, and in the family's own language. All parents have orientation.

To build bridges between parents and PSP centers, staff members regularly ask themselves questions:

- What strengths does each family bring?
- How many times have you thanked a parent? Laughed with families?
- How can we make it easy for parents to meet each other?
- How many opportunities do we offer for parents and children to do things together?
- Are we taking time to build relationships with parents and other family members?

PSP understands that parenting practices are culturally influenced. Therefore, staff members raise issues with parents about racial, language, and cultural differences and work to build understanding among families and between families and staff. Understanding that child care centers and family child care homes often serve as the entry point for families into the larger community, PSP sites develop strong relations with other local organizations and institutions. This way, parents can connect easily to resources and opportunities.

Finally, parents play critical roles in their programs—planning programs, determining priorities, evaluating programs, and setting policy. PSP programs make sure that parents understand some of the larger issues that affect child care in general, such as the extreme shortage of qualified workers.

*We strive to develop relationships of reciprocity. We actively seek advice, assistance, and support from our parents. We encourage parents to get involved and contribute time and skills to making their center or home a wonderful place for their children. There is a genuine give-and-take between families and staff. Both become teachers and learners to each other.*—Ethel Seiderman, PSP founding director

*The center provided a stable and safe environment for my children, allowing me to go to work and school and be okay with it, because I knew they were safe. My children saw that I participated in the center activities, and I think that this sets a good example for them for later when they become adults and have to think about their own children's school and parent participation. It helps build their own self-esteem.*—Barbara, PSP parent

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### 2. Community Centers and Family Resource Centers

*The Idea*

Family resource centers are family-friendly places by definition, as they seek to support parents and their children in a variety of ways. When they first appeared in the 1970s, family resource centers were places where nonworking families could come for social gatherings, skills development, and information exchange. Since then, some of these centers have become more inclusive and supportive of working parents, and have evolved from simple parent and child drop-in centers open during working hours on weekdays, to centers that serve families all week and include evening and Saturday activities. Most communities have at least one family resource center, which may be located within a school, YMCA, Boys & Girls Club, or other community-based organization.

More recent models, built from the ground up with the full involvement of parents, are far more empowering than the earlier versions were, and they provide family access to promotion, prevention, and treatment resources. Some very successful centers are planned and operated as parent-led organizations. Over the years, some aspects of family resource centers have been adapted and applied with excellent results to more traditional environments: health clinics, child care centers, hospitals, churches, and community centers. All of these settings hold in common the basic premise that parenting is an essential task and that parents deserve support in their efforts.

*What to Look Out For*

Family resource centers that are shaped and run by neighborhood parents offer an effective vehicle for family empowerment and for building much-needed bridges between policymakers and neighborhood residents. However, developing a family center with resident involvement requires building tremendous trust between resident leaders and the organizations that agree to fund the centers—and this process can take time. Funders should respect the process of resident decision-making and agree to abide by their choices. Moreover, shifting to a true partnership with families means that staff must commit to holding respectful and empowering dialogues with parents.

*The Idea in Practice*

Three family centers were developed in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, in 1994-1995 to improve child outcomes in diverse communities within the county. County leaders, in partnership with the University of Pittsburgh, set forth the broad goals and principles for the initiative and created a central organization called **Partnerships for Family Support** (PFS) to provide technical assistance and administrative support to each center. Each offers a core set of family support programs to foster optimal child development, including case management services, assessment, social and recreational activities, and a program for teen moms who come to the center twice a week to learn about health, nutrition, and child development.

Community residents played a major role in designing and operating the centers. With support from PFS professionals, residents made decisions about whether to have a family support center, how a host agency for fiscal and personnel matters would be selected, how staff would be hired, the location of the center, its days and hours of operation, and what programs and services the center should offer. Six years later, parent councils still make decisions about programs and resources, and the centers are vital and filled with community residents.

Instead of providing "training" to the resident leaders, PFS staff act as liaisons between the residents, funders, and other institutions and organizations.

They also serve as "protectors" of the process and the decisions of parents. In the words of the PFS director, "People have skills and gifts. They make decisions every day. Partners don't train partners —you work with them."

*Parents help administer the programs they design. They help with the school-age program; they help prepare the dinner we serve to families twice a week. If you walk into any room at the center you see parents are working side by side with staff. I share all decision-making with parents, except for some personnel issues. Parents shape the program and they work on the budget. They are involved in everything at the center. The greatest influence parents have had recently is getting the center to embrace the school-age child. All three family centers were originally funded to serve children ages birth to three, and then we expanded to birth to five. Our parents challenged this, because they wanted to address school-age children. We petitioned our funders and the restriction was lifted.*
—Paulette Davis, director, Wilkinsburg Family Support Center

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### 3. Faith Communities, Civic Clubs, and Neighborhood Associations

*The Idea*

Neighborhood churches and faith groups offer families not only spiritual guidance, but a host of other supports as well. Neighborhood places of worship embrace families in good times and in hard times, and families serve as natural supports to each other. When faith groups mobilize behind a cause, powerful changes can take place in the community; therefore, places of worship are excellent places to engage in a family strengthening and neighborhood transformation agenda.

Neighborhood-based civic clubs and neighborhood associations are good sources of resident volunteers as well as vehicles for resident leadership development. Civic clubs and neighborhood associations often have members who have watched the neighborhood change over thirty, forty, even fifty or more years. These residents can provide valuable insight into current efforts to improve conditions in the neighborhood, help bridge relationships with senior citizens, and support family outreach efforts.

*What to Look Out For*

Because faith communities, civic clubs, and neighborhood associations are often established community institutions, their leadership may be entrenched in more traditional ways of viewing families and exercising power. Building relationships with these groups requires understanding their territories, hierarchies, and beliefs, as well as taking the time to find a common vision for family and neighborhood change. The payoff for such perseverance can be a set of secure commitments to help mobilize residents in support of families in the neighborhood.

*The Idea in Practice*

The **New Salem Baptist Church,** in Columbus, Ohio, is an 83-year-old church that ministers to a mixed-income congregation of nearly 3500. Church programs, which include full-service day care, a latchkey program, after-school activities, Bible study groups for all ages, a community redevelopment program, a black college fair, a food pantry, and summer recreational and job skills training programs, serve about 1750 children and adults. Many of New Salem's programs represent cooperative efforts with small businesses and minority entrepreneurs, the public schools, and other churches in the Columbus

area. "Our primary thrust is youth, but we are attuned to all family needs," says Rev. Keith Troy.

***Contact:***
*Keith Troy, Minister*
*New Salem Baptist Church*
*2956 Cleveland Avenue*
*Columbus, OH 43224*
*614-267-2536*

The **Community Needs Council** (CNC), the youth arm of Chicago's Logan Square Neighborhood Association, organized a basketball game between Logan Square youth and adult community leaders to celebrate the grand opening of a new sports center. The opening offered a chance for the young people to share their excitement with the community and an opportunity to build relationships among members of different community groups and organizations. Celebrity guest players included the pastor of a local church, the parent coordinator from a local middle school, and two police officers from the 14th District of the police department. A member of the local Church Caucus refereed the game, and an alderman from the 35th ward joined the group for the ribbon cutting and half-time ceremony. "It was a fun learning experience for the youth," said Arlene Martinez, youth leader and president of CNC. "We learned how to organize our own events. For the adult players, it was a way of uniting and working with the youth." One of the adults commented, "Although I was a bit intimidated at first by the youths' energy and enthusiasm, I am pleased to see that age and experience are still very valuable."

***Contact:***
*Adida Perez, President*
*Nancy Aardema, Director*
*Logan Square Neighborhood Association*
*3321 West Wrightwood Street*
*Chicago, IL 60647*
*773-384-4370*

*The material on CNC was excerpted from The Eagle News, the Logan Square Neighborhood Association Newsletter, Fall 1999.*

## C. FAMILY LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Supporting residents in neighborhood transformation efforts is important, but full participation in community decision-making requires building residents' capacity to take on leadership roles. *Making Connections* site teams can help residents learn how to be productive leaders, starting with their participation in the planning phase of *Making Connections* and continuing through the implementation of programs, policies, and supportive services. However, careful consideration must be given to how every program strategy will simultaneously help to address the needs of families and build their potential for leadership in the neighborhood.

Every *Making Connections* neighborhood has an abundance of family leadership expressions, yet that wealth may go unnoticed unless site teams make an effort to discover them. Every contact with families should yield new information on how families help themselves and others in their community. This neighborhood leadership wealth is the foundation of further development, as well as the principal root that will sustain leadership efforts over time.

### Signs of a Family Leader

A family leader in a community is someone who

- uses his or her own resources to help a family in need;
- volunteers in family recreation and other social activities;
- informs families about resources and helps engage families in programs;
- organizes child and youth activities to keep them safe and off the streets;

- serves as a consultant or advisor for program design and implementation strategies;
- joins a parent advocacy group and speaks on behalf of children and families;
- actively participates in his or her neighborhood association;
- attends PTA and other community meetings;
- serves as a parent representative in neighborhood governing boards;
- recognizes the contributions and gifts of other families; and
- keeps his or her own family as a priority.

Family leadership efforts in neighborhoods seldom receive the recognition and support that they deserve, in part because leadership is primarily associated with money, power, titles, and positions, and in part because family development issues have not been viewed as central to community development. *Making Connections* neighborhoods will undoubtedly have highly talented leaders who have exercised their leadership skills under circumstances that lack adequate support, validation, and resources. Therefore, supporting and enhancing indigenous family leadership is a top priority for *Making Connections*. In the following pages, family leadership development is discussed in terms of (1) parent leadership training and (2) family-focused community organizing and family advocacy.

### 1. Parent Leadership Training

*The Idea*

Leadership training attempts to build the knowledge base and skills of indigenous neighborhood leaders. Group processes can accelerate the acquisition of new skills as participants teach and support each other. Training can take the form of short-term coaching assignments before a resident testifies before the city council, or it can be a series of training sessions on advocacy skills, action planning, communications strategies, public speaking, and grant writing. Some communities provide one-on-one support for emerging leaders through a type of mentoring program, while others organize exchanges with family leaders from other communities.

*Honor yourself now, where you have been, and the person you have yet to become. When you talk to people, make it seem like you are sitting down and having coffee. Everyone has something to say that you can learn from. When you are in a tough situation, handle it with dignity and respect. Never take away anyone else's dignity. Pay attention to dynamics. Silence allows you to learn and understand where people are coming from. You can often get a lot more out of the situation if you observe.*

*People need to hear your opinions. Network. People have resources that can help you. I always bring someone along. I listen. I have real conversations with people and get an understanding of what they want to do; then I add my opinions. I keep these contacts in my mind for the future.*

*Pass the baton. Share your power. I stand behind my integrity on these issues, but if I am not sharing this power with others, then I am not leading. Share information, bring opportunities in front of the parents, and be willing to step aside and let others take the baton.*—Michelle Gaither McDonald, co-director of the Hartford Parent Network

Successful training efforts share some common characteristics:

- They are developed in response to a local need.
- They include parents as trainers or co-facilitators.
- They build on and validate parents' strengths and leadership experiences.

- They help participants identify personal goals and develop strategies for achieving them.
- They include a variety of supports for participants, such as child care, scheduling, and transport.
- They provide practical skills and step-by-step processes for thinking about community goals and how to achieve them.
- They promote mutual support and collaboration among parents as well as accountability for results.

*What to Look Out For*

While any leadership training program can provide useful information and skills, it will be far more effective if residents are involved in its planning and preparation. Strategies for developing family leadership in *Making Connections* neighborhoods will be most successful if local leaders first spend time listening to and supporting residents' own creative ideas before offering information and technical supports.

Furthermore, parent leadership training should address areas where opportunities for exercising leadership are actually available. It does not make sense to train parents in board participation skills, for example, if organizations have not made room at their board tables for community residents or if the available slots are minimal.

*The Idea in Practice*

The **Urban Children's Coalition** (UCC) is a six-year-old nonprofit organization on the northwest side of Denver that works with families in need of support, many of whom have recently arrived from Mexico. Nine family advocates work with individual families who have been referred by one of 18 schools in their area. Family advocates visit families and partner with them to address whatever concerns and needs they have.

When UCC had the opportunity to nominate some parents to serve on the Collaborative Council of the 9th District, a community collaborative in Denver, family advocates provided the bridge to effective membership on the council. First, however, they had to

- consider the responsibilities that families were currently managing;
- review the expectations and demands that membership in the council would place on parent representatives;
- identify the hurdles or barriers to parent participation; and
- plan an intensive system to recruit, train, and support each parent representative who joined the council.

UCC staff recognized that participation in the council could not jeopardize parents' abilities to fulfill their day-to-day obligations. Effective parent participation would necessitate child care, food for children at mealtimes, transportation to and from the meetings, and perhaps a stipend. After examining what families would realistically have to overcome in order to participate in the Collaborative Council, UCC staff took the following steps:

- Invitations were sent to parents who had worked with a family advocate from the program.
- Anyone who expressed interest received more information about the expectations of Council members.
- A retreat was held for those parents who were still interested in joining, to discuss the following issues:
  - the purpose and operations of the council;
  - their role on the council;
  - the funding stream that supports the council;

- issues and concerns that parents want the council to know about; and
- ways that UCC staff could support the parents' involvement.

Once parents had joined the council, family advocates picked parents up after meetings, took them home, and discussed their thoughts about the meeting as well as their expectations about upcoming ones. Family advocates answered parents' questions, listened to their ideas and concerns, and sometimes also attended meetings, providing translation services when necessary.

As a result of this approach to supporting parent involvement in the District 9 Collaborative Council, parents have become much more active and have raised their expectations about what needs to change in the community. Two have become members of the Urban Children's Coalition Board. Parents' comfort speaking in public, their fluency with English, and their willingness to speak up on behalf of their children at school has grown dramatically. One District 9 councilmember has testified before the Denver City Council regarding several issues identified by the parents, particularly the high cost of family housing.

***Contact:***
*Enrique Orozco, Program Manager*
*Urban Children's Coalition*
*5100 Lincoln Street*
*Denver, CO 80216*
*303-308-1859*
*303-308-1861 (fax)*

*The rhetoric of past community development initiatives tended toward telling residents that they had opportunities—but not giving them the resources they needed to take advantage of those opportunities—or giving resources without providing an understanding of opportunities to put them to use. To truly empower residents, you need to give them resources, skills, knowledge, and the opportunities to apply them.*—Mustapha Abdul Salaam, community leader, New Haven, Connecticut

### 2. Family-Focused Community Organizing and Family Advocacy

*The Idea*

In recent years, largely because of federal programs that mandate parental involvement, parents have been recruited to represent family voices on a number of boards and in commissions, community groups, and organizations. However, many parents do not have the skills to step into leadership roles that may require them to have a voice in public policy, participate in decision-making, and lead community change activities for families.

In response, hundreds of parent-led groups have emerged to organize parents at the neighborhood, county, and state levels. Distinctions between these groups are largely based on the key issues that galvanize participants (child care, schools, special needs children, drunk driving, or neighborhood safety), as well as on whether they work at local or state levels. Their focus aside, these groups share the belief that families are the building blocks of communities, and that parents and other family members are powerful —if often overlooked—sources of community leadership. Their common goal is to build the leadership capacity of parents in order to effect change in the schools and in their community. Working from the principle that building strong families is key to building strong communities, family-focused organizing and family advocacy efforts provide leadership skills that link personal, family, and community development.

*The Idea in Practice*

**Community Organizing and Family Issues** (COFI) offers leadership training in which COFI staff work in partnership with a local community organization to help bring parents into decision-making roles within their community. Developed in 1994 by long-time labor and political organizer Ellen Schumer, COFI grew out of frustration with

traditional organizing approaches that rarely addressed issues that affect families.

Here's how COFI works: COFI staff members train an organizer from the community organization, who in turn invites families to participate in a long-term effort to improve their neighborhood. Those who sign up attend five to six workshops over two to three weeks that focus on setting personal, family, and community goals. This process, which many parents have never experienced before, allows parents to articulate their dreams for themselves and for their families; sharing their visions with eight to fifteen other group members creates an atmosphere of mutual wisdom and support. As an outgrowth of the training, participants form parent action teams to improve conditions within their own neighborhoods. Parents work with the organizer and COFI staff to map their strategies and take concrete action over the next three to six months. Typical projects include lobbying for school uniforms; beginning a parent-mentoring program; opening a family resource center at the school; organizing a parent safety patrol; and starting ESL, GED, or computer classes in the community.

Parents report gaining a clearer vision about what is important to them and their families. Taking action in pursuit of personal and community goals reinforces their sense of their own capacity to effect change. As a result, parents often return to school, get jobs, and become leaders at school, on their block, or in a community organization. Within the year, many parents go on to Phase II of COFI training, during which they develop and conduct a neighborhood needs assessment to assist in long-term planning for their neighborhood.

COFI provides an effective means for activating small groups of parents across a neighborhood. Over the course of two to three years, COFI-trained parents become neighborhood activists working to improve conditions for children and families in schools, child care centers, in the parks, and in libraries. COFI parents then become the trainers for the next cohort of interested parents.

***Contact:***
*Ellen Schumer, Executive Director*
*Community Organizing and Family Issues*
*954 W. Washington Street*
*Chicago, IL 60607*
*312-226-5141*
*312-226-5144 (fax)*

*We used to have a drug-infested neighborhood. I felt we could stop it, that we could break the cycle. We did break the cycle. Before I got parent leadership training, I wanted to make changes, but I didn't understand the system or how to navigate it. I did not know how to get the system to be more responsive to my needs, and now I do.*—Anna Green, Spring Lake, North Carolina

**Parents United for Child Care** (PUCC) began in the early 1990s when a group of Boston parents began meeting informally to discuss their child care needs. Their mission is not only to expand the availability of affordable, quality child care (particularly in inner-city neighborhoods in Massachusetts), but also to add a strong parent voice to the public debates over child care and family policies in the state. PUCC has grown into a grass-roots, multiracial organization of 2000 low- and moderate-income parents. Its Leadership Development Program trains parents to become neighborhood leaders in terms of the child care needs in their neighborhoods. All PUCC activities are directed at organizing parents to become effective advocates for themselves and for their children.

*We are working and nonworking parents from many different rungs on the socioeconomic ladder, united around our mutual concern for child care. We come from every neighborhood in Boston and many communities around the state. We are trying to cope with busy, often disjointed schedules, and we need affordable, high-quality child care. By uniting our hands, we are connected to one another; uniting our voices, we are louder; uniting our neighborhoods, we are more powerful.*—Mark Smith, PUCC

***Contact:***
*Mark Smith, Director for Community Organizing*
*Parents United for Child Care*
*30 Winter Street*
*Boston, MA 02108*
*617-542-1515*
*617-426-8288 (fax)*





## D. PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

The strategies, tools, and examples described in this guide illustrate just a few of the many creative possibilities for resident engagement and parent leadership in *Making Connections* neighborhoods. Experience suggests that a combination of these and other approaches is necessary to promote real family involvement in meeting basic needs and collective action activities.

### *The Idea in Practice*

The **Family Support Network** (FSN) was created by a Bothell, Washington, mother on welfare who found that the formal social service system could not meet all of her needs or those of her four children. Her needs reflected those that most families have for stability: time together, child care while she looked for work, a plumber to fix a leaky faucet, haircuts for her children. Using an asset-based community development approach, she organized her neighbors into a network that now has 150 volunteers who have contributed more than 50,000 hours in the past five years to help their neighbors in need. Today, FSN is a grass-roots operation that seeks to create a network of connections among neighbors, unfettered by bureaucracy, politics, religious doctrine, race, or socioeconomic status.

The network seeks to improve the lives of everyone involved—giver and receiver alike. Some members have identified specific issues affecting their neighbors and have spearheaded efforts to address them: creating a network of safe havens for victims of domestic violence or identifying host families in different neighborhoods to assist teenagers who are escaping gangs. Others have organized neighborhood gatherings, special events, and family fun activities.

The FSN model includes specific roles and responsibilities:

- *Community connectors* are residents who register volunteers and match needs and resources to specific requests.
- *Community weavers* encourage families to get involved in the network and connect families to more formal resources when needed. They are usually family support workers in the schools, volunteer coordinators in agencies and churches, or corporate employee assistance program managers who have been tasked to participate in the network.
- *Family advocates* provide direct services and supports: child care, transportation, or the supervision of visits with children in foster care. All participate in a certification training program where they learn about the causes of community problems, the characteristics of healthy communities, and how to weave a web of community support.

- *Good neighbors* are the volunteers who lend a helping hand from time to time or as needed for specific projects. A good neighbor may be a hairdresser, a carpenter, a VCR repairman, a lawyer, or a teacher who can tutor. Others may take in a child or a whole family, visit a senior shut-in, or advocate for a child with special needs. Good neighbors may receive assistance when their own needs arise.
- *Good friends* are professionals—for instance, lawyers and doctors—who are willing to provide pro bono services for individual families.
- *FSN partners* are individuals, community organizations, agencies, and businesses who contribute cash, time, expertise, services, and equipment. For example, some partners have developed a database and website for the network.

The FSN model also includes a complex volunteer management and tracking database, Community Weaver Software, that contains material and human resources data-linked and catalogued according to the abilities, assets, and expertise of each volunteer in the network. Requests for assistance come to a community connector (or community weaver) who screens each request and searches the database to find a family advocate or good neighbor who can fulfill the request. A single request may contain several tasks. Results are reported back to the community connector, who keeps an activity log on every match. All information is compiled in a report on the quantity and quality of network services.

With a small grant from the Institute for a Civil Society, FSN is being replicated in two other communities: Cortez, Colorado, and Lewiston, Idaho. Family Support Network International (FSNI) can provide training and technical assistance to interested communities. The Community Weaver Software could be a useful tool in *Making Connections* sites to help residents identify, organize, and use assets; track needs; and connect families to resources and support.

***Contact:***
*Cheryl Honey*
*Family Support Network International*
*14316 75th Avenue, NE*
*Bothell, WA 98011*
*800-529-2294*
*425-820-2224*

# resources

The following organizations provide assistance and information on resident engagement strategies:

**Family Support America,** formerly the Family Resource Coalition of America, is an alliance of people and organizations convinced that in order to do the best we can by our nation's children, we need to support and strengthen America's families and communities. Since 1981, Family Support America has been helping the family support movement grow. It offers information, resources, and support on legislation and policy.

***Contact:***
*Family Support America*
*20 N. Wacker Drive, Suite 1100*
*Chicago, IL 60606*
*312-338-0900*
*312-338-1522 (fax)*
*www.frca.org*

**Family Support Network** is a network of responsible citizens who are willing to exchange services and supports, both locally and nationwide. Families serve in a variety of ways, providing meals to shut-ins and respite to those in need. Community members complete a two-part, 16-hour certification training where they learn leadership, community building, team building, resource pooling, and peer support skills. They also learn what is happening at the local and state level in the areas of family preservation and family support.

***Contact:***
*Family Support Network*
*21902 Second Avenue West*
*Bothell, WA 98021*
*800-529-2294*
*425-487-4009*
*www.familynetwork.org*
*wecare@familynetwork.org*

**Family Voices** is a national grass-roots organization that speaks on behalf of children with special health care needs. Founded by parents who developed national and state family networks and organizations to improve the health and education systems that serve their children, Family Voices' goal is to help shape national, state, and local health care policy and practice in private and public health care systems by

- supporting a national network of volunteer regional and state coordinators who provide information to families and policymakers;
- serving as a clearinghouse to keep members informed about health care issues; and
- forming partnerships with professionals and other state and national organizations to make sure the voices of families are heard.

Family Voices is a partner with Family Support America in disseminating guidelines for health supervision of children and adolescents.

***Contact:***
*Family Voices*
*PO Box 769*
*Algodones, NM 87001*
*505-867-2368*
*505-867-6517 (fax)*
*www.familyvoices.org*
*kidshealth@familyvoices.org*

The **Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health** is a national parent-run organization focused on the needs of children and youth with emotional, behavioral, or mental disorders and their families. The federation serves as a catalyst for change by promoting partnerships among family members, professionals, and other interested citizens to improve services for children with emotional, behavioral, or mental disorders. It also provides leadership training for parents in advocacy and community outreach.

***Contact:***
*Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health*
*1021 Prince Street*
*Alexandria, VA 22314*
*703-684-7710*
*703-836-1040 (fax)*
*www.ffcmh.org*
*ffcmh@crosslink.net*

**Mothers Against Drunk Driving** (MADD) is a parent-led organization that trains parents to get involved in schools and talk to the media to advocate against drunk driving. MADD parents serve on public, law enforcement, and legislative advisory boards and aid in establishing local and county initiatives and task forces. Parents provide victim assistance and conduct outreach. Workshops and publications are available.

***Contact:***
*Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)*
*511 E. John Carpenter Freeway, No. 700*
*Irving, TX 75062*
*972-869-2206*
*214-744-6233 (fax)*
*www.madd.org*

The **National Association for the Education of Young Children** (NAEYC) is the largest membership organization of early-childhood professionals. NAEYC works to increase public understanding and support for high-quality programs for young children and their families through public policy and public education initiatives. It collaborates with media representatives and government representatives at all levels to advocate for services for children and families.

***Contact:***
*National Association for the Education of Young Children*
*1509 Sixteenth Street, NW*
*Washington, DC 20036*
*800-424-2460*
*202-232-8777*
*202-328-1846 (fax)*
*www.naeyc.org*
*naeyc@naeyc.org*

The **National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education** advocates for the involvement of parents in their children's education and fosters relationships among home, school, and community that enhance young people's education. It provides information through publications, training, and services.

***Contact:***
*National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education*
*c/o National Community Education Association*
*3929 Old Lee Highway, Suite 91A*
*Fairfax, VA 22030*
*703-359-8973*
*703-359-0972 (fax)*
*www.ncpie.org*
*ferguson@ncea.com*

The **National Network of Partnership Schools** is a network of schools working to develop and maintain partnerships with parents.

***Contact:***
*National Network of Partnership Schools*
*Johns Hopkins University*
*Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships*
*3003 N. Charles Street, Suite 200*
*Baltimore, MD 21218*
*410-516-8818*
*410-516-8890 (fax)*
*http://scov.csos.jhu.edu/p2000*
*nnps@csos.jhu.edu*

**Parents Anonymous** is a national organization that provides technical assistance and training on a variety of leadership skills for parents. Parents Anonymous trains parents to train other parents to operate mutual support groups. The organization is based on a vision that establishing parent input, leadership, and mutual support are essential components in strengthening families and preventing child abuse and neglect.

***Contact:***
*Parents Anonymous*
*675 W. Foothill Boulevard, Suite 220*
*Claremont, CA 91711*
*909-621-6184*
*909-625-6304 (fax)*
*www.parentsanonymous-natl.org*
*parentsanon@msn.com*

**Parents as Teachers** trains parents to be parent educators in its nationally replicated program to provide parents with the information and support they need to give their children the best possible start in life. Parents become certified to conduct home visits, coordinate group meetings, conduct developmental screenings, and link parents with service providers and other supports. Parent educators work in partnership with the school and the community.

***Contact:***
*Parents as Teachers*
*10176 Corporate Square Drive, Suite 230*
*St. Louis, MO 63132*
*314-432-4330*
*314-432-8963 (fax)*
*www.patnc.org*
*patnc@patnc.org*

The **Time Dollar Institute,** established in 1995 by Edgar Cahn, assists in the design and operation of Time Dollar programs. The institute uses Time Dollars—a local, tax-exempt currency—as a way to create an alternative to conventional currencies for promoting the exchange of goods and services in cash-poor communities.

***Contact:***
*Time Dollar Institute*
*PO Box 42519*
*Washington, DC 20015*
*202-686-5200*
*www.timedollar.org*

## ADDITIONAL ON-LINE RESOURCES

In addition to the above national organizations, the following websites offer useful information about resident engagement strategies:

*www.pta.org*
The **National Congress of Parents and Teachers** provides information for parents, teachers, students, principals, administrators, and others interested in uniting the forces of home, school, and community on behalf of children and youth.

*www2.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/hsb*
This website is maintained by the **Head Start Bureau** as an electronic resource for Head Start service providers, parents, volunteers, community organizations, and others who share an interest in helping children look forward to a brighter future.

*www.npnd.org*
The **National Parent Network on Disabilities** provides a list of parent training and information centers in the United States. Most centers serve the entire state; others are community-based and serve more local areas.

## REFERENCES

The following references provide information about resident engagement and parent leadership:

*Empowerment and Family Support*, Moncrieff Cochran, Ed., 1995, 167 pp. Cornell Empowerment Group. Available from Family Support America, 312-338-0900.

From leading researchers in the parent empowerment movement comes this compilation of two-years-worth of a networking bulletin published by members of the Cornell Empowerment Group. Articles offer research findings and program models to show how family support can empower families, especially low-income families, to meet the challenges that face them. Special topics include child care and the empowerment process, redefining the professional role, and a global view of empowerment and family support.

*Essential Allies: Families as Advisors*, Elizabeth S. Jeppson and Josie Thomas, 1995, 76 pp. Institute for Family-Centered Care. Available from Family Support America, 312-338-0900.

A guide for family resource centers to involve parents in a variety of ways. Discusses the benefits of and barriers to parent-provider collaboration, and provides tips for developing partnerships with parents.

*Findings from an Evaluation of the Parent Institute for Quality Education Parent Involvement Program*, Gail L. Zellman, Brian Stecher, Stephen Klein, and Daniel McCafrey, with Silvia Gutierrez, Roger Madison, Denise D. Quigley, and Lisa Suarez, 1998, 19 pp. RAND Education, 310-451-7002.

Although there are ample programs designed to improve children's educational outcomes by teaching parents to become more involved in their children's schooling, few are evaluated. This makes it difficult for conclusions to be drawn about effectiveness in meeting goals. The evaluation in this document was based on data from two large school districts—outcome data from 2000 students in one district and interview data from the second—to evaluate a local parent involvement program. This report will be of interest to providers of parent involvement programs, school district personnel, and others concerned about helping children to learn and the ways that parents can help to make that happen.

*Learning from Colleagues: Family/Professional Partnerships Moving Forward Together*, Peer Technical Assistance Network. Writing team: Jane Adams, Charlie Bliss, Valerie Burrell Mohammad, Judith Meyers, and Elaine Slaton, 1998, 51 pp. Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, 703-684-7710.

This document presents research and commentary on the issues involved in using a family-professional partnership systems approach in situations involving families of children who have developed or are at risk of developing serious emotional, behavioral, or mental health disturbances.

*Learning to Be Partners*, Lynn E. Pooley, Flora Woratschek, and Jeanne Williams, Eds., Family Support America, Center for Assessment and Policy Development, and University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development, 1997, 250 pp. Family Support America, 312-338-0900.

This ready-to-use training program contains a week's worth of activities, handouts, discussion ideas, and mini-lectures to help staff begin to develop the skills and knowledge they need to act as true partners with families. Written by a team of

seasoned practitioners, trainers, and researchers, the curriculum draws on group experience rather than "classroom" learning, active participation, hands-on practice, and peer interaction and sharing. With this detailed road map, the trainer can guide staff who are new to family support through a validating and supportive training experience.

*Making Room at the Table*, Elizabeth Jeppson, Josie Thomas, Anthony Markward, Joanne Kelly, Gail Koser, and David Diehl, 1997, 72 pp. Family Support America, 312-338-0900.

With this program of guided activities, families, program planners, staff, policymakers, and other key players develop the awareness and skills they will need to work as a team in planning services and carrying out programs.

*National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs*, National PTA, 1998, 42 pp. National PTA, 312-670-6782.

Developed by the PTA in cooperation with education and parent involvement professionals, standards for communicating, parenting, learning, volunteering, school decision-making and advocacy, and collaborating with community were created to be used in conjunction with other national standards and reform initiatives in support of children's learning and success.

*Partnerships for Change*, 1997, two videos and a 50-page guide. Family Communications, Inc., and University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development. Available from Family Support America, 312-338-0900.

This video-supported training program stresses partnership, shared decision-making, local governance, and collaboration. Staff members and parents are trained together to gain skills in identifying strengths, communicating needs, and reaching out to others in the community. Available in Spanish and English.

## resource GUIDES

As part of the *Making Connections* Technical Assistance/ Resource Center, the following Resource Guides are scheduled to be produced before the end of 2001:

**Economic Opportunities for Families**

- Connecting Families to Jobs
- Building Family Assets

**Enhancing Social Networks**

- Family Support
- Residents Engaged in Strengthening Families and Neighborhoods

**Building High-Quality Services and Supports**

- Building More Effective Community Schools
- Community Safety and Justice
- Child Care for Communities
- Meeting the Housing Needs of Families
- Community Partnerships to Support Families
- Improving Health Care for Children and Families
- Developing Community Responses to Domestic Violence

**Techniques for Advancing a Family Strengthening Agenda in Neighborhoods**

- Using Strategic Communication to Support Families and Neighborhoods
- Connecting Families to Computers and On-Line Networks
- Outcomes-Based Accountability

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