



ASYLUM HILL NEIGHBORHOOD HARTFORD CONNECTICUT

2017 CASE STUDY

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A PLACE-BASED INITIATIVE

Over the past decade, there has been a slow but steady increase in the number of “place-based population change initiatives.” The goal of a place-based initiative is to bring overall change to a particular geographic area. Rather than implementing a particular stand-alone program or project, the focus has been on identifying particular neighborhoods, and taking a holistic/comprehensive approach to change.

For example, an organization may create an after school program, a food program, a gardening project, a lead paint abatement project, a tutoring program, or any number of individual stand-alone initiatives. And these projects may very well achieve their goals and provide measurable help to participants. But even in success, they do not necessarily change the underlying environment, or the social or service networks. However, in communities across the nation, there have been an increasing number of initiatives that look to developing a comprehensive approach and are investing in a defined place/neighborhood in order to fundamentally transform the entire neighborhood and its residents.

POPULATION CHANGE LEARNING COMMUNITY

In 2014, representatives from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and the Brighter Futures Initiative were invited to participate in the Population Change Learning Community. This community of learners includes groups from areas across the US including the Brownsville Partnership – Brooklyn, NY; Brighter Futures – Hartford, CT; Community Studios – Sarasota and St. Petersburg, FL; Eastside Community - United Way of San Antonio, TX; Growing Together - Tulsa, OK; Magnolia Community Initiative - Los Angeles, CA; the Amani Neighborhood –

Milwaukee, WI; Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation – Pine Ridge Reservation, SD; Vital Village Network – Boston, MA; as well as Avenues of Change, Guildford West - Surrey, British Columbia, Canada.

Formed to create an exchange between practitioners, researchers, and funders, the Population Change Learning Community aims to assist site-based practitioners supporting place-based efforts. Members of the Learning Community also include the UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families, and Communities, the Wisdom Exchange, Boston Medical Center, University of Wisconsin Extension of Milwaukee County, the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston Working Cities Challenge, the Community Foundation of North Texas, and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families, and Communities provides coordination and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation provides the financial support for the Learning Community and provided funding for this case study.

It was through the Population Change Learning Community group exchanges, participating site based teams identified their common struggle to understand what roles and functions are being used to support a community change process, assess how well they are actually

performing these functions, and ultimately determine what of these functions are necessary to actually drive positive change. While much has been written about the need for support entities for multi-sector place based endeavors, whether called backbone organizations, integrators, intermediaries, or lead agencies, little has been captured as to how best to organize and deliver on this role.

THE CASE STUDY PURPOSE

It was determined by the Learning Community that efforts to improve outcomes in place-based efforts would be greatly enhanced by sharing the progress and challenges of those us having assumed the support role for place based endeavors. Site based members of the Learning Community self-selected into a case study design team and/or volunteered to administer the case study within their respective communities.

We recognize that the decision-making process in each place-based initiative is different; the demographics in each initiative are unique; and the range of the specific programs and projects for each initiative vary. However, the goal of this case study for each community is to better understand the practice of how best to respond to the on-going development and delivery of the support and services needed for multi-sector place based endeavors. And in each case, this study is informed by the collective experience of, and written by, those actually responsible for the place-based work in their community.

The case study was designed to better understand how, and what, the Learning Community members have determined to be the support roles and functions, and how each site has organized to accomplish their work. In order to best understand this, the Population Change Learning Community intended to answer these key questions:

- **What are the roles/functions necessary to support a multi-sector initiative trying to improve a place based population?**
- **What operating or management structures are the most promising for organizing and sustaining this work (delivering on the functions)?**
- **How do we know (assess) if we are effectively delivering on these functions?**
- **How do we effectively resource (human, financial, technical) this support?**

By relying on local stakeholders to share their experiences and perspectives, and make meaning of those insights, the aim is to strengthen our shared understanding of the elements of effectiveness for those supporting multi-sector place based endeavors.

Through our use of a guided exploration of what has happened and what has been learned from those responsible for supporting a place-based endeavor, the Population Change Learning

Community has now generated 9 site-specific case studies.

What follows is a case study of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving's Brighter Futures Initiative efforts in the Asylum Hill neighborhood. Representatives from the Brighter Futures Initiative "anchor agencies" entered into this process with a commitment to ask questions and gather the perspectives of participating agencies, residents, and others, that would allow for a deeper level of understanding of the full range of functions and capacities of support entities for multi-sector place based efforts.

Significant effort was made to gather information from a diverse range of participants. Nevertheless, we acknowledge and recognize that it was not possible to speak with everyone, and as a result it is impossible to represent everyone's views and experiences in our local efforts. We recognize that there are many people within the Asylum Hill neighborhood and from throughout our community who contribute their time, effort, and resources to improve the Asylum Hill neighborhood and the lives of Asylum Hill residents.

HARTFORD'S LOCAL STORY

Founded in 1637, Hartford is among the oldest cities in the United States. It is home to the nation's oldest public art museum, the Wadsworth Athenaeum; the oldest publicly funded park, Bushnell Park; the oldest continuously published newspaper, The Hartford Courant; the second-oldest secondary school, Hartford Public; Trinity College, an elite, private liberal arts college, and the Mark Twain House where the author wrote his most famous works and raised his family, among other historically significant attractions. In 1868, resident Mark Twain wrote, "Of all the beautiful towns it has been my fortune to see, this is the chief."

Following the American Civil War, Hartford was the richest city in the United States for several decades. Nicknamed the "Insurance Capital of the World", Hartford still houses many insurance company headquarters, and insurance is the region's major industry. Yet, despite Connecticut's frequent ranking as the state with the highest per capita income, Hartford is one of the poorest cities in the nation.

Hartford's population of nearly 125,000 people is diverse with 43 percent Hispanic or Latino residents, 38 percent black or African-American, and 15 percent white. This is in stark contrast to the surrounding suburbs. As expressed by current Hartford residents, "Hartford is a very diverse community in which sixty (60) languages are spoken. The City attracts and welcomes new immigrants." "Hartford is home to migrants from several continents. It has a rich cultural tapestry. Yet, because most residents are in the lower income brackets, there are many employment challenges."

Currently, 38% of Hartford's residents live in poverty, compared to 11% of Connecticut's overall population. Highlighting the socio-economic disparity between Hartford and its suburbs 83%

of Hartford's jobs are filled by commuters from neighboring towns who earn over \$80,000, while 75% of Hartford residents who commute to work in other towns earn just \$40,000. Unemployment in Hartford is at 7.1% while neighboring West Hartford is 4.2%. This disparity of income indicates a real lack of financial stability for many Hartford families. It further indicates that job training and development is not really designed to meet the needs of the residents so that they can work where they live.

Housing is also inadequate. To address this, Habitat for Humanity obtained large tracts of land to help provide housing for low to moderate-income people but this did not come close to meeting the needs of the residents. The United Way's information and referral service, 211, received 70,501 service requests from Hartford residents in 2014 and more than 52 percent of those requests were for assistance with basic needs such as housing, food, utilities and furniture. Forty-four percent of Hartford families with children live in poverty, and 77% of students in the Hartford Public Schools receive free or reduced priced lunches.

The motto of the city is "Hartford Has It," indicating that everything you need can be found in Hartford, but for many families living in poverty this does not ring true. "As a diverse city, Hartford is full of world-class talent, is musically rich and yet families are living in crisis and poverty." Many regard this as the result of institutional racism and decisions made by an elite group from the business community that did not include the input from the people that actually resided there. A resident's view of the city reflects both the promise and challenges of the City. "Hartford has many assets such as a beautiful parks system and the greatest acreage of parks per capita in the country. Yet at the same time, we never have the resources to keep them clean and maintained for use."

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION

Hartford Foundation for Public Giving

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is the community foundation for Hartford and 28 surrounding communities. The Foundation, made possible by gifts from thousands of generous individuals, families and organizations, has awarded grants of more than \$700 million

since it's founding over 90 years ago. As part of its investments, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving has supported the Brighter Futures Initiative for the past twenty-five years. The Initiative was designed to prepare young children to enter school ready to learn and to succeed during the early grades. It is built on the premise that young children who are healthy, have high-quality early childhood experiences, and have families who are supported in their childrearing, will experience success.

THE BRIGHTER FUTURES FAMILY CENTERS

Within the past twenty years of the Brighter Futures Initiative, the six Family Centers have experienced much success in their efforts to improve child outcomes; collaborate with formal institutions; to utilize new approaches towards the development of place-based efforts; and to motivate parents to work with their peers and neighbors to bring about change and improve the quality of life in the neighborhoods served by these Centers.

Most of the parents and families come to a Family Center because they are in need of resources to support themselves or their families. The directors, staff and volunteers who interface with these families continuously strive to respond to these needs and support them in meeting their challenges.

As described by a parent, "parents who formed the community were able to re-design the family centers by creating new theories of change; coordinating new services; and establishing a new model and approach for a family center."

The renewed theory of change holds that outcomes for a population of children and families depend on the day-to-day actions of individuals and organizations supporting families and other neighborhood residents. Progressive changes in these actions contribute to shifts in family and neighborhood conditions as well as changes in individual health and parenting behaviors. Taken together, all of these small shifts build toward longer-term improved outcomes for children.

This new theory of change resulted in adopting new tools, new use of data, new approaches to capturing and defining the Family Center way, and parents were invited in specifically as co-designers and planners as context experts within our work.

ASYLUM HILL FAMILY CENTER STORY

Asylum Hill is a very diverse neighborhood with families that have resided here for generations. There is also a steady influx of migrant groups that moved here voluntarily and a significant group of involuntary migrants or refugees who

have been relocated to the neighborhood. The Brighter Futures Asylum Hill Family Center, administered and operated by Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Hartford, has become the hub of neighborhood activity as old and new residents seek solutions for the many challenges they face. In addition to meeting their needs, information is shared about leadership development and civic engagement in the Asylum Hill Community.

A particular hallmark of the Asylum Hill Family Center is the dedication to leadership development and encouraging parents and residents to become civically engaged in activities throughout the city. The Director of the Asylum Hill Family Center describes her view of cultivating leadership and building social capital as having 3 parts: "We are committed to investments in parents to strengthen families, build resilience, and to contribute to community change efforts. We also aim to build civic capacity, strengthen neighbor-to-neighbor connections and offer community-building strategies that mobilize citizens to serve and be the catalyst for the change they wish to see in the neighborhood in which they work, live, and raise their children. We believe these things are sure to lessen disparities and produce outcomes at the individual, family, and community level for the benefit of all."

This in-depth exploration will focus specifically on the role of Asylum Hill Family Center in



Parent leaders and staff learn new skills together while learning from each other.

developing, spreading and sustaining leadership and civic engagement among parents in the Asylum Hill neighborhood. It will further explore how parents transition from service recipients to community leaders and change agents and the role of the Family Center in supporting this process.

“Our learning that evolved within the Brighter Futures Initiative is that you must understand that building capacity takes time, effort, and dedication. The first step is to create an organizational culture that supports and recognizes parents as partners, leaders, and co-designers in program development.”

The Asylum Hill Family Center Director describes the parent leaders as “civically involved individuals that we call Parent Ambassadors.” These Parent Ambassadors are concerned parents and professionals who want to become catalysts for change in their community and to improve overall conditions for their children, families and their neighbors with the overarching goal of their children’s success in school and beyond.

The Parent Ambassador role was to carry out the mission and to spread the vision of the Brighter Futures Initiative. Parent Ambassadors are recruited because in their early interactions with the Family Center staff and other parents, they display characteristics indicative of leadership qualities, show good judgment, and have time to commit to training, learning, and volunteering in their interactions with Center staff. Staff then interview these parents to see what other complimentary skills and knowledge they

possess and if they have a personal desire to be involved and to work collectively with others.

The staff, Parent Ambassadors and volunteers of the Family Centers routinely participate in jointly held workshops, seminars, and other training opportunities to enhance their leadership skills and, in turn, impart related knowledge and skills to other parents within their neighborhood. The training and coaching is long and extensive covering the basic elements of leadership, self-discovery, the Family Center and larger organizational mission; guiding principles; services; program goals; civic engagement and their community. It is the community of learning, support, recognition, social connections, and having meaningful roles and functions within the Center and community that contribute to retention of these volunteers.



Parents join with community partners to provide activities that will help children be ready for school and support a healthy lifestyle.

Parent Ambassadors typically have different interests as to their leadership activities and level of involvement. Some of the areas of responsibility they assume are largely due to what is currently happening in their lives and those of their family. 'Family First' remains the motto at the Family Centers. While some may

maintain involvement in one particular interest area, others continue to develop new ideas and lead programs that add to the array of services at the Family Center.

Some Parent Ambassadors occupy different roles within the Family Center and the wider

community at the same time. These opportunities can also be used as a career pathway and for parents to become more formally engaged in civic leadership. For some Parent Ambassadors, these roles and responsibilities compliment and augment career pathways, in addition to fostering personal satisfaction and hope.



Community Café Training- Breaking down barriers and deepening social connections.

CASE STUDY EXPLORATION

Within the Case Study, questions were asked across 5 domains that the Population Change Learning Community determined would shed light on the roles and functions of the support organization (The Asylum Hill Family Center) considered critical to be effective in driving a community change process:

- **Increase the ability of network partners to improve outcomes and practice a shared vision;**
- **Measure and share data to guide the effort;**
- **Innovate and improve through active participation in the organized change effort;**
- **Support the human element of change; and**
- **Use networks to sustain, scale and spread.**

INCREASE THE ABILITY OF NETWORK PARTNERS TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES AND PRACTICE A SHARED VISION

The Asylum Hill Family Center's approach to practicing a shared vision and improving outcomes for young children requires all partners, staff and volunteers to adopt common practices and be trained on how best to support the transition from service recipient to parent leader. All Family Center staff is trained in the fundamental philosophies of family support and engagement. The Family Center Director emphasizes that moving these philosophies to become practice is critical so that "all

staff, program administrators, interns, volunteers and partners are trained and coached to support a welcoming environment, greet families warmly, be helpful, and ensure families are left with their dignity intact when they leave the Center."

One resident, also a Parent Ambassador at the Family Center, expressed it this way "the vision is to promote the well-being of all families in the community through intentional programming that can improve the lives of citizens of the community." Another added, "I think the shared vision is to improve the quality of life for families and to empower families." This desire to have the involvement of various types of community organizations, of parents and concerned leaders, demonstrates their interconnectedness and cooperation within the neighborhood. Simply put by one parent leader, "The vision of the Brighter Futures Family Centers is to improve the quality of life for families and empower them."

MEASURE AND SHARE DATA TO GUIDE THE EFFORT

The six Family Centers worked together to develop, test and adapt new survey tools, build their data collection process and introduce new data and visuals that enable them to improve their organizational practice and motivate others to contribute to child outcomes. The Family Centers have constructed a data and measurement system that aims to concurrently capture information about staff actions, family and neighborhood conditions, their organizational culture and learning environment, and gather and share population level outcome on children.

For example, the recent administration of the Early Development Instrument (EDI) in Hartford, a population measure of child well-being and school readiness, showed that only one-third of Hartford's Kindergarten are on-track in terms of their overall development in regards to their readiness for kindergarten. Data from the Early Development Instrument revealed that many of the children in the Asylum Hill neighborhood showed considerable strength in the area of Physical Readiness for School at 95% ready and in the area of Emotional Maturity at 63% ready. However, overall Social Competency at 26% kindergarten ready and Communication and General Knowledge at 20% kindergarten ready were two of the indicators that raised concerns. In response to this situation, wide-scale training of parents and leaders of grass-roots organizations was introduced to assist residents in understanding and making sense of the data.

Parents and other community partners were taught how to utilize community cafes to share information throughout the neighborhood and galvanize the community. The community cafes were held because everyone, including leaders and parents, believed that "people most affected by issues should be co-creators of the solution." One neighborhood association leader noted,

"when communities are given a voice in their own affairs, the resulting sharing of power and a feeling of self-determination restores self-confidence and creates an impetus towards sustainable change efforts."

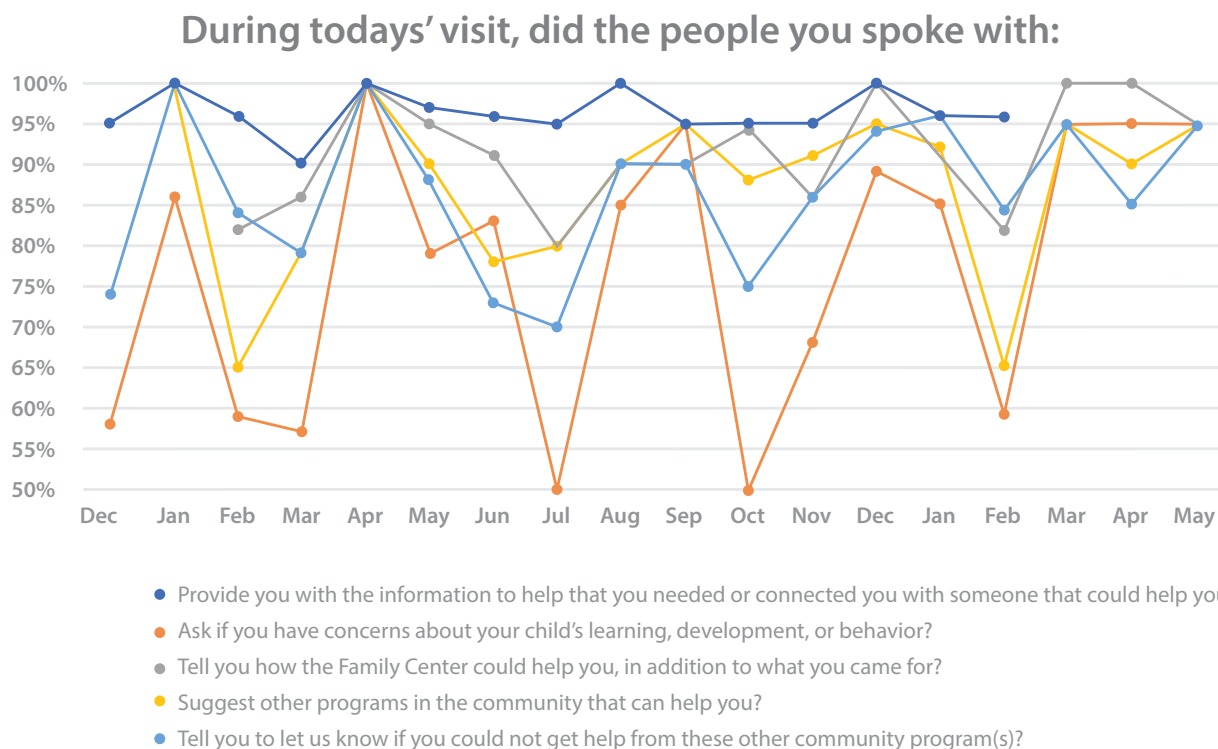
The six Family Centers have also been collecting three other sets of data over last year. These include:

- **Experiences of Care Survey (Monthly data collected on the family experience of culture and practice at Family Centers)**
- **Family Survey (A quarterly Parent/Resident Survey of Neighborhood and Family Conditions)**
- **Practice Change Survey (An annual survey on the organizational culture and practice assessment by Family Center staff, leadership and volunteers).**

The Centers spend time reviewing the results, and look for connections between the parent and resident experience and other data sets, program outcomes or available community indicator data. For example, in the Family Wellness Survey there is a set of questions that focus on neighborhood perceptions. Responses from families indicate that they feel connected and comfortable in their neighborhood. Interviewees commented that they feel a part of the neighborhood they live in because their involvement with the Family Center introduced them to the neighborhood association. Their involvement in the Family Center and neighborhood association helps to keep them informed and fosters better neighbor-to-neighbor interactions.

In the data collected in March 2016, 71% of respondents from the Asylum Hill Neighborhood strongly agreed with the statement “I work with others to make my neighborhood a better place”. In the five other Family Center neighborhoods, respondents that strongly agreed with this same statement ranged from 23% at the lowest and 54% at the highest. Also in the Asylum Hill Neighborhood, 71% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement “I feel a part of the neighborhood I live in”, while the range of respondents answering that they strongly agree in the other Family Centers neighborhoods is from 18% to 59%.

Brighter Futures Initiative Family Center Experience of Care Survey Results (December 2015-June 2017)



Asylum Hill Family Center understands these positive perceptions as stemming from the consistent efforts to build leaders and support civic engagement within the neighborhood. These positive perceptions promote a sense of belonging, foster connections between neighbors, and support a sense of hope that working together residents can create positive changes in their neighborhood.

A parent leader explained, "I am getting the information myself and I can contribute to changes to make things better for my family." According to another leader, "I like that the Police Community Service Officer is at every meeting and that I know him personally. Hearing from him firsthand what is happening in my community and what the crime rate is makes me feel comfortable about the safety of my family and my children in particular."

INNOVATE AND IMPROVE THROUGH ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE CHANGE EFFORT

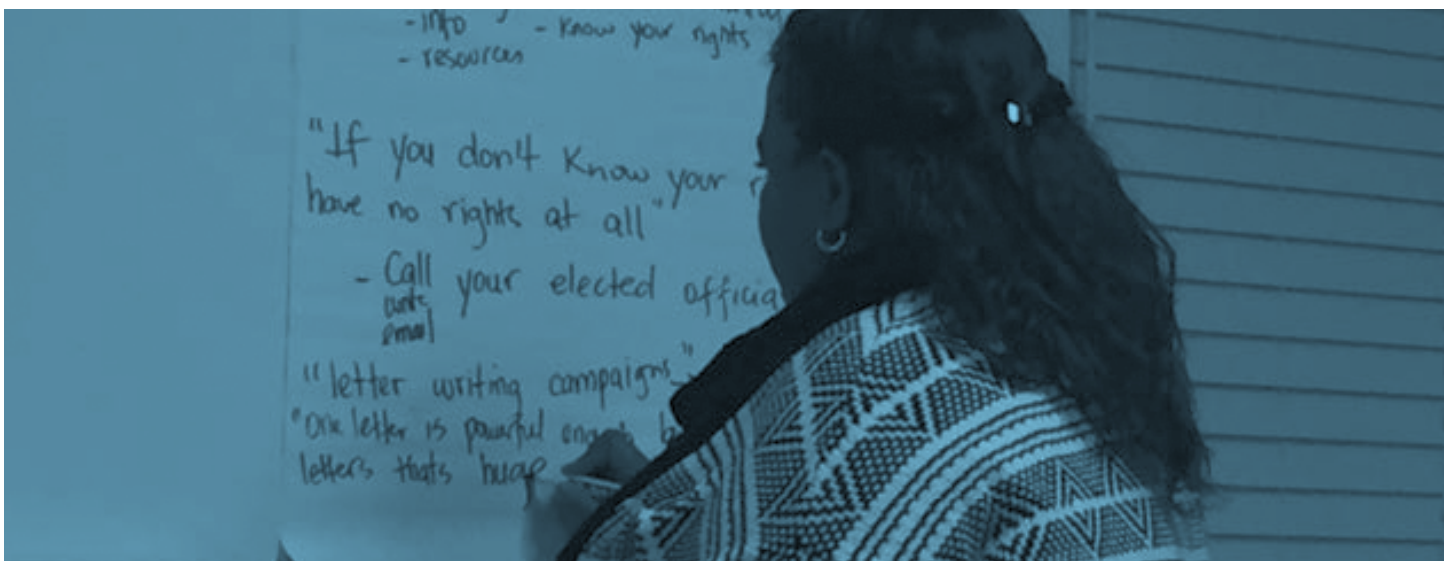
The staff, Parent Ambassadors, and volunteers, who contribute to the program development and implementation at the Family Center, have a very clear way of explaining how they approach change. They listen keenly to the concerns shared and requests made by program participants and discern opportunities for responding to these needs. Staff and Parent Ambassadors are trained to assess situations and to identify resources that are needed and develop strategies for launching new programs.

In analyzing their data and focusing on the results of the Experience of Care Survey in the Fall of 2016, the Asylum Hill Family Center discovered that families were being asked by staff "Did anyone ask if you have concerns about your child's learning development or behavior?" only 50% of the time. The first step in their change process was to share the data collectively with parents and staff to determine what were the barriers to families being asked this question. Some of

what was learned was that staff felt uncomfortable asking the question for two reasons. One, they did not think the question was asked in a strength-based way, which made it uncomfortable for them to ask. This was especially true for new staff working with new families. Two, some of the newer staff and interns did not know what to do if parents did have concerns because they were not aware of community supports and resources that could help.

The Family Center then used Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) cycles to test out ideas as to what would positively effect their next round of data. As described by a staff member,

"We, as the support organization, had process meetings with the parent leaders to guide the work and support the actions that needed to be taken. We collectively problem solved obstacles to progress. We then listen to the feedback from other community members and incorporated that into next steps."



Parent leaders bring the community together to discuss issues families are facing with immigration. The goal was to connect them with resources that could help and ensure they understood their rights and options.

Staff and parents collectively decided to engage in a “Lunch and Learn” series that would help staff find ways to frame the question in a way that was comfortable for them and get immediate feedback from parents if what was being asked was understood, respectful and experienced as strength based. During their “Lunch and Learn” series, they also discussed the importance of being information rich about the resources that exist to help parents if they do have concerns.

This series also let newer staff know that both staff and parents are a resource to each other and they should access seasoned and /or more knowledgeable people in the content areas where they felt less sure or prepared. While seemingly obvious, they realized that the training had to be strengthened and be more directed, beginning with the orientation process for newer staff and interns. After implementing their strategy, they continue to monitor their data in response to this question and use the data to guide and sustain their improvement efforts.

SUPPORT THE HUMAN ELEMENT OF CHANGE

The staff and parent ambassadors are trained to develop an awareness of gender, cultural differences or any other issues that may lead to resistance or feeling disconnected. Two of the interviewees shared it is the responsibility of the agency staff and leaders who have to adjust the ways in which services are provided until families are able to work through their own challenges. As families visit the Family Center, the staff and parent ambassadors pool their ideas and create significant “new beginnings” for neighborhood families.

One of the resident interviewees referred to a case that involved a parent who was raised in numerous (13) foster homes. During a neighbor-to-neighbor

event at the Family Center, this parent shared that she had never had a birthday party in her life. A group of Parent Ambassadors arranged to bring the community together to provide the experience for the family. The Parent Ambassadors also used this opportunity to introduce group processes that help establish cooperation and collective work. The group established group “rules” so Parent Ambassadors, staff and families knew what they were expected to do in order or to make the event successful, and it was. From this, they developed a Birthday Club that is still being run totally by Parent Ambassadors once every month.

One of the members of the Family Center made another comment regarding the importance of diversity and inclusivity which also reflects the need at times to re-define or re-conceptualize terms or group rules. “The Fatherhood program focuses on the improvement of conditions for families in the Asylum Hill area. Some programs have either age or gender restrictions but in the case of the Fatherhood Initiative, if a male is a stepfather or even considering becoming a father, he is now welcomed into the community.”

Family Center staff and Parent Ambassadors made a concerted effort to include many older adults in responsive programming and encourage several to lead community cafes and to be trained as parent leaders. They noted that since many of the migrant and refugee households are multigenerational, the older adults play significant roles in shaping the values of successive generations, and some spend an inordinate amount of time caring for young children.

As the holders of tradition, the Family Center staff and parent leaders recognized that older adults must be included in any community responses that enable children to assimilate, integrate and to develop into useful contributors

to society in the future. It was reported that the results of such inclusion could be seen in the mixed audiences that show up during community or agency sponsored events. Additional successes become evident during teachable moments in the Family Center where previously gained skills and knowledge by older adults, proved beneficial in successive staff and leadership training.

WHEN ENTIRE FAMILIES ARE INCLUDED IN THE EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES, THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SCALING AND SPREADING NEW APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY PROBLEM SOLVING BECOME MORE EVIDENT.

USE NETWORKS TO SUSTAIN, SCALE AND SPREAD

As shared by a community resident, “residents have been encouraged to communicate freely with each other and to use every available opportunity to spread valuable information about services, programs, opportunities to improve the general community. At the same time, people need training and encouragement to express themselves and they need community acceptance.”

As described by another resident, “Community building is the only way. I would like to see more parents and children working through different issues together. If more families and youths could accomplish change, this could result in more people being able to access services and opportunities. The building of a safe community with better jobs and available

pre-school programs should be an important part of the community efforts.”

At the same time, community residents also expressed the view that everyone should be acknowledged for their contribution to assisting residents to sustain momentum through their tireless efforts, “when everyone in the community is encouraged to join forces to better themselves and the community, then whatever they contribute, this should be regarded as shared community strength.”

Asylum Hill Family Center has successfully prepared their trained leaders to participate in activities that benefit other community initiatives and organizations. For example, through the active engagement of the Family Center in the State of Connecticut’s Two Generational Program, parents had a seat at the table in all phases of this work, from development to implementation. They served as governance committee members with responsibilities for overseeing the grant and making presentations about the program at a national conference.

Parent leaders also were active in designing and providing a statewide parent academy to raise awareness of the two-generational approach to services for families. A staff person from the Family Center noted, “Parents began to understand that these activities result in personal empowerment.” She listed a number of accomplishments made by Parent Ambassadors in the development of this program, which resulted in a sizeable grant to the Greater Hartford area.

It was also noted that changes at the local, state, and national levels, as well as changes within the staff at the Family Center, really affect the change process. These, too, can be big barriers to progress.

The availability of sustained funding has played a role in enabling the Family Center to manage these changes and sustain its work. As was noted, “Having consistent funding for parent leadership and opportunities to support parents in the work is very helpful for building the capacities that lead to larger community change.”

LESSONS LEARNED

From extended interactions with parents, the Family Center has come to realize that parents find power and voice by advocating change first at the Family Center (through sustained support and coaching), and then, in turn, their children’s school (again with support and coaching), and then again within the larger community. Leadership development is not linear or easily formularized. Every person has their own leadership journey and with parents, in particular, their journey is deeply linked to the development of their children.

Parents must reach a certain level of stability in their own life to take on new roles and responsibilities. The concept of bandwidth and the sheer amount of time available in each parent’s life is critical and must be recognized. One can literally provide the same exact inputs to two different parents and get drastically different results. Therefore, this work requires supporting and honoring different stages of leadership development and providing opportunities for parents to “try out” their skills in safe supported environments. The Asylum Hill Family Center Director explained,

“it takes tremendous time and effort from the professionals who train, provide the support, and seek out opportunities for parents to truly “create a place at the table for parents”.

The Asylum Hill Family Center also continues to focus on improving its own organizational practice by moving from simply collecting data for external reporting to using a structured approach for ongoing reflection, testing of new ideas and continuous improvement.

The new approach to data and measurement underscores not only the importance of timely feedback, but also surfaces opportunities through which staff are able to foster continued parent engagement and to identify potential leadership interests. Given this data, staff has gained a clearer understanding of how the encouragement given to parents to participate in programs and activities influences the building and deepening of engagement. The combined effort of the director, staff and Parent Ambassadors of the Asylum Hill Family Center constantly promote organized change.

The Center believes that building parent leaders is one of the best ways to create sustainable positive changes for children, families, and communities. One parent leader shared this summary of the whole experience, “Program participants at the Family Centers have been known to improve their resilience to periodic life stresses and to in turn help other organizations and their communities build capacity so that this support could be continued for others.”

CONCLUSION

The Asylum Hill Family Center has shown that parent leaders who are initially trained to meet the needs of parents and families in their communities develop the capacity to function effectively at higher levels within the civic structure of their communities. Earlier Brighter Futures reports indicate that through the small steps taken by the Asylum Hill Family Center and its cadre of parent leaders, a clear pathway can be made to increase participation at the broader community and citywide structures. Bringing parent voice and other voices that are the most affected by the issues at hand, into the dialogue early to help create solutions, seeing their ideas reflected in what is implemented, and witnessing a positive change is what fuels them to continue.

The belief is that this increased civic engagement is a first step that will ultimately result in a better quality of life for parents and families. As summarized the Director of the Family Center, “skill levels have improved, the community has become more integrated and there is a growing awareness that the families who benefit and learn from what is currently being offered and the changes that are taking place today, will

be able to sustain these efforts and to take the initiative to continue to spread progressive ideas to the next generation in the years to come.”

As one parent leader shared, “When my daughter saw me taking on leadership roles in my community it made her believe she could do the same in her school and community.” Once a person sees that they can work with others to

create positive change, and see that change actually occurs, it inspires hope in a better future. It will not be hard to measure the ripple effects of inspiring hope in future generations after they see it as their right and obligation to engage civically and that their voice matters.



Neighborhood children who participated in the Children's Cafe share what they love in their neighborhood and what they would like to change.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The case study team would like to thank the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation for the support of this project. Understanding the “how” of what it takes to support transformation changes in neighborhoods is complex but this project really gave us a chance to have a much deeper understanding of this through the case studies and site visits. Many thanks also to the UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families and Communities who provided coordination support for the Population Change Learning Community. They were so inclusive in all their actions and fostered a learning community where the projects and outcomes are truly the result of a shared vision. The coordination of the site visits was so well organized by the team and the site hosts and it supported a very meaningful rich learning experience for all.

In addition, a thank you to the case study team in Hartford for their dedication to this project which includes Joy Butler, Consultant, Moureen Bish, The Director of the Asylum Hill Family Center, Joyce Bosco, The Brighter Futures Family Center Circuit Rider and the CBO, Hartford Foundation of Public Giving, Catholic Charities for encouraging staff, partners, parents/residents to support this project. Many thanks to all the interviewees for their time, willingness, and honesty in exploring what it takes to support positive community change.



METHODOLOGY

THE PROCESS

This Case Study seeks to understand what type of support a parent or resident needs, and what role and functions would a neighborhood organization need to assume, to support a resident change and positive growth in their neighborhood.

Out of an initial pool of about twenty (20) invitees, sixteen (16) respondents participated in the interviews. Respondents were all carefully selected because of their known involvement in the Asylum Hill Family Center, other civic engagement city agencies or non-profit organizations in the communities of Hartford. The gender distribution was fairly equitable.

There was no conscious attempt to have the respondents proportionately reflect the composition of the Greater Hartford population in relation to racial or ethnic classification. As a result, seven were Caucasian, six were African American or black, and three were of Hispanic origin. Following the first round of the interviewing process that ended in May the case study team realized that more in-depth information was needed.

The second group of interviewees was comprised of nine additional people which resulted in one more white male, the Director of Early Childhood Investment at the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, one African-American woman, the chair of the Asylum Hill Neighborhood Association and resident, two African-American male parent leaders, two Latino women and three East Indian women. Each of the last seven people interviewed were parent leaders. Respondents were placed in each of three groups or categories, namely:

- 1. Support organization – Staff of Catholic Charities working at the Asylum Hill Family Center**
- 2. Parent leaders who are residents in the Asylum Hill Neighborhood and actively involved in the Asylum Hill Family Center; and**
- 3. Community Partners – Partner organizations that play an active role in supporting quality of life on the Asylum Hill neighborhood and work in partnership with the Asylum Hill Family Center.**

THE INTERVIEWS

Most of the interviews were conducted over a six-week period between March 29th and May 10th, 2016. At a much later date in October, a few other parent leaders and partners were interviewed. Each respondent was provided with a copy of the research instrument (structured interview schedule) prior to the interviews. Each interview lasted approximately two hours.

Members of the Hartford Team and the respondents agreed on the venue. Since most of the respondents worked or lived in the Hartford area, interviews were conducted at their offices, their homes, or in public spaces that was convenient for all parties. Regardless of the venue, there were no visual or auditory distractions during the interview. The aim or purpose in site selection for each interview was to ensure that each respondent was familiar with the environment and felt comfortable in sharing his or her perspectives on the networks and related issues.

The questions were not necessarily asked in the order in which they appeared in the instrument. We also provided modified questions to particular participants to gain the information that was most relevant to their relationship with the project. All respondents were given an opportunity to elaborate on specific points or to seek clarification from the interviewer, if they so desired.

Consent forms were prepared in advance and were signed at the beginning of each interview. Appreciation was expressed to all for their contribution to the case study.

The Hartford Team appreciates the quality of the data provided by each respondent and it also recognizes the limitations of the data, given the small size of the sample. The data collected, therefore, may not necessarily reflect the views of a broader cross-section of those who work tirelessly in organizations or agencies affiliated with the networks, or who volunteer continuously on behalf of the citizens of Hartford so that families, youths and communities may benefit from place-based efforts.

THE INSTRUMENT

All sites used a structured interview schedule that was developed by the Population Change Learning Community. The average number of questions on the schedule for each of the groupings or categories of respondents was 23. The introductory questions were all similar since they focused on the respondents' perceptions of the city of Hartford from a socio-demographic perspective. We also provided modified questions to particular participants to gain the information that was most relevant to their relationship with the project.

As the data was being reviewed and analyzed and coded, the Hartford Team of Joyce Bosco, Moureen Bish and Joy Butler focused on some of the key words and phrases used by the respondents in order to identify themes. Coding was done by hand and two definitive concepts encapsulate everything that was shared by the respondents. The two concepts that were interspersed throughout the data are: Intentionality and Interconnectedness.

POPULATION CHANGE LEARNING COMMUNITY

Purpose

- Create a learning environment that accelerates learning and progress, and builds camaraderie and shared purpose, across various sites and communities working to improve population outcomes within their respective geographies.
- Connect Community/Initiative Teams with researchers, innovators and problem solvers (from various sectors) to further inform the learning process, overcome barriers and improve local actions.
- Identify and improve the necessary capacities to be successful in this work - including the organizing strategies, operational structures and measurement system needed to achieve population level success.

Learning Areas

- How did we create the conditions that lead to positive change?
- Are we getting better results?

Case Study Design Process and Approach

The goal of the case study is to better understand the practice of how best to respond to the on-going development and delivery of the support needed for multi-sector place based endeavors, informed by the collective experience of those actually responsible for the place based work. Local teams entered into this process with a commitment to ask questions and gather the perspectives of participating agencies, residents and others, that would allow for a deeper level

of understanding of the full range of functions and capacities of support entities for multi-sector place based efforts.

While what was learned through the sharing of our experience in this role, and from the stories of those involved with us, is intended to benefit each local effort, we believe the case studies can also contribute to other's collective efforts on behalf of children, youth, families and communities. To that end, the Population Change Learning Community has adopted a two-phase approach for the case study process.

In phase one, we sought to document the collective experience of those actually responsible for and involved in the local place-based work. Each case study is intended to be a feedback source for those sites participating in the Population Change Learning Community. The process provided the opportunity for those involved to reflect on and make sense of their individual and collective action. The findings from each locale allow us to articulate the on-the-ground experiences of the support entity, or entities, that provides one or more support functions. By relying on local stakeholders to share their experiences and perspectives, and make meaning of those insights, the aim is to strengthen our shared understanding of the elements of effectiveness for those supporting multi-sector place based endeavors. Through our use of a guided exploration of what has happened and what has been learned from those responsible for supporting a place-based endeavor, the Population Change Learning Community has now generated 9 site-specific case studies.

In phase two, these 9 site-specific case studies serve as source documents with which to collectively analyze place based work. Sites within the Population Change Learning Community participate in other well recognized place based efforts such as Promise Neighborhoods, StriveTogether, Working Cities Challenge, IHI SCALE initiative, Purpose Built Neighborhoods, United Way, Avenues of Change in British Columbia, Mobilizing Action for Resilient Communities (MARC), among others. Each of these endeavors have been informed or influenced by at least one, if not many more, theories or frameworks on how to change at a neighborhood or community level. By applying some of these different theories or frameworks on how to drive community or systems change, this subsequent analysis of the collective work of the 9 sites will provide new perspectives for the sites within the Population Change Learning Community to deepen their learning, as well as provide information and insight on the support role to the larger field of population based community initiatives.

For more information regarding this Case Study or the Population Change Learning Community, please contact Alexis Moreno, Case Study Coordinator at alexisgeemoreno@gmail.com or Patricia Bowie, Population Change Learning Community Project Lead at patriciabowie@me.com.

DOMAINS EXPLORED WITHIN THE CASE STUDY

INCREASE THE ABILITY OF NETWORK PARTNERS TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES AND PRACTICE A SHARED VISION

Information was gathered about:

- Impetus for working together
- Initial goals
- Membership criteria and member roles/responsibilities
- Network coordination
- Development of a shared vision and guiding principles
- Necessary knowledge and skill sets
- Decision making processes

MEASURE AND SHARE DATA TO GUIDE THE EFFORT

Information was gathered about:

- Local insights generated through data
- Motivations for using data
- Data sharing processes
- Use of data
- Additional data needed
- Resident involvement in data-related efforts

INNOVATE AND IMPROVE THROUGH ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE CHANGE EFFORT

Information was gathered about:

Information was sought about how and what changes, improvements and innovations happened throughout the effort:

- Major phases and developments
- Most significant changes
- Detecting a need for change
- Taking initiative to make a change
- Moving through a change process
- Roles of partners and missing partners
- Results of change efforts
- Inventions and innovations
- Enablers and inhibitors of change

SUPPORT THE HUMAN ELEMENT OF CHANGE

Information was gathered about:

Information was asked about the different aspects of working collectively and the various resources and tools used to support the effort:

- Relationships
- Diversity
- Asset vs. problem orientation
- Conflict Resolution

- Managing emotions
- Leadership
- Funding
- Technology

USE NETWORKS TO SUSTAIN, SCALE AND SPREAD

Information was gathered about:

Information was sought about the ways the effort has been sustained and the ideas or actions scaled or spread throughout the network and the community:

- Spreading the vision
- Scaling the efforts
- Spreading the efforts
- Sustaining or perpetuating the efforts
- Specific role of the support/operating entity in scaling, spreading, and sustaining
- Functioning as a Learning Community
- Networking beyond the local community