

"Making Connections" Is An Initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation

WINTER 2005

Making CONNECTIONS

DES MOINES
Transforming Neighborhoods • Strengthening Families

CURRENT PROJECTS:

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IMPORTANT EVENTS:

- **Neighborhood Collaborative Mtg.**
Feb. 10 (Thurs.), 5:30 p.m., North H.S., 501 Holcomb Ave.
- **School Readiness Action Circles Forum**
Feb. 19 (Sat.), 10 a.m., King School, 1849 Forest Ave.
- **CCI Credit and Home Buying Seminar**
Feb. 26 (Sat.), 8 a.m. to Noon, Callahan School, 3010 Center St.
- **Growing Communities Workshop**
March 18 & 19 (Fri. & Sat.) Mickel Center, 1620 Pleasant St., Des Moines
- **MC-DM Newsletter Article Due Date**
March 30-Submit Your News or Event. Call 282-3561 for details.

Preparing Children to Enter Kindergarten:

READY KIDS, READY SCHOOLS, READY COMMUNITIES

To prepare children of ages birth to five years old for school, the *Making Connections School Readiness Work Group (SRWG)* has been developing strategies that can increase family involvement. Partner-ships have been formed with schools and community members.

The SRWG is a team of dedicated and concerned parents, child caregivers, and community leaders. It has been forming since April 2004 and successfully developed a two-pronged approach:

- **School Readiness Action Circles**
- **Home Child Care Givers Network**

Meetings — For home, family, friend and neighbor caregivers.

- Wallace Elementary
- Moulton Elementary
- Hispanic Educational Resource Center.

The action circles and childcare givers network activities are designed to gather ideas for actions that can be taken in the *Making Connection's* neighborhoods to help

Three additional school circles will start in 2005: King Elementary, Capitol View Elementary, and Longfellow Elementary.



School Readiness Action Circles engage parents and teachers in preparing preschoolers for the first day of kindergarten.

children ages birth to five prepare to enter school.

SITES: School Readiness Action Circles are currently being conducted at four educational sites:

- Holy Family

School Readiness "Action Circles help people who share a common goal," said program coordinator Melissa Nelson. "They learn from one another and build

(Continued on Page 2)

READY KIDS, READY SCHOOLS, READY COMMUNITIES (CONT'D.)

on each other's strengths to reach that goal." The goal of these action circles is to develop family, school, and community partnerships that help our youngest residents have a great start in school.

Home Childcare Providers Network

meetings are being conducted in each of the *Making Connection's* neighborhoods. They are geared towards providing home-based family, friend and neighbor care giver's an opportunity to discuss

ways they can enrich their efforts for the children.

They identify resources that would assist in preparing young learners and their families for school.

"It truly takes an entire village to ensure that our children are prepared to succeed in school," said MC Community Builder, Dawn T. Narcisse.

"Parents know they are their children's first teachers. In Action Circles, they have expressed their

desire to know more about what is expected of their children and of them when preparing for that first day of Kindergarten."

KEY POINTS:

Participants learn ways to help kids get ready for school, which can start as early as birth. Home childcare providers are asking for personal support and resources in order to assist children during their early learning years.

In response, many of our schools are increasing parent involvement by offering an array of leadership and engagement opportunities. These range from serving as volunteer welcoming hosts, joining parenting support groups, and PTO membership.

"It is widely recognized that preparing children for school at an early age can proactively address grade level achievement," said Narcisse. "Also, fostering good attitudes toward school and education affects our children's ability to succeed in school." ■

GET INVOLVED:
Persons interested in the [School Readiness Action Circles](#) may contact [Making Connections](#) at 515-282-3561 for details about the meeting nearest you.



"Starting Early": Kindergarten Assessments and Addressing the Achievement Gap in Des Moines Public Schools" Report is available online:

<http://www.urban.org/nnip/pdf/Starting%20Early%20May%2026%2004%20DRAFT.pdf>

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

SURVEY IDENTIFIES TEEN CHALLENGES

TEEN SURVEY:

The Neighborhood Learning Partnership (NLP) has undertaken a project to collect information from youth living in the *Making Connections* neighborhoods and adjacent areas.

Community residents want to learn what relationships and lifestyles influence youths' education and aspirations for the future. They also want to discover what may be done to help youth succeed and graduate from high school.

THE RESEARCH PROJECT: *The survey is an opportunity for young people to share what it is like to grow up in the Making Connections neighborhoods.*

The information is obtained through focus groups. Sessions involve six-to-10 youth who range from 14 through 17 years of age.

The groups have been held at Creative Visions, Oakridge Neighborhood Services, and Union Baptist Church. Focus groups are still being scheduled with other neighborhood-based organizations that work with youth.

PROFESSIONAL PARTNERS:

Felipe Gallardo, with assistance from NLP board members Kelli Carter and Kamara Fowler, is

facilitating the focus group sessions. Matt Levi (University of Iowa) is providing the transcription and analysis. He has assistance from Dr. Anne Wallis (University of Iowa), co-writer of the final report.

TOPICS: Issues covered in the focus group sessions include:

Can you describe what it is like to be a high school student?

What inspires you?

What type of things keep youth from succeeding in school?

How much is your family involved in your education and school activities?

What do you see yourself doing when you are 20? 25?

OUTCOMES:

The information acquired from the focus groups will be presented to the MC Neighborhood Collaborative (Feb. 10), Human Services Planning Alliance (HSPA) Board, the HSPA Youth Cluster, and other interested organizations that work with youth who come predominately from low-income neighborhoods. If you wish to receive a copy of the results, Contact United Way of Central Iowa, 515.246.6500 ■



TEEN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IS KEY TO THEIR SUCCESSFUL FUTURES.



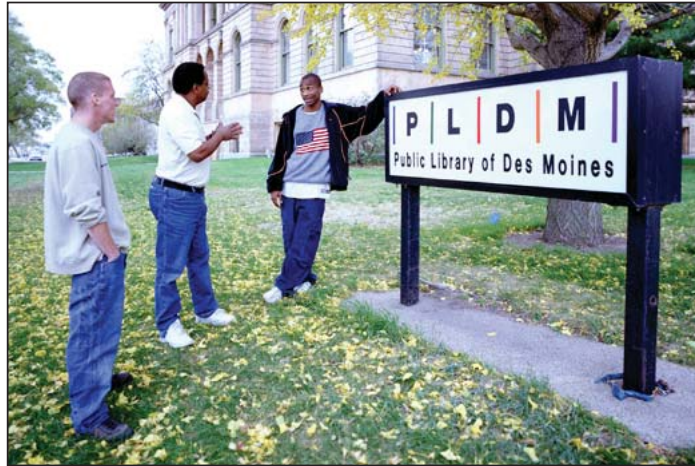
Community Building Team meetings focus on resident-based organizations and connecting them. Members include the Neighborhood Collaborative, Neighborhood Associations, Neighborhood Leadership Academy, Community Gardens, Neighborhood Grants for Growth, Time Dollar, CCI (Citizens for Community Improvement), AMOS (A Metropolitan Organizing Strategy), The Directors Council, the MC Community Builders and Community Results Coordinator. (Article on page 4.)

YOUTH AND ADULTS LEARN AND ORGANIZE TOGETHER

It is Wednesday night, December 1, in the parking lot of the Boys and Girls Club—Logan Center, where a team of adults and youth touch base before a Neighborhood Collaborative Team meeting. It is with the director of the club, which is in Des Moines' central east side.

It is cold, so the two youth quickly go over the questions they want to ask. This is one of several research teams who are holding similar meetings with organizations that provide youth services in *Making Connections* neighborhoods.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD COLLABORATIVE: Getting teams to this point has been along process. After carrying out a successful Neighborhood Pride Celebration in July, team members narrowed their



attention to issues that they wanted to impact in the community. Paul Turner of *A Metropolitan Organizing Strategy* (AMOS) said "This is important because it represents youth [and adults] determining their own destiny and learning how to act as citizens to affect their own future."

ISSUES: Residents decided to focus on the number of youth and youth-directed programs available

in the community. The teams picked this issue based on several criteria: 1) being an issue with a solution rather than just being a problem; 2) that all of participants feel very strongly about the issue; 3) the issue is winnable; and 4) having clear, local, decision-makers, along with other criteria.

PROGRESS: The Neighborhood Collaborative will continue

carrying out research regarding the types of programs available to 10,000 youth in the *Making Connections* neighborhoods. They aim to ensure that all children have opportunities for meaningful after-school activities in the inner city. ■

NEIGHBORHOOD COLLABORATIVE INFO:

Contact the *Making Connections* - Des Moines office at 515.282.3561, for Carlos Macias-Castillo, MC Community Builder, carlos@makingconnections dm.org

COMMUNITY BUILDING TEAM

INFO: Contact Margaret Wright, MC Community Results Coordinator, at 515.282.3561 or mwright@makingconnection sdm.org

BUILDING ON UNITY IN MAKING CONNECTIONS NEIGHBORHOODS

Building a stronger community is the primary focus of *Making Connections* - Des Moines (MC-DM) and partner organizations. MC-DM is taking a new approach in helping residents and their organizations grow, become more empowered, and increase their impact.

A DIFFERENT APPROACH: Individual resident-led organizations were making an impact. However, by combining

forces and jointly developing strategies that combine their strengths, even more may be done to build stronger community in *Making Connections* neighborhoods. The Community Building Team's (CBT) purpose is to improve results. Goals include 1) Increase membership, 2) enlarge the scope of work that organizations can handle, and 3) work with one another on major issues.

COMMUNITY BUILDING TEAM FOCUS: This team is working on finding ways that we can do community building well. Increasing neighbors involvement with issues that matter, rather than event-to-event contact, is key. Team results should show gains in: supporting residents to make improvements in the lives of children and families of their area; preparing children to enter school; helping youth succeed and graduate from high school;

and helping adults to have the housing, jobs, money and support that they need for their family.

Also, the team will be looking for ways to partner effectively with other organizations, and obtaining funding for efforts residents most want to address. The Community Building Team will create a strategic plan during early 2005 that details how more can be accomplished. ■

FIRST HOME OWNERSHIPS A MATTER OF VALUES

A HOME FOR KAMESAH:

At fourteen, Kamesha Gully made a vow. She was on her own and had just given birth to her son,



KeShawn, an event that nearly took her life. “I was determined to get an education,” said Kamesha, “So I could have a good future.” Kamesha earned a bachelor’s degree, worked herself out of public housing assistance, and at age 27 is now an analyst with Well Fargo. Financial saving goals seem to be a huge challenge while raising a son, paying for a dependable vehicle, and handling school loans.

THE CHANGE: A boost to her economic goals came with a letter from the City of Des Moines. First-time home ownership for qualifying individuals was described in the “Neighbor Works” program letter. Kamesha said “I don’t know how I got the letter, but it explained how I could own a home. I went through

USBank. For a down payment of up to \$800, I now own a \$70,000 home at a fixed mortgage interest rate of 5.25%. The program also said that if I stay in the home for seven years, 1/3 of the mortgage cost would be forgiven. “I signed two notes for both portions, attended home-buyer education classes, and worked with a counselor to pick my split-foyer home. My childhood friend lived in one and I loved it.” Now, her son may also have good memories of a split-level home.

THE HERNANDEZ FAMILY HOME: Two children at home and one on the way meant a new housing challenge for Roberto and Celeste Hernandez. It was



also a lifestyle choice they faced as well as housing. “When you have three children,” Celeste said, “Is it worth working outside of the home? I don’t want others raising my children.”

They were living in a two bedroom Des Moines public housing apartment and received a similar letter as Kamesha’s regarding the disposal of Des Moines’ reposed homes that were in need of revitalization. They qualified to participate in the home-buying offer and took the opportunity through the Neighborhood Finance Corporation. “An Iowa Finance Authority matching grant let us fix up the home we selected,” said Celeste.

Our total housing costs are now only \$50 more per month than when we rented. Plus, we have a three bedroom ranch, a basement, yard, and garage.”

HOME BUYER AND REVITALIZATION PROGRAMS:

Information may be obtained at the Neighborhood Finance Corporation, Phone: 515-246-0010 or at www.hud.gov/local/index.cfm?state+ia.&topic=homeownership

Another life-style choice enabled by the home is that Celeste could become a day-care provider. “I can stay home with the children during the day and Roberto can on the weekend while I work.

ADVICE FOR HOMEBUYERS: Kamesha advises “Make good choices for yourself. Choose to buy a home before anything else because it keeps financial value.”

Celeste Hernandez said, “When you buy, plan to live on one income so you don’t have to scratch every month to pay the bills. Don’t spend over your means on a house. You never know what will happen.” ■

1111 - 9th St., STE 290
Des Moines, IA 50314

Phone: 515.282.3561
Fax: 515.282.3593

E-mail: info@makingconnectionsdm.org
Website: www.makingconnections.org

Address Service Requested

“TIMEDOLLAR” IS GROWING!

It has been a great year for TimeDollar, a resident-helping-resident organization. The number of members has doubled in the last year.

PURPOSE: Everyone who is a member of the TimeDollar program gives an hour or more of their time to help others, and in turn can receive help from others. You can receive help with shoveling snow, while recovering from a hospital stay, learn to knit, or learn a new hobby. All of these services can be provided by “exchanges” instead of money, TimeDollars. The great



part about TimeDollar is that you don't have to exchange services with the same person you provided your time to, it can be a third party.



FOUNDER'S VISIT: December 1, 2004 members of Time Dollar enjoyed a visit from Dr. Edgar Cahn, founder of “TimeDollar” and author of several books about it's potential (Shown left with Coordinator Dawn T. Narcisse). “His visit was very important, as it gave us a renewed sense of energy and vigor,” said Narcisse. “The potential for it is amazing, and we are very excited to know we are on the right track.”

ACTIVITIES: Organizers of TimeDollar—Des Moines are looking for new or current “TimeDollar” members to help expand the program in the Making Connections Neighborhood. They will work closely with the Coordinator to encourage and tracking the activities of the local club.

If you are interested in membership or helping with TimeDollar, contact Dawn T. Narcisse at 515.243.3930.