

Making Connections

in Hartford

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A Celebration of Achievements

A sense of accomplishment and a spirit of collaboration marked the January 17 Making Connections in Hartford reception held at the Artists Collective. The gathering brought together more than 150 local partners of Making Connections. The evening celebrated the solid foundation that has been established in Hartford for strengthening families and neighborhoods. It also focused on the ambitious goals that lie ahead.

Sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the evening featured presentations by numerous community leaders and performances by the Artists Collective's Youth Jazz Orchestra and its "Eclipse" Choreographer's Workshop, as well as Amor y Cultura.

Debra Delgado, Making Connections in Hartford site team leader, set the context for the evening's activities and the Making Connections in Hartford initiative. "We are particularly pleased to be here sharing in a celebration today of what's good in Hartford — all the good peo-



Many of Making Connections local partners came together at a recent reception held at the Artists Collective. The meeting focused on the positive work that's being done to strengthen Hartford's families and to improve its neighborhoods.

ple and the great organizations that work towards a common agenda that's about improving conditions for families in the city," she said.

The Making Connections initiative which is taking place in 22 cities nationwide focuses on connecting families to economic opportunities, neighborhood-based services and informal support groups.

"The two core premises that shape this work are that families matter — that improving outcomes for kids requires that they be looked at within the context of their families — and that place matters — that a family's ability to do right by its kids to a large part is determined by what is available to it in its immediate environment," Delgado told the audience.

For the past 18 months, Making Connections in Hartford has been identifying and working

with citywide networks that are focusing on neighborhood improvement such as Hartford 2000. It also has been working with networks that have a demonstrated commitment to improving services and support for children and families at the neighborhood level such as the Hartford Community Partnership Initiative, the city's Department of Human Services and Hartford Youth Collaborative. Lastly, it has developed partnerships with organizations such as the Hartford Youth Opportunity Grant that work to improve connections between families, young people and economic opportunities.

In outlining what Making Connections in Hartford hopes to accomplish in 2002, Delgado explained that much of the same work would continue with two enhancements.

"Consistent with the new mayor's vision for Hartford, one of the things we want to pay

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more attention to is connecting with groups and organizations that are working to improve families' connections to jobs that can relate to the accumulation of wealth such as home ownership," Delgado said.

"We also will pay even more careful attention to the connections piece, and in part, that is what tonight is all about," she said. "I really believe in the value of informal exchanges and those are the kinds of opportunities we are hoping to be able to set up in the next year."

The evening's keynote speaker, Chandler Howard, president of Fleet Bank of Connecticut, praised the important work that is underway in Hartford through Making Connections. "The thing that really has me excited is that we all share the same vision, and that is the vision of having clean, safe, secure neighborhoods here in our capital city," he said. "Neighborhoods where we feel safe, where we feel confident and where we feel comfortable raising families, owning homes and starting businesses. I think that we all recognize that creating healthy neighborhoods is the first step in creating a healthy city."

Howard helped launch the Businesses Roundtable, a group of 30 business leaders and



(L-R) Mohamoud Ahmed of the Asylum Hill NRZ and Frank Lord of the SoDo NRZ chatting with Trish Torruella, a local Hartford Making Connections consultant.

economic development organizations that is working to strengthen links between residents of Hartford's neighborhoods and local employers.

Bernadine Silvers, co-chair of Hartford 2000, told the audience, "I believe the reason that the Annie E. Casey Foundation could come to Hartford is because we had resources here

already, and it was easy to come here because there are multitudes of people in various places that are trying to build the city up. What we need, particularly in the neighborhoods, is capacity and that is what the Annie E. Casey Foundation is offering us through the Making Connections program.

"What the Annie E. Casey Foundation has done for us is to help strengthen us so that we can begin to receive what we need in order to strengthen our neighborhoods," Silvers said.

Ramon Rojano, director, Hartford Department of Human Services, spoke about the city government's commitment to improving the conditions of local neighborhoods. He outlined plans to foster "family economic success" in order to attract the middle class to Hartford and increase the city's own middle class. "It is a way of linking families to opportunities they need to have access to in order to have a good quality of life in Hartford," Rojano said.

George Bahamonde, president and CEO, United Way of the Capital Area, explained how the partnership that has been formed between United Way and Making Connections in Hartford is helping the community address child



(L-R) Chandler Howard, president of Fleet Bank of Connecticut, Paula Gilberto, vice president community services, United Way of the Capital Area and Dollie McClean, executive director of The Artists Collective.

poverty and youth development issues through a Local Learning Partnership.

“The Local Learning Partnership has brought together organizations, institutions, community leaders, and residents to collect, store and share data that documents their challenges and serves as a baseline from which to measure change,” he said. “It is not about activity, it is about results.”

The final speaker, Deputy Mayor and City Councilwoman Veronica Airey-Wilson, brought greetings on behalf of Hartford Mayor Eddie Perez and the City Council. “It is just wonderful

to see this kind of networking come together,” Airey-Wilson said. “It is just what we need, just what Hartford needs.” She encouraged the group to “put all your resources together and let’s join in making Hartford the rising star that I know it can be in New England.”

In closing the evening’s program, Delgado reminded the audience about the real purpose of the gathering. “This is an evening to talk about what is wonderful about what is happening in Hartford,” Delgado said. ☺



Welcome to the second issue of the Making Connections in Hartford newsletter. In this issue, you will see that we begin 2002 with a sense of great accomplishment about what has taken place to

transform neighborhoods and strengthen families in Hartford during the past year. You also will learn how Making Connections’ local partners plan to build on this success in the next year.

A story on the community reception that we held in January highlights all the important work that is taking place through Making Connections in Hartford. In “Connecting Isolated Families...” article on page 4, you will learn that Making Connections plans to focus its efforts this year on improving family economic success in local neighborhoods. Local partners are working on an ambitious agenda to target the factors that keep families isolated from the economic mainstream, and to develop the knowledge and tools necessary to reverse those conditions.

In the last issue of the newsletter, we told you about City Scan, an innovative way Hartford’s young people are using data to make a difference in their neighborhoods. Here you will learn how a new grant will further the work of this program in 17 Neighborhood Revitalization Zones.

The role of the news media in shaping public perceptions of neighborhoods is another important issue raised in this issue. Two recent workshops have been held with media representatives and some local partners to explore ways to better align perceptions with reality.

Finally, we are very pleased to announce the opening of our new office in Hartford. Please call our office at any time with your questions and comments, (860) 293-0097.

Debra Delgado
Hartford Site Team Leader



Dollie McClean introduces the Artists Collective’s Youth Jazz Orchestra.



The “Eclipse” Choreographer’s Workshop group performing a post 9/11/01 tribute to America in dance.

Connecting Isolated Families and Neighborhoods to the Mainstream

Throughout 2001, Making Connections in Hartford focused on adding momentum to efforts already underway in the community to improve the access of families to economic opportunities. Steps were taken to build working relationships with residents, civic groups, political leaders, grass roots organizations, leaders in the public and private sectors, and the faith community. By all accounts, significant progress occurred during 2001 that provides a solid foundation for expanding opportunities for the economic success of Hartford's families in 2002 and beyond. Below are some concrete examples of where Making Connections' technical assistance and financial support has made a positive difference:



Among the objectives Torruella said Making Connections in Hartford has set for 2002 are:

- Working with public and private investors to increase the availability of family economic tools such as Individual Development Accounts.
 - Teaching families how to take advantage of earned income tax credits and other tax assistance resources.
 - Partnering with the Hartford Public Library to develop a Web site with financial literacy tools and an online library.
 - Collaborating with Hartford 2000 and other partners to conduct seminars at the neighborhood level about opening small businesses.
 - Completing the planning phase of the Hartford Community Information Center, a community data warehouse.
 - Convening a Family Economic Success Conference where Making Connections' community partners from Hartford and other cities will interact and learn from each other's successes.
 - Collaborating with YO! Hartford and the Hartford Youth Network to enhance professional development opportunities for youth workers.
 - Assisting the Citizen's Research Network to disseminate user-friendly Census 2000 data reports to neighborhood groups and organizations.
 - Supporting the Hartford Community Partnership with its efforts to improve neighborhood-based prevention services for children and families.
- "Although our challenge to create a foundation for the economic success of Hartford's families may seem overwhelming, we can make progress by working together," said Torruella. "It will take the skills and experience of all segments of the community in order to achieve our goal." ☺

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- Forums were created for local partners to learn from one another and from the experiences of those in other Making Connections cities as well as from national networks that support family strengthening and neighborhood improvement activities.
- Technical assistance was given to local groups on issues related to family strengthening. Groups were encouraged to call a Help Desk that connects cities participating in Making Connections initiatives to examples of what is working nationwide.
- Strategically targeted grants were provided that brought key players together to promote community dialogue about Making Connections ideas, to seed new community-based activities that embody family strengthening and to leverage public and private investments in support of family strengthening.
- Support was given to a Local Learning Partnership to develop its capacity to provide

data for local planning and documentation of progress, as well as to help groups with grant writing, advocacy and other needs.

"I am tremendously excited about all the incredible things that are going on in Hartford," said Trish Torruella, consultant to the Making Connections' initiative. "The energy, the commitment and the determination of all those who care deeply about Hartford is impressive.

"The question that we are asked most frequently is what is ahead for the next year or so," said Torruella. "The answer is that we want to build on the tremendous progress of the past year and mobilize our local partners to work together on connecting families to greater economic opportunities. With 40 percent of Hartford's families living in extreme poverty, there is a lot of work that needs to be done. We need to identify the barriers that are separating families from economic stability and create new pathways that will help them to achieve greater economic success."

Investing in Results-Driven Family Economic Success Strategies

All too often, families in neighborhoods where poverty is prevalent are isolated from the economic mainstream and unable to build a base of economic security for themselves, their children and their neighborhoods. The many causes of this isolation include shifts in urban job opportunities, the migration of the middle class to the suburbs, the withdrawal of financial and commercial institutions, the breakdown of social support networks, inadequate public transportation, and fragmentation in public policy.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation believes that establishing long-lasting connections among families, neighborhoods and the mainstream economy is one of the most important building blocks for family strengthening and neighborhood transformation. For this reason, the Foundation and its local partners are planning to invest in a number of results-driven family economic success strategies at the 22 Making Connections sites over the next 10 years. Strategies and investments will include grants, technical aid, program-related support, and assistance with data and information.

The Foundation plans to use coordinated, multiple strategies in three areas: workforce development, family economic support and community investment in neighborhood economic development to help families achieve economic stability. Each Making Connections site will develop strategies that are responsive to local problems, opportunities and barriers, and to the aspirations of residents and partners — reaching as many families as possible in a concentrated way. Strategies and investments will evolve over 10 years based on their results, co-investments, new opportunities, and changed conditions.

Workforce Development

A critical component of family economic success is connecting people to jobs which allow them to support their families, and which provide opportunities for career advancement. Workforce development strategies will focus on regional



Representatives from a broad range of community-based organizations who recently met at Hartford's IRS headquarters to plan a community-wide Earned Income Tax Credit campaign.

labor markets and will include job readiness, job search and short- and long-term training. They will promote career advancement through volunteering, part-time work, transitional jobs, basic job skill training, English language classes, and vocational training and post-placement supports. In order for these strategies to succeed, they will be integrated with childcare, healthcare and transportation support services.

Family Economic Support

Family economic support strategies enhance people's ability to increase their personal and family incomes, and to build their asset base. They include increasing utilization of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), improving consumer financial services and taking advantage of asset-building tools such as Individual Development Accounts (IDA) and homeownership.

Community Investment

Community investment strategies focus on housing, business development and facilities development. They include new retail projects, evaluation of neighborhood investment areas,

improvements to schools, and the formation of neighborhood partnerships. Community investment strategies work best when they anchor additional development and are significant enough to improve the perceived quality of a neighborhood for residents and potential investors.

Putting the Pieces Together

Because all Making Connections cities face different challenges and opportunities, no single model for investment will be used at all sites. The strategies for workforce development, family economic support and community investment will be combined at each site in the way that best responds to local needs. The Annie E. Casey Foundation views its Making Connections initiative to strengthen families and transform neighborhoods as a long-term process. The Hartford site team is now participating in a strategic planning process to identify the existing resources and new strategies that will help Hartford's families achieve economic stability and that will help Hartford's neighborhoods become safe and supportive places to live and work. ☺

City Scan Wins Technology Award

City Scan, a pilot project launched by the Connecticut Policy and Economic Council to involve young people in gathering data on the condition of local parks and neighborhoods, has been awarded an \$845,992 grant from the Commerce Department to expand the project.

The money will be used to help train high school students to use mobile computing devices — including personal computers, digital cameras, global positioning satellite receivers, wireless modems and custom-designed software — to collect data and document problem areas in Hartford’s 17 Neighborhood Revitalization Zones.

Citizen groups will learn how to use the data to develop a citywide database of problems that need addressing. Funds also will be used to conduct online surveys of residents about quality of life issues such as municipal services.

In addition to the Connecticut Policy and Economic Policy Council, the Citizen’s Research and Education Network and the Hartford Public Library are involved in City Scan. All three groups are members of a Local Learning Partnership that brings organizations together to use strategic planning and advocacy to address neighborhood issues.

Tony Hall, evaluation liaison for Making Connections in Hartford, helped facilitate the Local Learning Partnership’s application for the technology grant.

In a related honor, the Connecticut Policy and Education Council was selected to make a presentation in November at a conference on “e-government” in Brussels. E-government is a term used to describe the movement to bring a wide range of government services online so that people can have easy access to information and help. The Council was the only delegation



Local high schoolers engaged in collecting data on their Hartford neighborhood.

presenting from the United States. Making Connections seed money played a role in building the capacity to gather and use data to serve the community, and helped leverage other funding opportunities. ☺

Learning to use Communications Strategies to Create Positive Change

Thirty people representing Hartford community-based organizations participated in two Communications Workshops sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. One workshop was held locally in November 2001 and the other took place in Los Angeles during early February 2002. The purpose of these workshops was to help our local Making Connections partner organizations to effectively integrate media concerns into their ongoing policy advocacy activities. The ultimate goal is to increase public will behind the effort to improve the lives of families in low-income neighborhoods. Dr. Frank Gilliam, who directs UCLA’s Center for Communications and Community and teaches political science at UCLA, led the workshops. He is a nationally recognized expert on the roles mass communications and race play in the effort to transform low-income neighborhoods.

Workshop participants included representatives from Making Connections partners such as the Connecticut Association of Human Services, Hartford Community Partnership, Hartford 2000, Hartford Youth Network, InterMinisterial

Alliance, and a number of other local public and private agencies. Representatives from Connecticut Public Television and WHUS Radio at UConn also attended the workshops.

“A central lesson of these workshops was that community transformation is most possible where a robust communications infrastructure exists,” said Dr. Gilliam. “We emphasized the importance of integrating communications concerns into on-going policy activities; of working to widen the journalistic lens when the media reports on the inner city; and of building alliances among community stakeholders, neighborhood residents, journalists, policy-makers, scholars, and opinion leaders in order to influence public policy.”

Dr. Gilliam and his skilled team of presenters used many tools to convey these messages. There were presentations from professional communications practitioners and scholars as well as simulations, break out sessions, films, and informal gatherings that enhanced the communications connections among the

community organizations from Hartford that attended the workshops. Participants also received text and video tool kits that helped them to share the lessons they learned with their respective groups.

“I learned a lot at these sessions,” said Paula Gilberto, vice president community services, United Way of the Capital Area. “But the most valuable thing I came away with was the importance of proactively framing our messages on a high level rather than simply allowing our story to be told from a narrow or one-sided perspective.”

The Making Connections Hartford site team is committed to continuing the momentum begun at these two workshops. Frank Gilliam will conduct a follow-up communications skill building workshop in Hartford in October. There also will be a separate session designed to sharpen the public speaking skills of our participants. Finally, the site team plans to provide a “communications-coaching” resource for our local partners that will help them implement project-specific communications tactics and strategies. ☺

Capital Region Workforce Development Board Targets Out-of-School Youth

As part of its five-year strategic plan, the Capital Region Workforce Development Board (CRWDB) recently adopted a comprehensive strategy to address the issue of out-of-school youth and its impact on the future availability of skilled labor in Hartford. According to recent projections, there will be 4,000 youth aged 14-21 out of school in Hartford. Such a dramatic loss in skilled labor poses a threat to the region's economy including its ability to sustain existing businesses and attract new ones. The CRWDB is now addressing this issue with various workforce development strategies that target out-of-school and in-school youth as well and how they can become part of a future workforce readiness strategy.

New \$18 to \$20 million Job Center Planned

Titled "Developing Tomorrow's Workforce for Today," the new CRWDB strategy will target workforce development efforts both in schools and out of schools.

Perhaps the most dramatic step planned is the construction of a new \$18-20 million Greater Hartford Job Corps Center at the old Charter Oak Housing Complex. With ground-breaking scheduled on the 22-acre campus for this October and an opening date planned in June 2003, it will mark the first time the federal Job Corps program has come to Hartford.

"It is something I have been planning since late 1993," said Tom Phillips, president and CEO, Capital Region Workforce Development Board. "It is part of a strategy developed by a partnership we put together to prepare a coordinated secondary education plan for getting kids back in school to get an education. It will be a catalyst for other efforts to help of out-of-school youth."

Reaching 300 Youth Each Year

The Jobs Corps Center will offer 300 youth each year, education and vocational training in four

major cluster areas: health and biosciences; business and information technology; manufacturing, construction, technical; and retail, tourism and entrepreneurial. The specific curriculum is currently being developed. The center also will have a state-of-the-art child care center with Head Start.

Funding partners include the federal, state and city governments, and the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. More than 50 linkage partners also are helping with program enhancements and construction of the campus valued at an additional \$2.8 million. Fund raising continues for a \$5 million residential component.

Wide Ranging Partnerships

"The CRWDB is helping us focus on what we need to do today to ensure a skilled, job-ready workforce," said Paula Gilberto, vice president community services, United Way of the Capital Area. "With employees 'aging-out' in the next 10 to 20 years, we need to ensure that today's youth are prepared to take their places and qualify for jobs in new markets. It's a shared responsibility and Tom's leadership in developing partnerships with education, community-based organizations, city officials, and employers is working."

Other CRWDB efforts planned as a part of the workforce development initiative include establishing a first-ever youth services training academy to train front-line youth workers. The plan entails training youth to collaborate effectively with the city of Hartford's leadership on managing issues related to out-of-school youth, and encouraging the education community to make workforce development a priority.

Debra Delgado, Hartford Making Connections site team leader, praised the work of the CRWDB in marshalling new training and employment resources on behalf of young people and families at risk.

"The contribution of the Capital Region Workforce Development Board to family

economic success can't be stressed enough," said Delgado. "Ensuring that individuals are prepared for jobs, particularly those with growth potential, is important. Starting the process with young people is the sign of a visionary leader. Tom Phillips has that vision and our Making Connections team is proud to work with him and his staff." ☺

Making Connections Opens New Office in Hartford

Making Connections in Hartford recently opened an office at 221 Main Street, Hartford, in the headquarters of the Connecticut Council for Philanthropy. Trish Torruella, who recently relocated to Hartford from Baltimore, and other local consultants can be reached at this office.

"It feels so good to have both my home and work address here in Hartford in time to focus on all we hope to accomplish this year," said Torruella.

The office can be reached by calling: (860) 293-0097 or (860) 525-0436 (fax). ☺

Linking Urban Families and Local Churches

Hartford is one of four Making Connections cities participating in a research study to explore whether residents living in low-income housing communities and nearby churches are interested in strengthening their ties. Titled “Strengthening Interactions: Faith Communities and Urban Families,” the study is focused on two Hartford public housing communities: Nelton Court in the North End and Dutch Point in the South End.

Residents who live in housing complexes and on the streets adjacent to the complexes participated in a survey about their level of involvement with formal and informal religious activities. They were asked about their affiliations with local churches, community organizations and civic life. They also were asked about personal religious practices and demographic information.

Similarly, clergy from churches that are located within a mile radius of the housing complexes were surveyed about the types of outreach programs their churches have in place for neighborhood families. They also were asked about their church’s size, capacity and ministries.

“We wanted to determine the level of interaction that is taking place between the residents of these neighborhoods and the local churches, and find out if there is interest from both directions in strengthening it,” said R. Drew Smith, principal investigator of the study and scholar-in-residence at the Leadership Center at Morehouse College.

“In a lot of low-income neighborhoods, churches are one of the only institutions left and they merit close attention because of the role they can play in strengthening a community,” he said.

Following the surveys, approximately 30 representatives of the residents and the churches from both neighborhoods were invited to two roundtable discussions held at the Capital Region Conference of Churches, using data from the surveys as a springboard for discussion.

“At the roundtables we brought representatives from the neighborhoods and the churches together for a candid dialogue about how they can develop strategies to better serve each other,” said Smith.

The other Making Connections sites involved in the research are Camden, NJ; Denver, CO; and Indianapolis, IN. The Annie E. Casey Foundation has provided funding for the research in all four cities. ☺

