

Making Connections *in Hartford*

A quarterly publication of the Anne E. Casey Foundation

Helping Efforts That Already Work In Hartford To Work Even Better

Who is the Annie E. Casey Foundation? What's the purpose of the Making Connections initiative? Why was Hartford selected to be a site for this initiative?

These questions have been coming up with increasing frequency around Hartford since 1998 when the Foundation first identified the city as one of 22 Making Connections sites around the country. The answers to each of these questions reside in an ongoing story that began to unfold over a half century ago.

A history of helping vulnerable children

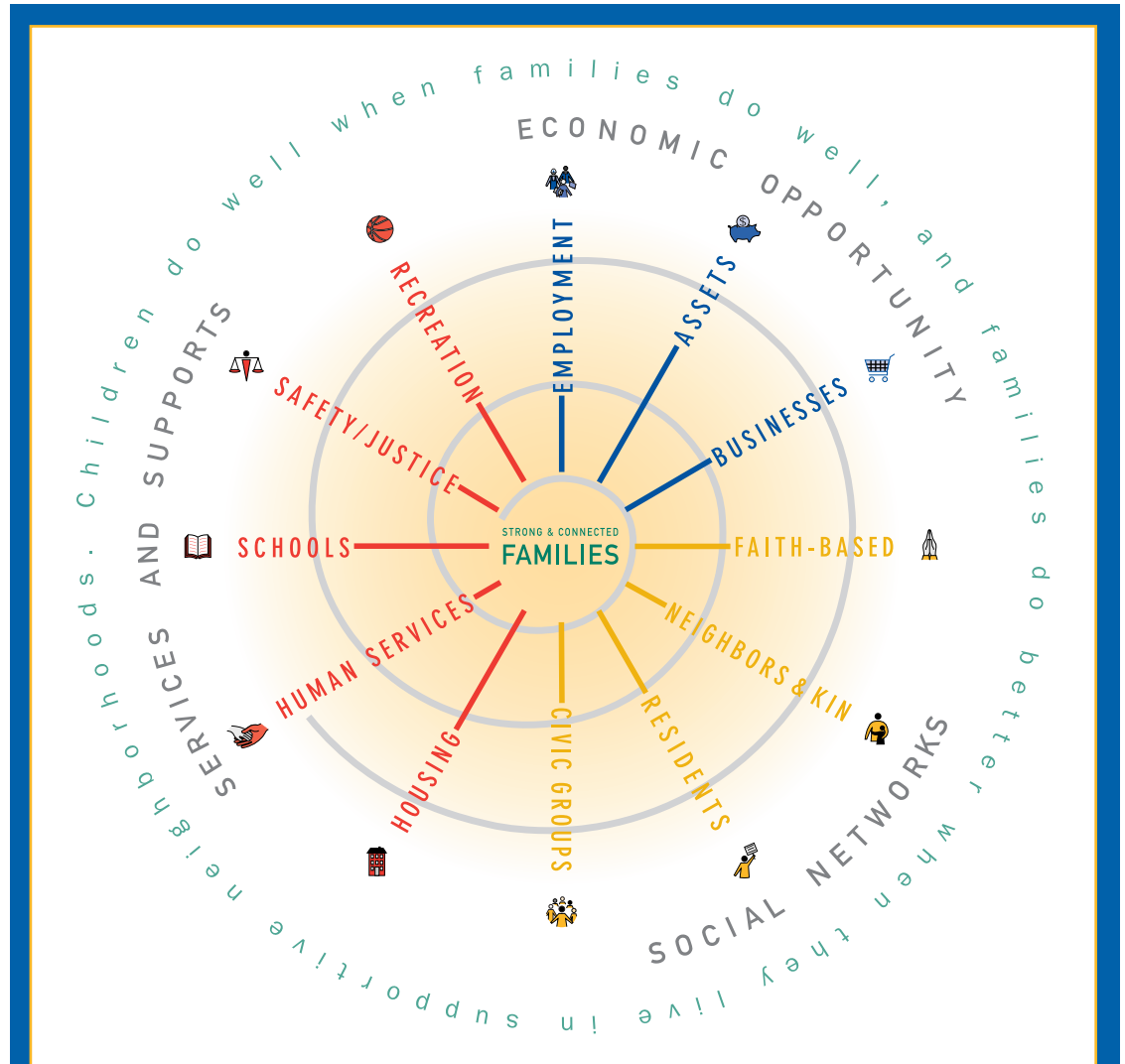
The story starts in 1948 when Jim Casey, the founder of United Parcel Systems, and his siblings established the Annie E. Casey Foundation to honor their mother by promoting the well-being of vulnerable children. Some of the Foundation's earliest efforts included making grants to support a camp for disadvantaged children near the Casey family home in Seattle, and efforts to find more stable placements for children bounced from one unhealthy environment to another in foster care.

In the 1980s, the Foundation began to focus on disadvantaged children who are at risk of poor educational, economic, social, and health outcomes.

This effort is known as the "neighborhood transformation/family strengthening strategy." It's built on the belief that children do well when their families do well; and families do better when they live in supportive neighborhoods.

Using a different framework

The centerpiece of this long-term strategy is "Making Connections," an initiative the



This visual graphically depicts the Making Connections premise and the elements of the community that need to work together to strengthen families and to build supportive neighborhoods.

Foundation launched in 22 cities nationwide in 1999 to demonstrate how a broad cross section of constituencies can be mobilized to improve the odds for families in tough neighborhoods. It is based on a different framework for thinking about our nation's poorest families. It focuses on connecting these families to the opportunities, tools and relationships that they need to succeed. These resources, which many of us take for granted, include good paying jobs, credit and equity building opportunities, responsive schools and support services, strong social networks, a

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safe and secure environment, and organized cultural and recreational activities.

Why Hartford?

Hartford was selected as one of the 22 Making Connections sites for a number of reasons. First, the Foundation felt that its approach had a good chance of gaining local support and of building results-oriented momentum over the long term. Second, the Foundation already had established relationships within the Hartford community, including previous investments on which it could build. Hartford also possessed the community characteristics that make change possible:

- A strong regional economy;
- Private resources that can be reinvested in children and families;
- Effective civic organizations, existing community building efforts; and

- Experience in implementing a range of activities focused around families.

A flexible catalyst for change

From its work across the nation, the Foundation has found that what contributes to improve family life in one community does not necessarily work in another. It also has learned that neighborhoods can't be transformed and families can't be strengthened without a sustained effort from a broad cross section of residents, civic groups, political leaders, grassroots groups, public and private sector leadership, and the faith community who share similar notions about the centrality of family and neighborhood. These “stakeholders” must be willing to act in meaningful ways to make their common agenda a reality. And their agenda should not be based on perceptions about what should be done, but on a thorough analysis of what needs to be done based on hard data about children, families, communities, services, and systems.

The Foundation has used these insights to make the Making Connections initiative a flexible catalyst for change. It can take the shape of what works most effectively with the people and organizations in an individual community.

Building relationships and a community voice

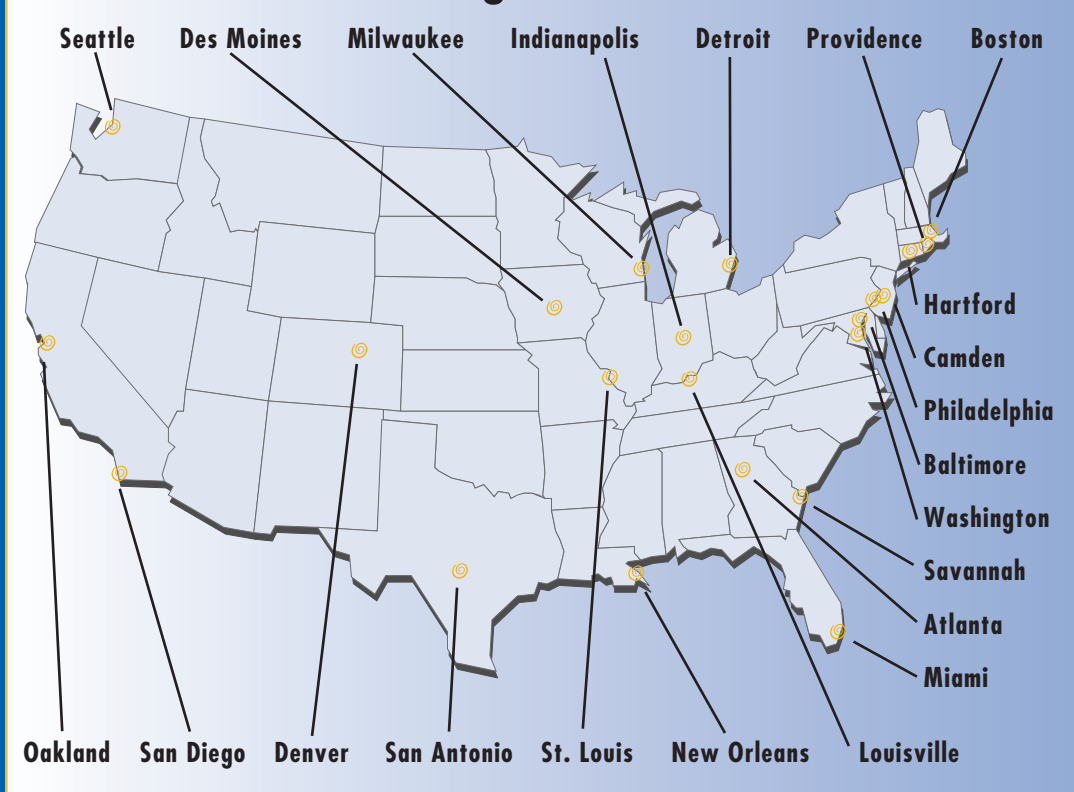
Rather than lead with money or a traditional request-for-proposals process, Making Connections enters a community by building relationships with a broad cross section of stakeholders.

The primary goal of Hartford's Making Connections site team has been to add value to programs and efforts already on the ground (such as those described in the other articles of this newsletter). It also works to attract other “investors” who are able to contribute to a neighborhood-based family agenda such as state and city governments and the local United Way.

The Hartford site team has used small seed grants to help connect people and build momentum around a common set of ideas rather than around a pot of money. It is encouraging the birth of a community voice that can help shape community decisions about resources for families. In the process, it is contributing technical assistance to strategies such as peer learning, local leadership development and data-driven strategic planning and advocacy.

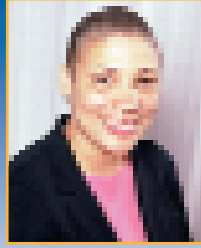
For the future, the Annie E. Casey Foundation is committed to deepening its investments in those Making Connections sites where local movements take root and where continuing opportunities exist for the effort to play a catalytic role in transforming neighborhoods and strengthening families. The Foundation ultimately seeks to leverage its work with local efforts to build a national commitment to transforming fragile neighborhoods into child- and family-supporting communities. ☺

The 22 Making Connections Sites



Each of these cities was selected as a Making Connections site because their policy climates, reinvestment potentials and track records of community problem solving represented a good potential for future success.

Welcome to the first issue of our quarterly newsletter. We've created this publication to keep you informed of the significant effort that's taking place here in Hartford to bring about positive change for its poorest families. While bad news about Hartford and its neighborhoods captures news headlines, bad news is far from the whole story. There are lots of good, hopeful activities going on here.



Our intent is to use this newsletter to highlight the many opportunities now being pursued to make Hartford's neighborhoods better places for raising families. We want to bring to life for you the deep personal and organizational commitments to improve neighborhoods and strengthen families that clearly exist here. There's a broad cross section of dedicated people who are working to link isolated families to economic opportunities, helpful human services and to supportive social networks. Our goal with this newsletter is to celebrate the efforts of these neighborhood residents, grass roots leaders, public officials and leaders in business and education who are making a positive difference. Their individual work and collaboration with community-based organizations, civic groups and faith-based organizations is keeping alive the dream of a successful future for Hartford's families.

In this first issue, besides the lead article that explains who the Annie E. Casey Foundation is and what we're doing in Hartford, we feature news about the productive work being done by the following groups: Hartford's Department of Human Services, the Business Roundtable, Connecticut Department of Children and Families' Community Partnership Initiative, the Hartford Youth Network, YO! Hartford, Hartford 2000, and Our Piece of the Pie. We hope our newsletter piques your interest in keeping informed and engaged in the neighborhood transformation and family strengthening efforts taking place in Hartford. Please contact us at any time with your suggestions, comments and questions.

Debra Delgado
Hartford Site Team Leader

Connecting Families and Neighborhood Supports

With a goal of adding momentum to efforts already underway to improve neighborhood support for families, Making Connections has established partnerships with three important initiatives in Hartford that are making a difference in the future of the community's families and neighborhoods. These initiatives include the Department of Human Services' campaign to make Hartford more supportive of a middle-class lifestyle, a collaboration between the Hartford Youth Network and YO! Hartford, and the Connecticut Department of Children and Families' Community Partnership Initiative.

Making Connections wanted to partner with these initiatives because they are addressing some of the most critical factors related to strengthening families: economic mobility, youth development and child protection.

"We want to add value to what is already working, and to serve as a catalyst for involving new partners and investors in these very worthwhile efforts," said Debra Delgado, Hartford Making Connections' site team leader.

Growing the base of middle-class residents

Hartford's Department of Human Services is spearheading an effort that is designed to make Hartford more supportive of a middle-class lifestyle.

What is innovative about the campaign is that it is designed to not only attract middle-class families to the city, but also "grow" the base of middle-class residents by improving economic outcomes for the city's poorest residents.

The department hopes to achieve this goal by involving the larger community in multi-pronged efforts, it calls "tracks," to address issues affecting middle-class growth. These tracks include activities such as economic



A group photo of "Community Stars" who were recognized for their efforts to improve family life in Hartford's neighborhoods.

development, human and social services programs, support from city and state government, the school system, community organizations, higher education, and housing.

"Instead of thinking of fighting poverty, we're trying to build the middle-class," said Ramon Rojano, director of Hartford's Department of Human Services. "We want to empower families and help them to have a good quality of life in Hartford and to get them on board the middle-class express."

Making Connections has assisted the department by providing information, tools and resources to support the campaign. It has helped develop a conceptual framework from which to create a state-of-the-art data warehouse that neighborhood leadership can use to plan for community mobilization.

"Making Connections is helping us facilitate a huge challenge and increase our capacity to be more effective," said Rojano.

Improving youth development opportunities

A shared vision for strengthening youth development services in Hartford will become even stronger through the joint efforts of the Hartford Youth Network and YO! Hartford.

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“Connecting Families” (Continued from Page 3)

These two organizations, which serve the region’s youth in a variety of ways, recently created a shared full-time position to improve training for youth workers in the community. Their goal is to educate youth workers, who can be influential forces in the lives of the youth they serve, about specific youth development principles and practices.

“To bring kids up better, we need to give them a better sense of who they are and what they can accomplish,” said Steve Balcanoff, former vice president of Hartford Youth Network’s board of directors.

Funding for the newly created position came from YO! Hartford and the Hartford Youth Network, through support it received from Making Connections.

“This shared funding symbolizes a very positive move toward even more collaboration on behalf of youth and families in Hartford,” said Lisa Berglund of the Making Connections Hartford site team.

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The position is envisioned as the first step toward development of a training academy for youth worker development.

“This is great news for all of us in Hartford and the timing couldn’t be better,” said April Goff Brown, director, YO! Hartford. “With the Department of Labor beginning to develop skills for this work, our city will be in the forefront of the movement to train those who work with young people.”

The Hartford Youth Network was formed in 1992 to serve as an influential voice for youth services in Hartford. It brings together in a collaborative way approximately 40 organizations serving youth in the community. The network has a volunteer board of directors, an active committee structure and holds regular meetings and programs.

YO! Hartford is the \$7-million Department of Labor Youth Opportunity Grant awarded to the Capitol Region Workforce Development Board, headquartered in Hartford, to increase long-term

employment of youth between the ages of 14 and 21 that live in specific high-poverty communities. Hartford was one of 36 national sites to receive the grant in February 2000.

YO! Hartford operates through a four-way collaboration of the Urban League of Greater Hartford, Southend Community Services, Hartford Areas Rally Together, and the Connecticut Puerto Rican Forum. It uses a case management approach to help youth develop the skills and training they need to successfully make the transition to adulthood and careers.

One youth who has benefited from the intervention of a YO! Hartford youth development specialist recently completed his GED requirements for a high school diploma after he had dropped out of high school at the beginning of his senior year. He has gone on to help found a new youth basketball league for the city and is enrolled in a local college.

“Making Connections is helping us build on what we have,” said Balcanoff. “Pooling our resources and working collaboratively is an important link for our future success.”

Working together to protect children

The Hartford Community Partnership (HCP) is a joint effort between the Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the community to dramatically redesign child protective services. Launched in 1999 by DCF and the Children’s Trust Fund, it is based on a national model to involve communities in the work of keeping children safe and healthy.

Key elements of the model include prevention services; shared responsibility in planning and responding to families at risk of child abuse; individualized child protective responses; and centralized services at “neighborhood hubs” that offer “family friendly” services.

DCF sought the assistance of the Annie E. Casey Foundation in bringing this community-partnership model for child protection to



The Hartford Community Partnership reaches out to neighborhood residents by encouraging the formation of family-friendly activities.

Hartford. Making Connections assisted DCF by linking it with the Center for the Study of Social Policy in Washington, which provided DCF with technical assistance in its start-up efforts. Linkages also were formed with the Hartford Department of Human Services’ data warehouse and middle-class growth project, and with the youth opportunity initiative.

The Hartford Community Partnership currently is working with the Hartford community to create and enhance education and awareness around family and children’s issues. Its aim is to move services away from a “crisis” orientation and from fragmentation to interdependence. It hopes to achieve this by creating true partnerships between DCF and Hartford neighborhoods.

“The community child protection movement and Making Connections share the same vision for connecting formal and informal resources in the community,” said Leticia Lacomba, the former regional administrator, Connecticut Department of Children and Families. “Making Connections has enabled HCP to organize community provider forums, participate in learning opportunities (including site visits to Community Partnership sites in other cities) and to convene the initial planning group. If this hadn’t happened, we wouldn’t be where we are today.” ☺

Business Leaders Aid Efforts to Grow Hartford's Middle-Class

Many of Hartford area's business leaders have become engaged in an effort to use the business community's influence and resources to help grow the middle-class in Hartford. A Business Roundtable was formed in April as the "business track" of a "multi-track" effort by Hartford's Department of Human Services to increase the upward mobility of the city's families. The roundtable is composed of 25 senior representatives of businesses and economic development organizations from the region and expects to continue to grow.

The idea behind the roundtable, according to Ramon Rojano, director of Hartford's Department of Human Services, is to enlist business leaders who care about the future of Hartford's families and neighborhoods in an effort to create a safe, vibrant community where people can achieve a middle-class lifestyle. Similar initiatives, or "tracks," are being launched related to housing, education, non-government organizations, and state and local government departments.

Hosts of the Business Roundtable's first three meetings were Oz Griebel, president and CEO, Metro Hartford Regional Economic Alliance; Chandler Howard, president, Fleet Bank – Connecticut; and Tom McInerney, general manager and CEO, ING Aetna Financial Services.

Richard Sugarman, founding president of the Connecticut Forum, has served as consultant and

facilitator. In partnership with Rojano and the Hartford Making Connections site team, Sugarman and the Forum Community Institute of the Connecticut Forum help to plan, organize and advise the direction of the Business Roundtable's activities.

The Roundtable is looking at factors that can affect middle-class growth such as workers' attitudes, community image, business climate, corporate commitment to economic development, job training, and quality of life. They have formed a smaller work group to take the ideas from the full roundtable's meetings and develop specific action plans.



A recent Business Roundtable was held at ING headquarters. Shown here from left to right are Bill Fray of UPS, Mike Meotti of CPEC, Richard Sugarman of the Connecticut Forum, and Alan Spier of Robinson & Cole.

"Our intent is to take the larger issues and put them in a model that can have neighborhood impact," said Sugarman. "One idea that we are exploring is the development of neighborhood support teams composed of business professionals from a variety of fields that would identify opportunities and problems that need attention in specific neighborhoods, such as transportation or the generation of economic development data, and to help develop solutions that the neighborhoods themselves can implement."

The Business Roundtable plans to participate in a community-wide meeting in 2002 that is designed to connect the work of all tracks working to foster upper economic mobility for hundreds of Hartford's families.

"In all of our efforts, we intend to stay very informed of what is going on in other groups in the community and to integrate our efforts with theirs," said Sugarman.

Sugarman praised the work of the Annie E. Casey Foundation in selecting Hartford as a Making Connections site and in helping launch the Business Roundtable. "The foundation is deeply concerned with real citizens and real neighborhoods, and is working long and hard to bring genuine change to the people of Hartford," he said. "Their approach is a long-term commitment and that is what is required here." ©

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Neighborhoods Work Together to Generate Economic Development

An impressive record of neighborhood development is transforming Hartford communities thanks to the work of Hartford 2000. This coalition of 14 Neighborhood Revitalization Zone (NRZ) Committees and the City of Hartford is working cooperatively to generate economic development in many city neighborhoods. Recently, the group took a number of steps to harness its collective powers even further and thus increase its capacity for driving change.

The coalition adopted a new governance structure and undertook a strategic planning process that can give it a stronger framework from which to work. Making Connections played a role in both of these efforts by providing needed technical assistance in a number of areas.

Hartford 2000 was formed in 1997 following the state's creation of a Neighborhood Revitalization Zone Process and the city's decision to include the NRZs in the development of

an application for State Urban Act funds. It has become an effective forum for neighborhoods to learn from one another, to develop working relationships and to assist the city with neighborhood stabilization and revitalization efforts.

Under the Neighborhood Revitalization Zone Process, neighborhoods where there are significant number of properties which are abandoned, blighted, foreclosed and deteriorated, can take advantage of certain benefits such as expanded

"Neighborhoods Work" (Continued on Page 8)

The Vital Role of Data

One of the milestones for success at each of the 22 Making Connections sites is helping communities increase their capacity to acquire and use information to influence the forces that shape their future. It is based on the belief that if neighborhoods cannot document their challenges, they have no ammunition to support their needs, no baseline from which to measure change, and no way to hold policymakers accountable.

Making Connections helps a community increase its capacity to produce, interpret and share data among local stakeholders. It does this by setting up a Local Learning Partnership that brings together organizations, institutions, community leaders, and residents to work together

to collect data from multiple sources to use in strategic planning, advocacy and in helping neighborhood people measure the progress of the work they do on a daily basis.

Upon arriving in Hartford, the Making Connections Hartford site team found a high level of support for the idea that data is essential for strategic planning, advocacy and message development. Given its size, Hartford already had in place a rich capacity for using data and information to address problems and opportunities specific to the individual missions of the various “data organizations” that exist. A goal in forming a Local Learning Partnership, therefore, was to bring these groups to the table to work together in new ways.

Under the leadership of Hartford’s Department of Human Services, representatives of city agencies, including the police department, housing authority, planning department, library, assessor’s office, health department and social services, as well as community representatives, all came together to take the first steps toward improving data sharing by creating a data warehouse. With technical assistance from the Urban Institute and Metis Associates, the group established a vision for a community data warehouse, to be called the Hartford Community Information Center (HCIC). It collects, stores and accesses information from multiple sources. Detailed planning for the funding, oversight and operation of the center continues with a variety of groups representing local data providers, neighborhood organizations, community residents, the business community, philanthropy, and local government. The public library will house the interactive center and work closely with the advisory committee to help residents learn how to access and use this information for strategic planning and advocacy.

City Scan is an innovative example of the way Hartford was already using resident-driven data to make a difference in neighborhoods before the Making Connections came to town. It is a pilot project launched by the Connecticut Policy and Economic Council to involve young people in gathering both positive and negative data on the condition of local parks and neighborhoods. Participants are using computers and cameras to document such things as graffiti, litter, abandoned housing, and unsafe playgrounds. They are using this data to produce reports, maintain a Web site and present information to policy makers. Their work already has produced results in the form of a number of public-private efforts to eliminate graffiti. ©

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Photo by Lorin Klavis, 2001

City Scan Hartford team collecting data and photographing graffiti, litter, and abandoned property.

Youth Businesses Build Career and Life Skills

A boat works, a sound recording company, a newspaper and a vegetable gardening company seem like typical businesses you might find in a city business directory. They are common until you find out that these businesses are run by youth 10 to 21 years of age. These youth businesses as well as others are part of a youth development program called Our Piece of the Pie (OPP), a program that helps more than 500 Hartford-area youth learn how the world of business operates and how to become successful employees and entrepreneurs.

OPP is structured as a youth business incubator that provides young people with hands-on experience in work and entrepreneurship. “It builds confidence, trains and mentors youth in areas where they have a real interest,” said Alan MacKenzie, director and founder of OPP, a program of Southend Community Services. It teaches the relevance of learning and staying in school and the importance work experience plays in achieving personal goals.

A team of adult and older youth role models including entrepreneurs, technical experts and senior citizens manages each of OPP’s youth businesses. The businesses produce a marketable product, sell it and share the profits with the youth participants.

At the River Wrights Boat Builders, young people learn the art of building wooden boats and other small craft, which they then sell at boat shows. At Urban Greens, youth raise organic herbs and vegetables that are sold to local restaurants. And at Echoes from the Street, a youth newspaper published six times per year, the young people learn news reporting, photography and other journalistic skills.

One of the secrets of OPP’s success is that its participants encourage their friends to get involved. Older mentors and role models, with whom the kids can comfortably relate, also motivate them to learn relevant life skills as well as workplace and business skills.



The youth in Urban Greens work hard to sell organically produced lettuce and greens to area restaurants. They also learn about maintaining relationships with vendors, insect control, checking PH levels and maintaining hydro units.

OPP has been so successful that it expects to serve nearly one thousand young people from the Hartford area during the next year. It also has plans to expand into two other Connecticut cities. “We see magic at work in that our programs are somehow stimulating the participants to stay in school and to achieve in the workplace,” said MacKenzie. “Between 80 and 90 percent of our participants continue their education.”

The youth businesses are created around what kids want to do rather than around what adults want them to do. “We want the kids to be interested, to feel comfortable and to come back,” said MacKenzie.

When the young people complete their youth business experience, OPP helps them find part-time work placements, linked to their career interests.

MacKenzie credits Making Connections with helping OPP develop in a number of ways over the past two years.

“Making Connections has really helped us build our capacity to grow,” said MacKenzie.

“With their technical assistance we have doubled in size and are now partnering with other programs in the community involving senior citizens and parents. They’ve also helped us to focus on tracking our outcomes to further build the credibility of what we are doing.”

Recently, OPP was recognized as a PEPNet Promising Program by the National Youth Employment Coalition.

“Making Connections’ technical support also has been instrumental in the development of an intergenerational component to our programs,” added Mackenzie. “We’ve even had seniors come forward and say they will finance the building of a boat and that they want to participate with the kids to see the project to completion. It’s not hard to figure out how everyone wins in this situation.”

In addition to the assistance it receives from Making Connections, OPP is supported by numerous other sponsors and in-kind donors. ☺

“Neighborhoods Work” (Continued from Page 5)

powers of eminent domain, and waivers of state and local environmental, health and safety codes.

Until recently, Hartford 2000’s 14 NRZs operated informally, without the kind of structure and processes in place that would allow them to maximize their collective efforts. They were working together to share ideas, resources and information, but they needed a stronger framework under which they could focus.

“Making Connections helped us make our dreams more of a reality,” said Edie Lacey, co-chairperson of Hartford 2000 and chairperson of the Frog Hollow South NRZ. “We were loosely knitted but tightly connected volunteers who came together out of necessity, but we never had the resources to come together formally.”

With Making Connections’ technical assistance, Hartford 2000 incorporated in 2001. “This has allowed the organization to extend its life beyond the longevity of its current volun-

Here are the NRZs that comprise Hartford 2000:

Asylum Hill, Blue Hills, Capitol Improvements/South Downtown, Clay Arsenal, Sheldon-Charter Oak, Frog Hollow South, North Frog Hollow, MARG (Maple Avenue area), Northeast, Parkville, South End, South Green, Upper Albany, and West End.



teers,” said Lacey. “We want to make sure that it is there for neighborhoods in the future.”

Making Connections also has provided Hartford 2000 with a grant to fund its first staff person and has supplied technical support for the launch of a strategic planning process. “We couldn’t have done the planning on our own,” said Lacey. “The technical assistance Making Connections provided us through the work of

consultant Trish Torruella has been critical in bringing people together around the table.”

Lacey said the coalition has been astounded by the community support the strategic planning effort has generated. “We are finding seven or eight new people in our neighborhoods asking to be involved,” she said. “Making Connections really has brought credibility and clout to the process.” ☺

