



TAPPING THE POWER OF SOCIAL NETWORKS:

Understanding the Role of Social Networks in Strengthening
Families and Transforming Communities

IN A SERIES OF REPORTS ON
SOCIAL NETWORKS FROM
THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

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About the Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. It was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, one of the founders of UPS, and his siblings, who named the Foundation in honor of their mother. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. In pursuit of this goal, the Foundation makes grants that help states, cities, and neighborhoods fashion more innovative, cost-effective responses to these needs. For more information and a copy of this report, visit the Foundation's website at www.aecf.org.

TAPPING THE POWER OF SOCIAL NETWORKS:

Understanding the Role of Social Networks in Strengthening Families and Transforming Communities

**FIRST IN A SERIES OF REPORTS
ON SOCIAL NETWORKS FROM
THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION**

by Audrey Jordan
Senior Associate
The Annie E. Casey Foundation

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Also, I would like to extend a special thank you to participants at the May 2004 consultative session of practitioners, researchers, and residents from *Making Connections* sites who came together to share their wisdom about ways to strengthen positive social networks in these communities that got us started on the right foot. The journey continues! I hope we have honored your contributions and your counsel.

With Appreciation,
Audrey Jordan

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FRAMING SOCIAL NETWORKS

The Foundation's Social Network portfolio began in early 2004 with the development of a framework and approach for the "third leg of the triumvirate stool" for the *Making Connections** theory: social networks. The three-legged stool represents the three opportunity strands—connections to economic opportunities, strong social networks, and quality services and support—that families must have to realize well-being and successful outcomes. These opportunity strands are at the heart of the Foundation's *Making Connections* initiative.

Cultivating strong social networks was a new area of focus for the Casey Foundation. The development process began with an exploration of existing literature on the subject. After reviewing the literature, it became clear that there was a need to better understand good practice and the social network experiences of families from their points of view. Thus, a consultative session was held in May 2004. The Social Network Team, formed during the planning and implementation of the consultative session, learned much from the participants—a mix of practitioners, resident leaders in the *Making Connections* sites, and researchers. Essentially, the message to the team was to "go carefully into the social ecologies of communities and learn."

A product of this early phase of research is a paper that I wrote, entitled **Tapping the Power of Social Networks**. This paper compiles relevant definitions, key findings from the literature and their limitations when applied to practice and measurement, and the understanding we came to about a potential niche for the Foundation in strengthening positive social networks in the context of the *Making Connections* work in the sites.

The next phase was to learn about and explore successful practices of intermediary organizations already working with families like those who live in our *Making Connections* neighborhoods. Based on a scan of promising approaches across the country and advice from the consultative session participants, we selected six organizations to visit and learn from: Beyond Welfare in Ames, IA; Community Organizing Families Initiative in Chicago, IL; Family Independence Initiative in Oakland, CA; Grace Hill Settlement House in St. Louis, MO; Lawrence Community Works in Lawrence, MA; and La Union de Pueblo Entero (LUPE) in San Juan, TX. These visits included observations, document reviews, interviews, and focus groups with key staff and families involved with these organizations. A second paper, written by Terri Bailey, entitled **The Ties That Bind**, summarizes our findings from these visits, and helps lay the groundwork for the development of a social networks point of view for the Foundation's practice and measurement work in *Making Connections* sites. A third paper, written by Elena Pell, entitled **Relationships Matter: How Agencies Can Support Family and Social Network Development**, focuses specifically on the discussions with the participating families and their experiences in social networks.

**Making Connections* is a ten-year community change initiative by the Annie E. Casey Foundation that seeks to improve child and family outcomes. To learn more about *Making Connections*, please visit www.aecf.org.

Being very clear about the importance of the link between strong, positive social networks and the achievement of successful, tangible outcomes for families, the Social Network Team began to explore how to incorporate a social networks approach into the results-oriented work of the Foundation. We are particularly focused on the core results of *Making Connections* in the areas of Family Economic Success (FES) and ensuring that children are healthy and prepared to succeed in school (CHAPSS). We began with FES, following the history of this work in the *Making Connections* sites, which resulted in a fourth paper, written by Nilofer Ahsan, entitled **Social Networks Make a Difference: Family Economic Success**. This paper describes examples of concrete opportunities where a social networks approach can bolster the scope, scale, and/or sustainability of FES results. It also contains some key insights about engaging families who are most vulnerable, such as those families with members who are formerly incarcerated, or with members who are dealing with mental health or substance abuse challenges, or immigrant families, and supporting the “success trajectories” of these families individually and collectively.

The fifth and final paper, entitled **Measuring Social Networks: Tools for Mapping and Evaluating Their Development**, written by David Chavis and Mary Hyde, provides an overview of the tools for mapping, measuring, and evaluating the development of robust social networks and their association with the improvement of key outcomes for residents and families. This guidebook can be used by practitioners and residents who live and work in the *Making Connections* sites. It provides hands-on tools for mapping and measuring social networks and the development of key elements within these networks, and for measuring effects at various levels of analysis: individual, group, organizational, or whole network.

The objective of the papers in this series is to tell the story of the social network development here at the Casey Foundation, as well as to share these lessons—gathered from practitioners, residents, and families—with the larger field. It is our hope that as you review these five papers you are able to understand the positive impact of social networks on improving the lives of children, families, and communities. Social networks can be so powerful in the lives of the most disadvantaged families. Therefore, it is important to focus on them and create opportunities where they can be supported and sustained. Indeed, it is clear that attention to strengthening these networks is a key ingredient in realizing the aspiration of transforming neighborhoods. We hope these papers help to provide some ideas, strategies, and tools for supporting positive social networks in your work. Please feel free to send us your comments. Comments may be sent to me at ajordan@aecf.org, or Bahia Akerele at bakerele@aecf.org.

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Social networks exist in every family, community, and institution, yet we often take for granted their power to affect and influence our lives. The Annie E. Casey Foundation and its *Making Connections* initiative are dedicated to helping families in troubled neighborhoods improve their quality of life. The Foundation believes that positive social networks—connections between people and between people and institutions—help families have access to valuable resources. These resources (economic, social, physical, and spiritual) are what families need to create positive, meaningful lives. By understanding the importance and dynamics of social networks and providing well-placed resources to support and strengthen them, the Foundation, in partnership with communities, can better ensure that families in *Making Connections* neighborhoods are able to get—and give—what they need to survive and thrive. Take, for instance, the story of Velma told below.

VELMA'S DAY

Every day, Velma awakes to the sweet sound of her one-year-old daughter Louisa who babbles in her crib ready for breakfast. Velma rises, picks up Louisa, and heads to the kitchen to join her husband Hector and their four-year-old son Victor for breakfast. This is Velma's favorite time of the day. Connecting with her family gives her the energy that sustains her throughout her work day.

After Hector gets the kids dressed and leaves for his job at a tire factory, Velma loads Louisa and Victor into a stroller and brings them to Mrs. Vasquez's house. Carmelita Vasquez is an older woman in the neighborhood who has raised five kids of her own. Known as a grandmother figure to many, Carmelita provides child care for several families in the neighborhood. Velma likes Carmelita very much and is confident that her children are getting excellent care. In addition, Mrs. Vasquez provides care at low cost, which helps Velma and Hector as they constantly struggle to make ends meet.

After dropping the kids off, Velma stops at the local coffee shop. Secretly, she thinks the coffee at Brown's Grounds is terrible, but she likes the owner Jim Brown and enjoys saying hello to the familiar faces she finds there every morning. This morning, Patricia Simpson, a woman she has exchanged some friendly words with in the past, asks her if she's still looking for a new job. Velma is excited to learn that Patricia knows of a good job opportunity at the local hospital where she works and can put in a good word for Velma. Trained as a medical assistant, Velma has been unable to find work in her field and is currently working as a housekeeper at a hotel that is an hour bus ride from home. If she could get a job at the hospital, she would be able to walk to work, enjoy a significant pay increase, and spend more time with her family.

Buoyed by the possibility of a new job, Velma is almost able to bear her work day. The management at the hotel is authoritarian and, in many cases, uses unfair labor practices. Many of Velma's co-workers are illegal immigrants who are afraid to speak out against low pay, long work days, and horrible working conditions. The only thing that sustains Velma at work is her relationships with several of her co-workers who she considers friends. In addition, a labor union has started to talk to the hotel workers about getting organized, and Velma is involved with these initial efforts. The union organizer, Orlando, has been respectful and patient with

the women's reluctance to form a union out of fear of retaliation from hotel management. Their trust in him, and in each other, has led to some hope about creating better working conditions.

On the way home from work, Velma stops at a food bank to get extra groceries for her family. This is one of the worst parts of her day. For years, she and Hector have struggled financially, coming up short month after month. Relying on the food bank feels like admitting defeat—yet her children need nutritious meals. Velma always dreads dealing with food bank staff who don't make eye contact, speak to her gruffly, and never remember her name. Luckily, today Lucinda is working at the food bank. Unlike some of the staff, Lucinda makes Velma feel comfortable. Velma senses that Lucinda respects her, and she enjoys the conversations they have about politics, books, and container gardening. With Lucinda, Velma feels like a person, not a charity case.

Finally, Velma picks up her groceries and heads home to the people she loves best and feels most comfortable with—her husband and children.

RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

The most important components of Velma's day have to do with her relationships with others. During a typical day, Velma is part of several types of social networks:

- Her family;
- Her neighbors;
- The coffee shop owner, employees, and fellow customers;
- Her friends at work;
- The group of hotel employees considering labor union formation; and
- The staff at the food bank.

These connections form the fabric of her life; they give her strength, open doors, and guide her future. Like Velma, we, too, can look back on our own day and identify the relationships that sustain us, delight us, frustrate us, and connect us to opportunities and ideas. Our *social networks* have a powerful influence on us. Both profoundly simple and surprisingly complex, social networks provide the connections through which we live our lives.

THE FOUNDATION'S POINT OF VIEW

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's *Making Connections* initiative is based on the belief that children do well when their families are strong, and families are strong when they live in supportive neighborhoods. In *Making Connections* neighborhoods, families are often

disconnected from each other and from the opportunities they need to get by, get ahead, and get results. And sometimes the connections they do have are not functioning optimally to improve the quality of life where they live.

Making Connections seeks to help families develop meaningful connections to economic opportunities, social network opportunities, and quality services and supports. The initiative’s “theory of change” suggests that strategies and results in all three focus areas (and the synergy between them) are necessary for families to realize the level of success that will transform their lives and their neighborhoods (see Figure 1). The Foundation aims for results that are large in both scope and scale and that can be sustained long after it retreats as a primary source of investment in the sites. Strategies must therefore be comprehensive, locally grounded, and powerful.

Making Connections is committed to helping families in tough neighborhoods recognize the power of their social networks and to giving them the tools to harness that power so they realize they are the primary change agents in their own lives. The name of the initiative says it all: connections matter. From the very beginning of the initiative, Foundation staff have worked to bring people together—stakeholders in the sites, other local partners with similar goals, and national experts and advisors—and have allowed time for relationships to form among them.

The Foundation believes that by understanding, identifying, tapping into, and providing opportunities to support or further develop healthy social ties, it will support tough neighborhoods in realizing better, sustainable results for disconnected children and families. At the same time, it must also investigate the ways in which individuals in *Making Connections* communities became disconnected in the first place from the institutions created to serve them. Too often, institutionalized racism, ethnocentrism, classism, bureaucratic red-tape, and social service worker burnout have resulted in a rift between community and institutional spheres. The Foundation has a critical role to play in reconnecting people and institutions within communities. Social networks provide the means to ground a systems reform effort like *Making Connections* in the reality of the lives of families. Indeed, promoting positive social networks may be the key ingredient to creating authentic, sustainable transformations in struggling neighborhoods.

In this paper, we take the first steps toward documenting and understanding the research and lived experience that support our beliefs about the power of social networks. On the following pages, we provide an overview of social networks theory and terminology; develop a working definition of social networks as it applies to the Foundation’s efforts; discuss the relationship between social networks and *Making Connections* core results; give an overview of conditions needed to enhance positive social networks in the *Making Connections* sites and beyond; and suggest some possible next steps for the Foundation’s work in this realm.

THE FOUNDATION
BELIEVES THAT BY
UNDERSTANDING,
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INTO, AND PROVIDING
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TO SUPPORT OR
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BETTER, SUSTAINABLE
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DREN AND FAMILIES.

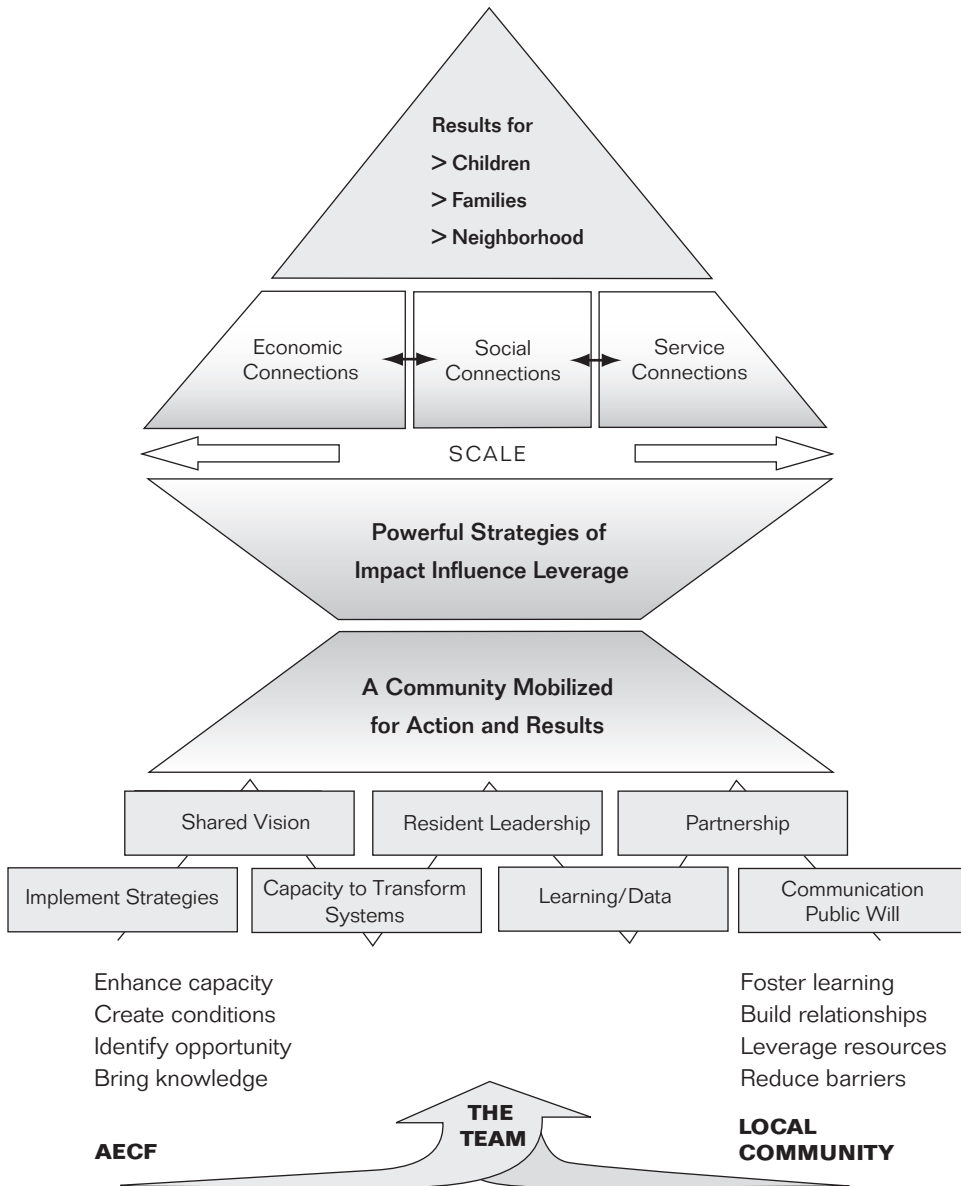


Figure 1: The Making Connections "Theory of Change"

HOW DO WE IDENTIFY AND DEFINE SOCIAL NETWORKS?

Social networks are such an integral part of our daily lives that we rarely take the time to think about their many forms and the needs that they serve. Just as we don't spend much time thinking about the chemical composition of the air we breathe, we don't tend to analyze the social networks that sustain us. Yet, being able to identify different types of social networks and their specific values (and drawbacks) is an important first step in becoming intentional about providing opportunities to create and strengthen sustainable, positive social networks. Since the 1970s, scholars have engaged in research and developed theories about the mechanisms of social networks. In this section, we begin to “demystify” social networks and examine them by some of their specific aspects to make them more tangible.

We begin with a working definition of social networks:

A **social network** is a set of people (or organizations or other social entities) connected by a set of social relationships, such as friendship, co-working, or information exchange.¹

Social networks can be identified at different levels (e.g., individual, group, or institutional), with a variety of benefits (e.g., informational, material, emotional, or spiritual), and among many different people across content or programmatic areas (e.g., employment, health, education, or community development). Many of these networks are active at the same time; they are rarely mutually exclusive.

DISTINGUISHING SOCIAL NETWORKS FROM RELATED CONCEPTS

It is easy to confuse the concept of social networks with other ideas related to relationships or collectivism. The difference is that *social networks provide the “scaffolding” or framework upon which successful community-building efforts are created*. Efforts to increase social support, social capital, civic participation, community building, or collective efficacy will be less successful if undertaken without an effort to identify and strengthen social networks. In the table below, these related concepts are compared and contrasted.

CONCEPT	DEFINITION	HOW IT IS DIFFERENT THAN AND/OR RELATES TO SOCIAL NETWORKS
Social network	A set of people, organizations, or other social entities connected by a set of social relationships.	
Social support	Support derived from social relationships. This support can be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Instrumental (e.g., child care or financial assistance) > Informational (e.g., a referral to health care services) > Affiliative (e.g., companionship or a sense of community) > Emotional (e.g., validation of self-worth) > Spiritual (e.g., giving meaning to life, giving hope) 	Social support is the <i>interpersonal result</i> of social networks. A successful social network will provide social support.
Social capital	“Specific processes among people and organizations, working collaboratively in an atmosphere of trust, that lead to accomplishing a goal of mutual social benefit... interactions among people through systems that enhance and support that interaction.” ²	Social networks are the actual connections between people, while social capital refers to the <i>systemic or cumulative result</i> of social networks. In other words, social capital is the latent or active resources that accumulate from social networks. A neighborhood with numerous, healthy social networks formed to obtain mutual benefits will have high social capital.
Collective efficacy	The willingness of neighbors to intervene or act on behalf of the common good. ³	Social networks build a sense of collectivism among people. Those who feel connected to others are more likely to act collectively. Therefore, collective efficacy is also a byproduct of social networks. It is also an important component of the following two concepts: civic participation and community building.
Civic participation	Interest in public issues and involvement in debates and common activities.	Social networks create the social capital that can give a community more “ownership” and interest in the policy issues that affect the common good. Civic participation can also be a platform upon which social networks are formed.

CONCEPT	DEFINITION	HOW IT IS DIFFERENT THAN AND/OR RELATES TO SOCIAL NETWORKS
Community building	Actions to strengthen the capacity of communities to identify priorities and opportunities to foster and sustain positive neighborhood change. ⁴	Like civic participation, an interest in community building can be the result of social networks that produce social capital. Unlike civic participation, community building is focused on geography rather than policy issues.
Community organizing	Building personal relationships and changing the ways in which people interact through a two-step process: 1. understanding individual self-interests and 2. helping people find connections so that they can act collectively with others who share their interests. ⁵	Community organizing cannot be successful without tapping into and/or building social networks. Good community organizers know that <i>relationships</i> are the key to their success. The goal of community organizing is often to increase social support, social capital, civic participation, community building, and collective efficacy.
Resident engagement	Engaging residents in efforts to participate in and change their own communities.	Resident engagement can involve social networks if efforts are made to encourage relationships. In some forms of resident engagement, people may only be offering comments and opinions rather than interacting with each other.
Social services delivery	Institutional provision of basic needs such as food, housing, crisis intervention, health care, mental health care, or other services. Social services are usually provided to socially or financially vulnerable groups of people.	In some cases, social services delivery may involve little communication or interaction, while in other cases, services may take the form of a support group or a close relationship between a participant and an agency worker. The latter are examples of institutional relationships.

In summary, social networks are the necessary precursor to the development of social support and social capital. Their existence makes possible the collective mentality that fuels community organizing and community-building activities. And while civic participation and resident engagement are facilitated and fostered by these networks, the networks themselves are also bolstered by increased activism at the local level. Likewise, social services delivery can be the springboard for connecting recipients to networks. Obviously, social networks are at work in many ways that are integral to community transformation efforts. In the following section, we look closely at the different types of social networks and their dynamics.

TYPES OF SOCIAL NETWORKS⁶

Social networks come in many forms. One way of distinguishing them is to identify *who is involved* and *for what purpose*.

- ***Informal networks*** are networks built among family members and friends. These networks are often characterized by strong emotion and deep, complex bonds.
- ***Generalized networks*** are networks formed among people who belong to organizational groups that often share ideas, beliefs, values, or common activities. For example, a neighborhood association, faith community, or a national association of African-American journalists could be called a generalized network.
- ***Institutional networks*** are networks formed in relationship with, brokered by, sanctioned by, within, or in response to directives from institutions. These social networks are often concerned with fairness of rules and official procedures. Parent-teacher-student associations or citizen and oversight panels organized by a municipality would fall into this category. In addition, most people's paid employment takes place within an institutional network—especially if they work for an institution or company with its own set of policies and procedures.

If we think about it, each of us is likely to be involved in all three types of networks at any given time. For example, Joan lives with her partner and their two children and has several close friends: her informal network. Joan is also in a local band, and band members and other musicians form a generalized network. Her job at the local phone company takes place within an institutional network, as does her involvement with a city-sponsored neighborhood watch effort. These categories can also overlap. For example, if Joan's partner were in the band with her, she would have overlapping informal and generalized networks. If she were on the neighborhood watch committee with a fellow band member, her generalized and institutional networks would overlap.⁷

DYNAMICS WITHIN NETWORKS

An easy way to look at network dynamics is to look at one-on-one connections and to map or describe the relationships between the people in the network.⁸ When mapping relationships, we seek to identify the following three characteristics of the connections between people:

- ***Directionality*** refers to the direction from which the relationship between two people originates. For example, who makes the effort to connect first and most often? This gives us a way to look at how power might be operating in a relationship. In some cases, directionality may be mutual, with both parties

contributing equally to the connection. This would most likely be seen inside an egalitarian friendship within an informal network. In other cases, directionality only flows one way. This might be the case when examining a student's relationship with her school or teacher within an institutional network. Examining directionality can give us a sense of who is giving, who is receiving, and who is making the rules.

- *Flow* indicates how efficiently and how often exchanges move across a connection. For example, two members of a group of stamp collectors who meet once a month through a generalized network and speak infrequently between meetings could be considered part of a low-flow connection. A mother and daughter within an informal network, who live two blocks from each other and talk daily, have a high-flow connection.
- *Exchange* refers to what is given and received via the connection. For example, in our institutional networks at work, we exchange services, goods, or ideas for money. In an informal connection between a grandfather and grandson, each is receiving love. The grandson may be receiving wisdom or knowledge, and the grandfather may receive a sense of pride in the future generation.

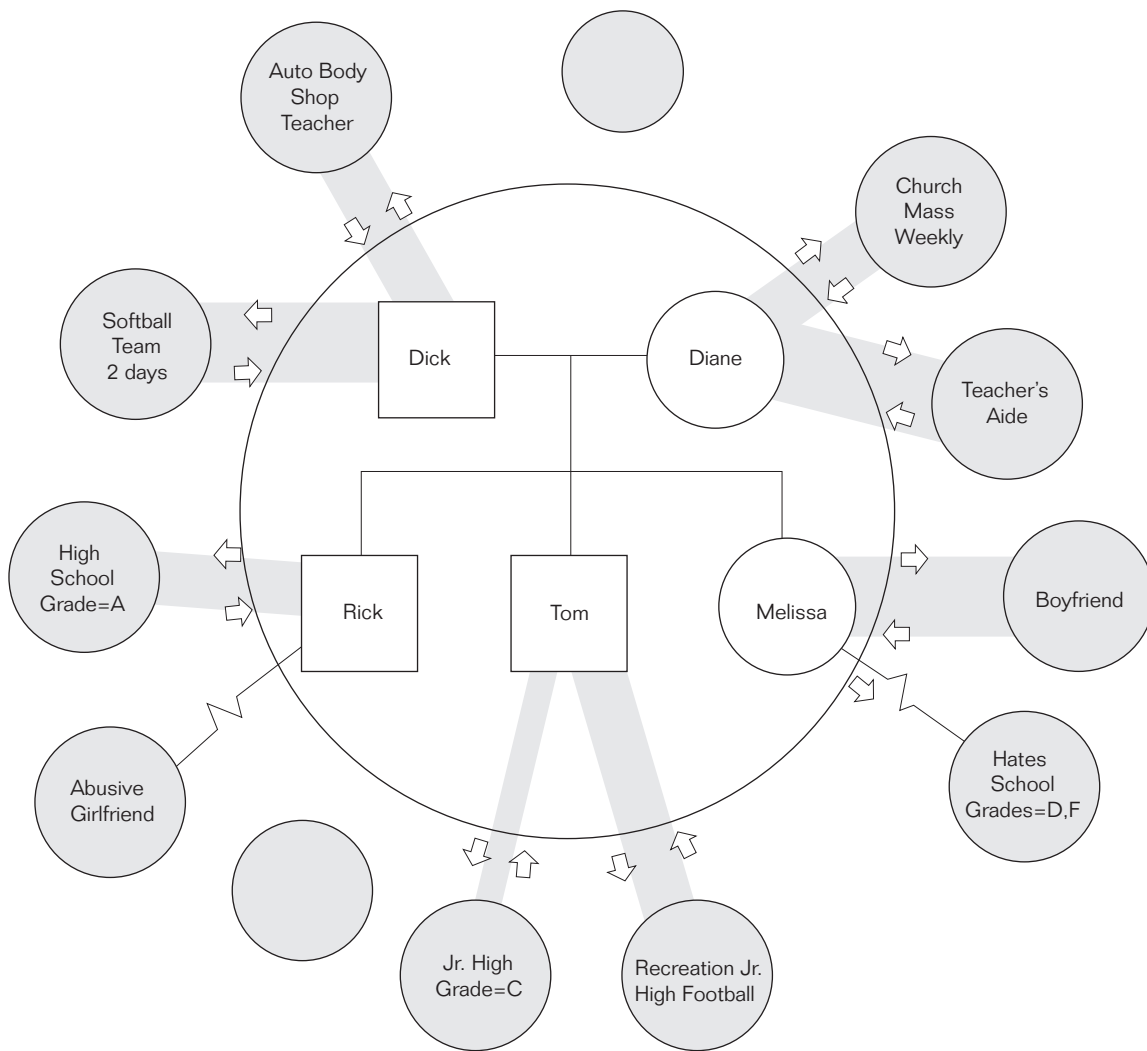
If we put these concepts together, we can analyze many relationships by asking these questions:

TYPE OF SOCIAL NETWORK	DIRECTIONALITY	FLOW	EXCHANGE
Is this an informal, generalized, or institutional network?	Who makes the rules or holds the power in the relationship? Who is most likely to initiate contact?	How often is contact made and how efficiently is information exchanged between the two parties in the relationship?	What is being given and received in the relationship?

Each of these elements—directionality, flow, and exchange—will most likely shift over time in a relationship, and when they are consistently one-sided, they may result in a breakdown within a connection or social network. If we apply these elements to our own relationships, we can create a map of the connections that surround us and the energy flowing toward us and away from us at any given time. One tool that is used to track these relationships is an “ecomap.” In Figure 2, relationships and connections between members of a family are mapped to show the directionality, flow, and exchange between family members and their environment.

Figure 2: Ecomap of the Gardner Family

SYMBOLS:
 Circle = female
 Square = male
 Arrows = the direction of the giving and receiving exchange
 Crooked lines = a conflicted relationship

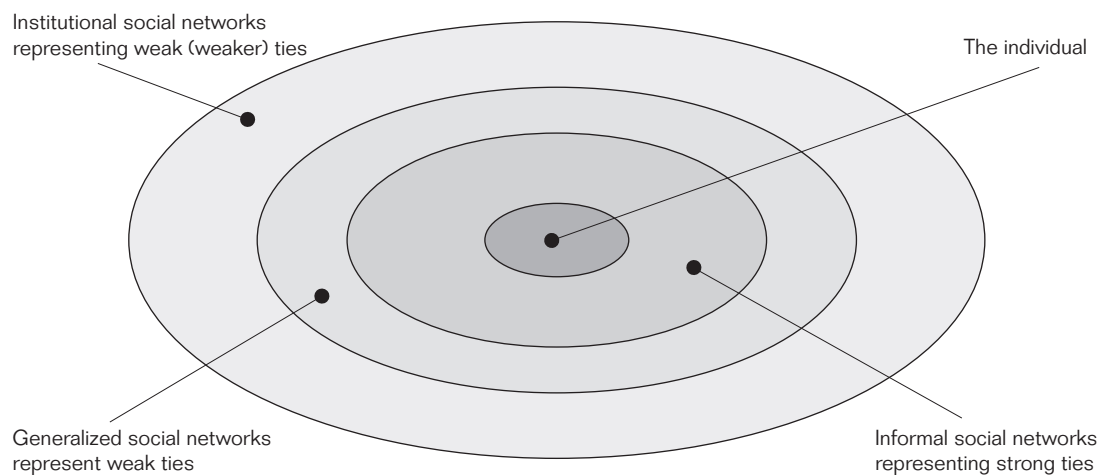


A quick review of the ecomap reveals the following information about this family:

- Diane, the mother in this family, gives and gets quite a bit in her relationship with her church and in her job as a teacher's aide.
- Daughter Melissa has reciprocal flow and directionality in her relationship with her boyfriend but feels conflicted about school where she is struggling and feels she puts out more energy than she gets back.
- Son Tom has reciprocal flow and directionality in both school and on his junior high football team. He is an average student compared to his sister who is struggling and brother who is excelling.
- Son Rick has a reciprocal flow and directionality in school but a one-sided and conflictual relationship with his girlfriend.
- Dick, the father, is also in a reciprocal exchange, both giving and getting energy from his job and softball team.

Identifying the types and dynamics of social networks that might exist in a community is imperative before beginning any comprehensive neighborhood transformation effort. These connections, if capitalized on, can be the key to an initiative's success. But recognizing networks that are nonexistent or need strengthening is equally important. Creating and encouraging the proper dynamics within social networks can result in the type of positive environment where change not only happens but can be sustained.

Figure 3: Social Network Types



DIFFERENT TYPES OF SOCIAL NETWORKS GENERATE DIFFERENT TYPES OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

There are a variety of types of social capital, or results, produced by effective social networks. They can be categorized by the nature of the ties, or connections, that are formed within each network.

- Within informal networks, the close social relationships that form with family and/or friends create *bonding ties*. These ties lead to *bonding social capital* that not only brings people closer together, but helps them “get by” (e.g., by providing emotional support or informal child care). Bonding ties already exist in every community and, therefore, are outside of the Foundation’s purview, except when it is necessary to create opportunities for people to come together to establish these bonds.
- In generalized and institutional networks the relationships are usually different. The ties established between people in these networks are called *bridging ties*. These ties lead to the formation of *bridging social capital* that connects people to resources across networks and may make the resources that exist in one network accessible to members of another. Bridging social capital enables people to “get ahead” (e.g., by providing job referrals, child care, and transportation to work and appointments). The Foundation is well positioned to help communities strengthen bridging ties, which are needed in order for families to link to real social power (e.g., parents organizing themselves to support a school initiative).

The social capital that results from bonding ties—a sense of belonging, validation of self, and an identification of purpose—is an essential element in sustaining any social change movement. Likewise, the social capital created by bridging ties—helping people extend beyond their immediate circle to connect to a broader range of resources and opportunities—can open the doors necessary for success. When considering families who live and work in tough neighborhoods, such as those of the *Making Connections* sites, an additional type of connection is essential:

- *Vertical* or *linking ties* are needed between social groups or classes where there is a power differential. These ties create *linking social capital* that can assist members of disenfranchised groups to “get influence” or “get results” (e.g., through collective action or activism). Bridging ties often precede linking ties, and when power builds through linking ties, it influences the strength of bonding and bridging ties as well.

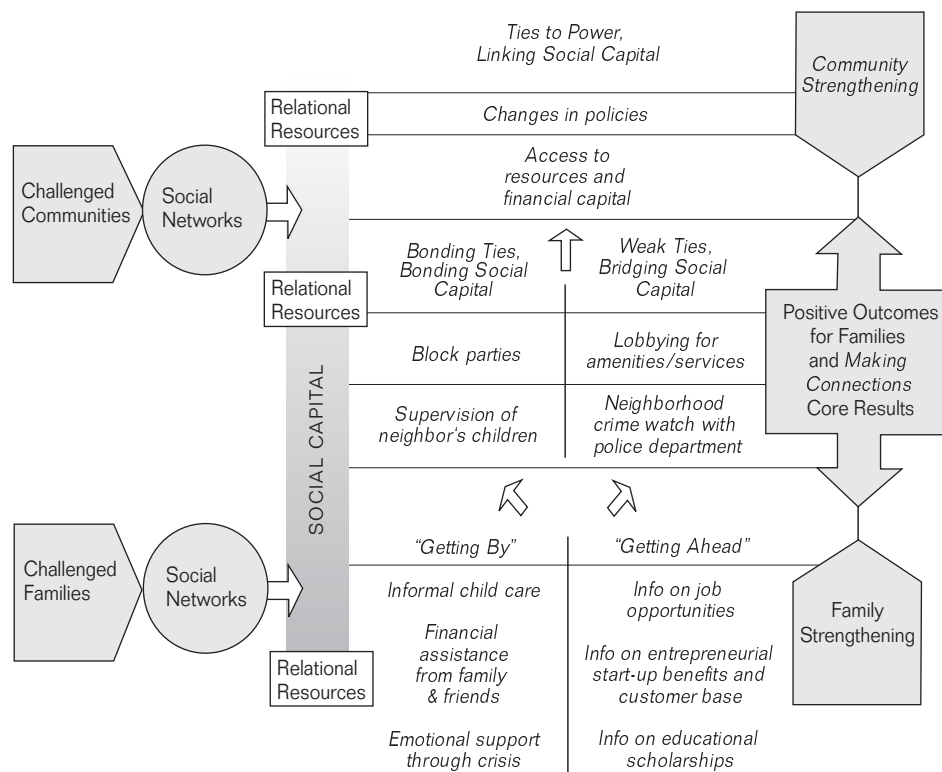
The positive results of the social capital generated by social networks can be understood broadly as:

- A sense of community identity, spirit, and pride that encourages participation in community life;

- The foundation for understanding different age groups, classes, races, and cultures that broadens one’s perspective of the world and reduces fear and mistrust of other people;
- A community culture that establishes norms and expectations for members’ conduct and serves as an informal control of antisocial behavior;
- An important bridge to needed resources and opportunities outside of the neighborhood; and
- The promotion of common causes and collective goals for advocacy or social action.⁹

Figure 4 shows how social networks and the different types of social capital that accrue from them generate benefits at both the individual resident and family level as well as the neighborhood or community level.¹⁰

Figure 4: Social Networks and Their Outcomes



TYPES OF CONNECTIONS AND BENEFITS

Another way to distinguish different types of networks is to look at the tangible and intangible nature of attachment and of the benefits derived from these connections.

- **Place-based or identity-based networks.** Social networks can be and often are geographical, or in other words, attached to a place such as a neighborhood. In neighborhoods, residents can form strong ties to one another, and these networks can become dense due to multiple opportunities to interact with people in the same space. But social networks can also transcend geography; membership in a group is not bound by location or even time (as in cultural or religious group identity). For example, a person's identity as an African-American woman in Baltimore, Maryland, in 2004 can connect that individual through cultural ties to African-American women in Mobile, Alabama, in 1954. Social networks, then, can have tangible connections, such as a location that is observable, and intangible connections, such as a sense of identity as a member of a faith or religious group.

- **Tangible and intangible benefits.** Similarly, the benefits that are available through social networks are both tangible and intangible. Additional income that an individual acquires by obtaining a career advancement opportunity through an acquaintance is quantifiable and tangible. The pride and inspiration a mother feels when witnessing the college graduation of her daughter is less obvious and not so easily quantified. Both types of benefits are valuable, and by the mother's account the benefit of the latter is perhaps immeasurable. Intangible ties often serve as a "sustainability engine" and are crucial for enabling and supporting tangible benefits. We must *feel* empowered to create real, tangible change.

Thus far we have discussed types of social networks, dynamics that exist with social network ties, the social capital associated with each type of network, and the benefits of those networks. To further elaborate on these concepts, the following table provides a summary of how the elements described above might intersect in Joan's life—the person introduced in a previous example on page 11.

RELATIONSHIP	TYPE OF SOCIAL NETWORK	PURPOSE OF SOCIAL NETWORK	EXAMPLE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT PROVIDED	DIRECTIONALITY
Joan's relationship with her partner	Informal	"Get By"	Emotional support, companionship, partnership	Bi-directional—power is shared
Joan's relationship with fellow musician and band member Pedro	Generalized	"Get Ahead"	Affiliative—sense of community and access to paid work as a musician	Energy currently flows from Joan to Pedro as Pedro can provide access to a job Joan wants
Joan's relationship with Officer Brown, city liaison for the neighborhood watch group	Institutional	"Get Influence" "Get Results"	Instrumental—safer neighborhood	Officer Brown holds the power as a representative of an institution and decision-maker about resource allocation to Joan's neighborhood

THE DOWNSIDE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS: RELATIONSHIPS ARE NOT ALWAYS POSITIVE

As we would expect of any situation involving human relationships, social networks have costs as well as benefits.

Some of the negative or "cost" aspects of social networks and the social capital that they create are:¹¹

- **Members of social networks can be territorial.** Social capital as a resource available through social networks must remain a shared commodity. If one individual in a network demands more than his or her "share" of a resource that was collectively created, turf wars can result, and some network members can become marginalized.
- **Social networks are often confused with the benefits derived from them.** When a group of people form a network to provide child care for each other's children, the result could be positive or negative. Children might get high-quality, loving care or might end up neglected or even abused. The ability to

FLOW	EXCHANGE	PLACE OR IDENTITY BASED?	BENEFITS	TYPE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL BUILT
Frequent, efficient	Love, financial support, partner in child rearing	Place	Intangible (love, support) and tangible (financial support, help with children)	Bonding
Infrequent, efficient	Time for collaborative effort to make music, access to new job opportunities	Identity	Intangible (artistic expression) and tangible (job opportunity)	Bridging
Infrequent, inefficient	Involvement for clout and influence with policymakers and police	Place	Intangible (greater sense of safety in neighborhood) and tangible (more resources allocated to keep Joan's neighborhood safe)	Linking

command resources through social networks must be considered separately from the level or quality of those resources. Romanticizing social networks as the “best” solution may not always serve families well.

• **Social networks can become exclusive.** Problems result when groups identify so strongly with each other that they exclude others. For example:

- Some ethnic groups hold tight control over construction trades and fire and police unions in some cities.
- A tight-knit, extended family may provide special support to its members, but only with “strings attached.” For instance, they may restrict a member’s initiative or freedom to “do things differently.”
- In a phenomenon known as “downward-leveling,” group members pressure others toward sameness. For example, some students of a particular ethnic group may pressure students of the same ethnicity to underachieve.
- “Public bads” such as mafia families, street gangs, and prostitute rings.

- **Social networks are not a substitute for social services.** A romantic notion that promotes social networks and social capital as the solution to the problems of the inner city is destructive. Social capital is no substitute for the financial and human capital troubled communities need—broken, publicly funded service systems must not be let off the hook so easily.

Obviously, those closest to us can do us the most harm. This is the case in domestic violence, child abuse, and even “dysfunctional” families, marriages, and friendships. When assessing the value of social networks, it is important to look for any destructive factors that are imbedded within them, rather than assuming that all networks are beneficial.

Repairing Networks Across Divisions of Race, Class, and Power¹²

When building social networks and social capital in poor communities and communities of color, we cannot forget two important structural factors that keep people disempowered and disconnected: racism and poverty. The Foundation can have a substantial impact if it focuses on strengthening bridging and linking ties between people and institutions in these communities.

How do poor communities get disconnected in the first place? Institutions play a powerful role in destabilizing poor communities. Efforts to build social networks in poor communities without attention to creating bridging and linking ties to institutional power will not have a long-term, structural impact and could even result in more intense isolation of poor people. Strong bonding ties developed among community members are powerful building blocks, but they are not enough when large institutions create policies around housing, welfare provision, police, and prisons that are devastating to poor communities and communities of color. In many cases, institutionalized racism plays a role in policies that perpetuate poverty. In some cases, the problem may not be a disconnect, but rather a one-sided, dysfunctional connection where residents are viewed and treated as completely dependent rather than agents capable of taking and giving in mutual exchange.

Social networks look different in affluent and poor communities. Poverty decreases the power of bonding and bridging ties in informal or generalized networks. In an affluent community, people are more likely to meet others who hold some institutional power through generalized networks. Contacts made at a country club, where members may be judges, policymakers, business leaders, or celebrities, are much more likely to lead to powerful institutional connections than connections made at a local food bank.

"Residents in poor communities may be friends with their neighbors, but those neighbors cannot provide them with connections and references to jobs in the way that many residents in affluent communities can. PTA members in an affluent community can discuss the latest curriculum innovations with school teachers while PTA members in inner city schools must discuss how to get an unresponsive central bureaucracy to fix the ceiling that has been falling down in the school auditorium for the last ten years."¹³

Lack of social capital in poor communities and communities of color may have more to do with racism and classism than an inability to organize or build social networks. For poor people, the chasm between reality and resources is demonstrably deeper and wider.

Transformation requires bridging. In order to truly empower low-income communities, four types of bridging ties must be established:

- **Bridging ties across local generalized networks** such as churches, PTAs, community development associations, tenant associations, and other neighborhood groups. These ties help to create networks with more reach and a sense of collective identity.
- **Bridging ties between different low-income communities and neighborhoods.** Poor neighborhoods are often divided against each other for complex historical reasons based on race, ethnicity, or identity. Bridging these differences in the interest of better conditions for everyone is an important step toward building social capital for the disenfranchised.
- **Bridging ties between poor and more affluent communities (referred to earlier as "linking ties").** This not only provides poor individuals and families more opportunities to "get ahead," but it can also be a first step in developing a national commitment to alleviate poverty.
- **Bridging ties or "synergy" between poor communities, financial institutions, and policymakers at both the local and national levels.**

FUNCTIONS AND ROLES WITHIN COMPLEX SOCIAL NETWORKS

Simply analyzing the connections between two people is an easy way to begin to understand social networks, but it does not capture the complexity of human relationships. Social networks run the gamut from *simple* (one person connected to one other person) to *complex* (where there are multiple connections between multiple individuals).

To better analyze and understand the complexities of larger social networks, the following table provides definitions for some of their key components:

FUNCTION	DEFINITION ¹⁴
Node	A point within a network that can connect to other points. A node can be an individual, a family, an institution, or a community, depending on the level of analysis.
Portals and Doorways	Places through which individuals and families enter a network, such as leadership programs, block parties, or neighbor circles. A program or activity becomes known as a portal or doorway when families are introduced to the network at that point of contact and are then made aware of other opportunities for engagement or participation in the network.
Hubs	Focal points for network connectivity and activity: for example, settlement houses, family support centers, or community schools. These are places where families come to get specific needs met, but also tap into networks that may lead to other opportunities to use their skills and talents.
Hives	Accumulation of points in the network where there are innovative communities that create, adapt, and spread network tools and ideas.
Connectors and weavers	A connector or weaver is an individual who sees his or her role as representing a network and taking responsibility for engaging individuals and families in opportunities within the network. While a connector will often stop at simply introducing people to each other, a weaver will take the time to build relationships and learn about a family's interests, skills, and needs with the intent to encourage more than one connection to the network.
Network stewards	People or organizations that cater to the care and feeding of networks (for example, data and information resource centers).

SOCIAL NETWORKS ARE OFTEN THE GLUE THAT BINDS COMMUNITY, THE REASON THAT FAMILIES SEEK AND COME BACK FOR SERVICES.

HOW DO SOCIAL NETWORKS OPERATE IN COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION WORK?

Social networks are often the “glue” that binds communities, the reason that families seek and come back for supports and services, and the catalyst to get and keep people invested in civic participation and community development efforts.

Encouraging or strengthening social networks can be a separate strategy within a community transformation effort. But because social networks often determine the success or failure of such an initiative, it is advisable to consider social networks as part of the overall strategy, similar to the way in which multiculturalism, class, or gender are considered. And like issues of ethnicity, gender, or class, social networks often operate under the surface of what’s “visible.”

GROWTH, RESILIENCE, AND REACH

Social networks contribute to and strengthen community change efforts in three specific ways: growth, resilience, and reach.¹⁵ Below are examples of growth, resilience, and reach in the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Jobs Initiative:

- **Growth.** Strong social networks expand rapidly and widely because the benefits are clear: existing members see the value of networking and new members see the value in joining. For example, when residents became aware of the success of the Jobs Initiative, they were more likely to join. Concurrently, employer partners were more likely to participate when they observed other employers benefiting from a connection to qualified workers and the opportunity to strengthen their community. Social capital grows exponentially as social networks get stronger. These confederations of people, however, have to be flexible; they must adjust as people come and go. Successful growth, therefore, is tied to reach and resilience.
- **Resilience.** Social networks don’t exist in a vacuum; they exist in a context where many factors threaten them. Networks need to be strong enough to withstand stress and to reorganize quickly when key links are cut off. For example, if a neighborhood resident has a bad experience with one employer through the Jobs Initiative, the network needs to be fluid enough to provide other opportunities for success. Similarly, one key employer’s departure from the network would not put the whole initiative in jeopardy if the network is resilient and has adequate reach.
- **Reach.** Most of us are aware of the concept of “six degrees of separation” and have found that we share common acquaintances with perfect strangers we meet in unexpected places (e.g., at a dinner party, on an airplane, on a trip to another country). As networks grow, they bring people together in novel combinations and connect us to opportunities we may not even be aware of until we need to access them. For example, a Jobs Initiative with adequate reach can connect people to opportunities across geographic or social boundaries simply because each point in the network carries connections to many other points.

Clearly, attention to social networks—which provide growth, resilience, and reach—can ground a community change effort and provide the staying power needed to truly transform communities.

How Attention to Social Networks Makes a Difference in a Community Change Initiative

Any strategy related to community transformation should be examined to consider the roles social networks may play that could affect the results of that effort. The following vignette provides an example of an unsuccessful community organizing/resident engagement event that could have been much more successful if the organizers had paid adequate attention to social networks.

A *Making Connections* site holds a community picnic to increase resident engagement and share neighborhood information gleaned from a cross-site survey. Organizers are excited by the high turnout. After residents arrive and get plates of food, they stand around in small groups eating and waiting to see what will happen. After about an hour, a *Making Connections* staff person gets up and reports on survey results in English. Flyers with the same information are available for the Spanish-speaking residents who make up 50 percent of the neighborhood and about 25 percent of the picnic attendees. After giving the report, the speaker encourages people to sign up for different committees on sheets posted around the perimeter of the park. After the event, organizers are disappointed to note that very few people signed up to work on neighborhood improvement efforts.

What Went Wrong? At this point in the *Making Connections* initiative, most of us can see the obvious mistakes made by the well-meaning organizers of this event. Here, we offer suggestions for improvement with an eye toward tapping into and building social networks:

- **Personally welcome people to any event.** In order for organizers to set the tone for conversation and social networking, they could have walked through the crowd introducing themselves and introducing families and groups of people to each other. In other words, staff, and hopefully resident allies, could act as connectors or weavers to begin creating bonding and bridging social ties.
- **Provide space for people to sit and talk.** Informal space and time is important for human relationships to form. Organizers did not provide a place for residents to sit at the event, forcing people to stand up while eating and hearing the presentation. This can lead to a sense of discomfort and disconnection. People might also feel encouraged to stay longer if they have a comfortable place to sit.

• **Attend to cultural barriers.** By only providing the verbal presentation in English, organizers marginalized the significant Spanish-speaking population in the community. The presentation should have been given in both Spanish and English, and connectors and weavers should also have been bilingual or at least representative of the neighborhood's residents. Cultural inclusiveness is crucial for creating bridging and linking social capital. Racism and cultural insensitivity create barriers that are almost impossible to overcome once they have been erected. Any Latina/o attending this event most likely would have felt peripheral and disrespected.

• **Ask people what they think.** After presenting information on the survey results, the speaker did not ask residents—the experts about life in their neighborhood—if the results resonated with their experience or reflected their concerns. Therefore, organizers missed out on a chance to gather important qualitative data that could illuminate or contradict survey results. As important, organizers created a “top-down” dynamic in the directionality of their communication with residents, and offered little in exchange for residents' time to motivate them to get more involved.

• **Illuminate bonding social capital.** Bridging and linking ties are often built upon bonding social capital. Organizers could have asked residents to introduce their families or asked why their community and the people in it are important to them. This would intentionally bring important social networks to light and create an environment where people felt that relationships and connections were valued.

• **Create opportunities for interaction.** Asking people to volunteer for tasks on peripherally located sign-up sheets is not effective. Instead, organizers could have asked people to break into groups based on their interests. By their nature, these groups have the potential to evolve into generalized social networks and give residents from different cultural and economic backgrounds the opportunity to create bridging ties around common interests.

• **Provide the conditions for institutional social networks and linking social capital to develop.** By inviting local decision-makers and institutional representatives to participate in discussions, organizers would have created the conditions for institutional social networks to develop where residents would have a chance to not only talk about their concerns, but also “get results” by linking to people with power.

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL NETWORKS AND *MAKING CONNECTIONS* CORE RESULTS

With the initial description and analysis of social networks provided above, we can begin to see how social networks play a variety of roles related to achieving results in the *Making Connections* initiative. Specifically, we can begin to understand what types of networks and which components of them can best advance strategies the Foundation has developed to achieve the following core results in the *Making Connections* neighborhoods:

- Families have increased earnings and income;
- Families have increased levels of assets;
- Families and youth increase their civic participation;
- Families have strong supports and networks;
- Families have access to quality services and supports that work for them; and
- Children are healthy and prepared to succeed in school.

If, after ten years of this initiative, the Foundation, in partnership with local communities, is successful, families who live in *Making Connections* communities will, in significant number and degree, experience a fundamentally improved quality of life in their neighborhoods. Examples of this transformation will include: parents who are successful breadwinners and nurturers of their children; children who are psychologically and physically healthy and progressing well in school and community activities; and adolescents who, as valued members of their communities, are making the successful transition from childhood to productive adulthood and citizenship.

The effort is intended to be sweeping—a local movement—beyond the sum of programmatic changes to major systems reform. This is no small feat. It hasn't been done before. And it is our belief that if we are to be successful, the connections families currently have to economic opportunities, social networks, and quality services and supports must be fundamentally changed. We believe that when the connections change, the results will change. Below, we look at the role of social networks in achieving each of the core results, beginning with those in which the role of social networks is most obvious. We also take a look at some special populations for whom social networks are even more essential for achieving core results.

MAKING CONNECTIONS CORE RESULT: FAMILIES HAVE STRONG SUPPORTS AND NETWORKS

For this core result, social networks themselves are the goal. In other words, the existence of strong supports and networks is a worthy achievement in its own right and is considered one of the hallmarks of a thriving community.

One of the key indicators developed for this core result is that “more families are connected to informal networks and natural helpers.” Of the three main types of social networks described in this paper, this indicator focuses on informal social networks—connections to those closest to us, such as family and friends. These networks help people “get by.” They offer intangible benefits (such as love, emotional support, and companionship) and tangible benefits (such as financial support in time of need and help with children). They generate bonding social capital, which provides sustainability to a community change effort.

A second key indicator for this core result is that “more families participate in resource exchange networks and mutual aid associations.” This indicator focuses on generalized networks—connections among people who are less familiar such as members of organizational groups. These networks offer opportunities to “get ahead,” through benefits such as access to job opportunities, services, or information. Generalized networks generate bridging social capital that creates ties across networks, may make resources that exist in one network accessible to members of other networks, and can increase ties between institutions and the people they serve.

Mutual Aid Associations: Using Social Networks to Ensure Successful Transitions for Immigrants and Refugees¹⁶

When immigrants and refugees from around the world seek safe haven in the United States, they often come with nothing but the clothes they are wearing. Such people need help and support just to survive in a place where the language and culture are foreign to them. Often, intensive supports across a broad range of needs are required. Social networks can play an important role in meeting these needs.

The organizations that often fulfill the needs of these individuals and families are called mutual aid associations (MAAs). These organizations are usually small, mono-ethnic, community-based organizations grounded in the traditions and customs of a specific immigrant group. They are characterized by a small bilingual staff that serves in a variety of important roles—interpreters, translators, advocates, and cultural liaisons—for their clientele.

Specifically, these organizations provide:

- The breakdown of cultural and language barriers to services;
- Navigation of the bureaucratic process for gaining legal status;
- Advocacy related to policies that adversely affect immigrants and refugees;

FIVE OF THE *MAKING CONNECTIONS* CITIES—DENVER, HARTFORD, OAKLAND, PROVIDENCE, AND SEATTLE—HAVE LARGE POPULATIONS OF FOREIGN-BORN, IMMIGRANT, OR REFUGEE FAMILIES WHO HAVE BEEN OR ARE CURRENTLY BEING SUPPORTED THROUGH MAAS.

- Protection from attacks on individuals and groups from immigrant populations;
- An important bridge to business creation and jobs; and
- Opportunities for coalition building between different immigrant groups who share common concerns.

MAAs exist throughout the United States, with 70 percent of them located in just six states. They serve myriad individual refugee and immigrant groups, including those from Southeast Asia, the Pacific Islands, Africa, Mexico, Central and South America, and war-torn European countries. Five of the *Making Connections* cities—Denver, Hartford, Oakland, Providence, and Seattle—have large populations of foreign-born, immigrant, or refugee families who have been or are currently being supported through MAAs.

MAAs most closely resemble generalized networks that produce bridging social capital but may also generate bonding social capital, usually offered by informal networks, and linking social capital available through some institutional networks.

MAKING CONNECTIONS CORE RESULT: FAMILIES AND YOUTH INCREASE THEIR CIVIC PARTICIPATION

For this core result, social networks are seen as the best way to foster increased participation in civic life.

One important indicator of civic participation is that “more families have adult members who register and vote.” This result could come about outside of a social network, such as when individuals act on their own to become registered to vote or respond to information in some type of media about the importance of registering and voting. However, generalized and institutional social networks can also encourage their members in large numbers to register and vote through voter education forums or voter registration drives.

Another key indicator of civic participation is that “more residents take up informal and formal leadership roles.” These roles are ones found in generalized and institutional networks that provide bridging social capital as well as the potential for linking social capital.

Another indicator, “more residents participate in associations and organizations,” has similar benefits for the community and its social networks. Activities related to both indicators can strengthen the functions of networks (by adding nodes or doorways) and can bring in connectors and weavers to enlarge the opportunities available within the network. In addition, participation in associations and organizations can increase other

types of civic participation. Research shows that organizational membership, political attitudes, and contextual factors are strong predictors of civic participation.¹⁷ It also has been shown that income and education not only affect individuals' civic participation, but also their social capital as expressed in group membership and social trust.¹⁸ In turn, civic participation can present opportunities from which other social networks are formed.

New York's Neighborhood Settlement Houses: Providing Opportunities for Families to Get Involved in the Community¹⁹

For more than 85 years, United Neighborhood Houses of New York has been an umbrella organization for 37 neighborhood settlement houses throughout New York City. Approximately half a million residents are able to participate in over 500 programs and activities, such as employment training, computer education, early childhood education, and the arts. These settlement houses are visible centers for community activity and relationship building because they are warm, welcoming places where a diverse group of people—young and old from different racial and ethnic groups—enjoy a variety of activities and events in the comfort and convenience of their own neighborhoods.

New York's settlement houses have had much success in promoting social networks because they provide residents and families:

- A dependable place for people to engage with one another;
- Space where they can enjoy activities that give people the opportunity to learn more about themselves, about others, and about the world beyond their own perspective;
- A source of security and belonging that every person needs;
- An opportunity for each person to gain more awareness and validation of his/her capacity to give and receive help and support;
- The chance to create with others activities and products that people can own for themselves; and
- A vehicle for people to act together to improve the quality of life for everyone in their neighborhoods.

Settlement houses are perfect examples of places that provide people with opportunities to develop powerful personal and small-group connections that

lead to bonding social capital. In many cases, participants in settlement house communities translate bonding social capital into social change efforts that create bridging and linking ties and more results in their communities. From community gardens and theaters to small business ventures, intergenerational programs, and shelter for abused women and homeless families, the settlement houses in New York meet the needs of individuals, families, and neighborhood groups.

MAKING CONNECTIONS CORE RESULT: FAMILIES HAVE INCREASED EARNINGS AND INCOME AND FAMILIES HAVE INCREASED LEVELS OF ASSETS

Families must have the resources they need to take care of their members. In the *Making Connections* sites, however, there is significant disparity between the level of income, earnings, and assets of families living there relative to families living in surrounding communities.

Research and experience indicate that low-income families rely heavily on informal social networks, and the bonding social capital that results from them, not just to “get by”—but also in their efforts to move up or “get ahead.” For example:

- Low-income residents are much more likely than the more affluent to rely on family and friends to get job referrals,²⁰ and
- Informal networks are the primary resource for job seeking in specific occupational niches for immigrants and ethnic groups.²¹

Nevertheless, generalized or institutional networks, and the bridging capital that accrues from them, may more effectively connect low-income families to employment resources and opportunities outside of their closest circles.²² One example of increased family earnings and income arising from an institutional network features welfare caseworkers tapping into their own personal social networks to aid clients in finding quality jobs.²³

In the *Making Connections* initiative, indicators of increased earnings and income call for more employment in jobs that provide supporting wages, benefits, and advancement; more families bringing home larger paychecks each month; and greater attachment of adults to the workforce. These goals will likely require the creation of linking social capital between social groups or classes that can assist families that are disconnected to resources and opportunities to get influence or get results. Linking social capital might arise from a connection made at a church between a successful businessman seeking apprentices and a father with two sons eager to learn a trade.

The initiative's indicators for increased levels of assets envision more families owning homes and other assets, more families filing for tax credits, more reasonably priced goods and services, and fewer disruptions in making payments. In not-so-obvious ways, social networks can also contribute to success in these areas. For example, families might find out about assistance for first-time homebuyers from a co-worker or learn about tax credits through a community organizing group. Studies have identified other ways in which social networks have helped families gain access to opportunities that can lead to increased assets:

- Strong kinship ties (informal networks) encourage loans or grants for business ventures and provide inexpensive labor for family businesses.²⁴
- In some challenged communities where financial institutions are absent or weak, residents pool their resources and lend money to those who need it in the form of a credit association.²⁵

MAKING CONNECTIONS CORE RESULT: FAMILIES HAVE ACCESS TO QUALITY SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

The services and supports that families in *Making Connections* sites need are provided by a variety of organizations such as health, mental health, juvenile justice, child welfare, or education agencies. While these are many of the same services that families anywhere might need, the difference for families in troubled neighborhoods is that there is often no easy way to gain access to what they need. The lack of connection between people and institutions that can help them improve their lives is pervasive in low-income communities. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, with its *Making Connections* initiative, is well positioned to make a profound and lasting impact in these communities by strengthening the institutional social network that can connect families to appropriate services and support.

One important indicator for this core result is that there is “increased availability, accessibility, and affordability of needed services” for families in *Making Connections* communities. Another indicator is that families are “satisfied with the effectiveness and responsiveness of services.”

While informal and generalized networks can contribute to these goals—a friend refers another friend to a trusted service provider, a senior center provides transportation or translation assistance, community organizers advocate for more culturally competent services in a neighborhood—institutional networks are the primary type of social networks needed to accomplish both of these goals. Institutions, when they form networks with one another, can coordinate referrals and visits and make sure that services work more effectively for families. Because social service delivery operates in an institutional network, families seeking health care, counseling, parenting classes, or child care are an integral part of that network. Yet too often, agency staff view these families as “other” than them. In reality, social service institutions and their clients are part of the same system. Institutions that tap into the concept of social networks can see that the connections they

INSTITUTIONS, WHEN THEY FORM NETWORKS WITH ONE ANOTHER, CAN COORDINATE REFERRALS AND VISITS AND MAKE SURE THAT SERVICES WORK MORE EFFECTIVELY FOR FAMILIES.

make with participants are valuable and are likely to make their services more effective. They can also tap into existing informal and generalized networks to spread the word about their services.

One change being tried by *Making Connections* Seattle/White Center is to develop and rely on the networking and leadership abilities of experienced community residents who have credibility among their neighbors and with community organizations. These “trusted advocates” serve as a natural bridge between institutions with the supports and resources families need and residents and families who would otherwise be disconnected from those supports.

Building Faith-Based Social Networks among Ex-Offenders

Ex-offenders are another special population for whom social networks can play an important role. Islamic institutions are especially important “hubs” within the networks of a large percentage of ex-offenders; many of these institutions devote considerable resources to prisoner reentry efforts.²⁶ Nearly 20 percent of the almost two million currently incarcerated prisoners are Muslim, a result primarily of conversion to Islam while in prison.

A primary goal of Islamic rehabilitation programs (based on “da’wah,” or the invitation to Islam) is to assist ex-offenders in developing informal social networks and the bonding social capital that can heal and strengthen their family ties (because the Islamic faith considers the family to be society’s central institution). Another primary goal of da’wah is to encourage all people to be good citizens through good works, such as assisting disadvantaged populations. The Muslim ex-offender population (a generalized network) is considered to be one such disadvantaged population.

By relying on networks of Muslims as the “touch points” for Muslim ex-offenders, formerly incarcerated brothers and sisters “in the faith” have access to correspondence, reentry support groups, family counseling, halfway houses, and toll-free numbers that they can use to connect to educational and other support opportunities (bridging social capital). Economic success strategies are a particular focus. The Islamic Society of Greater Houston, for example, prepares and then places Muslim ex-offenders in Muslim-owned businesses (linking social capital). To sustain this kind of assistance, there is a growing network among Islamic organizations and other faith-based organizations that is increasingly working to support ex-offenders. Another method of sustaining this work, which relies heavily on volunteers as opposed to paid staff, is leadership development among Islamic leaders and congregations.

MAKING CONNECTIONS CORE RESULT: CHILDREN ARE HEALTHY AND READY TO SUCCEED IN SCHOOL

Researchers have documented many ways in which social networks can improve the health and school readiness of children:

- The trust families have with workers facilitates family participation in health care delivery systems.²⁷
- There is a positive association between parental involvement with neighborhood institutions and effective parenting and early childhood development.²⁸
- First-grade children who live in neighborhoods with higher collective efficacy (a term related to social capital that means “the willingness of neighbors to intervene or act on behalf of the common good”) read at higher levels.²⁹

These studies show how institutional and generalized networks can increase the likelihood of seeing improved indicators for this core result such as “moms receive prenatal care in the first trimester” and “more children have developmentally appropriate preschool experiences.”

Informal, generalized, and institutional networks can all play a role in the indicators of “increased parent involvement in schools” and “more children enter school ready to learn.” Examples include informal support groups, cooperative preschools, and schools communicating with families the year before their children enter kindergarten.

Social networks have the potential to provide a powerful boost to strategies aimed at achieving each of the *Making Connections* core results. People become invested and stay invested when efforts are meaningful to them. Social networks can create a sense of meaning, collectivism, and community that keeps people involved.

At this point, it is clear that different types of social network activities yield different types of outcomes. No two social networks are alike; each has its own dynamics and evolution. A look at any family, organization, or neighborhood makes this clear. Social networks’ type, number, and variety will shape significantly any effort to build community or bring about social change. In order for us to see deep, sustainable achievements for families and neighborhoods, social networks must be considered in planning and implementing strategies and programs that aim to further the goals of *Making Connections*.

RESEARCH	FINDINGS
	MC Core Result: Income and Wages
Jackson and Bokemeier (1997)	> Study of Michigan families found ties to family and friends represent a potential reservoir of capital for families in times of need.
Abrams and Bulmer (1986)	> Informal relationships provide a social safety net by meeting material and financial needs during difficult times.
Oliker (1995)	> Informal care-taking networks have been longtime sources of free or low-cost child care in poor neighborhoods.
Lin and Dumin, (1986); Briggs, (1998)	> Strong ties are prime sources of information on jobs. > In general, the poor appear more likely than the non-poor to rely on friends and relatives (strong ties) to get jobs.
Henly (1999)	> Informal network members play an extensive role in job search (48 percent of respondents surveyed). > Employers disproportionately utilize informal job search strategies to do their hiring (52 percent of employers surveyed).
Waldinger and Bailey (1991)	> Networks help immigrants or ethnic group members with access to occupational niches for employment.
Granovetter (1974, 1995)	> Weak ties are important for obtaining professional-level jobs (higher earnings).
Erickson (2003)	> Variety of networks is a qualification for upper-end jobs.
Livermore and Neustrom (2003)	> Welfare caseworkers tap their own personal social networks to aid clients in finding quality jobs.
Lin and Dumin (1986); Lin (1999)	> Distant contacts yield more desirable jobs.
	MC Core Result: Assets
Weidenbaum and Hughes (1996)	> Strong kinship ties encourage loans or grants for business ventures and provide inexpensive labor for family business.
Besley, Coate, and Loury (1993)	> In challenged communities, where financial institutions are absent or weak, residents pool their resources and lend money to those who need it as forms of credit associations.
	MC Core Result: Civic Participation
Potapchuk, Crocker, and Schechter (1997)	> An intercultural network is essential for building social networks that allow civic organizations in multicultural neighborhoods to be viable.

RESEARCH	FINDINGS
Lyons and Fabiansson (1998); Klesner (2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Volunteering is said to be one manifestation of social networks at work. > Organizational membership, political attitudes, and contextual factors are strong predictors of civic participation.
Stoltz (2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Income and education not only affect individuals' civic participation but also their social capital as expressed in group membership and social trust.
MC Core Result: Mutual Assistance and Informal Supports	
Youniss, et al. (1999, 2001)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > High school students who are involved in community services were less likely to exhibit "deviant orientations," compared with other students.
Eccles and Barber (1999)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Involvement with church and volunteer activities is associated with positive educational trajectories and low rates of risk taking.
MC Core Result: Quality Services and Formal Supports	
Ellen and Turner (1997)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Families in challenged neighborhoods fare better when strong institutions create places for people to gather and help to strengthen the community's social fabric.
Baum (1997); Kawachi (1997)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Trust combined with formal and informal social networks helped to design better health care delivery systems for families.
Dominquez and Watkins (2003); Dreze and Sen (1995)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Social service agencies are sources of support for low-income mothers resulting from their close ties. > Doctors and nurses are more likely to show up for work and perform their duties attentively where their actions are supported and monitored by citizen groups.
MC Core Result: Children Healthy and Prepared to Succeed	
Duncan, Dunifon, Doran, and Yeung (2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Finds that nearly all the measures of social capital increased the likelihood that children would complete school, especially children in low-income neighborhoods.
Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore (1992); Goerge (2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Indochinese families in low-income areas linked the average and above-average performance of children to parental involvement in education. > Children who live in neighborhoods with higher collective efficacy read at higher levels in the first grade.
Goerge (2002); Zill and Nord (1994)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Informal social networks were associated with receipt of first trimester prenatal care among women living in the neighborhood. > Parental involvement with neighborhood social institutions, neighbor-to-neighbor relations and community resources for families can have positive effects on parenting and early child development.

LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT SOCIAL NETWORKS THROUGH *MAKING CONNECTIONS*

When we started the *Making Connections* initiative, we chose to focus initial efforts on strengthening economic networks and opportunities for families and residents in these select neighborhoods. It seemed imperative to invest first in helping families gain more economic security. This would not only put residents on more stable financial ground, but also engage families in *Making Connections* by providing tangible, measurable strategies to increase families' economic success.

The Foundation's commitment to increasing family assets helped us to get our "foot in the door." It now seems clear that we cannot take these strategies much further or look toward our other goals for *Making Connections* without turning our attention to identifying and building social networks. In fact, lessons learned through our Jobs Initiative speak to the power of social networks to ground and sustain community change work.

LESSONS LEARNED THROUGH WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Despite modest achievements, workforce development efforts that improve the employment situations for residents and families have proven to be a difficult venture across all of the *Making Connections* sites. For large numbers of families to "get ahead," *Making Connections* neighborhoods need much more than the bonding social capital on which they depend. They need the bridging and linking ties that connect informal, generalized, and institutional networks together. Recent reflection upon the struggles experienced in the area of workforce development reveals the critical importance of building social networks. We need a more deliberate delineation of the ways in which social networks can facilitate increased economic opportunities for more families.

How can social networks help achieve these goals? The Foundation's Jobs Initiative, a comprehensive workforce development and systems change initiative, revealed these important lessons:

- **Stronger informal networks decrease workplace conflict.** Both employers and employees on the job need opportunities to learn about one another's concerns so that the potential for misunderstandings or conflicts (which contribute to high turnover) decreases.
- **Stronger generalized networks increase worker retention.** Support groups; meetings; and financial, housing, and child care assistance are necessary supports and resources for low-income workers to be able to retain jobs and position themselves for career advancement.
- **Stronger generalized networks create bridging ties between agencies and employers.** New relationships between employers and intermediaries (such as community-based organizations that represent potential employees) must be

brokered to encourage employers to work collaboratively with these groups to hire and train underemployed people.

- **Stronger institutional networks can lead to better program design and accountability.** Community-based organizations must be provided with financial support, technical assistance, and networking opportunities with local employers that enable them to design more effective, accountable, and outcomes-oriented programs.
- **Building strong institutional networks is the key to success and involves major systemic change.** Linking low-income residents to family supporting jobs that offer career advancement requires broad, systemic change and buy-in among workers, employers, elected officials, community-based organizations, government agencies, and others.
- **“Connectors” and “weavers” are the key to successfully building institutional networks.** Engaging employers requires liaisons or brokers (“connectors” and “weavers”) who know the industry and can promote workforce development programs. Because they know the employee pool too, these liaisons help employers know more about cultural considerations and the needs of prospective employees such as transportation, child care, and housing.

For the Jobs Initiative, it is clear that stronger, more robust institutional social networks that reach beyond individual residents and families were necessary to improve the levels of economic opportunity. This finding could easily be embedded in the economic opportunity strand of the *Making Connections* work. For example, the following factors could contribute significantly to increased employment and economic opportunity in the sites:

- More outreach to increase resident awareness of programs that can connect them to better employment opportunities beyond their neighborhoods;
- More culturally competent support services through appropriate intermediaries (or connectors) to prepare potential employees for prospective employment; and
- Stronger, better intermediaries (or connectors) who can help bridge the chasm between an underprepared employee pool (both in terms of soft and hard skills) and often inflexible and culturally incompatible employer sites and slots.

These are all places where attention to social network enhancement or facilitation can make a significant and positive difference for the successes experienced by significant numbers of families.

CREATING THE CONDITIONS TO ENCOURAGE SOCIAL NETWORKS

How do we better understand the development of a “social infrastructure” that leads to networks of families connected to each other and to institutions in their neighborhoods and beyond? One place to start is by identifying and building social networks that emphasize bridging and linking ties that help families to get ahead, get influence, and get results. But often, these ties must be built on the meaningful relationships formed in informal and even generalized networks. While some networks flow from bridging and linking ties, bonding ties can make a significant difference when the goal is to encourage people to “stick” to networks. At the same time, bonding ties can also provide social supports such as love and a sense of belonging that are ends in themselves and can make all networks stronger.

At this point, it may be helpful to see a model where social network theory is applied.



Social Networks In Action: Lawrence Community Works, Inc.³⁰
A Program Design Based on Network Development

Lawrence Community Works (LCW) in Lawrence, Massachusetts, is an organization committed to engaging residents in the revitalization of their city. For the past five years, it has used a community organizing approach that relies on social network development to connect residents with one another and local institutions, which, in turn, has led to the collective action necessary to generate neighborhood improvements that are mutually beneficial and sustainable.

LCW is an excellent example of a hub, or focal point, for network connectivity and activity and a hive where a group of network stewards have intentionally created a place where community members can create, adapt, and spread network tools and ideas. Through the program, community organizers, or connectors and weavers, build a network of local residents while increasing family assets and engaging in neighborhood renewal. Family assets are defined as both tangible (e.g., savings, homeownership, educational attainment, businesses, credentials, and marketable skills) and intangible (e.g., communication skills, health, friends, self-esteem, strong family ties, and a network of support). Both kinds of family assets together are the building blocks of collective community assets or social capital (e.g., good schools, open spaces, community facilities, solid civic leadership, safe affordable housing, and strong community values and norms).

An open, community network was begun by LCW staff and a small cadre of community organizers by engaging residents in a wide variety of activities that met their “real-time” family asset-building needs. The network acts as a hive when it facilitates interaction, dialogue, and community-planning and problem-solving activities commensurate with issues of common concern that are raised by residents. These activities occur through Neighbor Circles and Property Improvement Committees that are focused on action rather than organizational structure. These circles and committees act as portals and doorways into a larger network. Through this process, both bonding and bridging links are established among families and LCW staff. Strong generalized social networks are developed and the seeds for a sustainable institutional social network are planted.

For giving their time, talent, and voice, families gain more and better connections; better skills, knowledge, and access to resources for their family and their neighborhood; and an opportunity to work with others to make change happen. They also get access to resources and influence through bridging and linking ties established through network partnerships, while staying engaged through expanded informal networks.

Resources come to the LCW network through partnerships with a wide array of institutions, organizations, service providers, and civic and business leaders who commit to serve as connectors; ensure that programs and services are provided in respectful and productive ways that strengthen families; collaborate with other partners with a focus on family strengthening; and listen to and act on the feedback and advice about priorities and needs that emerge from the collective voice of families in the network. Through their participation, institutional partners gain resources, effective collaborations, more knowledgeable consumers, and a constituent base.

For both institutional partners and the families that participate, there are “gives” and “gets” in the network. In other words, directionality is equalized, the flow of information and resources can come from either side, and the exchanges are efficient and reciprocal.

LCW’s results after five years of investment are impressive: new affordable homes, community facilities, and parks and playgrounds have been built, and a community technology center and a school are in the works. It seems clear that bridging links to institutional networks have increased the power of Lawrence residents to obtain resources for, and attention to, their community.

In May 2004, the Annie E. Casey Foundation convened a meeting of residents from *Making Connections* neighborhoods and practitioners and scholars well versed in social network theory to help Foundation staff set the stage for further work on social network development in the sites. The role of staff at this meeting was mostly to listen to and learn from the wisdom of residents and experts in the field. The goal of this session was to expand everyone's understanding of positive social networks and how to strengthen them and to begin creating a cadre of people who are committed to this work. The group identified numerous conditions they believe are needed for social networks to form and flourish, as well as qualities of successful social networks.

Conditions Needed for Social Networks to Form, Develop, and Flourish

- **Intentionality: a paradox.** While it is important to be intentional about encouraging social networks and to talk openly about their value, at same time, social networks should not be put under a magnifying glass. Social networks are initially fragile. Until a strong foundation of trust is developed, too much intentionality without authentic connections and time to build relationships will result in weak or unsuccessful networks.
- **Respect for spirituality.** Although the United States is a secular society, spirituality is extremely important to most Americans. Spirituality cannot be ignored when developing social networks—it is often the “glue” that binds people together.
- **Trust.** Trust determines how far you can go when supporting a social network. Relationships will not be formed without trust, and social networks become stronger and more resilient as trust is built.
- **Flexibility.** When working to develop social networks, flexibility is crucial. It is important to recognize that there will be many aspects of the work that cannot be controlled.
- **Informal space.** Social networks need informal space to develop.
- **Face-to-face connections.** Face-to-face, empathic connections are the first building blocks for successful social networks.
- **Cultural inclusiveness.** Culture defines many social networks. Any effort to develop networks among and between people of different cultures must be multiculturally inclusive and competent.

Qualities of Strong, Successful Social Networks

- **Peak life experiences.** Successful social networks provide people with peak life experiences. A peak life experience has occurred when we feel recognized and empowered, and our self-knowledge and sense of connection with others has increased. These experiences bond individuals to a network and keep them invested.
- **Risk taking.** Successful social networks encourage risk taking and accept the successes or failures that result. We must step out of our comfort zones to create peak life experiences and shared history.
- **Voluntary.** You cannot force people to bond to a social network. You must create the conditions and let them enter the network on their own.
- **Reciprocal support.** Asking for help—and providing help—deepens relationships. Successful social networks create space for people to give and get support.
- **Multidirectional power flow.** Institutions and the people they serve should be encouraged to build networks with one another. Institutions, however, must be careful not to take control of the directionality, flow, and exchange of the network otherwise the network itself will be destroyed. A strong institutional network will be built on a mutual exchange of power, not one that is dominated by protocols, rigidity, and power plays.

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These advisors emphasized the importance of staying focused on human relationships as we think about social networks. This is especially true as we develop strategies, structures, systems, and technology to strengthen social networks. While choosing next steps and embarking on further analysis, we must respect the mystery and organic nature of human relationships, and we must never lose sight of the intangible and immeasurable benefits inherent in this work.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

In this paper, we have laid the groundwork for a deeper exploration of how social networks might provide sustaining infrastructure and “glue” to ensure that our efforts in *Making Connections* sites are substantive, meaningful, lasting, and truly transformational. We have provided an overview of social network theory and definitions, demonstrated the potential impact that strong social networks can have on the achievement of *Making Connections* core results, and provided some models for encouraging the development of social networks and using them to sustain social change efforts. In addition, we have presented some of the Foundation’s current beliefs concerning the importance of social networks, the conditions needed to create them, and the qualities strong networks possess. We have much more to learn as we begin to apply social network theory to activities taking place in the *Making Connections* sites.

Foundation staff will conduct further research to help identify and nurture existing social networks at *Making Connections* sites, while also identifying gaps where social networks can be encouraged.

As we embark on this work, we begin with the following assumptions, allowing them to evolve and expand as our learning increases:

- In any community, there are always existing social networks. We must gain a good understanding of the current conditions before intervening in the realm of social networks.
- In many cases, the problem is not a disconnect between people in a community, but between people and institutions. This may be the most important point of intervention in *Making Connections* sites. A systemic view of change embraces communities and institutions as equals.
- It is important to “see” social networks beyond description or “anatomy.” We should not analyze networks to the point where we lose sight of their intangible, emotional, and relational elements.
- If our goal is to help strengthen the impact and influence these networks can have, we must understand, as best we can, how residents and families experience social networks. There is much work to do in this area.
- The Foundation and its partners both within and outside of the *Making Connections* neighborhoods must build upon what exists and works for residents and families in such a way as to both “do no harm” and *not* “do for residents/families what they can do for themselves.”
- It is important to understand both the benefits and the costs associated with social networks. These benefits and costs are both tangible and intangible. Some will be measurable and some will not.

- Strong social networks are important in and of themselves for families at our sites. However, strong social networks are also the means to economic opportunity and better access to quality services and supports for these families.
- Building from strong bonding ties to strong bridging and linking ties is an important way *Making Connections* sites can move toward well-grounded and sustainable outcomes and improvements for children, families, and neighborhoods.
- Robust social networks have key elements—key people and organizations—that operate within them and serve to build and sustain the connections. Further, there are key “enabling conditions” (e.g., demand-driven environments with many opportunities to exercise freedom of choice; open and varied communication; “form follows function”) that serve to nurture robust social networks.
- There are additional considerations regarding the appropriate elements and enabling conditions of social networks for special populations (e.g., immigrants and refugees, ex-offenders, and youth).
- In communities where racism and poverty are pervasive, people must have access to linking ties that connect them to others outside of their immediate community and that give them access to real institutional and social power.

From this broad beginning, we can start to consider an agenda for addressing social networks within the context of the Foundation’s work. There is more information to gather to understand how residents and families in *Making Connections* neighborhoods experience social networks and to build our knowledge and competence to see, understand, and encourage networks in these communities. Below are some possible next steps:

Field Development and Shared Learning

- Specifically, we can contribute to the field by sharing our experiences and knowledge about social networks with others who are investing in community change initiatives. In turn, we can open up a dialogue with others to improve our understanding of the role of social networks in this work.
- As we increase our learning and develop a body of knowledge about social networks, special attention must be paid to the following topics:
 - We need to think more coherently about connecting bonding, bridging, and linking social capital.
 - We must address race, class, and power dynamics in terms of concrete strategies and tools (as opposed to mere description and philosophizing).
 - We should explore the role of gender in social networks. Do women and men experience social networks differently or have different routes for finding

social support? For example, is one gender more likely to value bonding ties over bridging or linking ties?

— In setting the agenda, we should consider starting “small,” in the right place, and with the right people to achieve the most effective results.

— We must look closely at how to engage and support the most vulnerable families and how networks must operate differently with and for them.

— We should gain a clearer, more practical understanding of the downsides of social networks and social capital and convert this understanding into effective tools to avoid or minimize those negative factors.

Qualitative Research on Existing Social Networks

- **Identify the social networks that currently exist in *Making Connections* sites.** Sites can begin by assessing their current programs and initiatives for the types of social networks that exist. In addition, residents and families can be interviewed to identify the informal or generalized social networks operating outside of the *Making Connections* radar screen. This is a first step toward understanding the types of networks that exist; the directionality, flow, and exchange present in those networks; the types of ties (bonding, bridging, or linking) they create; the connectors and weavers in the community; and the portals, doorways, and hubs for social connection. This effort should be undertaken with great care and sensitivity to the fact that the Foundation may automatically bring an institutional presence to an informal or generalized network. Power dynamics must be addressed, and residents’ efforts to protect their informal connections should be respected.

- **Identify how local social networks get started and get stronger.** When mapping existing social networks, we should pay special attention to when, where, and how they form and what makes them sustainable. For example, have networks formed around specific crises, events, needs, or identities (such as gender or ethnicity)? What factors have predicted a social network’s sustainability?

- **Explore specific ways that *Making Connections* sites can identify, support, and encourage social networks.** Through our qualitative research, we can begin to identify a niche for the Foundation to encourage effective social networks at *Making Connections* sites.

Tool Development

- We can connect leaders in the sites with experts who can design tools and techniques that will help sites strengthen their social networks.

- While acknowledging that many benefits of social networks are not measurable, we can begin to design tools to measure those elements that are quantifiable in an effort to evaluate the success of social networks. This may involve conceptualizing evaluation much differently than we have in the past.
- We can identify and disseminate information on promising approaches and models for building social support.

Leveraging Support via Creating Conditions, Seed Money, and Influence

- We can provide leveraging support (i.e., funds, visibility, collaborative opportunities, and our influence in policy and systems change) to organizations who know how to do this work.
- We can help to demonstrate what works by supporting seed grants for pilot projects in *Making Connections* sites that rely on social networks to improve the lives of families in their neighborhoods.
- Based on qualitative research at *Making Connections* sites, we can create conditions and provide opportunities for residents to build supportive social networks.

The *Making Connections* initiative has an ambitious goal—neighborhood transformation that will improve the quality of life for children and families. To meet this objective, we need to identify and implement the most effective strategies and approaches. From the beginning, *Making Connections* has highlighted the importance of social networks in reaching the core results that will lead to the achievement of its goal. Yet the Foundation’s work in this area has not been as readily developed as strategies for improving economic opportunities or access to social services because, until now, there has not been a comprehensive body of information or tools to identify, support, and strengthen social networks.

We believe that increasing our knowledge about both the theory and real-life functioning of social networks can lead to developing effective skills and strategies to encourage and support these connections in the Foundation’s community change work. This learning needs to draw upon and give back to all types of stakeholders—researchers, practitioners, residents, foundations, and all those working to improve the lives of children and families.

This paper is intended as a first step in the process of understanding both the whole and the parts of different types of social networks. Now that we have recognized the power of social networks to improve the trajectory of success for families and organizations involved in community change efforts, we can begin to consider appropriate and effective roles for the Foundation to help sites maximize the potency of these intangible conduits to positive change. To help illuminate these options, the next logical step is to examine and learn from social networks in action, in places where they are an integral part of large neighborhood revitalization efforts. The Foundation’s work in this regard is under way, with the hope that the lessons gleaned from the experiences of these pioneers will help pave the way for greater success in the *Making Connections* communities.

WE BELIEVE THAT INCREASING OUR KNOWLEDGE ABOUT BOTH THE THEORY AND REAL-LIFE FUNCTIONING OF SOCIAL NETWORKS CAN LEAD TO DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE SKILLS AND STRATEGIES TO ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT THESE CONNECTIONS IN THE FOUNDATION’S COMMUNITY CHANGE WORK.

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