

# A Different Kind of Network

The *Making Connections* Louisville Network is using social network theory to spark a bold movement for community change

“A job may be life-altering for the individual who gets the job, but social networks can transform whole generations and communities.”

—TERRI BAILEY



By Laura Crawford

After initially struggling to find ways to engage lots of residents in its work and build momentum for change in its four target neighborhoods, *Making Connections* Louisville decided to invest heavily in a very different approach to change.

That approach involves building an ambitious community network, one that would not just link residents to one another but also to many opportunities that *Making Connections'* partners provided, such as jobs and asset-building programs.

Network Nite bingo combines fun with a purpose: learning more about other Network members.

This network would also try to build new relationships between service providers and residents, relationships that could change the way these providers do business in these communities as well as change the expectations of residents. Louisville's Network is based on successful models of social network strategies developed by organizations such as Lawrence CommunityWorks in Massachusetts, Beyond Welfare in Ames, Iowa, and LUPE in South Texas.

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which is create a community-wide social network.  
It’s a huge story. It’s a field-building story.”

—Terri Bailey

It is still early, but Louisville’s Network is already generating much energy and excitement, both among residents, Louisville *Making Connections*’ staff and partners, and among a group of people connected to the Annie E. Casey Foundation who are exploring the potential of social networks to help transform communities.

What makes Louisville’s Network so interesting is that “it’s not about a single organization adopting a social network approach,” explains Terri Bailey, author of *Ties that Bind: The Practice of Social Networks*. “It’s about initiative-wide change. They are trying to change the whole environment.”

Bailey adds that what Louisville is trying to do “has never been done before, which is create a

community-wide social network. It’s a huge story. It’s a field-building story.”

She adds that Louisville’s Network is providing an “incredible opportunity to watch people moving down the path...of infusing social network approaches into everything they do.”

This publication tells the story of the Louisville Network: how and why it got started, how it functions, how difficult it is to define exactly what it is, and the challenges of building it into a force that can indeed help transform an entire community.

**O**n a crisp December morning, a small group of employees at Norton Health-care gathered for a holiday celebration. Though they all work in different departments with varying responsibilities and shifts, they are connected by a common affiliation — they are all members of the *Making Connections* Network.

The Network connects families to each other and to opportunities for jobs, wealth-building and success for their children in schools. It focuses on four “tough” neighborhoods in Louisville — Smoketown, Shelby Park, Phoenix Hill and California.

At the heart of the Network is the belief that these communities have the underlying assets and tenacity necessary to bring about lasting community change. With the proper support to lift up and harness that strength — along with some fundamental changes in the way that the array of people and institutions that impact these communities interact

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“We want you to be successful and go back  
into your neighborhoods and spread that success.  
Don’t just let it stay here. Let it be contagious.”

—Michelle Williams

with residents — they can prosper and thrive. The Network offers that support.

Each employee in the room that day had been recruited to their positions at Norton Healthcare through a special pipeline designed by the *Making Connections* Network to link residents to career-ladder positions at Norton Healthcare. Many had previously applied to Norton only to discover they couldn’t crack the code for entry. This pipeline was the equivalent of a “friend inside.” (For more on this jobs pipeline, see *Building a Pipeline to Success* at [www.DiaristProject.org](http://www.DiaristProject.org).)

As employees arrived for the party, members of the *Making Connections* team were on hand to welcome them and pass out Network pens and binders. After sharing laughs and stories over breakfast, the group heard from local banks and institutions about new financial products, including an affordable credit product designed to help folks pay down high-cost debt, a product that is only available to *Making Connections* Network members.

As the event came to a close, employee members gave emotional heartfelt testimonials.

### What is *Making Connections*?

*Making Connections* is a long-term effort in 10 cities to pull residents and institutions together to improve the lives of families living in specific low-income neighborhoods. Established in 1999, this initiative is supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation along with many local funders.

One woman said that prior to coming to Norton she always had to work two jobs to make ends meet. Now she feels she has a future.

Another woman who is a Certified Nurse’s Assistant spoke about the “Catch 22” of needing experience to get a job, but also needing a job to get experience. *Making Connections* helped her to get a job at Norton without prior experience.

A man spoke about how he worked most of his life in the service industry and was paid in tips, making it difficult to save money. Now he believes it’s possible to actually buy a house some day.

For local staff who were present, it was a joyous occasion. The rhetoric and the reality were matching up. *Making Connections* staff inevitably spend a significant amount of time in meetings, writing proposals and reports, forming partnerships with other agencies and experts — all in the service of strategically framing the Network. While necessary, it sometimes leaves staff feeling disconnected from the heart of the work. Events like the holiday party at Norton Healthcare — one of dozens of Network-sponsored activities — are where the Network lives and breathes and staff members are keenly aware of this.

Michelle Williams, the post-employment coach at Norton, provided final thoughts. Williams works with *Making Connections* employees to help them navigate the many benefits and educational opportunities available through Norton Healthcare. She also helps

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—Dana Jackson

employees troubleshoot problems with child-care, transportation and other potential barriers to success.

“You all are important to me,” she said. “You’re important to the *Making Connections* community and we want you to be successful and go back into your neighborhoods and spread that success. Don’t just let it stay here. Let it be contagious.”

In that simple speech she crystallized one of the main differences between a traditional employment program and the *Making Connections* Network. The Network does help individuals obtain jobs but it doesn’t end there — for the member or for the Network. There is always another connection to be made, problem to solve, opportunity to leverage, relationship

to nurture, piece of good news to share or inequity to right.



## Looking Back: How the Network Evolved

*Making Connections* Louisville began seven years ago as an initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. After studying the lessons of previous community change initiatives, AECF wanted to try a new approach. In 10 cities across the country, the foundation selected each community’s “toughest” neighborhoods as its focal point.

Louisville’s neighborhoods were selected in part because they had the lowest rates of labor force participation, homeownership and



Dana Jackson, shown here with neighborhood children at a “Network Nite,” says that most work done in communities doesn’t tap that community’s talent and know-how.



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person leadership, but network leadership.”

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median income within the metro Louisville area. Yet these areas were also selected because they had robust community organizations and services — a ripe environment for “making connections.” The goal was to close the gaps between those four neighborhoods and the rest of metro Louisville in 10 years.

Rather than come to town and simply fund programs, AECF wanted to plant the seeds for a different way of doing business, where residents feel empowered to make the changes they want to see. The communities already had a number of services and organizations, but in some cases they weren’t being utilized well. The *Making Connections* Louisville team knew that within these four neighborhoods lay many of the resources necessary to close the gaps. The challenge was to uncover those assets, support and nurture them and grow a movement from “the bottom up.”

“*Making Connections* is a different kind of approach and I’m very careful to say that it is an approach — it’s not a program,” states Dana Jackson, *Making Connections* Louisville Local Site Coordinator. “Often people will say, ‘Where’s the staff? Where’s the office? What services do you provide?’

“Well, we don’t do direct service. It’s very much a grassroots approach — resident driven. Often in community work and community development — and I feel like I can say this as a recovering bureaucrat having worked for the state — things come flying into the community and the community isn’t consulted about what it wants. This approach is very different. We believe the talent and the skill and the information and the know-how lie in the

community. And the challenge is to connect grassroots with what we consider to be power makers.

“So part of the vibrant role of *Making Connections* is that of the convener, getting the right people to sit around the table in a way where the balance of power isn’t so skewed like we’re used to. And begin to create a level playing field between grassroots and actual power holders.”

From the beginning the organizing team struggled with resident engagement, constantly re-evaluating their work and making mid-course corrections. They began with “consensus organizing,” which proved to be an awkward fit for *Making Connections* Louisville and the approach was aborted. Then they implemented what they called “Leadership Organizing,” but something about the term “leadership” troubled many team members. It implied that not everyone can be a leader.

“Yes, we want leadership,” says Delquan Dorsey, lead organizer. “But we want a certain kind of leadership, not just a singular perspective. We want groups of people to show leadership and come forward to lead. Not just one person leadership, but network leadership.” From those lessons and insights, the concept of “Network Organizing” was born.

In the last few years, the benefits of social networks to community change have been presented in several in-depth examinations by experts in the field — specifically, *Relationships Matter* by Elena Pell, *The Ties that Bind* by Terri Bailey, and *A Reflection on Why Social*

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Delquan Dorsey, shown with his son, was impressed by how empowered the members of LUPE were.

*Networks are Critical to Sustainable Change,*  
with Audrey Jordan.

These analyses, based on observations from six established and successful social networks such as Lawrence CommunityWorks, Beyond Welfare and LUPE, lift out the fundamental operating principles and core values shared

by all successful social networks and point the way towards successful replication in *Making Connections* sites.

Recognizing the potential benefits to their resident engagement work, the *Making Connections* organizing team bought into the concept of social networks early and decisively. A site visit to LUPE, the community organizing arm of the United Farm Workers, clinched the deal.

Dorsey recalls this visit: “Even though the people living in this community had economic challenges, they were so empowered. And more importantly, they had this LUPE card. Even though people have trouble making money, they were actually buying a family membership of one year for \$60 because they saw the value.”

In July 2005, the site team formally established their own branded “*Making Connections* Network,” complete with membership cards, stamping partners, network events, a newsletter and network gear — cups, t-shirts, etc. By the end of the first six months, over 1,100 members were signed up and in the data base.

As the team quickly discovered, getting folks signed up is the easy part. The challenge is putting some “there there” and providing value propositions that increase participation. For the last 18 months, the team has been working passionately to build out the Network in a strategic and thoughtful way — a way that provides for local ownership and sustainability. They have tried to take the social network concepts laid out by the Social Network team

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at the Annie E. Casey Foundation and “Louisville-ize” them — a process that has felt painstakingly slow to some.

“Sometimes it’s harder and takes longer to build things the right way — especially when you don’t have a book of directions,” states Dorsey. “We have some material but even when you read it, you still have to translate it into your everyday life.”

### **Searching for the Elevator Speech — To Be in the Network Is To Continually Define the Network**

Understandably, people have many questions about the Network. People who live in the four neighborhoods want information they can easily digest and interpret, as do potential partners, government entities and other allies. What exactly is the *Making Connections* Network and how is it different from every other social service initiative that’s come before it?

Network organizers often begin their explanations with the standard answer: “The *Making Connections* Network connects people to each other and to opportunities for jobs, assets and children being prepared for school.” But once the conversation gets a little deeper, a variety of answers emerge.

“In some ways I think it’s like trying to describe ‘blue,’” suggests Jennie Jean Davidson, Technical Assistance Coordinator. “Everyone has their own way to talk about blue that is more emotional than factual. Blue is soothing. Blue is like the ocean. You know what it is, but it’s difficult to actually describe it.”

Indeed, many people use metaphors to paint a more detailed picture. “It’s like a hot air balloon, and the ropes are the strategies and the Network is the glow.” “It’s like a big soufflé.” “It’s like a tent revival absent the religion.”

Some describe it by what it’s not. It’s not a “program” with providers and clients. It’s not “doing for.” It’s not a “top down” or “hierarchical” approach.

For some, it’s best defined by its outcomes — 2,200 members, 196 people placed in good paying career track positions, \$628,323 in earned income credits received by families who filed tax returns at VITA sites in these neighborhoods, 28 local childcare providers receiving training in early childhood development.

For others it’s personal and specific: “I got a job at Norton Hospital after I applied six times before.” “I heard about a way to get free prescription medications.” “It helped boost my self-esteem.”

All those things are true — but they are just pieces of the story. In the final analysis, any single attempt to define the Network inevitably comes up short somehow. How can you define something that is constantly evolving, shifting its shape and gaining momentum? How can you put parameters around a growing movement for cultural and community change?

The *Making Connections* team frets over this. “We need an ‘elevator speech,’” is a constant refrain in team meetings. (An “elevator speech” is a carefully worded description that a person can share with someone during the time it takes to ride up an elevator.) But the elevator

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### Network Principles

The *Making Connections* Network connects families to one another and to opportunities and resources in Smoketown, Shelby Park, Phoenix Hill and California.

- We believe that connections matter: connections to opportunities for family economic success, for children's success in school and in life, and connections to strong and healthy neighborhoods.
- We believe that families are the most important resource in our neighborhoods, and that the most important connections are the ones between families.
- We believe in reciprocity, or give/get. This means that everyone in the Network has something to offer, and that everyone can and should give back to the Network. People GET more from the Network when they GIVE to the Network.
- We believe in accountability and *results*.
- We believe in creating opportunities for *all* families, regardless of race, class or culture.
- We believe that the most important thing we can do is *make change together*.

### Operating Principles

We employ our principles in a Network that is:

- Membership based: people join and are part of something that belongs to them.
- Voluntary/Demand Driven: folks select what works for them, rather than what they must do based on rules and regulations.
- Flexible and responsive: the Network must respond to the needs and priorities of its mem-

bers. If something doesn't work or members don't respond, it needs to be changed.

- Reciprocal: every member has something to give to the Network, as well as something to get from it.
- Relationship-based: we believe in a model that is deeply collaborative, so that the Network is shaped by its members, their relationships to one another, and their relationships to staff, Network Stewards and partners.
- For the *whole* family: everything is connected.
- Fun and family-friendly.

### Network Partners

Our partners are central to our success.

#### Partners give:

- Resources, opportunities and services to Network members
- Training and professional development for Network members, Stewards and staff
- Places for the Network to gather and grow
- Credibility and stature
- Access to new networks
- Access to other resources for Network members

#### Partners Get:

- To be part of a growing “Make Change Together” movement
- Access to Network members
- Access to funding opportunities
- Access to technical assistance including best practices, expert assistance and peer learning
- Access to comprehensive neighborhood-level data about the families and neighborhoods they serve

#### Partners also

- Employ Network members
- Work with Network members for feedback and input on operations and offerings
- Bring new members into the Network
- Bring new partners into the Network



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—Jennie Jean Davidson

speech hasn’t come yet. In the meantime, each week there’s a new success story, a fresh metaphor, another exciting batch of numbers.

“It’s difficult to communicate what *Making Connections* is,” states Sammy Moon, Louisville Site Team Leader. “We can clearly communicate what a workforce pipeline looks like. We can clearly communicate what we’re trying to do around school readiness. But you start trying to communicate about how these are related and interconnected to each other and what is the expectation about being part of the Network — this is where it gets hard to communicate.”

“I think the real struggle is creating a consistent message that is specific enough to be compelling but that’s not a box,” suggests Davidson. “My feeling is that we need to get a little more concrete so that people can picture themselves in the Network, but if we go too far down that road, people are going to see a thing that’s not their thing. So it’s partly just about becoming comfortable with this open architecture approach.”

## A Different Kind of Network

When most people think of social networks, they think of a loosely defined group of friends and associates who share common interests and lifestyles — folks who share meals and leisure time, exchange resources and information, and rally when one of their own is struggling.

Or, with the explosion of the Internet, they might think of online social networks like Friendster, which “aims to make the world a smaller place by bringing the power of social

networking to every aspect of life, one friend at a time,” according to the Friendster mission statement.

The *Making Connections* Network is sort of a hybrid social network. It combines the personal focus of small, real-world friend



Louisville Site Team Leader Sammy Moon says that it’s hard to communicate how the various parts of the *Making Connections* Network are interconnected.

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—Elena Pell

networks with the intentionality, scope and demand-driven environment of virtual networks.

“I think the Internet is the proper metaphor,” says Elena Pell, a national consultant and coach for organizations that are seeking results through transformational change, referring to the architecture of the *Making Connections* Network. “Network environments are environments that people go to because they are seeking value. The other thing about networks is that you help co-create them. You do your web page or blog. You’re creating something where everyone can develop and influence the shape of what it becomes. Once someone is a part of the network, they can create space to do something because they have the power of a network and they understand how to navigate in a network.”

While Internet networks are often value-neutral, the *Making Connections* Network has clear values and goals. The underlying message is this: “Yes, it’s great to know folks socially, but it’s even better when those relationships can help people get jobs, own homes, educate children to their highest potential...and ultimately mobilize a powerful network of people and organizations to transform communities.”

In other words, it’s a social network with a higher purpose.

“Fifty percent of folks say that they have two or fewer people that they can talk to,” states Jackson, the local site coordinator. “More than ever, relationships are absent. For me this affirms what we are doing to build relationships. It’s not that we are connecting

people to the Network but we are connecting people *through* the Network.”

The Network represents a tacit acknowledgement of the old phrase, “It’s all in who you know.” Instead of viewing it as an unfair advantage for some, the Network embraces the concept of “connections” as a fact of life. The challenge and goal is to make certain that all people, regardless of economic status, can take advantage of connections.

According to Kris Rogers, *Making Connections* Louisville Program Assistant and CHAPSS (Children Healthy and Prepared to Succeed in School) Coordinator, “When you think about where you are in your life and your career now, you probably got there by way of who you knew. I know that I came up from my connections.”

At its deepest level, the Network is about dismantling a social system that creates gross disparities in opportunity.

“If it’s just a case where we’re all happy to know each other and we get to know people from all walks of life in a deeper and richer way — that’s good for us personally but it doesn’t prove anything other than that it’s better to be friendly to people than not,” explains Jack Trawick, director of the Center for Neighborhoods, a Network Partner.

“We’re doing it not just because we individually believe it’s the right way to be, but because we believe it could create social change. It’s very ambitious and humbling at the same time to think that what we are doing could bring about social change.”

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—Jack Trawick



Many Network activities are quite concrete, such as this joint effort to clean up an empty lot.

## A Paradigm Shift — Not Just Business as Usual

For decades, the standard approach to solving issues related to poverty has been to create new programs and hire staff to administer the services. Traditionally these programs are hierarchical and exist as silos — often addressing just one particular need in a community. The *Making Connections* Network, on the other hand, is horizontal, holistic and interconnected.

“It’s an approach to community change that requires that you jump over the ‘us and them,’” states Davidson. “You have to take an approach that is a really deeply asset-based egalitarian approach as opposed to simply thinking, ‘Let’s help some folks out.’ It’s much less of that case manager/neutral therapist

approach and much more about building relationships and making sure that the relationships make the difference.”

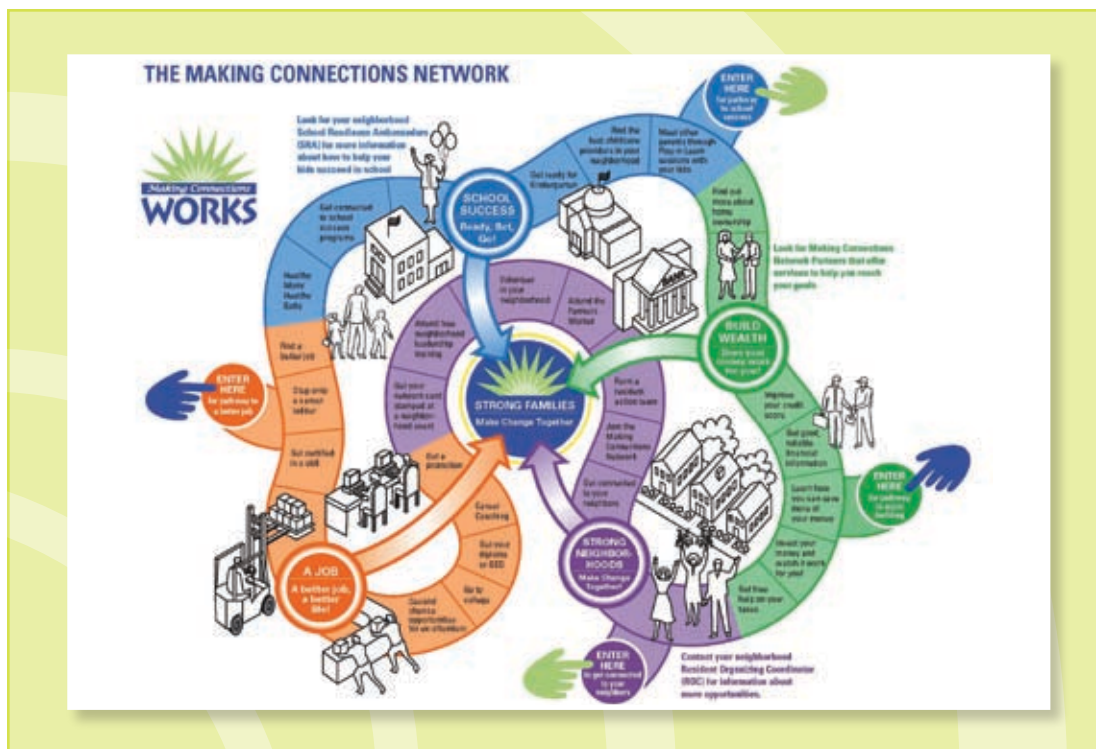
For many people who work in social services, this shift can be difficult to grasp and accept, in part because it’s very antithetical to the typical workplace culture.

“All the instincts we have about building organizations aren’t that useful when it comes to building an organization that looks like a network and that tries to foster social networks,” explains Bill Traynor, director of Lawrence CommunityWorks. “Our instincts are to have a meeting and get business done. It’s not to have social time. It’s not our instinct to let it flow and see what happens. There’s a level of informality and trust in the



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—Bill Traynor



relationships that we take for granted in certain of our social networks that we don’t trust in other settings.”

According to Traynor, using the right language can go a long way towards helping people look at the Network as something wholly different. Both Lawrence CommunityWorks and the *Making Connections* Network use the term “value propositions,” not “programs,” to describe the things the Network offers.

“‘Program’ is laden with a hundred years of history of settlement houses and the New Deal...and all the stuff that’s layered into that kind of dependency relationship that’s indicated when you are running a program,” states Traynor.

The *Making Connections* Network addresses the dependency relationship with the constant use of the phrase “give/get.” Folks give and get in the Network in a variety of ways — by sharing ideas, time and talents. *Making Connections* lead organizer Dorsey states, “True enough, you can get something out of the Network, but you can get something more by bringing something to the Network. And that begins to shift the perspective of Network members. It says, ‘I have value.’ Not only do I have value, but I have some control over my life and my community.”

“We try to set up the give/get in mundane ways,” adds Jane Walsh. “When we start meetings, we ask, ‘What do you bring to this



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—Delquan Dorsey

meeting?’ and ‘What do you need?’ At the Farmer’s Market in Smoketown, we set up a swap meet where you bring some stuff you want to get rid of and swap it for someone else’s stuff. So we try to do this all the time. It’s a habit.”

### How the Network Makes the Difference — One Metaphor

The question remains, how does the Network itself lead to results? Wouldn’t a group of programs do the same thing?

Dorsey lay awake one night, as he had many nights, his mind working overtime mapping out a metaphor for the Network which could communicate how social networks are critical to obtaining measurable, demonstrable change in *Making Connections* Communities.

His vision goes like this:

Imagine the Network as a building with rooms on every floor.

On the fourth floor are rooms which help parents prepare their children for school and help schools prepare for children.

On the third floor are rooms which help folks save money, buy down high-cost debt, become homeowners and get more money back on their taxes.

On the second floor are rooms which help people get good jobs with benefits and room for growth.

On the first floor is an open area where people just come together to meet and greet, share ideas, break bread, envision a stronger community, develop a sense of their own gifts and connect with one another. This area is on the first floor because it is the most accessible to all. When people enter the building, even if they are not interested in taking advantage of the offerings on other floors, they’re just glad to be among friendly faces and spend some enjoyable hours.

In other words, the first floor “social networking” area affords people the time to learn more about how and where they fit in — what they need and what they have to give. This floor is called the “give/get.” The “give/get” represents reciprocity, the sense that, “We are all in this together.”

Everyone embraces change at a different speed. The social networking area also offers a way for people to stay close to the opportunities the Network provides even when they are not ready to take advantage of them for one reason or another.

The ROCs (Resident Organizing Coordinators), trained organizers who live in the neighborhood, serve as elevator operators who directly connect people from the first floor to the opportunities on the other floors. They make the journey easier: the opportunities are still there without them, but it would be akin to taking the stairs.

The Network is designed with multiple entry points so that access leads to more access. And as staff often say, “There is no wrong door into the Network.”

“You have to build the first door for people to walk into. And then you have to have a room full of stuff — but it might not be the right stuff because you’ve created it and the people haven’t created it. But you’ve got to have a room.”

—Bill Traynor

Once members are inside the structure of the Network, one opportunity segues seamlessly to the next.



## A Look at the Building Occupants — “The Value Propositions”

The task of the *Making Connections* Louisville site team is to populate those floors with value. There’s no sense in bringing people into a building with lots of empty rooms.

Yet that also presents a challenge because how do you know what to put into the rooms?

Traynor of Lawrence CommunityWorks is intimately familiar with the challenge.

“This stuff is not linear — there are things you do before other things, but it’s iterative. [‘Iterative’ is a term from math that in essence means you learn from doing something.]

“You have to build the first door for people to walk into. And then you have to have a room full of stuff for people to recognize that there is a room — but it might not be the right stuff because you’ve created it and the people haven’t created it. But you’ve got to have a room.”

In the *Making Connections* Network, the “stuff” had some ready-made parameters. There are three major areas where results are measured: increased jobs, assets and number of children reading on grade level by third grade. Because of this, the *Making Connections*

team has designed “value propositions” that directly impact those areas.

The value propositions in place now will not necessarily be the value propositions in place next year. As member participation grows, the authentic demand will push the flow in one direction or another.

### Jobs

Currently, special employment opportunities are the most visible value propositions offered by the Network. Connecting folks with well-paying, career-ladder jobs is a clearly definable value of the Network. For members, the Network offers several distinct programs.

### Workforce Pipeline

Employment programs are abundant in Louisville: a job seeker has a number of avenues for career advice, job training and referrals. But when *Making Connections* staff began assessing needs in the four neighborhoods, they discovered that some folks needed a different kind of assistance and support — they needed a certain personal attention in order to make that “connection.”

From this insight, a jobs pipeline was born. The *Making Connections* Workforce Team developed a pathway that links folks directly from the four neighborhoods to recruiters at Norton Healthcare, United Parcel Service and other employers via a special liaison who helps applicants bypass the standard “faceless” online application procedure. Most applicants in the pipeline are recruited by a single person

“This is like your great Aunt Sallie who works at Ford and she can pull your application and get you a job.”

—Michelle Stigall, Network member

who prepares them for the interview, hones work skills, determines job readiness and then personally delivers the application to the corporate recruiters. This single point of contact and additional support have proven extremely successful.

“We always say, ‘What if some of the folks who are participating in *Making Connections* had our network? What if they knew the folks that we know?’” asks Jackson. “Because who you know and who your support is really opens the door to another level of opportunity that would otherwise be closed to you. And that really is what this pipeline does — it may not give them my network, but it gives them a network and a support system that otherwise would be absent. It helps them not just be one of many but kind of a known entity.”

At a recent Network “Conversation” — a series of small “listening circles” with Network members — Michelle Stigall, a new Network member, confirmed this sentiment: “The Network was able to let me know that there are partnerships and you can go to different companies and they’ll open the door if they know you are part of the Network. It seems like it gives you more validity.

“I’m between jobs and I went to Career Resources Inc. I’ve been to CRI before, but when I told them I was with *Making Connections*, it was like they said she’s a member and she’s serious. They didn’t think I was there just because some caseworker told me to come. They actually told me that I was over-qualified, but they acted like they had a vested interest in me.



Dallas Thornton says that because his youth employment program is part of the Network, the kids get opportunities that go beyond a job.

“I thought this was me for the rest of my life, but it’s not. They opened not just one door but many doors. I don’t have to do the same thing for the rest of my life: there are other ways to go.”

—Network member

“This is like your great Aunt Sallie who works at Ford and she can pull your application and get you a job.”

For Kim Katz, Jobs Coach for *Making Connections* Louisville, cultivating employment partners who value the Network concept is critical to the sustainability of the jobs pipeline. “We have to have committed employers who look to the neighborhoods as a source of qualified labor. At the end of the day, it’s going to be the employers that keep the pipeline going. And once the neighbors and people in the pipeline know who those employers are, then it begins to feed off itself.”

In essence, Network members will ultimately take on the role of recruiter and job coach as they reach out to fellow Network members and friends.

### **Job Training and Placement Program for Ex-offenders**

Because a certain number of applicants to both UPS and Norton Healthcare are turned away due to background check issues, an alternate program is available in partnership with the Louisville Urban League called “Making It Work.” This two-week program provides ex-offenders with classes, counseling, job training and assistance with expunging records if possible — all with the goal of placing people in jobs.

According to one member, “I went through the Making It Work program and it opened my eyes as to how to move forward and the different routes I can take to make life better. I thought this was me for the rest of my life, but it’s not. They opened not just one door but



A Network Youth Summer Job Fair helped connect young people with local employers.



“It’s going to be the employers that keep the pipeline going.  
And once the neighbors and people in the pipeline know  
who those employers are, then it begins to feed off itself.”

—Kim Katz

many doors. I don’t have to do the same thing for the rest of my life: there are other ways to go.”

The Making It Work Program offers bonuses for people who complete the program who then recruit others — another example of the Network at work.

### Youth Opportunities Unlimited — YOU

The YOU program, which receives funding through *Making Connections*, is a youth education and employment program. When it was established in 2005, it expected to serve approximately 250 young people; 1,100 came through the door that year. Dallas Thornton, a former Harlem Globetrotter, works with youth from the *Making Connections* neighborhoods.

Because YOU is part of the Network and not an isolated program, the young people at the program were offered a special opportunity through a grant from Outreach Extensions and Kentucky Educational Television (KET) to make videos about their feelings about the civil rights movement. The grant was part of an outreach campaign surrounding the acclaimed documentary *Eyes on the Prize*.

For Thornton, this is a clear example of the Network breaking down walls and barriers. “The young people in my group had the opportunity to sit down and interview Raoul Cunningham, the NAACP president in Louisville who marched with Martin Luther King. They might never have gotten that kind of information without this opportunity.”

### Network Opportunity Moments — Forging New Partnerships

Beyond the organized programs, some opportunities spring up organically and it’s incumbent upon team members to seize them. Dreema Jackson, a *Making Connections* Resident Organizing Coordinator, heard about a local plumbing company that wanted to start a paid apprenticeship. She passed the information along to her colleague, Ella Retter, who knew how to make that connection and conversations are currently underway to create those apprenticeships.

### Assets

In some ways, Jane Walsh, the Family Economic Success (FES) Coach, had the good fortune of arriving late at the party. She came on board in June 2005, just as the *Making Connections* Network was launched. Network organizing was her mantra from the beginning — she didn’t have to struggle with paradigm shifts. “I’m the assets person, but I don’t do assets work. I do Network work. I’m a Network organizer. If I do that well, the assets stuff is going to happen,” states Walsh.

One of the first things she did was organize Network Circles in which members from distinct groups — child-care providers, ex-offenders, teenagers, etc. — spoke about their issues, feelings and ideas about money and asset building.

“I know what the data says. I know what the cross-site survey says. I know what the census data says. But where I get my real data is in Network Circles, where I sit down with 10

“I’m the assets person, but I don’t do assets work. I do Network work. I’m a Network organizer. If I do that well, the assets stuff is going to happen.”

—Jane Walsh

## Snapshot of a Network Nite

On a cold Thursday night in the basement of the California Community Center in the West End of Louisville, The *Making Connections* Network hosts a regular “Network Nite.” In the rear of the room, young children draw pictures with a Network member hired to provide child care for members. Teenagers huddle around the jewelry-making table making beaded bookmarks. Members and *Making Connections* staff mill about chatting like long-time friends until Delquan Dorsey takes stage.

“Good evening everybody! Does anybody here know what the *Making Connections* Network is about,” he asks enthusiastically.

A woman in the back shouts out, “It’s about helping you find a job and straightening your life out.”

At this, the assembled crowd offers a big round of clapping.

Another man adds, “It’s about people coming together and connecting with each other and sharing their ideas.”

The woman next to him says, “It teaches you to have an input but to make sure that you are helpful in that input.”

Everyone offers sounds of affirmation and encouragement.

Delquan then summarizes, “The *Making Connections* Network is all that and then some. Like the brother said, it’s about connecting people to each other and to opportunities and those opportunities are around jobs, building wealth, early childhood education and neighborhood improvement.”

Network orientations, or Network Nites as they are called, are the heart and soul of the Network — the times when the Network feels the most

real, less like an idea and more like a functioning entity. You can feel it in the energy in the room.

At each Network Nite, members or staff talk about some of the value propositions offered by the Network.

Dallas Thornton, a career planner at the YOU program and a former Harlem Globetrotter, talks about a special incentive for young people ages 16-21 who come to them to get their GED. “We’re the only program in the State of Kentucky where the young people who get a GED can get a \$350 bonus. That’s good for a young person. We’re going to have a prom for the young people who quit school and got their GED — sometime around Christmas. We asked them what they would like to do more than anything and they said that they would like to go to a prom.”

Jane Walsh, the Assets Coach, takes the floor. “I’m here to talk to you about free money. Tax time is almost upon us. Tax time is the one time we can get a chunk of money for savings. A lot of people lose that savings because they go to paid tax preparers. And then some people lose a lot more money doing what is called a rapid refund. Which is really a loan to get your tax refund in a day, but you’re paying two, three, four hundred percent. All throughout the city there are free, fast, income tax prep sites where you can go get your taxes prepared at no cost to you.”

But the highlight of the evening comes with the introduction of Myra Thomas, a *Making Connections* member who is now employed at Norton Healthcare.

“My name is Myra Thomas and I live right around the corner in California Square. I’m a senior nursing student at Spalding and I was trying to get a job at a hospital and I thought I’d try at

“Just because I was part of *Making Connections*, I got my job and I’m moving up the ladder there. At *Making Connections* I meet all kinds of people.”

—Myra Thomas

Norton Hospital. So I put in six applications and nothing worked. But then, just because I was part of *Making Connections*, I got my job and I’m moving up the ladder there. At *Making Connections* I meet all kinds of people.” She laughs and then says, “I’m nervous.” The crowd laughs and cheers.

Myra continues: “With Miss Jane Walsh, I participated in the last asset circle — the one about saving your money and growing your money. I now have a financial broker who helps me invest my money. He’s helping me with my 401-k at work, knowing exactly what that is. And he’s giving me some different options about how to invest my tax refund when I get it and how to increase my money. I had a savings account with my daughter that really wasn’t giving much back and so he told me some different ways to get that working better.

“I’m a senior nursing student at Spalding — I’m going for my RN/BSN. I work for Norton on the weekends and A&S Temporaries whenever I have spare time. I had to cancel stuff to get here, but I was determined to come tonight.”

And then it’s time for a door prize — someone can win a *Making Connections* binder or umbrella. After that it’s Network bingo — members have a sheet with squares to fill — find someone who has volunteered in their neighborhood, someone who played sports in high school, someone who speaks another language or knows a celebrity — questions designed to get folks talking. When someone has a whole row filled, they shout, “Work the Network.” The folks in the room move about looking for people who represent filled squares (a volunteer, a foreign language speaker) and then it comes, “Work the Network!” from one side of the room.

or 12 members and I say, ‘What happens when you go to the bank? What does your teller say to you? What’s your experience of having a checking account? What’s it like having a check casher?’ That’s how we create financial products and [learn] what has to happen in the long haul. That kind of listening and understanding people’s perspectives and having total respect for the everyday decision-making — that is what is going to make it work for us.”

Using the information from these circles and other research, Walsh and her team created the Assets Strategy, which has three focus areas and utilizes a Network approach throughout.

### **Affordable and appropriate financial products**

The “value propositions” in this strategy range from free tax preparation for EITC refunds to a new affordable credit product for people with high-cost debt from predatory lenders. This credit product allows people to pay down debt with a new loan at 14% and get a matched savings account at the same time.

Also on the radar is a new low-cost “stored value” card, which will enable people without bank accounts to have something akin to a debit card. It will come with MasterCard and *Making Connections* logos. Stored value cards typically cost between \$30-\$40 a month. However, this one would cost a fraction of that. It’s designed for people who can’t have an actual checking account due to problems with the Chex system. The card has a saving and checking account attached to it.

“I know what the data says. I know what the cross-site survey says. But where I get my real data is in Network Circles, where I sit down with 10 or 12 members and I say, ‘What happens when you go to the bank?’”

—Jane Walsh

All of these products and services represent actual dollars coming back into the hands of people within the Network.

### Increase savers

The *Making Connections* Network has joined the “Louisville Saves” campaign, which is part of the “America Saves” campaign. The goal is simply to get people to put a little aside for an emergency fund or some personal goal. The Network will be hosting “Network Wealth-Building” on a regular basis to jumpstart the program. The Consumer Federation of America, which created America Saves, wants to study Network Saves as a national model for taking America Saves into other low-income neighborhoods.

### Stable housing and homeownership

Often valuable programs exist but are not marketed widely. In Louisville, the Louisville Metro Housing Authority offers an incentive to families with Section 8 subsidies that allows them to use part of their rent to save for a mortgage if they participate in the Family Self-Sufficiency Program. The average rate of return is \$9,000. Yet very few residents in *Making Connections* neighborhoods take advantage of this program. The Network intends to spread the news of this resource. “It’s one of the best asset-building tools at our disposal,” says Walsh.

### Utilizing the Network

The breakthrough strategy for this year is being called the MoneyWorks Neighborhood



The *Making Connections* Network is working to pull together child care providers in its neighborhood. This is Tara Goodlett, owner of Little Blessings Child Care.



“If child care providers can speak with a united voice,  
they can potentially influence area funders and powerbrokers.  
They can get that important seat at the table.”

—Kris Rogers

Messengers, a 12-month leadership strategy to hire and train two neighborhood messengers to focus on asset development in the neighborhoods through a learning/teaching model. These messengers will do an in-depth study of what is available in the financial arena — products, services, opportunities — and then spread the word through the neighborhoods while offering ongoing support and advocacy.

### **Children Healthy and Prepared To Succeed in School**

From a Network perspective, once you reach the children in a family, you’ve reached the whole family. The Network offers a number of value propositions designed for children, parents and childcare providers, including Camp Kindergarten, a summer program for children entering elementary school, and Play and Learn, an experiential learning opportunity for parents and caregivers to learn about parenting while playing with their children.

As part of her work, Kris Rogers, CHAPSS coordinator, regularly helps families who use these programs to connect with other parts of the Network. For instance, one day while following up with Camp Kindergarten participants, Rogers heard from a Network member who was struggling with credit card debt. The member had charged \$200 but now owed the credit card company \$800 due to fees and interest.

Rogers saw an opportunity to connect her to an affordable credit product that the Network offers its members to erase high-cost debt while repairing their credit and

establishing savings. She referred the member to the Louisville Urban League, the Network Partner that oversees this program. The Network member in turn volunteered to provide child care at Network events.

“Kris is having these rich conversations that connect people,” notes Davidson. “That’s the crux of what the Network needs to deliver – just in a much more organic and extensive way. We need to get to the place where moms who meet each other in play groups begin to share that information. For me, it’s the relationship piece of it that builds it out. The power of the Network is not fully tapped yet.”

Another way that Making Connections infuses the Network approach into its early childhood work is through its Child Care Partnership, which links the child care centers in the four neighborhoods. The partnership’s goal is for child care centers — both licensed as well as family, friend and neighbor care — to join forces to make their businesses more successful as well as increase the amount of quality child care available in these neighborhoods.

Initially, participation in this still new partnership was low, but gradually these providers have begun to see this mini-network as a value, especially as a way to share resources and leverage power. For example, only one of the 19 accredited child care centers in Metro Louisville is in a Making Connections neighborhood. The Partnership’s members want to increase the number of accredited centers among them, thereby sending a clear message that the Partnership has high expectations for their businesses as well as for the outcomes of children in their care.

“That’s why the ROCs are here — to delve into it more and see what you’re doing and if you need any more assistance. And once you are able to achieve your goals, you can in turn help someone else — it’s give/get.”

—Alicia Gardner



Patricia Bell, with her daughter — and fellow ROC — Alicia Gardner, says that being a ROC and being part of the Network has changed her life and “made me feel more worthy.”

“If child care providers can speak with a united voice, they can potentially influence area funders and powerbrokers, like the Metro United Way, and ultimately change policy,” states Rogers.



## The Nuts and Bolts of the Network

Underneath the architecture of the Network is the infrastructure — the concrete systems that organize the Network and assist the flow of resources and people through it.

## Residents Who Connect People to the Network

The Resident Organizing Coordinators (ROCs) and School Readiness Ambassadors (SRAs) are the most visible face of the Network and often serve as the first access point to the Network. All of them live in the neighborhoods they serve and have a deep and abiding love for their community.

They are the “connectors and weavers” — the ones on the ground who help people hook up to the Network and find their place within it. They often assist people with immediate needs — such as jobs and housing — but they are always working to support others to take action on their own behalf. Each of them is a walking information warehouse of all the important services and programs available in the city, as well as the specific value propositions of the Network.

These neighborhood messengers represent not only the opportunities for jobs and other resources the Network offers, but also the opportunity for personal and communal transformation. One of the first things you notice when the ROCs and SRAs are all together is how much fun they have — they have a playful, lively, good-natured banter that is impossible to manufacture. They and the rest of the team carry this joyful spirit into all Network events and activities.

“We see joy as an indicator of success. It’s an indicator that we’re doing it right,” explains Traynor of Lawrence CommunityWorks. “If it’s not that and it’s a drag and people aren’t able

“The Connect Pad is a physical application of how to be a listener and how to go about Network organizing for results.”

—Delquan Dorsey

to find some joy in it, then it's not going to be as powerful.”

And that joy translates to a level of dedication that goes way beyond a paycheck — what some have referred to as the “economy of caring.” According to Alicia Gardner, “We don’t leave you by the wayside — it’s an ongoing thing with us. We check on you — just because you may have gotten a job or you may have gotten the thing that you need, we just don’t leave it like that. That’s why the ROCs are here — to delve into it more and see what you’re doing and if you need any more assistance. And once you are able to achieve the goals that you have, you can also in turn help someone else. It’s an ongoing thing — it’s give/get.”

All the ROCs have traveled a long way in their personal journeys and can articulate the impact the Network has had on them. Says Patricia Bell, who happens to be the mother of fellow ROC Alicia Gardner, “I feel like my life has changed to the degree that it’s helped my self-esteem, it has made me feel more worthy. I’ve always been a person that loved to listen to people, but now I’m able to actually give them some resource help and guide them in the directions that they need to go to increase their knowledge and help them with other things that might be beneficial to their lives and their families. It’s like a ball that get larger and larger.”

## Network Card

When folks sign up for the *Making Connections* Network, they get a Network Card — very similar to a punch card at a coffee shop. The way the card is currently constructed, every time the members use the services of a Net-

work Partner — if they take a financial education class at the Louisville Urban League, apply for a job through Career Resources Inc., take an exercise class at the Presbyterian Community Center, or shop at the Smoke-town Farmer’s Market, for example — they can receive a stamp. At the annual “Network Celebration,” members can redeem their cards for a variety of Network gear — umbrellas, t-shirts, mugs, etc. — depending on the number of stamps they have.

Moving forward, the team hopes to replace the paper Network card with a plastic “swipe card” which can capture member data and Network use in real time.

## The Connect Pad

When talking with residents, ROCs and other Network organizers listen for areas where the Network can respond and then make appropriate connections. An unemployed ex-offender will be connected with the Louisville Urban League for the Making It Work program. A mom in need of child care will be connected to the CHAPSS people. A family on the verge of foreclosure might be connected with Jane Walsh, the FES Coach, who can connect them to partners and resources.

Initially, all these connections happened informally in the way that most connections do — names and numbers written on a piece of paper torn from a notebook. But shortly after the Network was launched, the team realized that a lot of important information was being missed in these exchanges. What exactly are the needs out there? How are people getting connected to resources? How can we make

“We see joy as an indicator of success.  
If it’s a drag and people aren’t able to find some joy in it,  
then it’s not going to be as powerful.”

—Bill Traynor

**CONNECT PAD**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Connect Who: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Info: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

Direct to Making Connections' Network Partner:

☐ FES/Assets \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Jobs \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Career and Education \_\_\_\_\_

☐ RKRS \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Other MCW Network Partner \_\_\_\_\_

Partners Contact Info: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

Follow-up Date: \_\_\_\_\_

ROC/SAV/OTHER  
Contact Info: \_\_\_\_\_

**MAKING CHANGE WORKS**  
Building a better world

sure that folks aren’t falling through the cracks and that people really are being connected to resources? The organizational answer came in the form of a three carbon-sheeted pad called a Connect Pad.

“The Connect Pad is a streamlined process that we created to make it as simple as possible for the ROCs to capture various conversations,” explains Dorsey. “It was a physical application of how to be a listener and how to go about Network organizing for results.”

The Connect Pad captures contact information for the member, the name of the resource partner or Network opportunity to

which the member was connected, and then a follow-up date — all so that there is a better sense of who is using the Network and why. One copy is given to the member who needs the connection, one copy goes to the Network partner and one is saved for *Making Connections* data collection purposes.

Additionally, the Connect Pad assists in evaluation and in making a case for the importance of this work. “The Connect Pad was a big important thing because before that it was hard to track the impact of the ROCs. I knew they were doing a lot of work that they weren’t getting credit for,” adds Dorsey.

## Network Nites

In the beginning of 2006, it became clear that many members had signed up for the Network without a clear understanding of what it was. After reflection, Network Coordinator Aubrey Williams and the team came up with the idea of Network Nite, a Network orientation.

Network Nites are held once a month on a rotating basis at key locations in each of the *Making Connections* neighborhoods. At these gatherings, members are given the broad strokes about the Network — the value propositions, the give/get, the vision of Making Change Together. Then members play ice-breaking games in order to get to know one another better. Each evening ends with a free home-cooked meal catered by a Network member. (See “Snapshot of a Network Nite” on page 18.)

Network Nites are an important opportunity for Network members to share their desires, beliefs and concerns. Some members have



“In a Network environment you need to replicate yourself. If you think about it as an electronic network, the bigger the Network becomes, the more nodes you need because you get overloads and bottlenecks as it grows.”

—Bill Traynor

shared worries about things like safety and litter. Others have expressed an interest in certain programs they would like to see developed — a cooking class for kids or a gymnastics program within the neighborhood, for example.

Above all, there has been a concern for the young people in the neighborhood. Some members feel like the youth don't have enough opportunities and meaningful activity. The young people themselves have stated a clear desire for summer jobs.

To respond to this concern around youth, the Network recently hosted its first Youth Summer Job Fair. Representatives from Norton Hospital, UPS, Kentucky Kingdom, Metro Parks and others were present, as were recruiters from Spalding University and Metropolitan College. Team members informed young people and their parents how to put their best foot forward in an interview and on the job. Over 100 people participated.

Ultimately, as the Network roots itself and more members take on a Network identity, the members will take over the planning and running of the Network Nites. This transition is already underway.

## The Mantras

Since the Network was in its infancy, the organizing and management staff and ROCs have worked closely with leadership coach Elena Pell. According to Pell, “The purpose of the coaching was to work with the people who had become core within the social network — to really deepen their understanding about where they were going.”

Once the Network was up and running, Pell conducted some group coaching sessions in which the ROCs and the staff were given an opportunity to say, “What are we learning here about what is unique about building a social network approach?” From that session they extracted several principles that were central to their work and success to date.

- **Lead to follow, follow to lead.**

Pell recalls the day when this principle emerged. “We dove deep into what is the model of leadership that exists within African American communities and Delquan had some extraordinary insights and powerful thoughts about this issue that really shifted the group's thinking. They began to realize that they had an opportunity to model a whole new type of leadership.”

According to Pell, this is what differentiates leadership in a social network from more traditional leadership models, which often emphasize a few heroic leaders. “A social network has to have distributed leadership. It's not about empowering people but about distributing the capacity to express and exercise leadership in different places in the Network.”

If you imagine the Network as a collection of interconnected “nodes” and not as a typical command-and-control organization, it's easy to see the danger in not distributing leadership and placing too much emphasis on one node: it results in “node overload.”

“In a Network environment you need to replicate yourself,” Traynor explains. “If you think about it as an electronic network, the bigger the Network becomes, the more nodes

“The goal is that *everyone* involved in the initiative is a Network Organizer and ultimately everyone embraces basic values about how they are connected to one another. Everyone is able to articulate that they are part of something special.”

—Elena Pell

and transmission points you need because you get overloads and bottlenecks as it grows. So a good network is always replicating its transmission points.”

The *Making Connections* Louisville site team is quite aware that it cannot depend on the efforts of a few over-worked people to keep it going. The team works constantly to identify and nurture emerging leaders and model a style of leadership where leaders are not experts but rather facilitators of the expertise within the group. Many ROCs and members have been to Resident Facilitation Leadership training. At team meetings, facilitation is now shared by all team members; some who had been terrified to speak in public are now taking the floor with ease. The team is embracing small discussion groups over large convenings whenever possible to make certain every voice is heard and nurtured.

- **Connect families to one another and to opportunities.**

The *Making Connections* neighborhoods, like many neighborhoods, have increasingly transient populations. The days when everybody knew everybody are gone. People who have lived in the neighborhoods for many years feel disconnected from their new neighbors. Bringing folks together through the Network and linking them to opportunities helps members move forward with their own lives and experience their community and neighborhood in a new way.

This principle also underscores the fact that people in these neighborhoods have not

traditionally had the opportunities afforded to others. At the core of the Network is a belief that a just society affords all people the same opportunities in life — the opportunity for a well-paid job with benefits, a nice home, a good education for their children and access to all the services and goods that families need to live comfortably.

“Network families to one another and to opportunities” is a constant reminder that the Network exists to improve the lives of families and children.

“A lot of times our neighborhoods are looked at as deficit-based as opposed to asset-based, partially because of economics. This principle [the need to connect families] speaks to families and individuals as the primary resource in the neighborhood,” explains Dorsey.

- **Make change together.**

This deceptively simple phrase points to several key values held dear by the Network. It highlights the *Making Connections* commitment to do “with” and not “to” or “for” communities. It assumes that the people who live in the communities know best what they need and that by working together the Network can be a potent force for enduring changes. It also suggests that there are in fact changes to be made — systemic and institutional changes as well as community changes.

Network Organizing then is about building a network of residents and other stakeholders who can work together to strengthen the collective voice, create value and use that value and voice for change.

“There needs to be a mechanism in place that makes sure that the learning emerges in the work — that they’re not so busy doing the work that they don’t stop and say, ‘Oh wow, there is some other glue here that holds us together.’”

—Elena Pell

According to Pell, “The goal is that everyone involved in the initiative is a Network Organizer and ultimately everyone embraces some basic values and philosophical points of view about how they are connected to one another. Everyone is able to articulate that they are part of something special and be clear enough that they can explain it to someone in basic terms. ‘We’re part of a Network, we support one another, we make change together, we don’t just build programs — we also help build the strength of the community.’”

For the team, these simple but rich philosophies about Network organizing serve as a touchstone as they play out their roles as Network Organizers. Dorsey states, “Whenever I get lost on Network organizing, I use the mantras.”

Pell says one of the challenges for the team now is to build in opportunities and structures that enable them to extract other core principles as they do their work, and then make them explicit for the Network so that they can be enacted and embraced.

“There are three principles of Network organizing, but I would say there are some other principles in there that have not been made explicit yet that are just as important to the success of what Louisville is trying to do,” Pell explains. “There needs to be a mechanism in place that makes sure that the learning emerges in the work — that they’re not so busy doing the work that they don’t stop and say, ‘Oh wow, we are discovering there is some other glue here that holds us together.’”



ROC Ella Retter works to connect people to the Network on buses, in waiting rooms — anywhere she meets people. “People are my heart, my love, my business — that’s what I do.”

## Network Habits

The team is constantly in the process of developing Network Habits — consistent actions which serve to reinforce the ethos and philosophy of the Network. For instance, whenever team members introduce themselves in a meeting, they begin with, “Hi, I’m so and so

“I see challenges around understanding that the way the Network is designed, it’s supposed to change. I see challenges around practicing what we’re preaching.”

—Delquan Dorsey



### The Network by the Numbers

January 1, 2007

Over **2,200** members signed up for the Network

**196** employed

**40** employed at UPS

**63** employed at Norton Healthcare

**28** in jobs with other employers as a result of recruitment for Healthcare Pilot

**40** youth employed via Youth Opportunities Unlimited

**25** ex-offenders employed via Making It Work

**62** Young adults engaged in GED preparation, post-secondary education and jobs through Youth Opportunities Unlimited

**52** ex-offenders graduated from Louisville Urban League’s Making It Work job training and placement initiative

**844** families received free tax services at VITA sites in MC neighborhoods in 2006

**\$628,323** in earned income credit received by families who filed at VITA sites in MC neighborhoods in 2006

**\$234,000** in child tax credit received by families who filed at VITA sites in MC neighborhoods in 2006

**44** Network members completed a personal financial vision statement and financial action plan

**16** families engaged in Camp Kindergarten in 2006, which prepares preschool-age children and their parents for the transition to kindergarten

**28** child care providers participated in early childhood development and literacy training

**290** families in MC neighborhoods were touched by the Starting Strong Institute in 2006, which builds on quality care and parental involvement in early childhood training

**2** pilot projects begun in MC neighborhood elementary schools focused on reading skills and attendance in the early grades, running through 2007

**1** lending library established at Dawson-Orman Early Childhood Education Center

and I’m a Network member.” This serves to make it clear that, while some people are paid for their work in the Network, they are part of it and not simply a facilitator of it.

## Challenges and Goals Moving Forward

When asked what was challenging about the Network, Dorsey laughed, “Where do you want to start? I got all kinds of challenges. I got 2,200 people in a data base and only so much capacity to engage with them. I got challenges around technology and the capacity to engage in a targeted, effective way. I got challenges around calendar.”

After pausing to reflect a minute, he added, “I see challenges around change and being able to accept change and understanding that the way the Network is designed, it’s supposed to change and re-enhance itself. I see challenges around practicing what we’re preaching.”

One of the most persistent and prevalent challenges — something every team member would affirm — is the challenge of expanding the level of resident engagement and ownership of the Network.

“I think there are a couple of things that are challenging about that,” explains Davidson. “One of them is that it requires all of us to step out of the way a little bit, which is always a challenge. The other is that it requires the Network to have enough value that they would care, and we’re still working on that.



“It’s hard to work with a membership base of 2,200 people. These ‘Network Stewards’ will bring ideas, work on their ‘give/get’ and talent inventories. They will have small, close-knit conversations and be the next tier of leadership.”

—Delquan Dorsey

“And that is a challenge in itself. How do we build the Network to have enough value that people would care about it without having an ‘If you build it they will come approach,’ which is also not right. So it’s a constant balance between how you create something and still create the space for it to become something different.”

Adds Patricia Bell, Resident Organizing Coordinator for Smoketown, “It’s a challenge to make sure that people are aware of what the Network is about — you can talk to them until they are blue in the face, but until they become a part of it and go through the processes of getting a job, getting an education or changing their job status to a career — just letting them know that the Network is here and this is what we are all about is a challenge. I just say, ‘Try it, you might like it.’”

In order to facilitate greater member participation and ownership, one of the main strategies for next year is the identification and designation of 30 Network members as “Network Stewards.” These are members who have expressed interest in becoming more involved with the Network.

“It’s hard to work with a membership base of 2,200 people,” Dorsey says. “This will be a group that we look to bring ideas, work on their give/get and talent inventories — the group that will have small, close-knit conversations. This group will be next tier of leadership.”

**A**nother core challenge is developing partners who truly understand the Network — who can describe it, understand it and



ROC Jackie Grace Lee connects people in her California neighborhood to the *Making Connections* Network.

believe in its potential. Partners like this are fundamental to the Network’s sustainability. While many partners are interested in the work of *Making Connections* Louisville or are vested in a piece of the work, they haven’t embraced the concept fully or taken up a Network identity. As Walsh puts it, “Our Network partners aren’t us yet.”

Moving forward, the *Making Connections* Network is making a concerted effort to identify all important partners, establish their

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position on a continuum of commitment and begin to understand what is needed to move them across the continuum to the role of “champion of the Network.”

To accomplish this, the team is reflecting together on basic questions like, what is a Network partner? What do we expect from Network partners and what can they expect from us? Do our partners need us? If we expect our partners to understand our way, aren’t we expected to understand their way? The team also recognizes that it can’t just be one person at a partnering organization who values the Network — all the people who work there must embrace the Network as well.

Site coordinator Jackson talked extensively with some Network partners recently to hear firsthand how the Network is perceived in the community and what adjustments might be necessary so that more partners feel the same sense of passion and commitment that the site team feels about the Network. This type of listening process is critical to how the Network learns and evolves.

Pell adds, “The management consultant Peter Block has said, ‘People resist coercion much more than they do change.’ We can’t just say, ‘Oh, we have a new way of doing things, it’s a social network approach and there’s lots of research out there that supports it.’ We actually need to step back and say, how do people actually change? How do you set up institutional structures that will help support this being taken on by the community? It’s not just buy-in. You’re really talking about engaging people in a collective effort that’s more like

a big extended family in some ways than a traditional program.”

### **Deepening and Expanding the Network: Utilizing The Power of Transformation to Transform Others**

Dana Jackson likens the challenges of marketing the Network to a sales pitch for a fabulous new vacuum cleaner. Her metaphor goes like this: Imagine you are selling a vacuum cleaner door to door. You tell everyone you meet about the many extraordinary and revolutionary features of this new vacuum cleaner and convince folks far and wide that they must have this incredible machine. But when they ask to see it, you say, “Oh I’m sorry, it’s not built yet.”

By necessity, the Network was built by a small group of people who tinkered with it and tested it until they felt confident they had built a solid entity which reflected the values and goals intrinsic to the *Making Connections* approach. Now those same designers recognize that it’s time to let the Network be the thing it claims to be — an open, organic, interconnected, holistic organism. To do this, they are widening the circle of people who experience the Network as intimately as they do so that they can influence and be influenced by the Network.

For Pell, who was a consultant and leadership coach to the team for the past five years, this represents an exciting affirmation of the learning that has taken place. In her role, Pell worked closely with the team to help them develop ways to be explicit about the path they are creating: to put “bright lines” under the

“If you change the way a small group of people work and they are surrounded by business as usual, it will collapse from the weight. There is a hunger for this, but it operates in this environment that is layer upon layer of pressure not to change.”

—Terri Bailey

values it holds dear, to embody them in their practice and communicate them out in the community.

She can see tangible signs that those values are resonating within the Network beyond the core team. “I see an expansion of the number of people who have taken up a Network identity. There is an energy and a commitment that is palpable.”

But, as Pell and the team know, taking up an identity as a Network member is not a “once and done” event. It’s an evolving experience. Pell believes that it’s important that there be systems and processes in place that support this evolution.

“Now there needs to be an unfolding of the strategy that helps people’s ability to make sense of this — to identify with it, to see that it’s something special. They have to intuitively understand it in order to fully come in. And that doesn’t mean they have to understand all the details, but they have to make a shift in their thinking — the system is us and it’s something we are creating together.”

Terri Bailey, a member of the Casey Foundation’s social networks team and a consultant to Louisville, echoes these insights, referring to this as the need for others to have “access to transformation.” For anyone to become a real Network champion and take up a Network identity, they must be near people experiencing real transformation. Being four or five layers removed mediates the experience too much for someone to grasp its power.

“The challenge is to be explicit about the path — so that transformation and the word and the understanding of it is constantly being talked about and deepened, just like ‘membership,’ like ‘give/get,’ etc.,” explains Bailey. “There has to be an explicitness to it, a reflection on it and a celebration of it, then there has to be a sharing of it.”

It’s not an official mantra, but hardly a meeting takes place without someone declaring, “It’s a process, not an event.” This is certainly a challenging concept in a results-oriented, data-driven environment, but the increasing frequency with which it’s heard indicates that there is a growing understanding and recognition that the path and journey to results really do matter.

If the Louisville team feels daunted and overwhelmed sometimes by the challenges of the path, Bailey says that there’s a good reason: they are attempting to do something that has never been done before, which is create a community-wide social network. Bailey for one is very impressed. “The story is huge — it’s a field-building story. It’s not about a single organization. It’s about initiative-wide change.

“If you change the way a small group of people work and they are surrounded by business as usual,” Bailey explains, “it will collapse from the weight. There is a hunger for this, but it operates in this environment that is layer upon layer upon layer of pressure not to change. Still the hunger is so great that these kinds of principles and ideals and opportunities resonate in a way that nothing else has ever resonated. And that’s when you know you’re right. And that’s Louisville.”

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have taken up a Network identity.  
There is an energy and a commitment that is palpable.”

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## The Diarist Project

This is one of a series of publications about the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s *Making Connections* Initiative put together by The Diarist Project. The project is a new approach the foundation is using to learn from its efforts to strengthen families and transform struggling neighborhoods.

Diarists work to capture strategies and insights of the people who are leading the neighborhood transformation work. In *Making Connections*, the diarist works closely with the staff people who lead the work in each city, the Site Team Leader and Local Site Coordinator.

This story of the Network was written by Laura Crawford, the *Making Connections* Louisville diarist. It was edited by Tim Saasta, diarist coordinator. Photos by Mary Ann Dolcemascolo (pages 6, 9, 11, 22, 27, 32) and Karen Abney (1, 4, 15, 16, 20, 29).

**Making Connections** is a Casey Foundation initiative to support work that demonstrates the simple premise that kids thrive when their families are strong and their communities supportive. What began in 1999 as a demonstration project in selected neighborhoods in 22 cities is now an intricate network of people and groups committed to making strong families and neighborhoods their highest priorities.

**The Annie E. Casey Foundation** works to build better futures for disadvantaged children and their families in the United States. Its primary mission is to foster public policies, human service reforms and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today’s vulnerable children and families.



“People are my heart, my love, my  
business – that’s what I do.”

—Resident Organizing  
Coordinator Ella Retter

For more information  
about **The Diarist Project**,  
contact:

Tim Saasta  
c/o Charitable Choices  
4 Park Ave., Suite 200,  
Gaithersburg, MD 20877  
Tel: 240-683-7100  
Tim@CharityChoices.com  
**www.DiaristProject.org.**

**Making Connections Louisville** is a ten-year initiative supported in part by the Annie E. Casey Foundation designed to catalyze change to close the gap and improve the life opportunities of families and children in four inner-city neighborhoods: Smoketown, Shelby Park, California and Phoenix Hill.

For more information, please contact  
Tonia Nolden 502-583-1426.