

# **Beyond the Reassuring Hug: Candace Redshirt on getting beneath the surface of the relationships in Making Connections**



*Candace Redshirt was a long-time resident of Denver's West Side, a focus of both the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Rebuilding Communities Initiative and Making Connections. She became involved in both initiatives and became a community staff person for Making Connections. An article about her personal transformation ("Making a Difference: One Life — One Family — Transformed") is on the Diarist Project website: [DiaristProject.org](http://DiaristProject.org).*

**REFLECTIONS**

on Making Connections

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“A lot of the success of our work is dependent on relationships. Four of the key elements of these relationships are race, class, gender and power. We aren’t intentional enough about identifying these dynamics in our relationships.

“I’m talking about relationships between individuals, between organizations in the partnership, between the community and resident staff, between resident staff and other staff, between the initiative in Denver and the foundation in Baltimore, between our initiative and other initiatives right here in Denver.

“There’s power stuff going on in every one of these relationships, and we don’t talk about it. And many of these relationships are stuck on the surface as a result.

“I don’t want to leave people hanging out there in conflict, with lots of unresolved issues in their relationships with people in the initiative, or in community, or with staff or the learning network.

“Being in good relationship means understanding and growing, and building trust, and treating people by our guiding principles, and holding ourselves accountable to that, or it’s just going to be another

initiative that comes and goes and nothing changes. And even more damage is done than good.

“If people on the outside don’t see and understand these things, they are going to end up saying things that hurt us. They need the same level of training to understand. People who’ve never gone hungry, people who’ve never had to struggle with the systems. There’s something holding back the people up there and they probably don’t even realize it. So some things people say make me angry, like, ‘Why can’t they get it together?’

“Whatever happens with the relationships will influence sustainability. Once the money and the resources are gone, it’s going to be the relationships that continue. The relationships can last beyond this initiative.

*Edited by Tory Read, former Denver Making Connections diarist. This excerpt comes from interviews Read conducted with Candace Redshirt on 11-21-03 and 3-23-04.*

This is one of a series of reflections and reports about the work of Making Connections, a long-term community change initiative supported by the Annie E Casey Foundation. These reflections are available at: [www.DiaristProject.org](http://www.DiaristProject.org). For more information, contact [Tim@CharityChoices.org](mailto:Tim@CharityChoices.org).

## REFLECTIONS

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