



**MAKING CONNECTIONS IN HARTFORD**

**A Pathway to Better Results**

An equal chance to succeed in school,  
at work and to save for the future.



## THE MAKING CONNECTIONS PROCESS

At its core **Making Connections** is a community-led change process. It relies on the active engagement of stakeholders from all sectors of Hartford to exert their will to influence the policies, programs, practices, and investments that will improve the well being of vulnerable families and distressed neighborhoods in sizeable, measurable and sustainable ways.

## THE PLACE

**Making Connections** focuses its efforts at this time on the Frog Hollow and Upper Albany neighborhoods for two primary reasons. First, each neighborhood has a disproportionate number of vulnerable families and, second, the combined size of the two neighborhoods is small enough for the efforts of **Making Connections** and its partners to have a discernable impact on the well being of the families who live here. These neighborhoods possess many strengths and assets and there's a huge potential for creating more access to the skills and opportunities that lead to secure, family supporting jobs. The **Making Connections** partners believe that their efforts in Frog Hollow and Upper Albany can help more families afford homes and cars, qualify for credit, and avoid paying too much for necessary goods and services. And if our efforts succeed in these two neighborhoods, they will be expanded and replicated in other neighborhoods throughout Hartford.

## RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT

To be successful in creating a sustainable pathway to opportunities, the wants and needs of residents must be central components of all strategies and actions. Only residents can create the level of demand that's needed to improve connections between families and supportive social networks, faith communities and civic groups. **Making Connections** partners provide many resources to ensure that the voices of residents are heard when decisions that impact family economic success, health, safety, schools, and day care facilities are made. Resident leaders receive training that is helping them engage their neighbors in the effort to bring about favorable community changes. **Making Connections** also has co-invested with several organizational partners to support the Hartford Collaborative for Community Organizing.

## RESULTS BASED & DATA DRIVEN

Data is an absolutely vital element of the **Making Connections** process. Great care is given to documenting and analyzing existing economic and social conditions as well as the support services that are available to residents. Once these benchmarks are established, equal emphasis is placed on targeting and tracking realistic short- and long-term goals for improving conditions. The **Making Connections** partners have all agreed to be held accountable to a results-driven agenda based on facts that can't be disputed. The Connecticut Association for Human Services is leading the effort to evaluate **Making Connections'** change strategies.



*While the Hartford community shapes the Making Connections process, the Annie E. Casey Foundation's ongoing support requires that the process remains results-based, data-driven and responsive to the authentic demand of the residents who make-up the target population.*

## HOW IT IS:

Hartford families with children living in low-income neighborhoods have fewer opportunities than families in the surrounding area — the children are less likely to enter school healthy and ready to succeed, and the adults don't have an equal chance of finding family-sustaining work or of being able to save for a better future and to protect their families from financial emergencies.

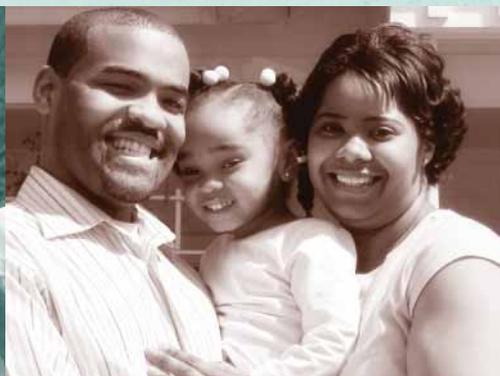
The opportunity gaps for children and families living in Hartford's Frog Hollow and Upper Albany neighborhoods include:

- 50 percent fewer kindergarten children in Frog Hollow and Upper Albany attend pre-school compared to the statewide average.
- Only eight percent of 4th graders in Frog Hollow and Upper Albany read at grade level. The statewide rate is 54 percent.
- 32 percent of households in Frog Hollow and Upper Albany with children live in poverty versus 10 percent of all the households in Connecticut.
- 72 percent of Frog Hollow and Upper Albany households with children have full time employment as opposed to 90 percent across the region.
- 44 percent fewer households in Frog Hollow and Upper Albany have savings than in the region as a whole.
- The average home ownership rate of only about two percent in Frog Hollow and 20 percent in Upper Albany is well below the 28 percent rate for the entire city.

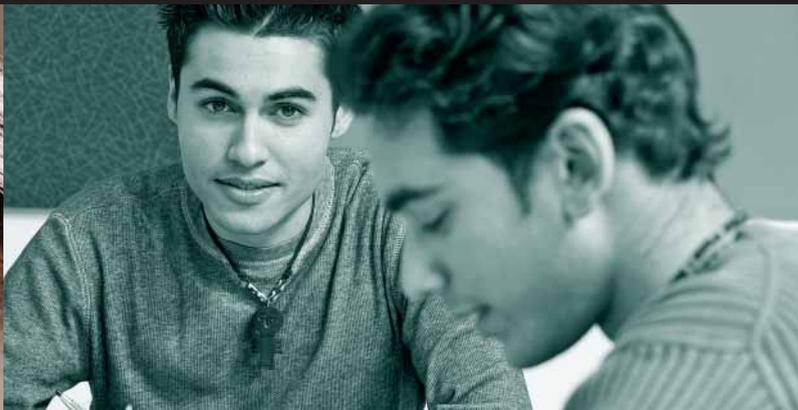
## WHAT IT CAN BE:

The Hartford community can build a better future by creating new pathways to opportunity for its disadvantaged families. A strong community building effort backed by a results-driven action plan is already underway. It's supported by the resources of a growing list of residents and local organizations who are committed to and who are holding themselves accountable for bringing about sizeable, measurable, and sustainable changes that will improve the quality of life in the Frog Hollow and Upper Albany neighborhoods. **Making Connections'** partners are aiming for the following targets over the next five years:

- 20 percent more children enter school healthy and prepared to succeed
- 52 percent or 172 more children read at grade level by 4th grade
- 350 families move out of poverty
- 428 families gain full-time employment
- 412 more families have savings
- 75 more families own homes



# THE STRATEGIES & ACTION PLANS OF



## CONNECTING RESIDENTS TO FAMILY SUSTAINING WORK AND EARNINGS

*Making Connections'* primary focus is on increasing family economic success. With the varied levels of job readiness among residents in Frog Hollow and Upper Albany, *Making Connections'* efforts have evolved over time to provide both basic skills and workforce strategies tailored to neighborhood needs. *Making Connections* and its local partners have placed strong emphasis on providing support to young adults and families in view of the disproportionately high youth unemployment, teen pregnancy, and high school drop-out rates in the Frog Hollow and Upper Albany neighborhoods. Following are brief overviews of the primary *Making Connections* activities and strategies to increase family employment and earnings:

### ■ Center for Young Working Families

The Center for Young Working Families is a prototype that works to pull together and coordinate services in ways that help young families find good jobs, increase earnings, and build assets. Because this program is targeting some of the hardest to employ young adults in the city, *Making Connections* and its local partners are doing extensive design and development work to make sure the prototype provides the right mix of education, job training, placement, social service, and other supports. The 45 families currently involved in the prototype demonstration effort of the Center for Young Working Families receive career counseling and financial education and get help identifying employment, career, and personal goals.

*Making Connections and its partners take a strategic two-generation approach to strengthening families. This involves working to ensure that families and parents succeed economically and that their children are also prepared to succeed.*

# MAKING CONNECTIONS' PARTNERS



## ■ Neighborhood Workforce Pipelines

**Construction Trades:** *Making Connections* is partnering with the Hartford Jobs Funnel to build a direct pipeline from the Frog Hollow and Upper Albany neighborhoods to jobs in the construction trades. The Hartford Jobs Funnel is a coordinated system of outreach/recruitment, assessment, case management, pre-employment preparation, job training, and retention services for city residents seeking employment. During the past five years, the Jobs Funnel has placed more than 500 Hartford residents in apprenticeships and full time jobs. The majority of these residents are from the Frog Hollow and Upper Albany neighborhoods. *Making Connections* plans to work with the Jobs Funnel to further increase the number of residents in construction jobs, as well as to provide basic literacy and math training to more residents. Increasing attention will be paid to helping men and women returning to the neighborhoods from prison to find work.

**Allied Health, Healthcare and Technology Sectors:** *Making Connections* also is working with the Urban League of Greater Hartford to build the capacity of its existing pipelines to jobs in the allied health, healthcare and technology workforce sectors in order to serve more Frog Hollow and Upper Albany residents.

**Career Advancement Training:** *Making Connections* collaborates with the Connecticut Women's Legal and Educational Fund to strengthen its Bridges Program, which has proven effective in helping Certified Nurse Assistants to develop the skills needed to move up the career ladder and qualify for nursing jobs and other specialized positions in the allied health care sector.

**Work and Earnings Partners:** *Capital Region Education Council, Capital Workforce Partners, Connecticut Puerto Rican Forum, Connecticut Women's Education & Leadership Forum, Co-opportunity, Hartford Public Schools/ Adult Education, Hartford Jobs Funnel, Our Piece of the Pie, The Village For Families & Children, United Way of the Capital Area, Urban League of Greater Hartford.*

## HELPING FAMILIES PROTECT, SAVE AND GROW THEIR ASSETS

Too many families in the *Making Connections'* neighborhoods live one missed paycheck or a medical emergency away from being able to provide for their children and loved ones. Working through a citywide collaboration, *Making Connections* is building upon existing relationships with the city, local funders, community organizations, and others to help families protect, save and grow their financial assets. Major strategies include:

### ■ Hartford Asset Building Collaborative (HABC)

This Collaborative leads the Hartford EITC Campaign and works with member organizations to start low-income families on a pathway to build assets. The Hartford EITC Campaign is a broad-based, citywide campaign with partners from virtually every sector of the city. Mayor Eddie A. Perez has become an increasingly active champion of the campaign, and a number of neighborhood-based nonprofit organizations now host free tax preparation centers.

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, United Way of the Capital Area, and the Connecticut Association for Human Services also provide support. These partnerships have resulted in a 132 percent increase in EITC refunds during the past three years, from \$1.2 million returned to 500 residents in 2003 to nearly \$7.8 million in refunds to more than 3,300 residents citywide in 2006. Hartford has had the highest percentage increase in taxpayers getting the EITC among all of the nation's 122 large cities. The amount of tax preparation fees that residents saved in the 2006 tax season using the free tax centers also has risen to roughly \$364,000, an increase of \$90,000 from last year and \$250,000 from 2004. In addition, the campaign is generating substantial impact on the *Making Connections*' neighborhoods.

- Some 100 residents attended financial workshops to learn more about credit repair, IDAs, and budgeting.
- More than 100 resident volunteers were certified as tax preparers and staffed the tax preparation centers.
- HABC worked with the Hartford Federal Credit Union to create savings incentives for residents who claim the EITC. More than 70 new savings accounts were created.

Co-opportunity, the lead agency of the HABC, has begun to implement the Savings Pathways model that the agency developed with the support of *Making Connections*. By establishing Savings Pathways, Co-opportunity links together the Center for Young Working Families, Hartford's integrated EITC/asset building campaign and the services that the Hartford Federal Credit Union provides. By the end of 2007, 200 residents will receive ongoing Savings Pathways coaching appropriate to their individual needs and aspirations.

### ■ **Hartford Neighborhood Development Support Collaborative**

*Making Connections* Hartford supports this Collaborative which has provided nearly \$6 million to Hartford community development corporations during the past decade, and has helped create more than 1,000 units of affordable housing within the city, with 500 more being built now. The Collaborative has created 34 new two-family homes in the *Making Connections*' neighborhoods last year and refurbished 74 rental-housing units.

*Asset Building Partners:* Capital Community College, Casey Family Services, Christian Activities Council, Community Renewal Team, Connecticut Association for Human Services, Hartford Asset Building Collaborative, Hartford Federal Credit Union, Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, Hartford Neighborhood Development Support Collaborative, Hartford Public Library, Internal Revenue Services, Mi Casa Family Center, The Village for Families & Children, United Way of the Capital Area, Upper Albany Neighborhood Collaborative, Urban League of Greater Hartford, YWCA.

## **ENSURING THAT CHILDREN ARE HEALTHY AND PREPARED TO SUCCEED IN SCHOOL**

In the early 1990s, a broad coalition of civic partners came together to promote a citywide early childhood development and education agenda. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving's early childhood initiative highlights this effort, which is now in its 15th year. City and state government also have made major commitments to improve early childhood education. Recent developments include the Mayor's appointment as chair of the Hartford Board of Education and establishment of the Governor's Cabinet for Early Childhood Education and the Early Childhood Research and Policy Council.

While building on this work, *Making Connections* in Hartford has focused attention on neighborhood and family-centered strategies. This is especially critical in Hartford, where there is a profound need to reach the most vulnerable children and families living in the toughest neighborhoods. To close the gaps in 4th grade testing results, *Making Connections* is focusing on strategies to reach families whose children are experiencing the most dramatic gap. Our initial strategies include:

## ■ Home Links

*Making Connections* supports the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving's citywide early childhood education initiative by intensifying focus on strengthening family, friend, and neighbor childcare providers. The Home Links strategy uses visits to childcare providers to promote early literacy employing a curriculum tailored to helping children achieve preschool learning goals and developmental benchmarks set by the state. Parents receive a monthly progress report on their children's activities in the program, as well as materials to help them prepare for the transition to school.

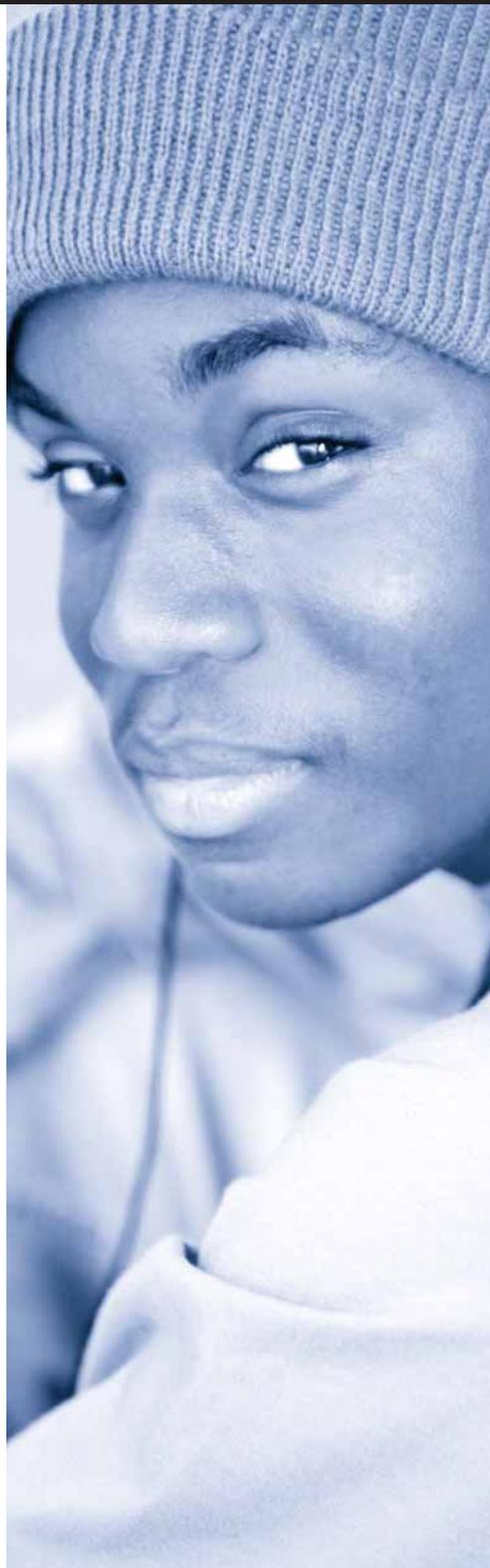
## ■ Walkers and Talkers

The "Walkers and Talkers" strategy trains community residents to provide families with information about developmentally appropriate activities for infants and toddlers and on how to connect parents who need help to the appropriate community services. Families who participate in the program attend workshops on healthy child development and receive information on how to access the EITC and other asset building programs.

## ■ Hartford Blueprint for Young Children

In 2005, *Making Connections* supported the adoption of the Hartford Blueprint for Young Children, a program initiated by the Mayor that lists the developmental indicators needed to ensure children are healthy and prepared to succeed in school. In cooperation with the Mayor's Office, Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and other committed organizations, *Making Connections* continues to seek new opportunities to increase the number of children from Frog Hollow and Upper Albany who enter school healthy and prepared to succeed.

**School Success Partners:** *Catholic Charities (Asylum Hill Family Center and El Centro Child Center), HART, Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, The Village for Families and Children (Rambuh Center).*



## Making Connections in Hartford

**Our Vision.** Children and families in Hartford's neighborhoods with the fewest social and economic opportunities will have the same chance as children and families in the Greater Hartford area to succeed in school, to gain well-paying jobs with benefits and to protect, save and grow their assets.

**Our Mission.** Strengthen and connect community-wide resources and mobilize the public will to improve economic opportunities, build social networks and advocate for supportive services for families in Hartford's neighborhoods.

### Our Values.

**Results-driven & fact-based accountability:** *Making Connections* and its partners hold themselves accountable for measurably improving the well-being of children and families; for favorably influencing public policies and practices; and for leveraging public and private investments.

**Resident leadership & community ownership:** We provide support and resources to people and organizations with a stake in the success of Hartford's families and neighborhoods and assist them in the development and implementation of action plans they believe in and take responsibility for.

**Building upon success:** We support existing initiatives and programs that have demonstrated potential for strengthening families and improving neighborhoods in Hartford, while also sharing our knowledge and experience about the best practices occurring in other U.S. cities.

**Finding the common ground:** We work collaboratively to identify the common interests that exist among the broad constituencies that impact Hartford's families and neighborhoods, and strive to mobilize the community to act in concert.



*A family strengthening & neighborhood transformation initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.*

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