

Notes from 12/3 Meeting

In attendance: Beryl Bailey, Jennie Bruening, Jose Colon-Rivas, Andrew Clark, Chris Doucot, Justin Evanovich, Janice Fleming, Rex Fowler, Judy Goldfarb, Erin Hagan, Lee Hunt, Bruce Gould, Shelly Jackson, Russell Jarvis, Carlos Rivera, Sandy Shanty, Richard Sussman

A group of seven individuals representing Hartford, more specifically the North End, attended the November 9-10 Harlem Children's Zone conference. The group was assembled by Jennie Bruening and represented public schools, public health, community organizations, faith-based organizations, and higher education. This group (Bailey, Bruening, Doucot, Evanovich, Ferris, Hunt and Rivera) has been communicating since their return from the conference and working to expand the number of people discussing the potential of the adaptation of the Harlem Children's Zone model in Hartford.

The original group, together with another eleven individuals that group invited, reconvened on December 3. Also in attendance was UCONN alumni Erin Hagan, who works for co-organizer of the HCZ conference, Policy Link.

The meeting began with those who attended the conference, minus Ann Ferris who was unable to attend, sharing their impressions of the experience and their sense of how the HCZ model could be adapted to Hartford. From there each person around the table introduced themselves and provided insight into why they were interested in being a part of the conversations about the Harlem Children's Zone. It became apparent that these people were already involved in positive programs and initiatives to improve the lives of Hartford's children and families and were ready for increased collaboration as a means to provide even better programming and more ambitious initiatives.

Following the introductions, Richard Sussman shared the initial guidance for a federal funding possibility for twenty "Promise Neighborhoods" across the country. He is part of a small group that has already discussed the potential for a Hartford neighborhood to apply for these funds. From there a conversation ensued about the selection of a neighborhood. Jose Colon-Rivas shared a map of the city and its seventeen neighborhoods with the locations of schools and social service agencies indicated. Erin Hagan pointed out that the Promise Neighborhood funds will go to neighborhoods with the capacity to replicate the HCZ model. This might not be the most disadvantaged neighborhood, but instead the one that can successfully put the HCZ model into action and produce measurable results. From there expansion is possible, as was the case in Harlem.

Andrew Clark raised the question of whether we were at the table to begin planning to apply for the Promise Neighborhood funds or to work together to enrich the lives of the children and families in Hartford. Richard Sussman pointed out that the act of preparing a competitive proposal, given the complexities represented by the HCZ model, would assist the group in laying out a strategic plan for better collaboration and improved services for the children and families.

Jennie Bruening echoed the message that was reinforced time and time again at the conference. Egos have no place in working with children and people have to come together to make the kind of wholesale cultural change that has occurred in Harlem. Both Chris Doucot and Andrew Clark commented on how plans for better collaboration and a willingness to stop the parochialism that keeps people from coming together for a common goal can make a significant difference.

In discussing how the group might move forward, Janice Fleming suggested invited more community members, as they are the voice that needs to be heard and needs to be a part of the decision making process. Others suggested names of people who should be at follow-up meeting.

A return trip to New York City was discussed with a tentative dates of January 7. This trip would be an all day bus trip to visit the Harlem Children's Zone sites, including the Promise Academy, the Truce Fitness and Nutrition Center, the Beacon Community Center, Baby College, and the College Success Office. More details to follow. It was suggested that the group meet on more time before the trip. Meeting will take place at the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving on Monday, December 14 3:15-5:00 pm. The group was encouraged to invite others to attend that meeting who have a stake in similar efforts around the City of Hartford. All names should be sent to Jennie Bruening, but individual group members are being asked to make the initial invitation.