

# Community Leadership

Strengthening Grassroots Community Leadership in Detroit

**Touchstone Center for Collaborative Inquiry**



## This report is a part of **Kids Matter Here:** An Analytic Review of the 10-year Good Neighborhoods Initiative.

**The Skillman Foundation's Good Neighborhoods Initiative** was a \$100-million commitment to six Detroit neighborhoods, spanning from 2006–2016. To best understand the outcomes of the long-term neighborhood-based work, the Foundation worked with a variety of evaluators, residents, stakeholders, grant partners, staff, Trustees and community allies to form a series of analyses and dialogues.

The goals of the Analytic Review are to synthesize what the decade of work has accomplished, inform decisions about the Foundation's work going forward, and build and share knowledge locally and nationally. This report is one of the many interconnected products that will be available on the Foundation's website at [www.skillman.org/GNI](http://www.skillman.org/GNI) as they are developed through spring of 2017.

# STRENGTHENING Grassroots Community Leadership in Detroit

Evaluation Report on the  
Community Connections  
Grants Program,  
2006-2015

Produced for  
Prevention Network  
and the  
Skillman Foundation

August 31, 2016

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# Strengthening Grassroots Community Leadership in Detroit

Evaluation Report on the Community Connections Grants Program, 2006-2015

*Touchstone Center for Collaborative Inquiry*

*July 2016*

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## Executive Summary

Community Connections is a resident-centered grant program working to strengthen civic engagement and grassroots leadership in six Detroit neighborhoods: Brightmoor, Chadsey Condon, Cody Rouge, North End, Osborn, and Southwest. It awards grants of \$500 to \$5,000 to local projects that mobilize residents' energies to improve opportunities and conditions for youth. Community Connections was launched by the Skillman Foundation in 2006 as part of the Foundation's Good Neighborhoods initiative, and is operated by Prevention Network, a statewide organization experienced in running resident-focused small grants programs. Since 2012 it has also received major support from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation.

Rooted in the conviction that local groups and leaders are essential if neighborhoods are to create safe environments where children and youth can grow up successfully, the program is guided by a four-fold impact framework. At its heart is a commitment to expand residents' **civic engagement**. Through its project support and related learning opportunities, Community Connections helps strengthen **community leadership** in these neighborhoods. Projects offer positive **youth development** opportunities to children and teens in these neighborhoods. And some projects contribute to **systems change** by connecting with kids in ways that larger institutional systems currently miss, by helping to create alternatives to those established institutional systems, and by engaging in neighborhood planning, policy advocacy and other efforts to reform those systems.

### **Results**

From August 2006 through June 2015, Community Connections awarded 815 grants, totaling nearly \$2.8 million, to 481 different groups: an average of 91 grants to 76 groups per year, at an average size of \$3,394. Analysis of final reports since 2012 indicates that:

- **Hundreds of neighborhood residents are engaging in community life and building their leadership skills** through Community Connections projects. Funded projects report over 750 adults involved (median 10 per project), and over 220 named adults playing leadership roles (average 3 per project) each year.
- These projects are providing **positive youth development experiences to over 2700 children and youth each year**. A median of 36 youth are reported involved, with an average of 76 groups funded per year in the past 3 years.
- **55% of the youth involved are boys**. About one in seven (15%) of funded projects work just with boys, the vast majority African American or Latino.
- **Community Connections groups and leaders are highly networked and collaborative**. Almost all grantees (92%) report mobilizing project contributions from at least one other

organization or group; nearly half (47%) named four or more contributing partners. Over a third (37%) reported obtaining funds from other sources besides Community Connections.

- **Most Community Connections project leaders are active learners.** Nearly three fourths (73%) reported getting guidance from one or more sources to plan or do their project. Over half (52%) reported getting advice, coaching or mentoring from Community Connections staff. One in five (22%) reported learning from training or workshops, and one in six (16%) said they got advice, coaching or mentoring from a neighborhood executive director.
- **Some Community Connections leaders are involved in policy change.** About one in four projects (24%) said they had connected or interacted with local policy makers, and one in six (17%) said they had contributed to changes in resources and public policies affecting youth and their neighborhood.

### ***Lessons***

- A small grants program such as Community Connections can be an effective way to surface and strengthen large numbers of grassroots groups and leaders.
- One key to an effective small grants program such as Community Connections is staff that are skilled at finding, encouraging, coaching and connecting these local leaders.
- Using a residents leadership panel to review applications, make funding recommendations and advise staff gives community credibility to the program, builds leadership, and helps staff focus more strategically.
- Achieving consistent youth participation in the program leadership panel is difficult. Adults panelists can be coached to provide a welcoming environment for young panelists. But youths' dynamic lives and limited resources mean that consistent schedule availability and transportation to meetings are bigger barriers for them than for adult panelists.
- Deeper leadership development happens largely through sustained experience and mentoring relationships, especially those that help leaders learn from their own experience.
- Finding adults skilled at supporting youth-led projects through the learning experiences of project implementation, without taking charge and reducing youth to "follower" roles, has been difficult.
- Grassroots project leaders' greatest contributions to systems change may be to create or illuminate alternatives to current flawed systems, rather than pushing to reform entrenched systems.

### ***Recommendations***

- **Continue supporting the Community Connections program.** The program has proven to be effective at surfacing and strengthening networks of active residents and grassroots organizations working for youth development and community improvement.
- **Make it easier for proficient small Community Connections groups to access larger resources from Skillman and other sources.**
- **Expand opportunities for grassroots leaders to grow through mentoring and peer learning relationships such as "communities of practice"** that can accelerate and deepen learning from experience.



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## Introduction

### Overview of the Community Connections program

The Community Connections program is part of the Skillman Foundation's effort to improve conditions for children in six Detroit neighborhoods, and of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation's strategy for Detroit. It works toward the goals that Skillman and Kellogg have for Detroit, especially:

- More caring adults in young people's lives, and deeper connections between youth and caring adults to instill positive pathways for youth to learn and grow into successful adults.
- More youth, adult residents, and other neighborhood stakeholders (business owners, nonprofit staff, public officials, etc.) engaged in leadership and leader development activities so they can help youth develop and learn in a healthy environment.
- Greater collaboration among networks of resident organizations and leaders, youth development organizations, and schools so they can be more effective in improving opportunities for youth.
- Improved neighborhood conditions including systems, policies and programs that help youth live in economically secure families and grow up safe, healthy, educated, and ready for adulthood.
- Equity and opportunity for youth of color, especially black and brown boys and young men.

Community Connections is a resident-driven grant program that believes local groups and leaders are essential if neighborhoods are to create safe environments where children and youth grow up successfully.

The program is guided by a four-fold impact framework. At its heart is a commitment to expand **civic engagement** in the Brightmoor, Chadsey Condon, Cody Rouge, North End, Osborn and Southwest neighborhoods. Its primary strategy is providing grants of \$500 to \$5,000 to local projects that mobilize residents' energies to improve conditions for local youth. Through these projects and related learning opportunities, Community Connections helps strengthen **community leadership** in these neighborhoods. Projects offer positive **youth development** opportunities to the children and teens in these neighborhoods. And some projects contribute to **systems change** by connecting with kids in ways that larger institutional systems currently miss, by helping to create alternatives to those established institutional systems, and by engaging in neighborhood planning, policy advocacy and other efforts to reform those systems.

Community Connections was launched in 2006 by the Skillman Foundation as part of its Good Neighborhoods initiative which made a 10-year commitment to work to improve conditions and benefit the lives of children in these six Detroit neighborhoods, which together are home to close to one third of Detroit's children (about 50,000 in 2014, down from 65,000 in 2006). Skillman wanted to make sure that neighborhood residents were integrally involved in the Good Neighborhoods change effort, and saw a resident-focused small grants program as a strategy to

surface and strengthen resident leadership. Skillman partnered with Prevention Network, a statewide organization experienced in administering small grants programs for grassroots substance abuse prevention projects, to operate Community Connections. The program was initially designed by then-Skillman program officer Sharnita Johnson and then-Prevention Network executive director Sheila Taylor. Inspiration was drawn from several sources, including the Neighborhood Connections program in Cleveland.

Prevention Network hired Lisa Leverette, a Detroit resident experienced in youth development and community engagement, to manage Community Connections. Nearly 10 years later, Lisa is still the program manager, though the total staff of Community Connections in Detroit has grown to three thanks to additional funding from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation which began in 2012.<sup>1</sup> Prevention Network's main office in Lansing also provides administrative support and fiduciary oversight of Community Connections.

Community Connections staff encourages its grassroots leaders to connect with other Skillman-linked assets for change in these six neighborhoods, such as the neighborhood executive directors (currently in five of the six neighborhoods), the University of Michigan Technical Assistance Center, and the Youth Development Alliances.

Key elements of Community Connections' approach include its grants; the coaching and connecting provided by Community Connections staff; its residents leadership panel, known since 2012 as the Changemakers panel; and the program's commitment to ongoing learning and evaluation.

### ***Grants***

Community Connections will provide up to two grants per year to grassroots groups and organizations. All groups are eligible for grants of \$500 to \$5,000. Since 2013, with the infusion of Kellogg Foundation support, Community Connections has also offered grants up to \$10,000 (maximum of \$20,000 per year), to experienced grantee groups meeting higher eligibility criteria.

### ***Coaching***

Community Connections staff hold pre-application workshops for prospective applicants. They also give individualized assistance to help applicants and grantees refine their project ideas and plans, think about how to grow their impact, and access various other resources and learning opportunities.

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<sup>1</sup> Funding for arts and culture opportunities has also come from the Berman Foundation.

**Changemakers leadership panel**

Community Connections’ goals of empowering residents and building resident leadership are pursued partly through using a residents leadership panel, comprised of residents from the six target neighborhoods selected by the Community Connections manager. Known since 2012 as the Changemakers Panel, this group meets monthly to review grant applications and make funding recommendations, which are forwarded to the Prevention Network board for final implementation (the board takes fiduciary responsibility for grants to groups without IRS 501c3 status). This responsibility requires several hours per month on a volunteer basis, in addition to whatever other involvement panelists may have in community and Skillman initiative affairs.

Having a panel of neighborhood residents make the grant award decisions vividly demonstrates Community Connections’ commitment to be resident-driven and community-owned. This may be especially important In Detroit, where many decision-makers over resource flows do not live in Detroit, let alone in these neighborhoods. The panel’s composition reassures applicants that their application is reviewed by a panel of people like them who understand their neighborhood from lived experience.

Following the Community Connections five-year evaluation in 2011, which recommended tapping this group’s strategic potential more fully, the panel was refined. The number of panelists was reduced from 21 in 2011 (though only 12 had participated actively) to 12 in 2016, while still maintaining representation from the six neighborhoods and multiple demographic categories as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Composition of Changemakers resident leadership panel, 2016**

<b>Gender:</b>	Men	4	<b>Neighborhood:</b>	Brightmoor	2
	Women	8		Chadsey Condon	2
<b>Age:</b>	20-29	2		Cody Rouge	2
	30-39	4		North End	2
	40-49	1		Osborn	2
	50-59	2		Southwest	2
	60 +	3	<b>Year joined panel:</b>	2006	1
<b>Ethnicity</b>	African American	9		2007	5
	Latina	2		2009	2
	Arab	1		2014	1
				2015	3

The panel is both a learning and a leadership group. Through their process of monthly deliberation over grant applications, panelists hone their understanding of program goals. They become aware of the overall mix of project types and of groups’ capacities. They spot opportunities for groups to collaborate with others. They watch for patterns of progress and difficulty across all the grants, and periodically review evaluation findings for clues on how to improve program effectiveness. This knowledge equips them to serve as a valued advisory group to Community Connections staff, giving them direction on where to focus their outreach

and coaching efforts. Panelists have also helped to revise the language in grant applications, report forms and program guidelines.

For the past several years, the panel and staff have held annual daylong retreats, exploring key topics in greater depth and refining vision and strategy for the program. Panelists take part along with Community Connections staff in national learning networks, thinking through how to adapt lessons to their Detroit context.

### ***Learning and evaluation within Community Connections***

Community Connections has pursued a multi-faceted approach to ongoing learning and evaluation, particularly since the five-year evaluation in 2011. Internally, the program overhauled its application and report forms to enable more precise and extensive learning from the information on those routine forms. One of the new staff positions created with Kellogg support enables Community Connections to maintain a data spreadsheet where many data points from these files are compiled and analyzed periodically for learning (among many other tasks). An evaluation team comprised of that staff person plus two external consultants, one from JFM Consulting Group in Detroit and the other from the Touchstone Center for Collaborative Inquiry in Minneapolis, works together to conduct these analyses, develop these data displays and guide these learning conversations.

Externally, staff are active in national peer learning networks, including Grassroots Grantmakers and the Leadership Learning Community. Staff often bring panelists and grantee leaders with them to learning venues in these national networks such as the Grassroots Grantmakers “On the Ground” events and the Resident Learning Exchange launched by Roque Barrios of the Jacobs Foundation in San Diego. Sometimes these learning journeys are bookended by prep and debrief sessions to help panelists and staff focus their learning goals more sharply and harvest their learnings more fully and critically.

Learning through critical reflection and dialogue also happens through panel retreats. The senior evaluation consultant sometimes helps to design and facilitate these retreats. He also serves as thought partner to the program manager and other staff, providing critical questions and a safe listening space where they can name and explore their challenges and opportunities, their impressions and wonderings.

### **Evaluation methodology for this report**

The chief purpose of evaluation efforts in the 2015-16 program year was to discover and communicate what Community Connections contributes to the goals of building community leadership, strengthening community fabric, and fostering youth success in these six Skillman neighborhoods.

Evaluation efforts have centered in two areas, probing breadth and depth. For breadth, we have analyzed data (mainly quantitative) from the grants data system. There are two parts to this system. One includes basic data on all grants awarded in the entire history of the program, back to the first grant in August 2006. These data include the name of the organization, its chief

contact person, the project name and description, and the grant amount. These data were used to examine cumulative grantmaking and long-term patterns.

The other contains up to 142 additional data points drawn from the application and final report for each grant. These data have been entered for all applications funded in the three most recent program years, from July 2012 through June 2015. We focused primarily on the most recent projects completed by 100 different grantee groups. These included data from seven projects funded in May or June 2012 plus the 93 groups that filed reports from projects funded between July 2012 and June 2015. These data were used to generate findings regarding youth participation, adult participation, barriers encountered by projects, incidence and types of developmental assistance reported by project leaders, and reported outcomes.

For depth, we conducted case studies of four grantee organizations that had received Community Connections support for at least five years, for maximum longitudinal perspective. We wanted to learn how these small organizations and their leaders grow and sustain themselves over the long term. Organizations were selected to provide some diversity in their neighborhood location, the age range of youth they involved, the racial and ethnic composition of their leadership, and the focus and approach of their project. We also wanted some diversity in whether they had evolved in focus and/or size over time, or stayed fairly constant in focus and scale (though they may have grown in quality and strength). Using these criteria, organizations were selected by Community Connections staff in consultation with the evaluation team. The organizations selected were:

- Amistad Reading and Music Project, led by Randall Mosley, in Southwest Detroit, funded by Community Connections since 2011.
- Brightmoor/Wellspring Youth Adventure Leadership, led by Peter Lisiecki, in Brightmoor, funded by Community Connections since 2007.
- Developing Kingdoms in Different Stages (Developing KIDS), led by Kim Newberry, in Cody Rouge, funded by Community Connections since 2008.
- Join In to Revitalize Arab American Neighborhoods (JIRAN) and Chadsey Condon Youth Committee (CCYC), led by Aswan Almakary, in Chadsey Condon plus Cody Rouge and Southwest, funded by Community Connections since 2010.

We interviewed between six and 12 people at each case study site: primary and secondary leaders, community partners and observers, youth and parents. We observed the project in action in three of the four cases. Case studies appear in Appendix A, and interviewees are listed in Appendix B.

Primary limitations of this evaluation are: (1) its interviews focus on groups and leaders with long-term viability and long-term Community Connections support, selected as instructive examples by Community Connections staff, rather than a more diverse or random sample that included groups and leaders no longer active or involved; and (2) it relies largely on self-reported data from project applications and final reports.

## Findings

### Grantmaking patterns

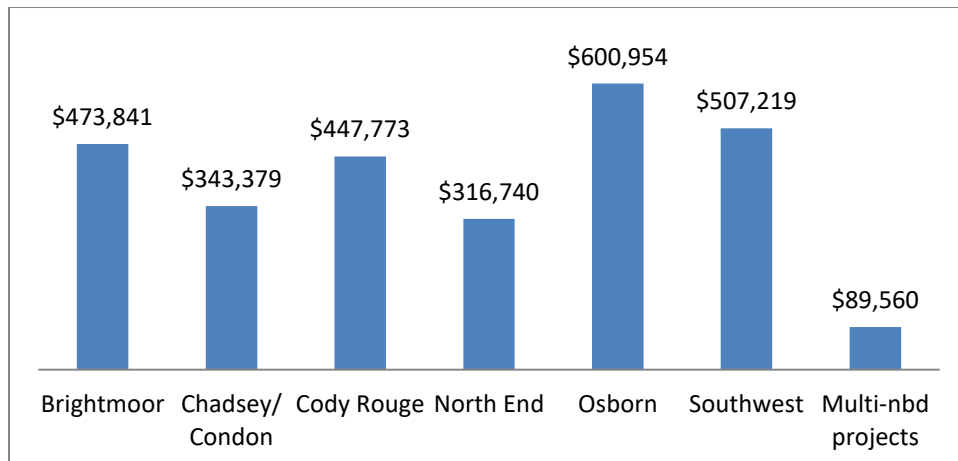
From August 2006 through June 2015, 815 total grants were awarded, to 481 different groups. About 91 grants were awarded per year, at an average size of \$3,410, as shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Grant totals by program year**

Year	Total # grants	Total \$ awarded	Average grant \$ size
2006-07	71	\$301,958	\$4,253
2007-08	103	\$379,080	\$3,680
2008-09	107	\$373,555	\$3,491
2009-10	93	\$303,484	\$3,263
2010-11	93	\$303,308	\$3,261
2011-12	90	\$240,128	\$2,668
2012-13	92	\$308,509	\$3,353
2013-14	92	\$309,136	\$3,360
2014-15	74	\$260,318	\$3,518
<b>Total</b>	<b>815</b>	<b>\$2,779,476</b>	<b>\$3,410</b>
<i>Average/year</i>	<i>91</i>	<i>\$308,831</i>	<i>\$3,394</i>

The six neighborhoods had roughly similar levels of small grant activities, with some variation. On average, each neighborhood received about \$55,000 per year, ranging from about \$46,000 in North End up to \$67,000 in Osborn, as shown in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Total grant dollars awarded per neighborhood, July 2006 – June 2015**

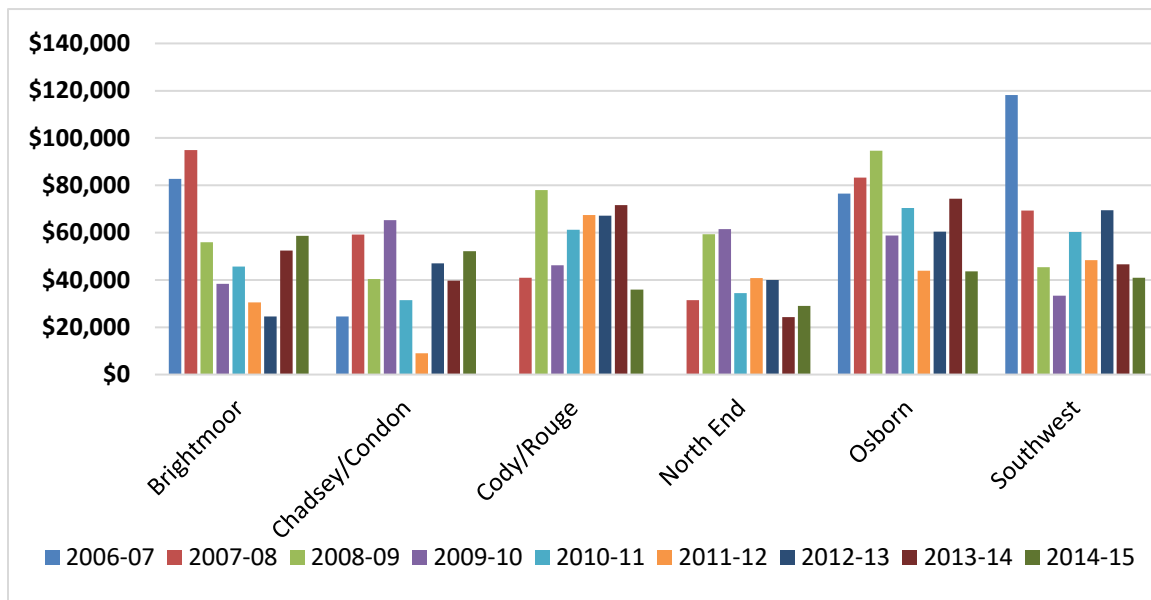


Yearly variations in total grant dollars awarded in each neighborhood are shown in Figures 4 and 5.

**Figure 4: Grant dollars awarded in each neighborhood by program year**

Year	Brightmoor	Chadsey Condon	Cody Rouge	North End	Osborn	Southwest	Multiple
2006-07	\$82,715	\$24,525	–	–	\$74,016	\$115,702	\$5,000
2007-08	\$94,959	\$53,093	\$40,899	\$31,430	\$83,302	\$63,187	\$12,210
2008-09	\$55,949	\$37,893	\$77,934	\$59,263	\$94,662	\$42,854	\$5,000
2009-10	\$38,328	\$65,260	\$46,228	\$61,521	\$58,817	\$33,320	–
2010-11	\$43,604	\$31,494	\$61,160	\$34,379	\$70,367	\$58,304	\$4,000
2011-12	\$29,349	\$8,230	\$65,470	\$40,728	\$43,971	\$47,580	\$4,800
2012-13	\$18,906	\$40,420	\$53,682	\$37,492	\$60,380	\$67,917	\$29,712
2013-14	\$52,224	\$36,185	\$69,806	\$23,786	\$73,891	\$43,234	\$10,010
2014-15	\$57,807	\$46,279	\$32,594	\$28,141	\$42,749	\$35,121	\$17,627
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$473,841</b>	<b>\$343,379</b>	<b>\$447,773</b>	<b>\$316,740</b>	<b>\$600,954</b>	<b>\$507,219</b>	<b>\$89,560</b>
<i>Avg \$/yr</i>	<i>\$52,649</i>	<i>\$38,153</i>	<i>\$59,703<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>\$42,232<sup>3</sup></i>	<i>\$66,773</i>	<i>\$56,358</i>	<i>\$9,951</i>

**Figure 5: Grant dollars awarded in each neighborhood by program year**

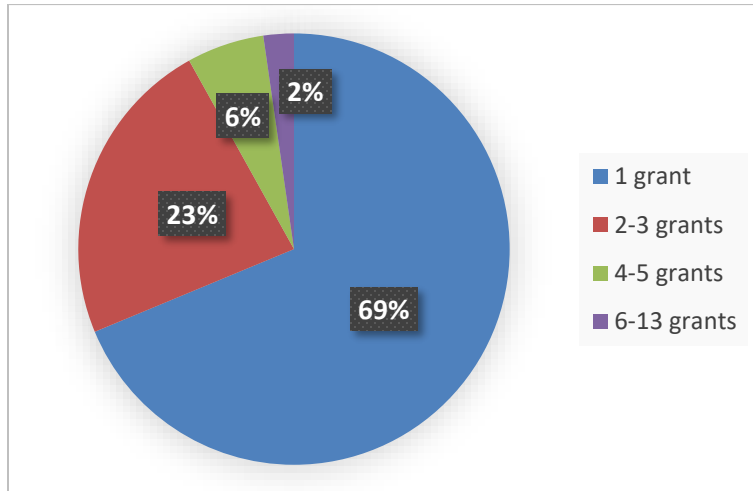


<sup>2</sup> Cody Rouge and North End grants began in January 2009, 18 months later than in the other four neighborhoods.

<sup>3</sup> See note 2.

About two thirds (69%) of the 481 groups funded received only one grant during the nine years. There are 151 groups that have been funded multiple times: 76 groups received two grants, 37 received three, 29 received four or five, and 11 groups received between six and 13 grants during the nine years, as shown in Figure 6. While groups may receive up to two grants per year, only a small percentage (about one in eight groups) come back for a second grant in the same year.

**Figure 6: Percentage of groups receiving multiple grants**



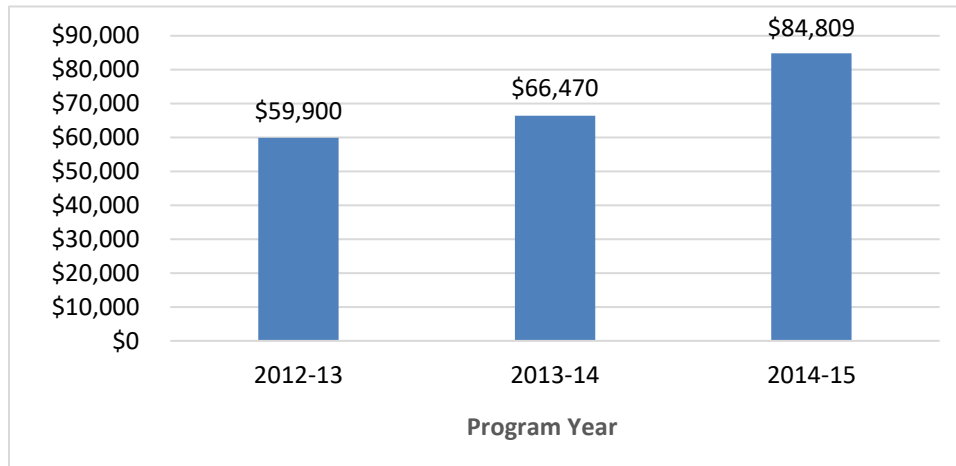
The number of groups funded each year is slightly smaller than the number of grants awarded because of those groups receiving two grants. On average, 76 different groups were funded in each of the three most recent years (from July 2012 through June 2015). Between six and 12 groups each year received multiple grants.

While \$5,000 is the standard maximum grant available, in 2013 guidelines were changed so that experienced grantees could apply for grants up to \$10,000 if they met these criteria: (a) multi-level leadership so that project well-being does not depend on just one person; (b) have a long-term plan; (c) strong community engagement; (d) engage multiple organizations and stakeholders; and (e) efficient with managing funds. These larger grants support infrastructure growth, including allocating a larger share of funds for stipends and durable equipment. They were made possible when W.K. Kellogg Foundation joined as a major funding partner.

Since March 2013, about 10 percent of grants, comprising between a fifth and a third of all grant dollars, have been in this larger dollar category. Through June 2015, 22 grants between \$7,150 and \$10,000 were awarded to 14 groups across five neighborhoods. These organizations had previously received a median number of five previous grants.



**Figure 7: Total dollars awarded in grants of \$7,000 – \$10,000**



To better understand who and what Community Connections has been nurturing in recent years, we analyzed applications and reports from the 100 grantee groups that most recently filed final grant reports with Prevention Network. These 100 projects were funded between May 2012 and June 2015.<sup>4</sup>

A majority (58) of these 100 groups had been funded at least once before by Community Connections. Thirty-six of them received multiple grants during these most recent three years (for these analyses, however, we looked just at their most recent grant file).

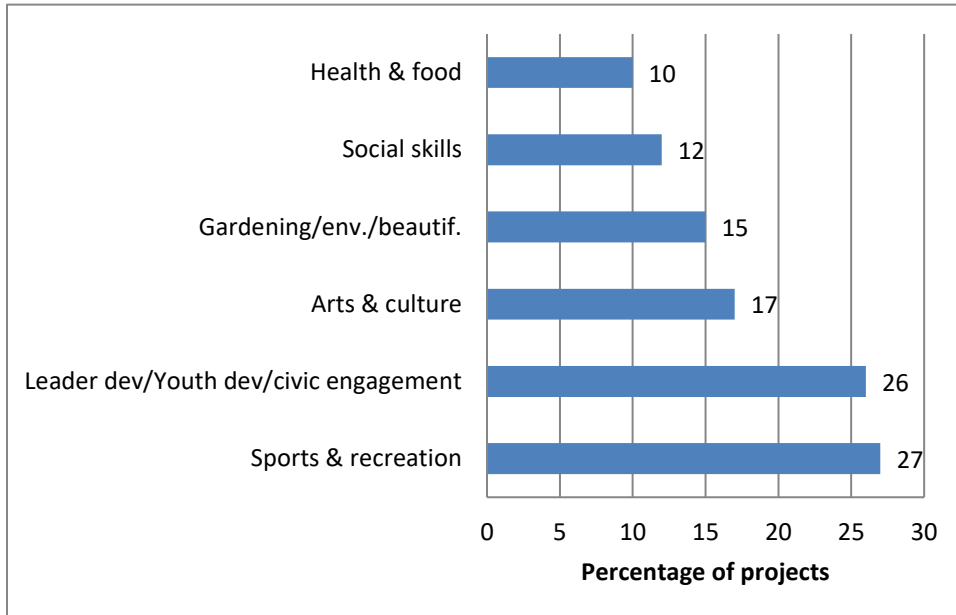
### ***Types of projects funded***

The application form asks groups to identify the type of project they are proposing, checking up to two options on a list of 15 choices. As shown in Figure 6, groups conducted a fairly balanced range of project types, with six different types each reflected in 10% - 27% of the projects. Most common were projects focused on sports and recreation and/or leadership development/ youth development/ civic engagement, each comprising just over one fourth of all projects. Next most common were arts and culture and gardening/environmental/ beautification projects, each comprising about one in six projects.

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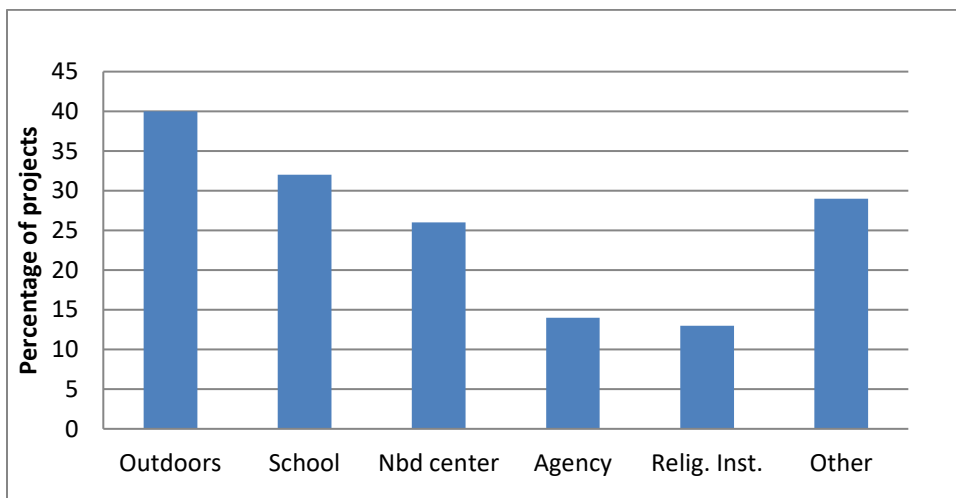
<sup>4</sup> The 100 files included 62 with new-format applications and 76 with new-format final reports, which contain more extensive and specific information than the old-format forms. The new-format forms were phased in starting in May 2013.

**Figure 8: Most common types of projects**



Projects took place in a variety of locations or settings in the six neighborhoods, as shown in Figure 9. The largest number (40%) took place at least partly outdoors. About a third of projects used a school setting, and about a fourth used a neighborhood center. About one in seven took place at an agency or a religious institution. Other locations, used less often, included businesses and other work sites, college campuses, and homes.

**Figure 9: Most common project settings**



## Youth participation

In our analysis, 99 groups gave information on the number of youth they involved. They reported a median number of 36 youth per project. With 76 groups funded per year, this suggests that over 2,700 youth are participating annually in these projects.

This is a dramatic increase since the early years of Community Connections. Our analysis of projects from 2006-10, conducted in 2011, found a median number of 19 youth involved per project.<sup>5</sup> However, we don't know whether youth numbers actually increased or if the change in reported participation is due simply to the more precise new reporting format used since 2013.

Projects varied widely in the number of youth they involved, from a low of three (in a block club with mainly adult participants) to a high of 1,121.

**Figure 10: Numbers of youth participating in projects, by neighborhood**

	Brightmoor	Chadsey Condon	Cody Rouge	North End	Osborn	Southwest	Multi-Nbd Groups	All Projects
<b>Median #</b>	26	33	47.5	28.5	25	36	96	36
<b>Range</b>	20-121	5-694	10-920	3-139	7-800	15-1121	12-1000	3-1121

In gender, ethnicity and age, these youth participants roughly mirror the demographic composition of these neighborhoods, according to analysis of final reports that included specific demographic information.

### ***Gender of youth participants***

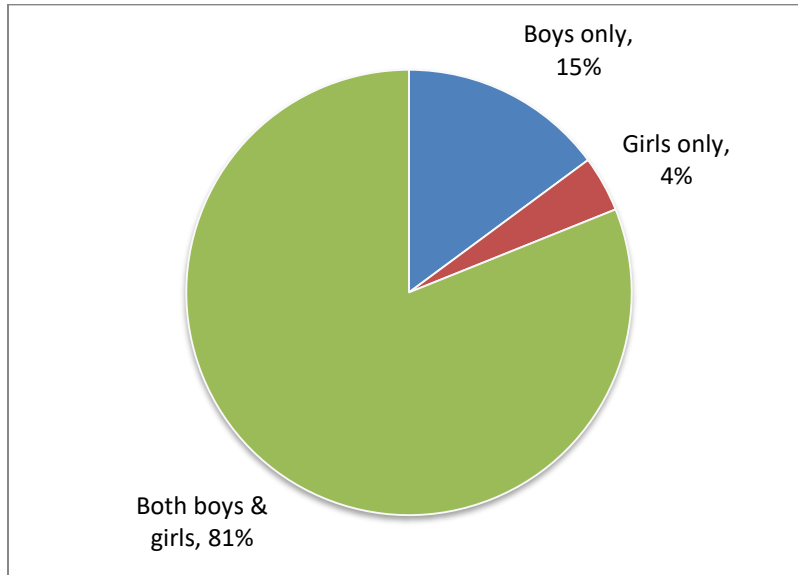
The great majority of Community Connections projects (81%) said they worked with both girls and boys. Fifteen percent worked just with boys, while four percent involved just girls, as shown in Figure 11. Overall, about 55 percent of the youth involved were boys, and 45 percent were girls.

Those involving just boys worked overwhelmingly with black and brown boys: 91 percent of their participating boys were African American, and 8 percent were Latinos.

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<sup>5</sup> See *Engaging "Natural Leaders to Improve Neighborhoods for Youth,"* Touchstone Center for Collaborative Inquiry, 2011, p. 25.

**Figure 11: Share of projects that involved boys, girls, or both**  
(n=74)



### ***Race or ethnicity of youth participants***

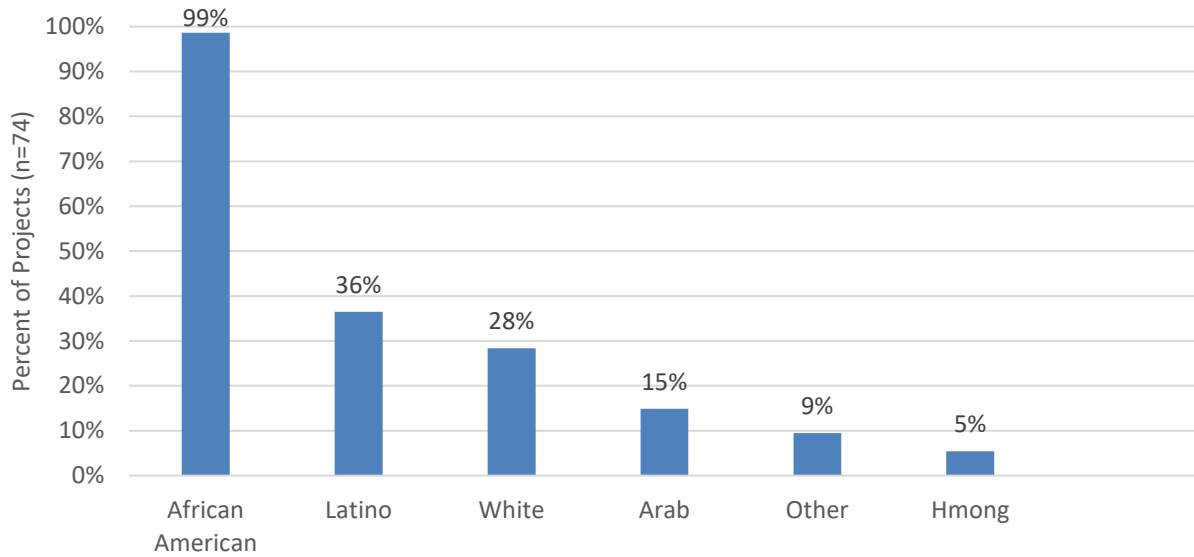
Of the 100 projects analyzed, 74 reported the ethnicity of the youth participants involved. Not surprisingly for Detroit, all but one of these projects involved African American youth. However, half of the projects involved youth from multiple ethnic or racial groups. More than a third of the projects included Latino youth, over a fourth included white youth, and one in seven included Arab Americans, as shown in Figure 12. Six (9%) of these projects reported youth from “other” groups, including one project each including “Asian” or “Chinese” plus four projects that did not identify their “other” ethnicity. More than a fourth of the projects included youth from three or four different ethnic or racial groups.

Ethnicity of participating youth varied somewhat by neighborhood. Most projects involving Arab American youth were in Chadsey Condon. Three of the four projects involving Hmong youth were in Osborn. Nearly two thirds of the projects involving Latino youth were in either Chadsey Condon or Southwest. Chadsey Condon and Cody Rouge had the largest number of projects reporting participation by white youth. See Figure 13 for variations among projects in different neighborhoods.

The four case study groups included three with mainly African American youth, and one with mainly Arab American youth that also included African American, Latino and white youth.

Altogether, about three fourths of participating youth are African American and one fifth are Latino, as shown in Figure 14.

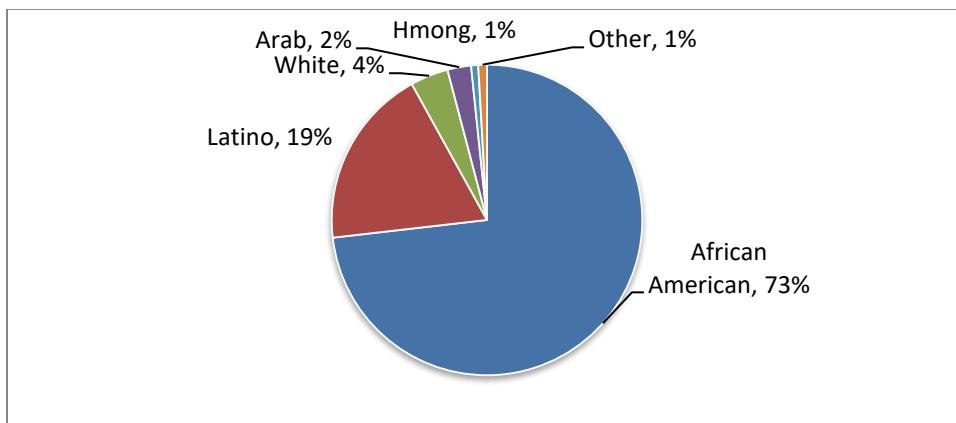
**Figure 12: Percentage of projects including youth of different ethnic or racial groups**



**Figure 13: Number of projects per neighborhood involving youth of each ethnicity**  
(total projects with youth ethnicity data: 74)

Youth ethnicity	Brightmoor	Chadsey Condon	Cody Rouge	North End	Osborn	Southwest	Multi-nbd projects
African American	9	14	10	5	25	7	3
Arab	1	7	2	0	0	1	0
Hmong	0	1	0	0	3	0	0
Latino	5	9	2	1	3	7	1
White	1	5	5	1	3	4	1
Other	3	0	1	0	1	0	1
<b>Total number of projects per nbd</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>

**Figure 14: Racial/ethnic identities of all youth participants**

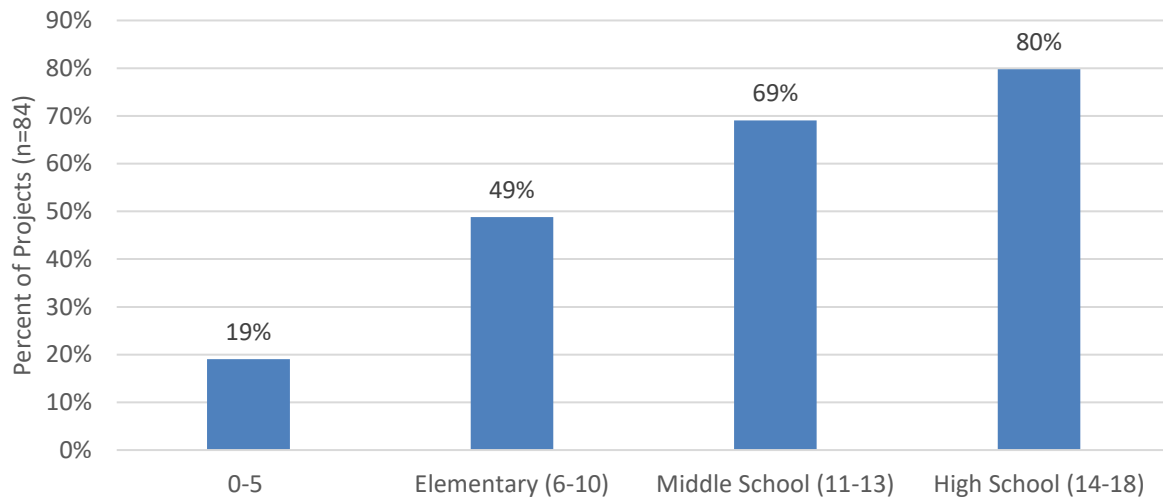


### ***Ages of participating youth***

Ninety-seven of the 100 projects in the analysis provided information on the age groups of their participants, in the categories of ages 0-5, 6-10 (elementary), 11-13 (middle school), and 14-18 (high school).

Most projects worked with multiple age groups. Four out of five projects worked with high school aged youth, two thirds with middle schoolers, and half with elementary aged youth. Figure 15 shows the total number of projects that reported working with each age group.

**Figure 15: Percentage of projects working with youth in each age group**



The four case study groups included one focused on elementary students, one that works with ages 5-18, and two that engage high school aged youth.

### **Adult participation in Community Connections projects**

The 100 projects analyzed reported a median number of 10 adults involved. Thirty percent reported 20 or more adults involved, and 32% reported five or fewer adults involved.

See Figure 16 for the median and range of number of adult participants for each neighborhood.

**Figure 16: Adult participant numbers**

	Brightmoor	Chadsey Condon	Cody Rouge	North End	Osborn	Southwest	Multi-Nbd Groups	All Projects
<b>Median #</b>	14	7	6	14	8	15	42	10
<b>Range</b>	7-43	2-44	1-32	5-45	1-100	2-557	2-55	1-557

### ***Ages of participating adults***

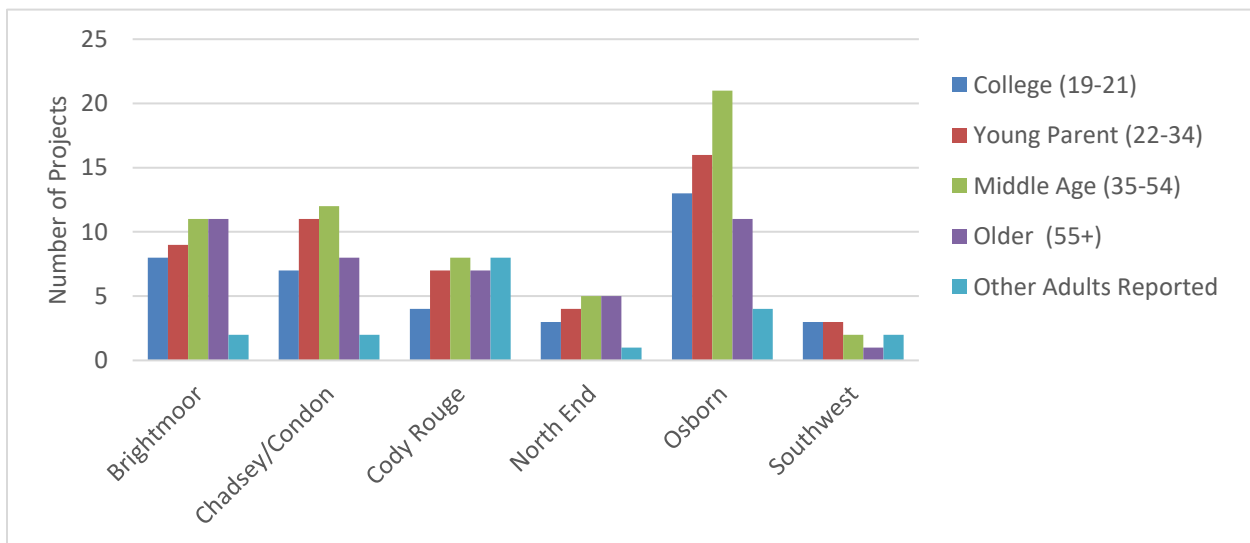
Adults of all ages are participating in Community Connections projects, according to project reports. Seventy-three of the 100 files in our analysis reported the age range of the adults involved in the funded project. The four age group options listed on the final report included college (19-21), young parent (22-34), middle age (35-54), or older adult (55+). Most projects reported involving adults from all four age groups, as shown in Figure 17.

**Figure 17: Participation by adults of different ages**

<b>Adult age group</b>	<b>% of projects involving this age group</b>
19-21	56%
22-34	73%
35-54	84%
55+	60%

Adult participation by age varies somewhat across neighborhoods. Middle aged adults are most common in Osborn projects, while Southwest projects have a higher proportion of young adults involved and Brightmoor has the highest proportion of projects with older adults involved, as shown in Figure 18.

**Figure 18: Number of projects working with each adult age group – by neighborhood (out of 73 projects who reported)**



The four case studies include two groups whose primary leaders are now middle-aged and two whose leaders are now older adults.

**Race or ethnicity of participating adults**

As with youth involved, the vast majority of Community Connections projects (93%) have adult African Americans involved. Next most common is involvement by white adults, active in nearly half (47%) of projects. About one in five projects (18%) reported Latino adults involved, and one in 12 projects (8%) had Arab American adult involvement, as shown in Figure 19.

White adults participated in more projects than did white youth. Arab and Latino adults participated in fewer projects than did youth of those ethnicities, as shown in Figure 20.

**Figure 19. Number of projects involving adults of each ethnicity by neighborhood**

	Brightmoor	Chadsey Condon	Cody Rouge	North End	Osborn	Southwest	Multiple Neighborhoods	TOTAL
<b>African American</b>	8	12	10	5	24	6	3	<b>68</b>
<b>Arab</b>	0	3	0	0	0	2	1	<b>6</b>
<b>Hmong</b>	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	<b>3</b>
<b>Latino</b>	1	4	1	1	0	4	2	<b>13</b>
<b>White</b>	3	7	8	2	6	6	2	<b>34</b>
<b>Other</b>	2	0	1	1	1	1	0	<b>6</b>
<b>No Ethnicity Reported</b>	5	2	8	2	2	7	1	<b>27</b>

**Figure 20: Comparison of projects' inclusion of adults and youth of different racial or ethnic identities**

	% of projects including people of this identity	
	Adults	Youth
<b>African American</b>	93%	99%
<b>Arab</b>	8%	15%
<b>Hmong</b>	4%	5%
<b>Latino</b>	18%	36%
<b>White</b>	47%	28%
<b>Other</b>	8%	9%

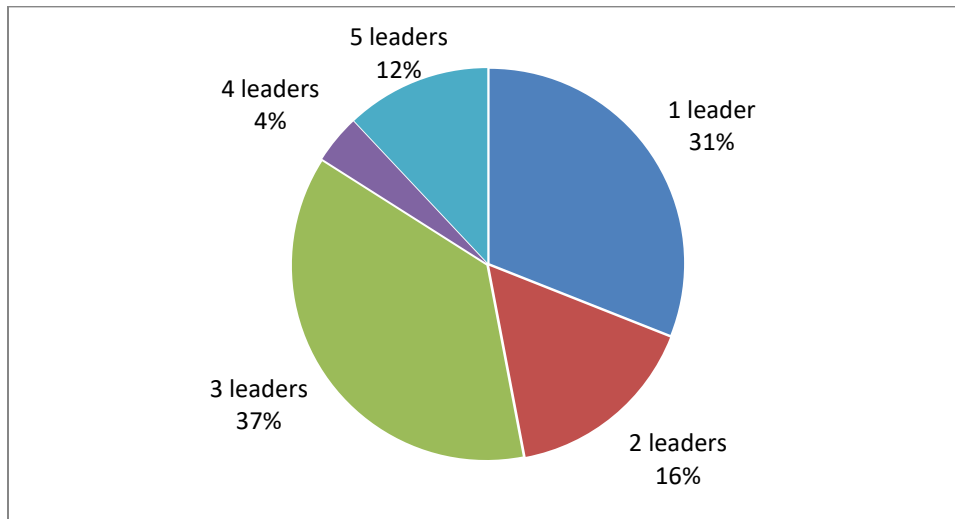
The four case study groups include two led mainly by African American adults, one with Arab American adults and one with mainly white adult leaders.



### ***Adults in leadership roles***

Most projects involved multiple adults in leadership roles. On the new application form, groups are invited to name up to five adults playing leadership roles in the project. On average, projects named three adult leaders. About a third of projects named only one leader while slightly over half of projects named two or three adult leaders, and one in six named four or five adult leaders, as shown in Figure 21. (Those listing five may have had more adult leaders, as the form only provided room to list five.)

**Figure 21: Number of adult leaders named per project**



According to Community Connections staff, one kind of adult leadership that has been difficult to find has been adults willing to support youth-led projects in implementing their project ideas. Adults that are willing to take charge and give direction to youth are more common. Adults skilled at letting youth attempt implementation and be a “guide by the side” while young leaders make mistakes and then struggle to learn and recover have been far more rare.

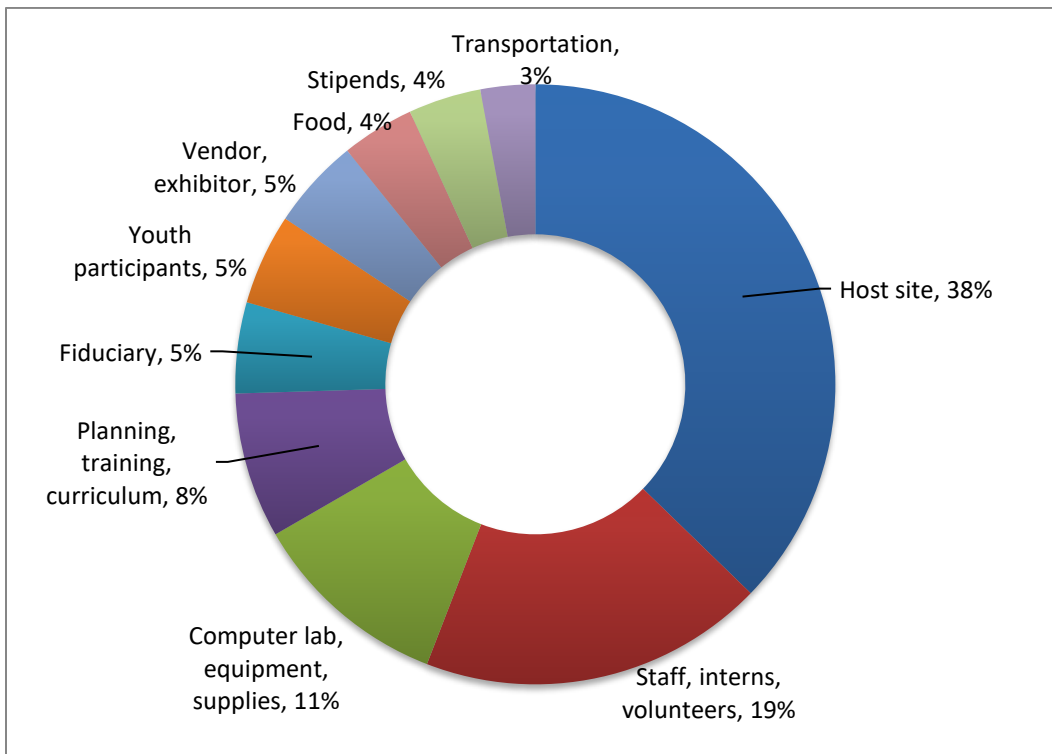
## Engaging partners, leveraging resources

Community Connections has supported a tremendous number of groups and organizations in these six neighborhoods: 481 to date, or about 80 per neighborhood. Consistent with its desire to surface and strengthen “natural leaders” and “natural helpers,” most of these organizations are resident-led or are small, locally rooted nonprofit or faith-based organizations with a mix of resident and non-resident leadership.

Most of these groups and leaders are collaborative, engaging other organizations or groups as partners or contributors in their funded projects. Ninety-two of the 100 groups analyzed described contributions from at least one other organization, thus leveraging resources and forming larger networks of partners in the community. Close to half (47%) of the groups reported that four other groups or organizations were involved in their project.

Partners most often provide host sites for project activities (38%), while 19 percent of partners provided staff, interns or volunteers. The remaining 43 percent of partner contributions ranged across eight other possible roles, as shown in Figure 22.

**Figure 22: Contributions by project partner organizations**



**Leveraging financial resources**

More than a third of Community Connections groups leverage their Community Connections grants with funds from other sources. Of the 100 groups analyzed, 23 reported procuring funds from one other source, while 14 reported funds from two additional sources. Amounts from other sources ranged from as low as \$52 for a first-time grantee awarded a \$2,335 Community Connections grant, up to \$16,340 for an experienced grantee awarded a \$10,000 Community Connections grant. In total, these 37 groups received \$129,412 from Community Connections plus \$105,883 from other sources.

Those that obtained additional funds from one other source expanded their project budgets by 40 percent, and those that leveraged two other sources had project budgets that were nearly 50 percent bigger than their Community Connections grant alone, as shown in Figure 23.

Funds leveraged were greater for groups that reported funds from more than one source, not surprisingly. The median amount obtained from other sources was \$1,000 for those with one other source, and \$1,433 for those that leveraged two other sources. Those that reported leveraging two other sources also got larger Community Connection grants. This might indicate that they are larger or higher-capacity groups; or that attracting more other funds is easier when one’s primary grant is larger.

**Figure 23: Funds leveraged from sources beyond Community Connections**

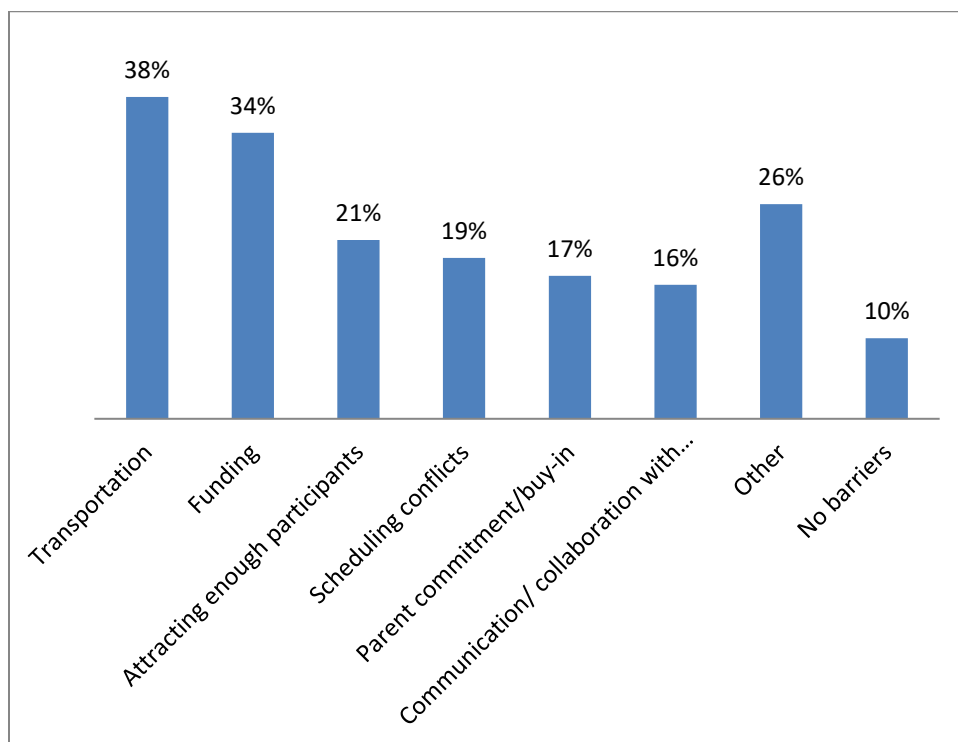


## Barriers encountered by projects

Ninety percent of organizations said they encountered at least one barrier during their project. About half of the organizations reported dealing with two or more barriers. The most common were transportation-related barriers, reported by 38 percent of projects. Close behind were funding-related barriers, reported by 34 percent of projects, as shown in Figure 24.

About one-fifth to one-sixth of projects reported barriers in four other areas: related to attracting participants, scheduling conflicts, parent commitment and buy-in, and communication or collaboration with partners or sites.

**Figure 24: Barriers encountered by projects**

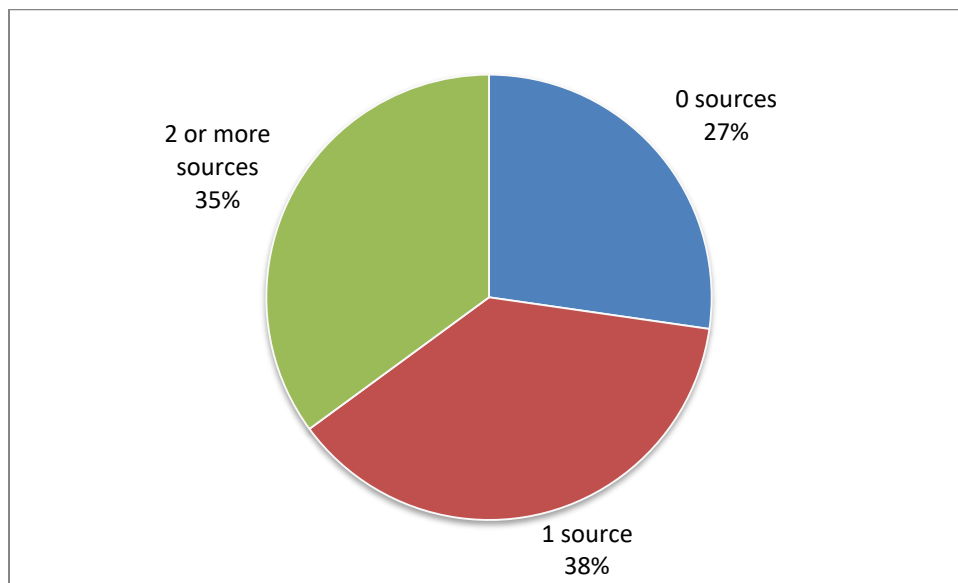


## Learning to improve: sources of guidance used by grantee groups

On the final report form, organizations were asked whether they got any help or guidance in planning or doing their projects. In a checklist, they could indicate whether they received advice, coaching or mentoring from up to four different sources – Community Connections staff, a panelist, an experienced grantee, or a neighborhood executive director (who coordinated local governance and planning efforts in the six Skillman neighborhoods) – as well as whether they attended useful trainings or workshops, or tapped other sources of developmental assistance. We examined these data for 77 funded groups in the past three years.

Nearly three fourths of these groups reported getting help or guidance from one or more sources (see Figure 25). Of those that reported getting help or guidance, half were first-time grantees and half had received at least one previous Community Connections grant. Those that reported zero sources of developmental help were slightly more likely to be experienced grantees.

**Figure 25: Number of sources of guidance reported by grantees**



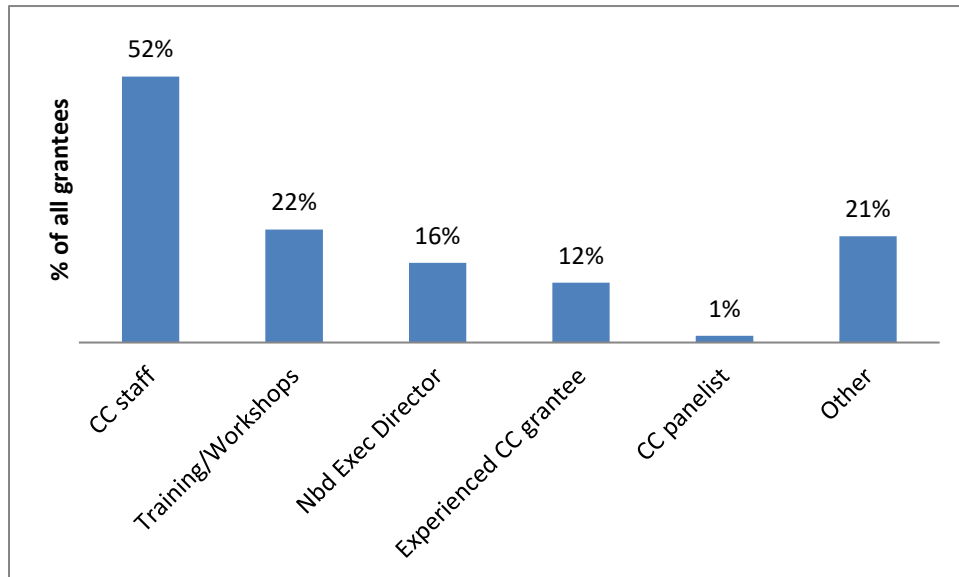
Not surprisingly, Community Connections staff were the most common source of help or guidance. Over half (52%) of projects reported getting advice, coaching or mentoring from Community Connections staff (see Figure 26).

The next most common source of learning help came from training or workshops, cited by about one in five groups (22%).

One in six groups reported guidance from a neighborhood executive director. Nearly half of these groups were in Cody Rouge, and a third were in Chadsey Condon. The only neighborhood where no Community Connections groups in our analysis reported getting help from the neighborhood executive director was Southwest.

About one in eight groups said they got advice, coaching or mentoring from an experienced Community Connections grantee.

**Figure 26: Sources of developmental assistance used by grantees**



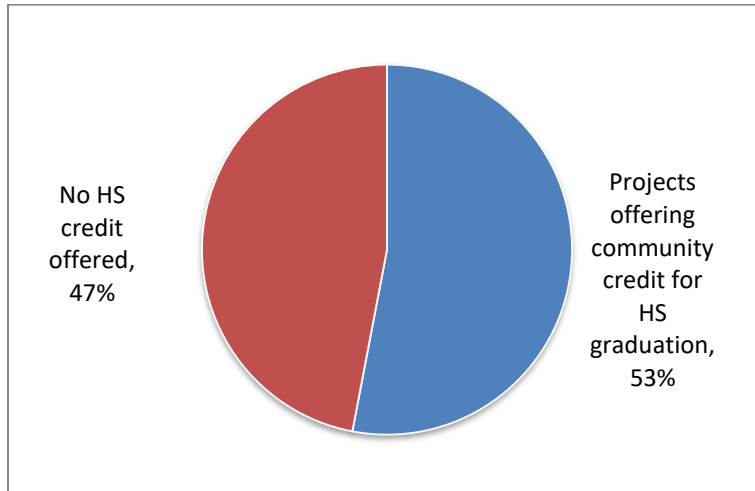
## Outcomes

### *Outcomes for participating youth*

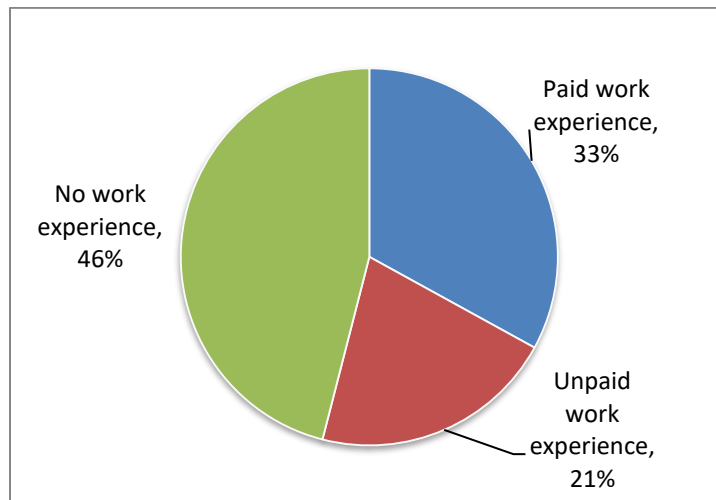
Over half (54%) of the projects involving high school aged youth reported that youth could earn community credit toward high school graduation, as shown in Figure 27. The same proportion offered either paid work experience (33%) or unpaid work experience (21%), as shown in Figure 28.<sup>6</sup> A few projects offered two or three of these kinds of opportunities.

<sup>6</sup> Fifty-seven projects that work with high school aged youth filed new-format reports that probed these topics. Of these, 30 said they allowed youth to earn community credit toward graduation, 19 offered paid work experience and 12 offered unpaid work experience.

**Figure 27: Share of projects offering credit for high school graduation**



**Figure 28: Share of projects offering paid or unpaid work experiences**



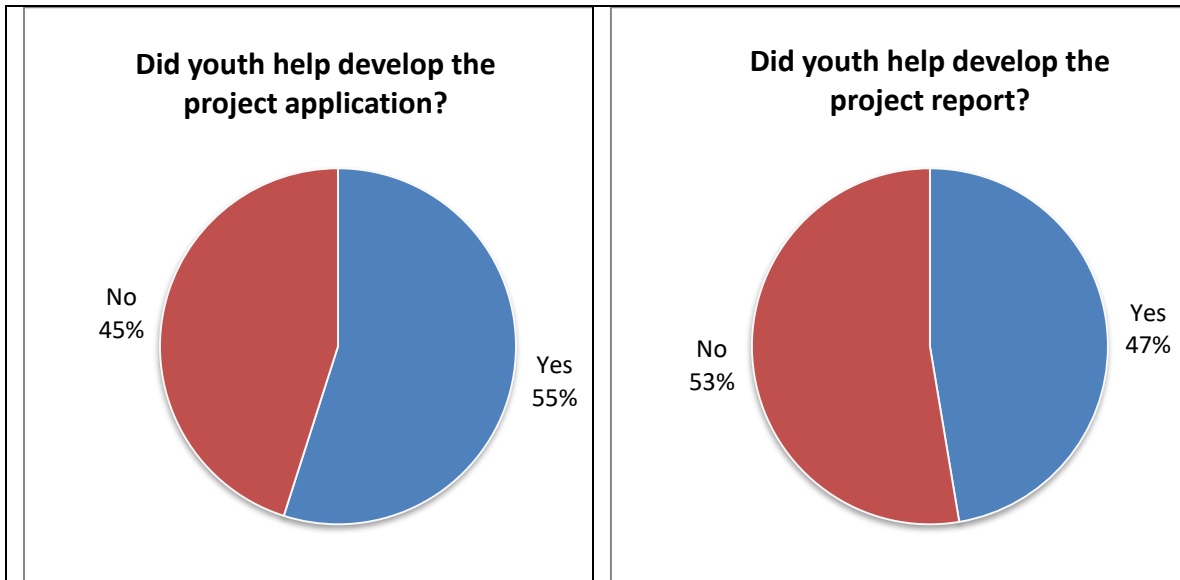
The new-format reports also asked whether youth built “new relationships and connections to their community.” Almost all groups (91%) said this occurred in their projects. Another question asked if the project “helped youth become more capable learners, navigators and contributors to their community.” Nearly as many projects (89%) answered yes to this question. The written comments provided to describe the results in these areas indicated that the magnitude of achievement in these areas was modest in many cases.

All three case study groups that work with high school youth include a focus on community service projects, typically neighborhood clean-ups and intergenerational social events with older adults and/or younger children.

## Youth in project leadership roles

As an indication of youth leadership and youth leadership development, about half of projects said that youth contributed to planning or writing the grant application or final report.

**Figure 29: Youth involvement in planning or writing project applications and reports**



The three teen-focused case study groups, particularly JIRAN/ CCYC, emphasize youth choosing and shaping their project activities. These provide a way to develop youths’ skills at framing and focusing, and help build ownership and responsibility among the youth.

### ***Outcomes for participating adults***

Of the projects that provided information on these questions in their final report, 84 percent said that their project had drawn “more adults into new or stronger relationships with youth.”

Seventy-four percent of projects reported that adults had developed “new skills, roles, and relationships in the community because of this project.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Seventy-six new-format reports included responses to the question about adult relationships with youth. Seventy-four reports responded to the question about new skills, roles and community relationships.



### ***Community-level outcomes***

When asked broad questions about possible community-level outcomes, more than three fourths of Community Connections grantees answered “yes”:

<b>Final report question</b>	<b>% answering “yes” (n=76)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Did your project empower residents to improve and/or influence schools, organizations, institutions or your neighborhood?”</li> </ul>	83%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Did your project help to increase opportunities and equity for youth of color, especially black and brown boys and young men?”</li> </ul>	78%

A review of the written descriptions of these reported results indicated that the magnitude of impact in these areas was modest.

When asked more specific and tangible questions about possible community-level outcomes, however, the percentage of “yes” responses was far smaller. Only about one in four projects said they connected or interacted with local policy makers, and just one in six said their project had contributed to changes in resources and public policies affecting youth and neighborhoods.

<b>Final report question</b>	<b>% answering “yes” (n=76)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Did your project connect, or interact, with local policy makers?”</li> </ul>	24%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Did your project contribute to any changes in resources and public policies affecting youth and your neighborhood?”</li> </ul>	17%

If these percentages are generalized to the 76 groups and 86 grants funded annually by Community Connections in the past three years, it means that close to 20 groups per year – three or four per neighborhood – are interacting with policy makers, and a dozen or so are helping to shift resources and public policies affecting their neighborhoods.

All four case studies show grassroots organizations working to increase opportunities for youth of color. The three teen-focused cases seek to empower youth participants and build their self-confidence, skills and relationships so that these young people can become more effective as community leaders. The JIRAN/ CCYC case study shows organizations that also work intentionally to help teens learn how to navigate and wield influence among schools, youth development networks and other institutions and systems in the community.

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## Reflections on building community leadership

### Growing the capacity of individual neighborhood leaders

In interviews with Community Connections project leaders, participants and observers, a handful of factors stand out as especially important in nurturing individual leadership growth. These include:

- early experiences in leadership formation;
- relationships particularly with mentors and models; and
- learning first through observation and then through experience in leadership spaces and roles.

Formal learning and peer networking opportunities such as trainings and workshops also have contributed to leadership growth for many Community Connections leaders.

#### ***Leadership formation starts early in life***

Many Community Connections project leaders have understood themselves, and been recognized by others, as having leadership ability since they were young. They were active as initiators, connectors and influencers among their siblings during childhood; they were peer leaders in their high schools and in the youth programs they participated in during adolescence.

This insight is why so many Community Connections projects focus on youth leadership development, and on sports opportunities for youth. Projects are designed and conducted so that kids can experience themselves as leaders among others, and so that kids can practice and come to own the skills and characteristics associated with leadership: learning, navigating, contributing and connecting; handling challenges, even scary ones; persevering despite barriers and difficulties. They learn about teamwork and working toward a shared goal, and practice the leadership traits of fairness, respect, integrity, and accountability. These projects also give children and youth opportunities to form relationships with peers, with adults and sometimes with children older and younger than themselves, through which they can give and receive support and feedback, and thus mentor and be mentored.

#### ***Relationships with mentors and models nourish leadership growth***

People come to believe in themselves as having leadership potential, and then develop their potential, partly through having relationships with people who affirm them, challenge and inspire them, instruct and encourage them. These relationships often extend over many years; several interviewees cited the influence of parents, teachers, and job supervisors that they met long ago and have stayed in touch with ever since.

These mentors notice and affirm people's talents, helping them to recognize their own gifts and to think of themselves as someone with something valuable to contribute. The mentors encourage people to contribute their talents, sometimes pointing people toward the spaces where they can make a stretch contribution.

- One project leader said it was her middle school principal that encouraged her to go to college, then hired her as a substitute teacher as a first job when she finished college. Watching her in that role, the principal told her she had a gift for working with children. Years later, the woman remembered those words as she dared to launch her own organization to work with kids.
- A father at one Community Connections program described how staff there had mentored him. When staff learned that he had recently DJed his child's birthday party, they asked him to DJ a teen party at the program. "He took his role seriously, and did well," the program director recalled. He subsequently has served as a DJ on several other occasions, both within the program and in other settings on referral from program staff. Staff also have asked him to share the wisdom of his life experiences with boys and young men at the center. Staff have told him, "Your mistakes don't have to define you," he said. "After all they did for my children, they put me on a platform I never thought I'd be on." That father is active in the neighborhood as a youth football coach and a chaperone at high school events.

Mentors sometimes give challenging feedback. Several Community Connections grantees named program manager Lisa Leverette as a mentor, even though she is blunt sometimes. "I learn a lot from Lisa, even when she's fussing at me," said one grantee leader. That style works well at least for this person, who described another of her mentors as "one of my hardest critics." This leader believes that the ability to take criticism and learn from it is a valuable leadership skill.

Leaders use mentors as models, too, and learn by watching them in action. "I watch what [Lisa] does, and how she does it," said one project leader. The adult leader of another project, renowned for her skill at developing young leaders, lets one or two teens accompany her to the many different community meetings and events she attends. "There are always a youth or two that are constantly with [her]," noted a community observer. "They self-select; [she] doesn't select them. They make themselves available to go to the spaces [she] goes to."

### **Watch to learn, and then start learning through experience**

This adult who mentors young leaders asks new participants simply to attend and observe at first. "Come and see, watch what we're doing, so that you can understand what we're doing," she explained. As youth gain understanding, they can move into leadership roles. "Last year's participants can be this year's leaders."

With this adult project leader, the youth leaders plan the agenda and run meetings of the group. This gives them experience and skills they can use in larger public settings. When they are ready, the mentor encourages the young people to stretch into larger public roles. The community observer we interviewed recalled a Youth Development Alliance conference a couple of years ago where two teen leaders from this organization served as MC's. "They were the highlight of the night," he said. He knew that they had practiced their parts ahead of time, and that the time they had spent shadowing their adult leader in different community spaces had prepared them also. "It wasn't their first time," he noted. "They'd spent time in all these spaces."

Stepping into these larger public spaces both helps these young leaders develop and lets them be an instructive and inspirational model to other young people, according to this mentoring adult. Recently, she asked that two youth that had been accompanying her to meetings of a citywide group focused on youth and education be allowed to co-lead the group's retreat with adults. "It will be good for other youth to see these youth using their voice," she said.

Other project leaders we interviewed also said they have grown through the experience of carrying out their work – as they have learned through various experiences in their jobs and as a parent and family member. "I have learned here," said one. "I have worked on my patience."

A young adult (now in her late 20s) said it was the combination of experience plus her relationships with mentors and also with kids in her organization that has helped her grow. "They are watching me. I know I have to do and be my best. I didn't notice my growth until they did...When they told me I was doing a good job, I could see it then and I wanted to keep doing it."

### ***Training and peer networking also help leaders learn***

Several of the Community Connections leaders interviewed said they have sought out and found value in a wide range of trainings and peer gatherings, including Skillman "lunch and learn" events and workshops sponsored by Skillman-related entities such as Partnership for Youth and the University of Michigan Technical Assistance Center. Both the information presented and the opportunity to interact with other people and groups with similar interests and experiences have been worthwhile.

### ***Key capacities for effective community leadership***

Many Community Connections projects work to help youth develop the intrinsic capacities for leadership: self-confidence, perseverance, using their voice, building relationships, being open to new ideas, and so on. A smaller number also emphasize youth becoming knowledgeable about their neighborhood and its diverse people, institutions and systems. They encourage teens to volunteer and do community service at diverse settings in the neighborhood, and to learn who decision-makers in education are above their own school principal. They coach them to write grant proposals for their project ideas not only to Community Connections but to other funding sources such as Partnership for Youth. And they encourage youth to care about other people in the community, and about Detroit as a whole.

### ***Get out? Or help Detroit confront its problems?***

One project leader said an early mentor urged her to leave her neighborhood. Noting how many of her childhood friends and even family members have made poor choices and struggled in adult life, she estimates that she is one of only 10 percent of her childhood peers who "made it out." But she eventually made a strong commitment to her West Side neighborhood and the children in it.

Another project leader gives a different kind of advice to the young people she works with. She said she encourages them "not to run away from Detroit and its problems, but go to college and

return to Detroit to face its problems.” She advises her youth to listen to what a range of people and youth in the community are saying, to learn what people care about. She coaches youth to bring others into the group’s projects and activities, and to learn how to work with other people, noting that “you can’t achieve as much by yourself!” Don’t try to control others, she advises; you must care about them.

## **Building the collective/ networked leadership of the neighborhood**

As reported earlier, Community Connections grantees are highly networked and collaborative. Nearly half of these groups report involving four or more other groups or organizations in their projects, and almost all (92%) described a contribution from at least one other specific organization. More than a third (37%) are attracting funds from other sources beyond Community Connections for their projects.

While we don’t have much information on how leaders in Community Connections projects are working collectively with others to affect broader neighborhood issues and decisions, we do know that many grantee leaders are active participants in neighborhood governance groups and other venues where planning and policy-making occurs. And we know that many Community Connections leaders are extensively networked with others.

## **Role of Skillman-related activities and programs in developing leadership**

Skillman-related resources and opportunities figure prominently in the leadership and organizational capacity growth of Community Connections leaders and organizations. As reported earlier, the most important of these is the coaching and mentoring provided by Community Connections staff, identified as a source of guidance by over half (52%) of grantees.

In addition, about one in five groups (22%) report learning from trainings or workshops, and these are quite often offered by Skillman-related resources such as the University of Michigan Technical Assistance Center or the Youth Development Resource Center.

One in six groups report getting advice, coaching or mentoring from a neighborhood executive director, and one in eight report getting this kind of help from a Community Connections panelist or experienced grantee.

Several of the leaders we interviewed cited Skillman and Community Connections “Lunch and Learn” networking opportunities as valuable learning sites.

As mentioned previously, the Partnership for Youth, Youth Development Alliance, Chadsey Condon Community Organization, and 482 Forward all have been important venues where leaders of JIRAN and the Chadsey Condon Youth Committee have learned and exercised their skills.

## **Prospects for leaders' influence on future neighborhood planning**

Our impression is that seasoned Community Connections leaders, those that have led grant projects and participated in Community Connections networks and other Skillman-related activities and venues for several years, are fairly well equipped to influence neighborhood planning post-2016. In general terms, this would include most of the 230 leaders of the nearly 80 groups that have received three or more Community Connections grants over the years. Their involvement will depend partly on how easily they can connect to activities and planning.

Most Community Connections grantee leaders are primarily committed to leading their own groups, projects and organizations. They are focused on taking action now, doing what they can now to make their community a better place especially for kids. Participating in larger neighborhood planning processes is of only secondary interest, worthwhile mainly to the extent that they can see its relevance to their primary work with children, families and neighbors. They have little patience for poorly focused or clumsily facilitated planning processes.

Many Community Connections leaders have been deeply active in neighborhood planning over the years. They are attuned to Skillman efforts and willing to participate and lead on efforts where they have interest, experience and access. Many of the young JIRAN and Chadsey Condon leaders who stay in or return to Detroit can also be expected to contribute to neighborhood planning efforts post-2016.

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## Lessons

- 1. A grassroots, small grants program such as Community Connections can be an effective way to surface and strengthen large numbers of grassroots groups and leaders.** Community Connections has increased the leadership experience of approximately 1500 people across these six neighborhoods in the past decade. It provides caring adult relationships and positive developmental experiences for over 2,700 youth per year.
- 2. One key to an effective small grants program such as Community Connections is to have staff that are skilled at finding, encouraging, coaching and connecting these local grassroots leaders.** Community Connections manager Lisa Leverette is widely recognized as a key driver of the program's success. However, finding or developing such staff is not easy! In recent years it has added staff who are developing these skills, but Community Connections still depends heavily on its founding program manager for its success. Finding people with a passion for this work and a willingness to learn, and investing time and resources for them to grow into the potential of such a program, are both important.
- 3. Using a residents leadership panel to review applications and make funding recommendations builds credibility and leadership, and provides valuable advice to staff.** Such a panel helps the program be perceived in the neighborhoods as resident-driven. Panel service is a powerful learning experience for its members, as they gain awareness of the patterns of groups, projects, challenges and opportunities, and as they participate in local, regional and national learning networks on behalf of the program. The panel is a valuable advisory group to staff, guiding them in how to focus their outreach and coaching efforts for greatest effectiveness.

One challenge the panel has encountered is figuring out how to achieve consistent youth participation in the panel. Finding transportation to the meetings, and preventing personal schedule conflicts with meetings, have been greater challenges for youth than for adult panelists.
- 4. Long-term mentoring relationships are an effective way to build leadership and organizational capacity, especially when they help leaders learn from their own experience.** Our interviews indicate that these grassroots leaders learn especially through the trial and error of their own experience. This learning is accelerated when coupled with long-term (multi-year) mentoring relationships that provide models for effective strategy and behavior, advice tailored to their specific circumstances, observation and feedback on their actual performance, and a safe, respectful space for reflecting on their experience to distill lessons from it.

5. **Finding adults skilled at supporting youth-led projects through the learning experiences of project implementation is difficult.** Community Connections staff have struggled to find adults willing to walk with youth-led projects without taking charge of those projects and reducing youth to “follower” roles. Apparently there are not many people skilled at helping others learn through experience – through the experience of taking action steps, appraising how it went, distilling lessons from that and adjusting next steps accordingly.
  
6. **Grassroots project leaders more often help to create alternatives to current flawed systems, rather than pushing to reform entrenched systems.** Many Community Connections project leaders participate in neighborhood and city-wide planning efforts to improve school, youth development and other systems that affect prospects for children. But most give their primary attention to creating working alternatives on the ground now for children in their neighborhoods: providing positive developmental experiences for youth, engaging youth with others to make immediate, local improvements such as clean-ups, beautification, and community-building events. Their most important contributions to “systems change” may come when their projects evolve in directions that are beginning to develop entrepreneurs, alter economic trajectories and change food systems for neighborhood residents. Or when projects help graffiti taggers and car detailers be recognized as artistic assets with economic potential for themselves and their community. Or when projects provide doorways through which mainstream, professional systems can learn culturally respectful and effective ways to be of service in these neighborhoods.



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## Recommendations

### *Implications for future Skillman investments*

1. **Continue supporting the Community Connections program.** The program has proven to be effective at surfacing and strengthening networks of active residents and grassroots organizations working for youth development and community improvement. It is building the expertise and connections of hundreds, possibly thousands of active residents and locally-rooted initiators in these neighborhoods.
2. **Accelerate support for projects poised for growth.** We would encourage Community Connections, Skillman and Kellogg to provide grassroots groups with potential to grow in impact with easier access to expanded resources (ideally from multiple sources). Offering grants of up to \$10,000 to proficient groups has been a good step in this direction. So has been the access to Self Development of People (SDOP) grants in the \$10,000 - \$30,000 range that Community Connections' manager has facilitated through her involvement as an SDOP board member.

Expediting access to larger Skillman and Kellogg grants could be another part of this strategy – perhaps by creating a lower eligibility threshold for organizations to qualify for grants in the \$30,000 - \$60,000 range, thus making the on-ramps clearer and more accessible to small and mid-sized organizations. Skillman and other supporters might also expand access to coaching and capacity-building assistance to accelerate growth. Helping these high-potential groups and leaders develop a network of supporters and partners beyond Skillman and Kellogg would also be valuable.

3. **Expand opportunities for grassroots leaders to grow through mentoring and peer learning relationships such as “communities of practice.”** To date, most developmental assistance for Community Connections leaders has been through ad hoc coaching, informal networking, and time-limited training events oriented toward accessing new information or specific skills. Yet leaders tell us that they learn especially through experience and through mentoring relationships. We recommend that Community Connections expand opportunities for grantee leaders to participate in “communities of practice,” “learning cohorts” and similar vehicles.

The goal would be to provide more focused, ongoing spaces for leaders to critically reflect on their practice, explore their own and their peers' stories in greater depth, experiment with new strategies and tactics (whether derived from self-reflection, peer examples, or “good practices” suggested by mentors and coaches), and then harvest lessons and adjust strategies based on their experiences. With continuity and a common commitment to learning and growth among participants, these spaces would also nurture deeper peer relationships of mutual support for excellence and innovation. Experience from other leadership and capacity building programs suggests that these spaces will be most fruitful when they combine ongoing experimental practice, peer interaction, and tailored coaching or mentoring for each participating organization.

These learning clusters could be organized thematically, such as on nurturing youth development, accelerating organizational growth, or leveraging program success for greater systemic change. Or they could be organized by other commonalities such as working with black and brown boys or organizational life cycle stage.

Developing vibrant peer and mentor networks among would-be change-makers is probably at least as important as providing more learning opportunities on strategies and tactics, given the long-haul nature of working for transformative change in Detroit.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Case studies of durable Community Connections projects

The longevity of Community Connections presents an opportunity to understand better how these kinds of grassroots organizations and leaders evolve over time, and what their distinctive contributions are to community social fabric and leadership growth. To explore these themes, we conducted case studies of four groups that have shown both effectiveness and staying power: active with Community Connections support for at least five years, with continuity in leadership and in relationships between adult leaders and youth participants, and evidence that youth are doing better in school and life because of their positive experiences. The four cases were selected in consultation with Community Connections staff to include some diversity in neighborhood, focus, and participant demographics.

- Amistad Reading and Music Project is located in far southwest Detroit in zip code 48217. It works with elementary school students, providing afterschool reading and music instruction. Its adult leaders and its young participants are almost all African American, consistent with the composition of the neighborhood and its schools.
- Brightmoor/Wellspring Youth Adventure Leadership program is located in the Brightmoor neighborhood of northwest Detroit. It works with high school students, providing team-building and leadership learning experiences mainly in outdoors settings such as ropes challenge courses, kayaking, and camping trips. Its adult leaders are white and African American, and its teen participants are almost all African American, consistent with the composition of the neighborhood and its schools.
- Developing Kingdoms in Different Stages (Developing KIDS) is located in the Cody Rouge neighborhood on the West Side. It provides educational, social and community service programs with youth ages 5-18 and their families, with afterschool and summer programs plus family nights. Its adult leaders and young participants are mostly African American, consistent with the neighborhood composition.
- Join In to Revitalize Arab American Neighborhoods (JIRAN) and Chadsey Condon Youth Committee (CCYC) are centered in the Chadsey Condon neighborhood with participation from adjoining west and southwest Detroit neighborhoods. These interrelated youth-led groups conduct educational, social and community service projects largely chosen and shaped by the students involved, with adult mentorship and support. Their adult leaders are mainly Arab American and their teen participants are mainly Arab American with African American, Latino, and sometimes other ethnic identities involved.

Methodology included interviews with primary and secondary leaders, community observers and partners, and in cases with teen involvement, interviews with some youth and parents. Between six and 12 people were interviewed for each case. Observations were conducted at three of the four case sites. We also reviewed the Community Connections grant applications, reports and supporting documents available for each grantee group or organization.

## **Case 1: Amistad Reading and Music Project** *Nurturing literacy and a love of learning*

When Randall Mosley was a child growing up on Beatrice Street, in zip code 48217 in far southwest Detroit, he was slow in learning to read. But education was important to his mother. She had been admitted to college when she finished high school but never got to go because her family could not afford it. She wanted more for her son. She worked intensively with Randall when he was seven and eight years old. She insisted he spend 20 minutes a day reading *Reader's Digest*. Gradually, Randall improved his reading skills. He eventually went to Cass Tech High School, then Michigan State University. He earned a master's degree in technical management from Eastern Michigan University and a certificate in instructional design from Wayne State University. He worked as a technical writer for Ford Motor Company, and as a middle school teacher in Ann Arbor. He married and had two sons. On the side, he cultivated his love of music, especially jazz.

Now, more than 50 years after he struggled with reading in grade school, Randall is back living in the house where he grew up. On Tuesdays and Thursdays he leads the Amistad Reading and Music Project, located in the church down the street from his house, helping today's grade-schoolers improve their reading and cultivate a love of learning. The Community Connections program has assisted Amistad since 2011. This is Amistad's story, and Randall's.

### **The longest 38 miles in America**

Randall spent 30 years away from Detroit, mostly living in Ann Arbor. The distance from Detroit to Ann Arbor, he said, is "the longest 38 miles in America." In the notoriously cyclical car industry, layoffs are common, and during layoffs from Ford Randall taught middle school in the Ann Arbor district for six years. "Kids are fun," Randall said, and his principal was impressed with his classroom management skills. Randall was impressed with how Ann Arbor parents valued education, like his mother had.

About a dozen years ago, however, Randall's life hit a rough patch. His job disappeared. His marriage ended in divorce. "I'm a believer," Randall said. "One day I asked God to give me a second chance." He vowed to do something good should he get that chance.

### **Returning home**

Then, in 2007, his father asked him to come home. By then Randall's mother had passed away, and his father was in poor health. Randall's brother, who has autism, was living at home with their dad. Randall decided to move home. He moved back into his childhood home in 48217 with his father and his brother. His father passed away in 2008, but Randall stayed on.

He began working as a substitute teacher in the Detroit Public Schools. In 2008 a principal offered him a long-term substitute position as a kindergarten teacher. "Long-term pays lots better than daily sub, so I leapt at it," Randall said. He discovered that kindergarteners "want to learn." In his thinking about how to do good with his second chance, he started to focus on early education, rather than middle schoolers.

In 2009, a friend from his days at Wayne State asked him to contribute his instructional design skills to help shape an after-school literacy project she had founded at Loving Elementary School in the North End. Her project, he learned, was funded by a program called Community Connections.

Randall helped his friend run that project at Loving through the school year and into the summer of 2010. He realized, though, that what he most wanted to do was start a reading project like that in his own neighborhood in far southwest Detroit. That neighborhood “is my home. I’m going to bring it home. Southwest Detroit doesn’t have champions,” in his view, particularly not the 48217 sliver which is mostly black. He decided he would launch what he called The Amistad Reading Project in his neighborhood.

“I’d had some blessings,” Randall explains, thinking particularly of his sons, now young adults, who he loves dearly. “You have to give back something. That is the motivation.”

He went looking for a site. At Loving, his friend had rented space from DPS, but Randall couldn’t find a suitable DPS site in 48217. He asked at his father’s church, but “met a deaf ear,” and also got turned down by a second church. Then he decided to ask at Saints Andrew and Benedict Catholic Church, which was centrally located and just a block down Beatrice Street from his home. Father Ed Zaorsky, the priest there, had him talk to the parish council. They, too, refused to rent him space. They told him instead that they wanted to co-sponsor his project. Amistad could use their space for free, and the church would provide liability insurance.

### **“We are a poor parish, but God has blessed us with buildings”**

The parish council’s decision aligned with Father Ed’s view. “We are a poor parish, but God has blessed us with buildings, and that’s good stewardship,” he said. Father Ed also served on Community Connections’ residents leadership panel during those years.

One evening in the spring of 2010, Randall attended a meeting of the neighborhood’s United Citizens group, which also used the basement of Saints Andrew and Benedict. He shared flyers and talked about his new reading project. He was impressed by a woman he observed there named Jackie Conley.

Jackie was more firmly planted in 48217 than Randall was. “I was born here. I raised my five daughters here. It’s home for me. These are my roots,” she said. Jackie’s mother still lives in the house she moved into in 1964. Her husband, now deceased, also grew up in the neighborhood and went to school there. Several of Jackie’s grown daughters and their children live nearby today. “And I feel like the children of the community need me.”

Jackie’s husband worked at Chrysler. She had a career as a legal secretary for 17 years, working for attorneys in downtown Detroit, Birmingham and Southfield. But she desired to give back to her community. She returned to college for child development courses, opened a day care business in her home and ran it for four years, then went to work for Hartford Head Start. She rose from teacher to center director and eventually traveled the country auditing Head Start centers. Retiring from work a few years after her husband passed away, she volunteered with

Excellent Schools Detroit, visiting schools across the city. She also worked occasionally as a substitute teacher in many DPS and charter schools.

The Amistad flyer caught Jackie's interest. Before she could contact Randall, though, he called her. "He asked me to help. I didn't realize then that he practically wanted me to run it with him!" She agreed to volunteer for a year, working with the younger children while Randall focused on the older ones. Six years later, she's still in that role.

### **Launching Amistad**

Randall and Jackie fine-tuned the reading project's design according to Michigan Department of Education standards. Amistad would operate from 3:30 to 5:00 on Tuesdays and Thursdays through the school year. To stay within the recommended 1:8 teacher:student ratio, they would admit no more than 16 students at a time. As an Excellent Schools Detroit volunteer, Jackie had been impressed by instructional materials at a Mexicantown school, and the school agreed to give her outdated copies of them. "They're wonderfully age specific, with a nice selection of stories for students to choose from."

The neighborhood has one DPS grade school and one charter school. Randall and Jackie reached out to both, asking to post and distribute flyers. Pierre Toussaint Academy, the charter school renting out the former parochial school of Saints Andrew and Benedict, readily agreed to Amistad's outreach. The DPS school did not. "The principal would not let us leave flyers, did not welcome us at all," recalls Jackie.

"The DPS school in the neighborhood treats us as competition," said Randall.

The same pattern holds true today, even though Pierre Toussaint Academy departed in 2013 and New Paradigms Academy has rented the church's school building since 2014: 24 of the 25 students registered this year at Amistad are from New Paradigms.

Amistad conducts an assessment of students' reading level about 30 days into the fall each year. What they have found confirms that Amistad is doing something important in the neighborhood. "In five years, only three kids came in reading at grade level," said Randall. Follow-up assessments at the end of year one, in the spring of 2011, found that students' reading speed had improved by a median level of 42 percent since the pre-test in the fall.

In August 2011, as the start of their second year approached, Randall and Jackie applied for their first Community Connections grant. Father Ed, by then serving on the board of Amistad, submitted a letter of recommendation. Community Connections awarded it \$1,750.

### **Growing in sophistication, not size, through music**

While holding steady at an average size of 16 participants, Amistad has innovated in its design. In the 2012-13 year, Amistad began incorporating music into its approach. Randall studied music when he was younger, and is a big jazz fan. In fact, he helps manage the famous Baker's Keyboard Lounge jazz club at Livernois and 8-Mile Road. One of his sons is an avid musician, studying at the University of Michigan and working in an Ann Arbor recording studio. "It's made

a huge difference in his life,” Randall observes. “He never asks for anything. He’s a happy young man.”

Randall began bringing Amistad youth to Baker’s Kids-n-Jazz program, where they can see the bands play. That year Amistad also had a Wayne State student volunteer who offered to lead some singing. “The kids liked it,” said Randall, “and that fueled the idea to do more with music.” Randall wanted Amistad to be different from what kids experienced in the school day, and sadly nearly all Detroit schools have dropped their art and music programs, which Randall calls “incredibly stupid.”

Randall also hoped that adding music to Amistad’s focus would attract more parents’ attention. He was troubled by how many parents kept their distance. Many seemed to worry that enrolling their child in a reading project would stigmatize their child as a poor reader. Furthermore, reading instruction is not “sexy,” he said; “it’s three yards and a cloud of dust.”

Parents who come to pick up their children rarely enter Amistad’s classroom, Randall has observed. They prefer to wait in the hallway. Sometimes Randall bakes biscuits in the classroom, hoping the delicious scent will lure parents to enter. Amistad has experimented with family pizza nights and other efforts using food to attract family involvement.

Sometimes Randall’s frustration with the challenge of engaging parents shows through. “Some parents work,” he observes. “And you’ve got a lot of fools raising children...The grandparents are often a better asset than the parents. Last year I knew more grandparents than parents.”

Father Ed has a more nuanced view. “Our educational system has been so political that we have generations of people who are not literate, including the parents of many children today,” he said. “Kids need someone to coach them, to teach them. Many parents don’t have these skills. This gives kids the extra help they need, that often they can’t get at home.”

Adding music would let Amistad students occasionally perform concerts which could attract parents and grandparents. And if a youth got really good at playing an instrument, it might help him or her win a college scholarship.

Randall persuaded his friend Allan Barnes, a Howard-educated musician with over 40 years of professional experience, and Allan’s friend Sondra Johnson, a retired DPS early education music teacher, to join the Amistad team. Tuesdays would continue to focus on reading, and Thursdays would become music days. Allan would teach instrumental music to the older kids – Amistad started by buying recorders -- and Sondra would lead the younger children in singing.

### **Support from Community Connections in several forms**

Community Connections has continued to provide annual grants to Amistad, with support growing steadily since 2011. Grants increased to \$3,600 in August 2012, \$4,940 in 2013, and \$5,000 in 2014. Randall attended Community Connections and Skillman Foundation “Lunch and Learn” events, which he found useful for networking. He talked numerous times with Lisa Leverette regarding organizational direction for Amistad. He participated in organizational capacity building events offered by the Youth Development Commission. He also turned to Father Ed for coaching, and went to workshops given by the Archdiocese of Detroit.

In June 2015, Amistad became one of the 15 Community Connections grantees invited to apply for a grant larger than \$5,000 (thanks to Kellogg Foundation support, Community Connections now can award up to \$10,000 to high-performing groups). After consultations with Lisa, Amistad applied for and received \$8,850, so that it could buy six more instruments – flute, clarinet, trumpet, two saxophones, and a drum set – and offer weekly lessons in the summer for the first time, to four advanced instrumental students. Funds were also expanded for snacks and family meals, in a continuing effort to increase family involvement.

### **The challenge of building long term relationships with children**

Despite Amistad’s steadiness since 2010, sustaining relationships with children over multiple years is not easy. This year, of the 25 students registered, only six were also enrolled last year. Three of these are in their second year at Amistad, two are in their third year and one is in her fourth year. This level of annual turnover is typical.

Many factors contribute. Turbulence in local schools is one factor. When Pierre Toussaint Academy closed and the parochial school building sat empty for a year, the former students there scattered. Transferring among schools is common anyway, Randall and Jackie say. Adjoining suburban school districts, particularly the River Rouge district, aggressively recruit students in the 48217 neighborhood. At least half of Amistad’s students have been to two or more school districts by third grade, Randall said.

Even though 48217 is known as a relatively stable, deeply-rooted community, those families that aren’t homeowners often move frequently. As in many Detroit neighborhoods, many people suffer from high levels of poverty and unemployment. Randall knows that many students live in fragile, shifting family configurations, too, with many part-time or absentee parents. These factors underscore the importance of Amistad’s steady presence as a safe, stable learning space in the neighborhood, even while they make it difficult for Amistad’s adult leaders to sustain relationships with participating students.

### **A larger role in the church and the neighborhood**

Meanwhile, Randall has grown into a larger community role. In 2014, Saints Andrew and Benedict Church was given a building, two blocks down the street. Two long-time parishioners, the Perry’s, had lived in the building and run a convenience store there. When they passed away, they bequeathed it to their church. The church refurbished it as the “Perry Outreach Center” and moved its food pantry and St. Vincent de Paul charitable assistance program in there. It also hired Randall Mosley as director of the Perry Outreach Center, with the understanding that he would help it grow beyond charity to empowerment. “When you have somebody in the community, you gain credibility for your programs,” Father Ed explains. Under Randall’s leadership, the Perry Outreach Center now offers adult computer trainings. People can get help creating resumes and submitting on-line job applications. The center is considering offering GED and other adult basic education classes.

Working at the Perry Outreach Center also gives Randall additional points of connection with parents and other adult family members, who come in for education and other assistance.



Jackie, too, continues to be active in the neighborhood in ways beyond the reading project. With a friend, she has led efforts to re-purpose an abandoned lot on one of the neighborhood's main streets, Schaefer Highway. They designed and installed a large public art piece. They have planted flowers – Jackie doesn't dare grow vegetables due to concern over soil and air pollution, thanks to the large Marathon Oil complex and other heavy industry nearby and the heavy truck traffic through the neighborhood. They have recruited a local business to help care for the lot, and obtained some financial support for their efforts from Marathon Oil and several grant sources (they have not yet sought a Community Connections grant). They have a vision of organizing a community festival on the site. Jackie has helped various local candidates run for elective office. Like Randall, she is frustrated by her perception that elected and institutional decision-makers – downtown, at DPS, and in other public and corporate systems -- generally ignore the residents of 48217. "We've fought so many battles with the companies," she said. She intermittently participates in local neighborhood groups, opting to stay away when she sees them clogged with "gatekeepers who want things to stay the same;" she considers herself a "changemaker."

### **Continuing with the children**

Both Randall and Jackie plan to continue at Amistad, along with Allan Barnes and Sondra Johnson. Other adults are sometimes involved. In the past year Randall's musician son has begun working there occasionally. "He's 22, a free spirit, hippie-like," said Randall. "Kids can see themselves in him."

Randall tries to foster a love for learning in children partly by inviting adults from diverse careers to spend time at Amistad. This introduces the children to a range of possible futures for themselves. Sometimes professional athletes stop by, but they are not Randall's main emphasis. A woman judge comes and reads. Another woman who is a naval reserve officer occasionally leads calisthenics. College student volunteers are welcomed.

Randall himself keeps going because he remembers, "I got a second chance." Giving back is important, he believes; and one should "do it in the arena where you can be successful. I teach reading; I don't try football." He finds children easy to be with, not heavy. "They generally see the glass half full."

## **Case 2: Brightmoor/Wellspring Youth Adventure Leadership** *Growing leaders through outdoor adventures*

### **“There’s so much more to you than you think there is”**

For nearly 10 years now, Peter Lisiecki has been leading Brightmoor teens into outdoor adventure leadership learning experiences, first through Brightmoor Community Center and since 2013 through Wellspring, a small nonprofit organization in the neighborhood. Youth engage in team-building exercises, tackle high ropes challenge courses, climb indoor rock walls, and learn how to kayak on the Huron River. They engage in community service projects, cleaning up abandoned lots and visiting senior centers. Peter and other Wellspring adults also take the youth on a multi-day camping trip to Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in northwestern Michigan where they hike, swim, climb giant sand dunes, cook and keep camp, and deal with whatever weather, bugs and other surprises Mother Nature sends their way. Community Connections has supported this work with a series of seven grants since 2009.

One participant, Jason Carter, said his favorite part was when they had to jump into 15 feet of water, wearing life jackets, in preparation for kayaking. “That’s when I knew I was the type of person I was: a risk taker,” he said. Other youth were reluctant to go in, but Jason was willing to jump first.

He also liked the teamwork games. “You had to put your minds together. It was more cooperative than competitive. I had to practice keeping my mouth quiet.” His biggest challenge came when they paired up for walks with one youth blindfolded and the other youth guiding the way. “There were lots of obstacles. The scariest thing for me was when I put my trust in someone else.” He experienced another insight when he took his turn as guide: “When someone else put their trust in me, I didn’t want to slip up!”

For Jamal Mitchell, going on the Sleeping Bear Dunes camping trip for three days when he was age 14 was a very big deal. “I’ve never experienced so much wilderness! It was one of the first times I’ve ever gone camping. Being away from home that long was a challenge.”

The high ropes challenge course was another growth experience for Jamal, especially because he fears heights. The power of teamwork helped him meet the challenge. “I had people that were depending on me, relying on me to do it. I just had to do it!” What he discovered next has also stuck with him: “Then, once you overcome it, you want to do it again and again.”

These are the kinds of life lessons Peter hopes youth will gain through these experiences. “We develop a culture of trying new things,” he said. He teaches a framework of three zones: our comfort zone, our out-of-comfort zone, and our panic zone. “The out-of-comfort zone is the growth zone, where we become better, stronger, smarter. Kids gain confidence as they try experiences outside of their comfort zone.” Peter says the core theme in his work with Brightmoor youth is “there is so much more to you than you think there is.”

## **Building character through outdoor experiences**

Peter's enthusiasm for outdoor adventure leadership development is rooted in his own experience. He grew up on the East Side of Detroit. The summer he was 17, he went to a 26-day Outward Bound program in Colorado. The solo and team-based adventure challenges "blew me away," he recalled decades later. "It was one of the most significant experiences of my life." He went into that month shy, not confident at all, and he came out a different person. He discovered he could handle all kinds of challenges and new situations. He saw how teamwork could accomplish things that a person could not do alone.

In addition, he said, "I realized how much I have, and yet others don't." That realization of his privilege led him to a decision: he would spend his life helping others with less access to opportunities.

After college at Wayne State, Peter went to Micronesia on a church program. He taught in a Catholic high school and sponsored the student outdoor club. He organized an adventure program called "Marianas Bound" modeled after his Outward Bound experience. He spent three years running a diversion program for youth in the criminal justice system. "Instead of going to jail, they could spend 21 days in the jungle with me," he grinned. All of these experiences reinforced his belief in the power of outdoor, experiential programs to develop character in youth.

Eventually, Peter returned to Detroit. He earned a Master's in Social Work at the University of Michigan, and in 1991 became director of youth and family services at Brightmoor Community Center. Twenty-five years later, Peter is still working with Brightmoor youth, with outdoor adventure learning at the heart of his approach.

## **Innovation fueled by Community Connections**

Peter has used Community Connections support strategically. "Community Connections grants allow me to try new things," he said. "Lisa Leverette encouraged that." Because Community Connections reviews applications monthly, new ideas can be acted on quickly. Brightmoor Community Center received large grants from the Skillman Foundation but these were awarded annually, in October. If Peter had a good idea in the winter, spring or summer, he could pitch it to Community Connections right away to pilot the idea. Then, if the pilot went well, he could build its continuation into the next year's large grant.

From 2009 through 2012, Community Connections supported Peter's innovations in experiential youth character development through four different small grants. In 2009 he got two grants: one for a partnership project with Detroit Community High School where he led the "Stepping Up Career Mentoring" program, and another to expand an ongoing youth leadership group at Brightmoor Community Center called "Detroit Young Citizens."

The career mentoring program introduced youth to the concept of multiple intelligences, helping them recognize what they were good at and what they liked to do. They explored career paths that aligned well with different intelligences, and then toured different higher education institutions that aligned with different careers: a technical institute, a community college, and a university. Finally, to build their self-confidence and teamwork skills as they

considered these future possibilities for themselves, Peter took them for a day to an outdoor challenge course. “Many of the kids were very individualistic,” Peter said. “This taught them, ‘With a team, I can do so much more!’”

Detroit Young Citizens began meeting weekly in March 2009 as an outgrowth of the Brightmoor summer leadership training that Peter had started in 2007. Some summer participants wanted to form an ongoing group to plan and implement educational, recreational, community service and leadership development activities. In contrast to Stepping Up which only involved students from Detroit Community High School, Detroit Young Citizens and the summer leadership training were open to any teens in the neighborhood. Peter visited schools, congregations and organizations throughout Brightmoor to invite participants. In June, Community Connections awarded \$4,300 so the group could continue its activities for several more months.

In September 2010, Peter got another Community Connections grant for what he called the “Brightmoor Youth Challenge Project.” This bundled together support for further innovation with Stepping Up and Detroit Young Citizens. For Stepping Up, the grant paid for four more groups of DCHS students to spend a day at the Operation Adventure challenge course at the University of Michigan-Dearborn as the culmination of their career mentoring program: two in December 2010 and two more in May 2011. For Detroit Young Citizens, the grant covered costs to add a four-session kayaking program in the summer of 2011.

Water-based adventures are new experiences for many Detroit youth. Typically, according to Peter, “in a group of 12, only three will swim, and several will be afraid of putting their face in the water.” Peter’s introduction to kayaking, therefore, started with the basics in the Livonia YMCA pool. Session one’s goal was to get comfortable in the water while wearing a life jacket. By the end of that session, most kids were jumping readily into water over their head. In session two they practiced operating the kayak in the pool. Sessions three and four were outside on the Huron River – first kayaking on a stretch of placid water, and finally on a section with some faster passages.

Peter’s next Community Connections grant, in November 2011, continued support for Stepping Up groups to do the adventure challenge course that winter and in the spring of 2012, and for another round of Detroit Young Citizens kayaking in the summer of 2012. It also supported innovation in the Brightmoor Youth Adventure Leadership Training program, the program that spawned Detroit Young Citizens, shifting it from a weeklong summer program to a series on fall Saturdays culminating in an adventure challenge course day.

### **From Brightmoor Community Center to Wellspring**

During these years, Brightmoor Community Center was falling on hard times. The Great Recession reduced many of its funding streams other than the Skillman Foundation. Staff was reduced, and Peter was intermittently laid off.

In the spring of 2013, Peter found himself laid off again. This time, another small organization in the neighborhood, Wellspring, contracted with Peter to lead summer youth adventure activities, combining his expertise in adventure-based leadership development with their tradition of taking neighborhood teens on a camping trip to the west coast of Michigan, at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore along Lake Michigan. Community Connections awarded a \$5,000

grant to support what they called “Summer Adventure 2013.” Eight boys and six girls took part in this series that included team-building exercises, a day at the Operation Adventure challenge course at University of Michigan-Dearborn, the kayaking series, three days of camping at Sleeping Bear Dunes, and a closing ceremony in the fall.

Joining the Wellspring team was an easy choice for Peter. He had known the founders and co-directors, Brightmoor residents Cherie and Dan Bandrowski, ever since his early days at Brightmoor Community Center. “We shared faith, love of kids, and outdoor stuff,” Peter said.

### **Growing further with Community Connections support**

In 2014 and 2015, Peter continued to refine the outdoor youth leadership strategy. In response to Community Connections’ and Skillman Foundation’s growing interest in opportunities for high school juniors and seniors, Peter and Wellspring in 2014 began to offer two leadership programs -- a three-part Basic Leadership program for 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders, and a five-day Senior Leadership Training for 10<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> graders – plus a Summer Adventure program that included the kayaking series and camping at Sleeping Bear Dunes. Due to interest from the kids, the camping trip was expanded to four days this time. Many youth in the Senior Leadership track also worked in Wellspring summer jobs as another venue to exercise their leadership abilities. Community Connections supported this expanded effort with a \$10,000 grant.

In 2015, Peter and Wellspring tweaked the program to focus still more on high school juniors. Basic Leadership was targeted to youth entering 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades, and Senior Leadership was for those entering 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>. The Summer Adventure track was organized into two groups of eight kids, up from one group of 12 in 2014, and the camping trip was expanded again, this time to five days long. Community Connections supported this with another \$10,000 grant.

To help sustain relationships through these intensive summer experiences, Peter organizes recreational and educational events about once a month during the school year, such as college tours or going to Detroit Pistons games.

### **Navigating community systems more than changing them**

Peter and the Bandrowskis guide youth to advance physically, cognitively, emotionally and socially. They also intentionally nurture youths’ sense of connection to multiple layers of community: at the neighborhood level through activities at various spaces and institutions in the Brightmoor neighborhood, the southeastern Michigan level through water safety and kayaking activities at the suburban Livonia YMCA and regional metroparks, and the state and national level by traveling across Michigan to camp and play at a national park there.

While they coach youth to navigate the institutions and systems in their community, they do not emphasize working to change those institutions and systems. They teach community service but do not talk much of community change. Their faith-based approach is more pastoral than prophetic, more love than justice. They teach appreciation for teamwork, but do not emphasize building collective power to change community conditions or systems.

Youth at Wellspring attend a volatile web of schools – urban and suburban, public and charter and private. Many students attend six or more schools between first and 12<sup>th</sup> grade as schools close and open, wax and wane. For the most part, the Bandrowskis and Peter steer clear of these dynamics, focusing on giving kids healthy learning experiences outside of school time. Wellspring’s main program offers the Kumon method of academic enrichment for neighborhood youth.

### **The complex interplay between “resident-led” and professional agency work**

This case illustrates the challenge in using categories such as “resident leaders” and “paid staff,” “resident-led groups” and “professional nonprofit agencies,” to describe community improvement efforts in neighborhoods such as Brightmoor. It also shows the interplay between Skillman large grants (often over \$100,000) to professionalized organizations run by paid staff, and Community Connections small grants (usually under \$5,000) to “local groups” for “grassroots projects.”

Wellspring is both a resident-led group and a nonprofit organization run by college-educated, paid staff. It has received both Skillman large grants to support a range of operations and programs, and Community Connections small grants to support specific youth development projects and programs. The founders and co-directors of Wellspring did not grow up in Brightmoor but have lived there for 30 years. They mobilize diverse resources from inside and outside of Brightmoor to support the work at Wellspring, and their efforts have created jobs for a few other Brightmoor residents. The staff also includes some people who commute to Brightmoor from homes in the suburbs, such as Peter Lisiecki. Yet could Peter be considered “local” because he has worked in Brightmoor for 25 years? Wellspring’s board of directors includes some Brightmoor residents, and a majority who live elsewhere – some in the city of Detroit, others in suburbs.

This case also offers an example of working long-term across racial lines. Most Wellspring board and staff members are African American, as are most Brightmoor residents and virtually all youth and families involved at Wellspring and Peter’s youth adventure leadership programs. Peter and the Bandrowskis, however, are white.

The Bandrowskis choose to live and work in Brightmoor. Peter chooses to work though not live in Brightmoor. Their adventure leadership development strategy is to help youth gain skills, confidence and awareness to consider and possibly pursue life options both within and beyond Brightmoor, Detroit and southeastern Michigan.

### **From youth to adult leadership**

Some youth start out as youth leadership program participants or Wellspring Kumon students, grow into summer workers, and display so much skill and leadership that they eventually join Wellspring’s permanent staff. DaSean Myree, now 22, is one of these. He was active at Brightmoor Community Center, participating in Detroit Young Citizens, and knew Peter Lisiecki there. He began doing Kumon at Wellspring at age 12, and at 14 or 15 he began working in the summer job program. As a high school junior he was hired as a part-time, year-round staff. “I was the rec guy – I’d hang out with the kids, play games and sports with them.”

DaSean continued working at Wellspring while he went to college. Now he works there fulltime. "I'm the head of Recreation, in charge of all activities after Kumon." DaSean's role is more versatile than that, actually: "I'm the utility knife." He shovels snow and handles custodial chores. He grades papers and does flash cards with kids. He substitutes as teacher for Mr. or Mrs. B when needed. And DaSean has helped lead the Sleeping Bear Dunes camping trip for the past three years.

Consistent with Peter's and Wellspring's relational approach, DaSean focuses on being an inviting, warm person. "My goal is to make this a second home for these kids. We want to be here for you. We want to build friendships, relationships. It's like a mentor, a big brother, a father figure, a mother figure." Through his 10 years at Wellspring, he said, "I've known most of these kids since they were yea-high. I've been like a big brother to them already."

Living and working in Brightmoor, DaSean said, "We often see the bad: abandoned buildings and stray dogs." But at Wellspring, particularly through its outdoor adventures, "We see nature, the stars. And positive relationships among kids. I've seen kids come in with the nastiest attitudes, and I've seen kids go from weakest of the weak to strongest of the strong.

"I enjoy my job," DaSean said. "I use my youth to connect with the kids here. I'm providing a service not just to myself but to the community. It's fulfilling." He is considering earning his college degree in social work, to help him continue and advance in this kind of work.

### **Case 3: Developing Kingdoms in Different Stages (Developing KIDS)** *Building a vital community asset for youth and families*

Developing Kingdoms in Different Stages (Developing KIDS) may be the clearest example of a grassroots neighborhood effort that has grown with Community Connections support into a major community asset. Started by a dedicated young mother and youth worker in the Cody Rouge neighborhood who began leading after-school activities for kids on her porch in the spring of 2005, Developing KIDS now engages several hundred youth in long-term relationships and activities. It runs programs for children ages 5-18 and their families year-round at two locations in the neighborhood. It has a core staff of three, and is a major host of Detroit summer youth employment program workers with 43 teen summer workers in 2015. For the past several years, 100 percent of its youth participants have graduated from high school. Kim Newberry, its founder, president and CEO, has become a significant leader in citywide youth development networks in Detroit with growing national recognition.

#### **Origins**

Kim Newberry grew up in a blue collar Detroit family. Even as a kid, she recalls, she was a leader among her four brothers. Her middle school principal encouraged her to go college, even though her favorite high school teacher told her she was too poor to do that. But Kim was a high achiever. In four and a half years she not only earned her BA in English and pre-law at Central State University in Ohio, she gave birth to her two daughters and married shortly after graduation.

Returning to Detroit, her former middle school principal hired her as a long-term substitute teacher. Kim took teacher training courses at Wayne State University on the side and became a permanent teacher. “Your gift is to work with kids,” her principal told her. “That’s your destiny.”

Kim liked working with kids but wasn’t content with teaching. In 2002-03 she earned a graduate certificate in human resource administration, realizing by then that she wanted to run her own business. She explored starting a janitorial service, hoping to create job opportunities for her unemployed brothers. But that effort did not go well, and in the fall of 2003 she entered law school. During her first semester there she had two discoveries. “I learned that I can do this -- but God had other plans for me,” she recalled. She also discovered she was pregnant with her third child. She left law school and stayed home until her son was six months old.

Then she took a job in mid-2004 as director of prevention services with Alternatives for Girls in Southwest Detroit, leading positive youth development activities for girls ages 5-18. She grew interested in offering programs to boys and to families, too. In 2005 she began leading activities on the porch of her house, and in mid-2006 she incorporated Developing KIDS.

During 2006, Kim also started participating in Skillman Good Neighborhoods meetings in Southwest Detroit where she worked and in Cody Rouge where she lived. She learned of the new Community Connections grant program and met Lisa Leverette. In fact, the first grant that Community Connections awarded, in August 2006, was to Alternatives for Girls for a project that



Kim led. Kim recalled years later that Ed Egnatios, then the Skillman Foundation Good Neighborhoods program officer, encouraged her to become active in Cody Rouge.

In late 2006, Kim went through an excruciating family tragedy that left her a widow. The experience heightened her desire to offer positive experiences for neighborhood children and families, and she increased her commitment to Developing KIDS. She resumed leading activities after school on her porch. “I’d take my van and pick up kids,” she said. “Their parents were people I’d grown up with but were on the wrong path.”

Then, in the summer of 2007, Developing KIDS began to offer programs in the former parochial school attached to St. Suzanne’s Church in Cody Rouge, a building that with Skillman support evolved into the Don Bosco Hall Community Resource Center, a hub for many community organizations and programs. Kim’s gift for working with kids was apparent as Developing KIDS’ participation swelled to 29 children that summer.

Kim wrote her first application for Community Connections support in the fall of 2007. It was declined – but Kim listened to feedback from Lisa and the panel. She revised the proposal and was awarded a \$4,000 grant in March 2008 to support weekly meetings of two groups: one of middle school students and another of high schoolers, both mixed groups of girls and boys.

In her report on that first grant, Kim said that getting boys to enroll was difficult. She and other volunteers “put in several hours driving and walking the streets letting parents and youth know about the program,” she wrote. Kim made a point of building relationships with parents and adult family members along with youth. Part of the difficulty in her view was that “in many single parent homes run by a woman, young males are allowed to do as they please, but the girls are pushed to do something productive.” However, she noted, “After moms dragged the boys in, they were shocked that they had to drag them out.”

### **Rapid growth, 2009-2011**

The next few years were a time of intensive learning and growth for Developing KIDS. Kim voraciously sought out workshops and networking opportunities through Community Connections and other Skillman-supported resources. She welcomed Lisa Leverette as a mentor, and traveled with a Community Connections delegation to a Resident Learning Exchange in San Diego sponsored by the Jacobs Foundation. In 2009, Developing KIDS began partnering with the city’s summer youth employment program. This enabled them to pay some of their experienced teen participants to step into paid staff roles, which in turn allowed Developing KIDS to work with more children. That summer, DK had five teen workers and engaged 57 elementary and middle school youth.

Kim resigned from Alternatives for Girls in late 2009 to concentrate on Developing KIDS. She drew no salary, however, preferring to use funds to make programming available to more children and families. “I thought either I can pay myself to do the work – but then we couldn’t grow,” Kim said. “I didn’t want to charge the kids fees, either. I wanted everyone to be able to participate regardless of how much they could pay or how many children were in their family.” She supported herself and her three children through contract work with other agencies, writing grants and administering projects.

Developing KIDS built its infrastructure. It applied for IRS 501c3 status, to help it qualify for more and larger grants. Kim obtained funds for board training, and the board (along with Kim and other volunteers) began organizing fundraising events such as bake sales and gala dinners.

In early 2010, Kim invited Tenecha “Toy” Bland to interview for a position as youth service coordinator. The two women had met at Alternatives for Girls, where Toy had volunteered as a mentor to youth because she was impressed by Kim’s approach. Toy accepted, mostly on a volunteer basis -- at first Developing KIDS could only afford to pay her for six hours per week. “We get paid for part time hours, but it’s a full-time job – we’re passionate here,” said Toy. Both Toy and Kim brought their daughters to Developing KIDS with them.

Toy’s talent and energy, nurtured by Kim’s mentoring of her, helped DK’s programs to grow. In the after-school program they guided the middle school students to begin mentoring the elementary students. These mentoring groups proved so popular that they kept meeting straight through the summer. With Toy’s leadership, Developing KIDS’ monthly family nights grew from 30 to 75 people per night. Toy is now DK’s director of programs. “She has been a solid rock in the foundation of DK,” said Kim.

The teen girls group that Toy was leading grew interested that spring in the once-a-decade US Census and its implications for the well-being of their community. They won Community Connections support to do a Census outreach project, encouraging three populations typically undercounted to turn in Census forms: people ages 15-25 who were (a) experiencing homelessness (many teens were not living with their parents) (b) had criminal records and/or (c) were unemployed.

The summer program in 2010, bolstered this time by eight summer teen workers plus Toy (and another Community Connections grant), planned for 50 youth but ended up attracting 115. The high school participants organized a business that earned several hundred dollars. Community service was another important theme as the kids organized a “Senior Mixer” for older adults that included lunch, games, dancing and youth performances.

### **Healing from grief, loss and trauma**

In 2010, Developing KIDS began to notice an increasing number of youth dealing with severe stressors. Many were coming from foster homes; others said they often had nothing to eat except when they were at Developing KIDS; a growing number were on medications for mental and emotional distress. “Our grief, loss and trauma groups grew from our teens program,” said Toy. “Teens came in full of emotion. One day, kids at Cody High School had lost a teacher due to a violent incident in the neighborhood. So we talked in a circle.”

Kim’s personal experience as a widow, single mother and survivor of many childhood challenges made her empathetic toward others who were coping with grief, loss and trauma. As adult family members spent time at Developing KIDS waiting for their children after sessions, many of them shared with Kim and Toy about the stressors in their lives, too.

Through active networking, Kim and Toy enlisted three partners to begin offering therapeutic support groups and counseling for children and families: the Ambassadors counseling clinic, the Sand Castles grief support program for children and families affiliated with Henry Ford Hospital,

and the graduate counseling program at Wayne State University run by Dr. Jina Yoon. Lisa Leverette helped Developing KIDS get a grant from the Presbyterian Self-Development of People (SDOP) fund to cover some costs.

Kim and other leaders at Developing KIDS helped these clinicians refine their cultural competence with African American neighborhood residents. Thanks to these modifications and the rapport that Kim and Toy built, the grief and loss groups drew a big turnout, despite the reluctance of many African Americans to participate in mental health services.

Sustaining these partnerships has been difficult. Sand Castles stopped leading support groups in 2013 when their grant ran out. Dr. Yoon retired in 2015, and it was unclear if her successor would continue to place graduate interns at the same rate. Ambassadors discounts its rates but depends on Developing KIDS to fund its groups there.

### **Further growth, 2012-16**

In the past four years, Developing KIDS has continued to grow in many dimensions.

#### ***More staff***

Late in 2012, Developing KIDS added a third person to their core leadership team. Denise Cranford, then 24, had been a peer leader in Kim's groups at Alternatives for Girls during high school. Like many others, she stayed in touch with Kim for years after that. In 2012, after some years at college, she came home and began working at a security company. That was unfulfilling, though, and Kim offered her a part-time job as Youth Service Coordinator at Developing KIDS. The salary was lower, but the work was more appealing. Denise took it.

"It's been a roller coaster ride these three years," Denise reflected in mid-2015. "Over time, I learned how to work better with kids. It helped me evolve tremendously as I learned the Developing KIDS way. I adapted. I have thicker skin now. I deal better with constructive criticism. I have more patience."

Early on, she considered quitting. "I wondered, maybe this is not for me. I was always messing up. But Toy and Kim said, 'No, you're doing well.'"

Denise recalled, "It clicked after I tried to give my two weeks' notice. I was sad – I had built relationships both with staff and with kids. They are watching me. I know I have to do and be my best. I didn't notice my growth, until they did. When they told me I was doing a good job, I could see it then, and I wanted to keep doing it."

Toy affirmed Denise's growth and commitment. "She has stepped up as a leader." In 2015, Denise got married, to a man who also volunteers at Developing KIDS.

Kim's and Toy's daughters grew into larger leadership roles, too, as they matured through high school and into college.

### ***More leader development***

Developing KIDS continued to build its leadership circle, and to emphasize learning and growth for adult leaders as well as youth participants.

- One of Denise's first duties was to go through the Good Neighborhoods Leadership Academy, along with Toy, the DK board president and two parent leaders.
- Kim completed the entire High/Scope training series on youth development, and became a trainer on Child and Youth Care Basics for the Academy of Competent Youth Work. She attended webinars on youth development, donor recruitment and marketing, and workshops on nonprofit fund- and friend-raising.
- Toy completed numerous High/Scope workshops and the 40-hour Child and Youth Care Basics course.
- The entire staff attended a capacity building conference held by the Skillman-supported Cody Rouge-Brightmoor Youth Development Initiative in 2013.
- The organization obtained a grant to pay for board development consultants in 2013. It also created a four-person advisory board in addition to the board of directors which includes six to eight members plus Kim.

In recognition of her exceptional investment in capacity building and her success in implementing organizational growth based on workshop learnings, Kim was honored with the Michigan Growth award for capacity building from the Youth Development Commission in 2012.

### ***More college student interns***

Along with growing its core staff, Developing KIDS continued to build partnerships with area colleges and universities, drawing interns and volunteers to DK. In addition to Dr. Yoon's Wayne State graduate students, interns began coming from Baker College, Marygrove College (through a partnership Community Connections built with Marygrove), Oakland University, Siena Heights University and University of Michigan-Dearborn.

### ***More summer teen workers***

The larger core staff enabled Developing KIDS to take on more summer teen workers, and to offer summer jobs to more of its participants, through the Grow Detroit's Young Talent city program. It hosted 11 summer workers in 2012 and 13 in 2013. During these years, however, it scaled back its summer enrollment to about 75 youth, to maintain quality.

### ***More funding***

From 2011 through 2015, Community Connections continued to support Developing KIDS with annual grants, starting with \$5,000 in 2011 and in 2012. When grants of up to \$10,000 became available in 2013 thanks to increased Kellogg Foundation support of Community Connections, Developing KIDS got yearly grants of \$9,455 to \$10,000 in 2013, 2014, and 2015. Its increasing skill at raising funds from diverse sources meant it didn't need to seek the maximum two grants per year from Community Connections any longer as in earlier years.

In addition to its SDOP grants and grassroots fundraisers, Developing KIDS began attracting grants from other sources. The Junior League of Detroit gave two grants to support family nights. Bright House funded science-technology-engineering-mathematics (STEM) activities.

In 2014, in recognition of its expanded performance and capacity, Developing KIDS became the first Community Connections grantee to win a Skillman Foundation major grant of \$75,000. The grant was renewed in 2015.

### ***More facilities***

After operating primarily out of the Don Bosco Hall Community Resource Center since 2007, Developing KIDS in 2014 began renting a space of its own, a former car wash on Plymouth Road about two miles from Don Bosco Hall. This enabled it to offer programming at two sites: after school on Mondays and Wednesdays at Plymouth and on Tuesdays and Thursdays at Don Bosco Hall, and during the six-week summer season at both sites, 10-5 on Monday through Thursday.

### ***More youth participants***

With two facilities, Developing KIDS could expand its number of summer teen workers and program participants. In 2014, it hosted 25 summer workers, all former program participants, and 100 participants. In 2015, it hosted 43 summer teen workers – 28 from within Developing KIDS plus 15 other Cody High School students assigned by Grow Detroit – and 150 participants.

### **Into the future**

While all this growth is impressive, Kim still is mostly a volunteer CEO. Since 2012 she has held staff positions at Don Bosco Hall, first as program director for the Youth Development Initiative and since 2015 as chief administrator overseeing the YDI and Community Center. Toy and Denise provide most of the day-to-day leadership at Developing KIDS.

Kim continues to serve in Cody Rouge and citywide networks and committees, focused mainly on youth development issues. “If there’s a gap, I look to fill the gaps,” she said. “My heart is to help people.”

Kim hopes to keep growing resources for Developing KIDS so that it can keep expanding its programmatic reach. Attracting more large funders beyond Skillman is one goal; working with her board to build a robust individual donor base is another. She also is open to partnering with schools or other organizations to engage children and families at more sites.

Toy agrees with this vision. “I just want to touch more families,” she said. “We’ve been small, and people don’t know who we are.”

Given her success since 2007, expanding from working by herself with fewer than 30 kids to Developing KIDS’ current scale with multiple staff, sites, partners and hundreds of kids per year, the odds look good that Kim and her colleagues will succeed in expanding its size and impact further. Which will be a good thing for youth and families in Detroit!

## **Case 4: Join In to Revitalize Arab American Neighborhoods (JIRAN) and Chadsey Condon Youth Committee (CCYC)**

*Cultivating young community leaders*

Two closely allied Community Connections groups, Join In to Revitalize Arab American Neighborhoods (JIRAN) and the Chadsey Condon Youth Committee (CCYC), work intentionally to build young people's capacity for community leadership. JIRAN was founded by the large organization ACCESS (Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services) in 2008, partly in response to Skillman's desire to ensure Arab American residents' involvement in Good Neighborhoods efforts. Its name was chosen strategically: "JIRAN" in Arabic means "neighbor."

Anisa Sahoubah, now director of the ACCESS Youth and Education division, was the first coordinator of JIRAN. Aswan Almaktary, a Yemeni American woman who had worked for ACCESS in community engagement in Hamtramck (another Detroit-area community with many Arab American residents), joined as JIRAN assistant coordinator in 2010, and became JIRAN's coordinator in 2011.

### ***Listening to Arab American residents***

JIRAN began as an adult-centered, intergenerational group. Its first step was to reach out and listen to Arab Americans in the Good Neighborhoods. A handful of committed residents were trained as JIRAN community organizers, and in 2009 they surveyed more than 500 Arab Americans across the three southwestern neighborhoods. They learned that people cared about safety, youth recreation, leadership and beautification.

One major concern of Arab American families was the safety of children walking to and from school, particularly when they had to cross busy streets such as Michigan Avenue in Chadsey Condon. In 2009 a student was hit by a car and injured in one of these crossings. Three fathers came to JIRAN and were coached on how to obtain a grant to pay for crossing guards at three dangerous intersections. Having learned of Lisa Leverette and the Community Connections grant program through their Good Neighborhoods networking, in April 2010 JIRAN submitted an application for a Safe Crossing Project to place crossing guards at these intersections. This grant was especially meaningful and empowering because the residents themselves wrote it.

### ***Using the Community Connections grant process to build leaders***

"The group that came up with this project is genuinely concerned about the safety of the youth and felt empowered when they realized that there is something that they can do to improve safety in their community," Anisa wrote in the application. "Together, this group identified the streets of concern, created a plan for identifying guards, discussed the training that each guard must attend, and, with the help of ACCESS, talked about ways of sustaining this project beyond the grant period. This is the group's first grant request, and they are learning the process of applying for grants, and what their role will be as grantees. If the project is funded, the JIRAN organizers will be actively involved in hiring the guards, supervising them, facilitating their training, and in ensuring that grant funds are expended. They have been involved from the

onset; they have selected this project, created the project design, and participated in putting the budget together.” This project was funded and the work began immediately.

The Safe Crossing Project strengthened relationships with two schools in Chadsey Condon with high Arab American enrollment, Universal Academy and O. W. Holmes School, and the students and families involved there. Later, the project also focused on students crossing to Priest Elementary and Middle School. ACCESS also coordinated a successful effort to obtain a million-dollar Safe Routes to School grant from the state. This paid for street and sidewalk repairs near several Chadsey Condon schools. (Aswan had also organized a Safe Routes to School project in Hamtramck, bringing together public schools, charter schools and community organizations.)

Along with engaging Arab American residents, JIRAN’s vision was to build relationships between Arab Americans and their diverse neighbors. “That’s what ‘join in’ means,” said Aswan.

“We wanted to bring multiple communities together,” said Anisa. They encouraged adults and youth to participate in neighborhood planning and governance boards, and began building relationships with schools, nonprofit organizations and city officials in the neighborhoods. Aswan herself became active in the Chadsey Condon Community Organization, chairing its Safe and Healthy Committee.

In 2010 and 2011, JIRAN volunteers participated in neighborhood clean-up, beautification and gardening projects in Cody Rouge and Chadsey Condon, working with Cody Rouge Community Action Alliance, Chadsey Condon Community Organization, and other organizations such as Tawheed Academy. Such hands-on projects, and the planning that goes into them, are an easy way to build relationships among diverse people, according to Aswan, because “everyone gets used to being together in the same room.”

That group of Arab American fathers has continued to run the crossing guards project. In 2013 they affiliated it with another grassroots group to which they belong, the Yemen American Benevolent Association (YABA). Since then, YABA has received three grants from Community Connections to continue the crossing guards project.

### **Evolving toward youth leadership**

Meanwhile, by 2010 most of the leaders in JIRAN were high school youth, and JIRAN decided to make youth leadership development its core focus. “We found more energy in youth, and we wanted to build for the future,” explained Aswan.

Anisa elaborated, “The adults were less focused, didn’t attend as many meetings, were less confident in their abilities to make change. They were discouraged by decades of having limited impact. But the youth had lots more energy. Maybe they were less jaded. It was easier to get them involved. They had more time, too – many adults had two jobs and were busy and tired.”

JIRAN’s main focus is on building cross-cultural relationships among young leaders, starting with a series of dialogue events over the past six years. These dialogues, designed and led by high school leaders for their peers, bring Arab American, Latino, African American, white and other youth “into conversation about identity, stereotyping and the power that they have in their communities.” Participants have constructed action plans for confronting prejudice in their

schools and communities. The first Dialogue in 2010 was largely designed by adults, but then youth evaluated how the Dialogue went and they went on to re-design it in subsequent years. “We’ve been deliberate in making sure it’s youth-led,” said Anisa.

### ***Encouraged to grow by Community Connections***

In the spring of 2012, JIRAN applied for a second Community Connections grant, this time to support their third annual Youth Dialogue. “We were able to expand in both numbers and scope because of Prevention Network support,” said Aswan (Prevention Network is the organization that operates Community Connections with Skillman Foundation support). “In the first two years it was smaller, and worked with just one group. We expanded with Community Connections support. Lisa Leverette encouraged us. She told us, ‘If you work with more, we’ll support you.’ So we expanded into Southwest, Chadsey Condon, and Cody Rouge.

“Lisa is fantastic. She encourages us to expand. I can talk with her. She’s open to discussion. She’s like a guide to me.”

The 2012 Dialogue drew on several partners. Forty-five youth came from the three neighborhoods via Chadsey Condon Youth Committee, Cody Rouge Community Action Alliance Youth Council, and Partnership for Youth in Southwest Detroit, as well as JIRAN. Michigan Roundtable for Diversity and Inclusion led small group discussions on “Diversity and Inclusion 101.” MOSAIC Youth Theatre performed an original play, “Speak for Yourself: Young Detroiters Speak About Race,” with discussion following. Welcoming Michigan prepared young leaders from JIRAN and Partnership for Youth to facilitate small mixed group dialogues on people’s own experiences around race. Lunch included Arabic, African-American and Mexican food. Later in the day, students gathered by neighborhood to create action plans to take back to their schools and communities. The day closed with a visit to the Arab American Museum, where students learned and performed the Debkka dance together.

The Youth Dialogue has continued to evolve with Community Connections support as JIRAN’s young leaders have had new ideas. In April 2013, the number of participants was held to 30 but they came from 10 different organizations across the three neighborhoods. At the close of that day, participants were invited to join an ongoing Youth Planning Committee for future Dialogues.

The new YPC created a two-session version for 15 participants which could be hosted by different organizations. The first session was designed by the Committee and the second session planned by the first session’s participants, so that they could claim ownership and exercise their own creative leadership abilities. This version was conducted six different times from November 2013 through April 2014, at different organizations across the neighborhoods.

In 2015 the design was revamped again, to enable participants to delve even deeper. It offered two five-session series, each for 30 participants. Sessions took place on Saturday afternoons, every other week from late April through June, with each session located at a different school or organization in the three neighborhoods. “We feel that it is essential for youth to visit each other’s communities and experience their cultures firsthand,” explained their Community Connections application. Sessions were led by youth who had experience in previous Dialogues. This is part of JIRAN’s strategy for youth development: first participate and become



comfortable with what we do here, and then, as you grow in understanding, step into larger leadership roles.

<b>Evolution of JIRAN Youth Dialogues, 2012-2015</b>			
<u>April 2012</u>	<u>April 2013</u>	<u>Nov 2013 - April 2014</u>	<u>April - June 2015</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1-day event</li> <li>• 45 participants</li> <li>• 4 organizational sponsors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1-day event</li> <li>• 30 participants</li> <li>• 10 organizational sponsors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2-session series</li> <li>• 15 participants per series</li> <li>• Offered 6 times at different organizations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5-session series</li> <li>• 30 participants per series</li> <li>• Each series held at 5 different locations so that participants visited multiple communities</li> </ul>

***Allied spaces: JIRAN and Chadsey Condon Youth Committee***

While JIRAN continues to evolve its youth dialogue projects, the Chadsey Condon Youth Committee has emerged as an allied space in which teens can build their community leadership abilities and act on their interests. The Youth Committee was founded by JIRAN youth who wanted to engage a broader range of young people, both Arab Americans and others. It is affiliated with the Chadsey Condon Community Organization. Aswan Almakary is active on the CCCO board, and she is the primary adult partner and supporter of its Youth Committee. Many youth in JIRAN also choose to participate in CCYC. In 2013 the Youth Committee collaborated with CCCO to do “Sensational Summer Clean-Ups” in the neighborhood.

In both JIRAN and CCYC, the approach to developing young leaders begins with listening and building relationships, encouraging youth to speak up for themselves and talk about what’s important to them. One of the early leaders of CCYC reminded Aswan, “Youth won’t come until we address issues that youth care about!” Aswan also encourages students to take their educational dreams seriously.

This led in 2014 to CCYC starting a “College Prep and Community Leadership Initiative” with Community Connections support. The main leader of this project was a young woman, Hanan Yahya, who had started participating in JIRAN in 2009 as a high school freshman. By 2012 she was a key planner of the JIRAN Dialogue. In 2013, by now a college student at University of Michigan, she became an intern at Chadsey Condon Community Organization and helped lead the Sensational Summer Clean-ups project.

The 2014 College Prep and Community Leadership Initiative reflected the passionate priorities of Hanan and Chadsey Condon Youth Committee members. It included a preparation course for the ACT college entrance exam, taught by the American Association of Yemeni Students and Professionals (AAYS), and tours of four local colleges (Henry Ford College, University of Michigan at Dearborn, Michigan State University at Detroit, and Wayne State University). It also included a series of youth nights with speakers on topics related to college, career and life success, and also fun social activities. Speakers were recruited based on findings from a youth

survey conducted by the Youth Committee. The Initiative also included a set of youth leadership and civic engagement trainings, and two community clean-up projects. In one clean-up project, the youth led a workday cleaning up a public space in the neighborhood. In the other, they collaborated with residents of six streets who asked the youth for guidance. The Youth Committee helped the adults create and pass out flyers, and contacted nonprofit organizations and city offices to provide supplies for the clean-up efforts.

CCYC reported that 72 youth and 17 adults participated in this initiative. About two thirds of the youth were Arab Americans, with African Americans and Latinos each comprising about 15 percent and one white youth involved. Those on the Youth Committee met weekly to make sure everything was coordinated. Aswan reflected, “This was the first project they did as the Committee leaders...The level of Youth Committee commitment in all events really surprised me. They took the lead and worked hard to ensure the success of each event. This project taught them leadership: how to be responsible for the different stages of holding an event from planning to creating flyers and recruiting youth and leading the projects.”

A rhythm was starting to emerge in which CCYC College Prep and Community Leadership efforts alternated with JIRAN Youth Dialogues on Diversity efforts. Many youth, along with Aswan, are active in both CCYC and JIRAN.

CCYC conducted a second version of the College Prep and Community Leadership Initiative in 2015, starting in July after the JIRAN Dialogues finished. Reflecting the interests of the youth who were leading CCYC by now – including America Yahya, Hanan’s younger sister – the 2015 version offered an SAT prep course, college tours, and youth nights that combined educational speakers with social activities. This year, however, instead of community service projects the initiative included three fun field trips for students who attended the youth nights. Even more youth participated this year, 80 in total.

### ***The JIRAN and CCYC approach to developing young leaders***

Guided by Aswan, JIRAN and CCYC nurture youth to develop their community leadership abilities through observation and participation in diverse community settings. Aswan encourages students to participate in their schools: get involved in student government, National Honor Society and so on. Through these organizations, they can do fundraisers that can build up resources. She coaches them to approach school officials boldly, asking for what they think they deserve.

She also teaches them to learn how to navigate community and institutional systems. “If the principal doesn’t listen to us, it’s not going to stop there!” She advises youth on how to navigate beyond the principal, if necessary.

JIRAN and CCYC both expect youth to volunteer in the community: to be of service, and to learn what organizations, programs, and groups there are in the community and what different people care about. So these youth participate at Bridging Communities, Alternatives for Girls, CCCO projects, and other venues. Aswan also welcomes youth to go with her to community meetings such as with the City Council member and to forums on receiving refugees (an important topic among Arab and Muslim Americans). They are active in Partnership for Youth

activities -- attending its monthly meetings, steering committee meetings, meetings of its grants review committee, and participating in its projects and trainings.

Aswan coaches youth to listen to what a range of people and youth are saying, and to care for their Detroit community. She says she encourages them “not to run away from Detroit and its problems, but go to college and return to Detroit to face its problems.” Aswan encourages her young leaders to learn how to navigate their community physically, too: to recognize vacant parcels that could be used for gardens, and to notice the parking problems that have local businesses concerned.

Along with these voice and navigational skills, Aswan coaches youth to bring in other people and learn how to work with others. “You can’t achieve as much by yourself!” she reminds them. Don’t try to control others, she advises; you must care about them. According to another adult active in Chadsey Condon and Southwest Detroit youth development who has known Aswan for several years, “She’s always had an ear to listen for what young people want. She’s always had that value: Listen to what they want, and help them get there.” She “relates to young people on an equal peer level,” in his view, “yet there’s an inherent level of respect for her by them. Because of what she’s done, she has a history that youth respect...And she communicates with them in a respectful way – not an authoritative tone. She allows young people to be the leadership to make it happen.” Over the years, he has seen her grow. “She has a learning mind...She’s moved from an active adult support to walking with them.” Now, he says, she will “intentionally create spaces to let them lead.”

When youth first show interest in JIRAN or CCYC, Aswan encourages them simply to attend and observe. Periodically, JIRAN will hold a training for new participants, to explain “this is what we expect, this is what it means to be a leader,” Aswan said. As youth gain understanding, they can move into leadership roles. “Last year’s participants can be this year’s leaders.”

One key way that Aswan helps young leaders grow is by letting them shadow her as she participates in community activities. “There are always a youth or two that are constantly with Aswan,” notes the community observer, naming a series of eight young people he’s seen over the past five years. “They self-select; Aswan doesn’t select them. They make themselves available to go to the spaces Aswan goes to,” such as Partnership for Youth, Chadsey Condon Community Organization, and a city immigration task force that she has recently joined.

As youth get familiar with these spaces and the people, issues and processes in them, Aswan advocates for them to play larger public roles. In 2014, the Youth Development Alliance held a conference. Three hundred people attended its dinner, and young people including two from CCYC served as masters of ceremony. “They practiced, rehearsed – and they were the highlight of the night,” this observer recalls. One of these two CCYC/JIRAN leaders has become “my go-to person,” he said – the one he contacts whenever anything arises. “She embraces it. It’s natural youth development: because she’s been in these different spaces, she’s grown to be more comfortable in them.”

Currently, Aswan and two CCYC youth are participating in 482 Forward, a Detroit-wide youth-led effort with adult allies which is working to create a model for youth organizing around education. When the 482 Forward group decided to hold a retreat in December 2015, Aswan

said, “I asked for my two youth to co-lead the retreat with adults. It will be good for other youth to see these youth using their voice.”

Aswan intentionally uses the smaller, safer spaces of JIRAN and CCYC meetings to help young leaders prepare for larger public roles. Youth plan the agendas and chair these meetings, with support from Aswan. And she asked the two young leaders to polish their 482 Forward retreat leadership plans at a JIRAN meeting two weeks before the retreat.

### **Lessons from JIRAN and CCYC**

This case illustrates the complexity in place-based, resident-centered work. Sometimes large professional agencies and skilled paid staff who live outside of the chosen neighborhoods make important contributions to surfacing and strengthening resident engagement and leadership in the chosen neighborhoods. Cultural affinity networks that reach across neighborhood boundaries play a vital role in facilitating resident engagement and leadership in neighborhood affairs.

JIRAN came into being because Skillman asked a major service agency based in a suburb to help get residents of the Good Neighborhoods involved in Good Neighborhoods activities. Both JIRAN and Chadsey Condon Youth Committee owe much of their effectiveness to the contributions of Anisa and especially Aswan, who are longtime ACCESS staff members doing this as part of their job.

These two organizations guide participants both to become more active and skilled in their own neighborhood and ethnic enclave, and to learn about and participate in institutions and networks that reach across neighborhood lines. These include citywide and even regional, state and national systems for accessing opportunity, developing capacity and solving problems. This big, strategic, multi-layered vision is part of what attracts youth and adult residents to participate in JIRAN and CCYC.

Community Connections grants provided vital resources that enabled JIRAN and CCYC to conduct meaningful community action projects and to build competence and confidence through the experience of these projects. Community Connections staff encouraged JIRAN and CCYC leadership to think bigger, reach across neighborhood and ethnic lines, and participate and wield leadership in larger systems. Other Skillman-supported resources, such as the University of Michigan Technical Assistance Center, also provided useful training, guidance and networking opportunities for these grassroots groups and leaders.

This case also shows how community leadership grows through experience, accelerated by wise mentorship: through the experience of taking one’s own ideas and concerns seriously; finding interests in common with neighbors through listening and dialogue; devising and implementing action plans with one’s colleagues, mentors and allies. Leadership grows as people figure out where resources and opportunities can be found and how to access these, and when people use safe, close-to-home spaces to prepare for public roles in larger, more distant spaces. People learn by reflecting on and evaluating these experiences; and they grow further as they go through the cycle of discernment, outreach, planning, action and evaluation again -- adjusting or building fresh plans as they combine what they are learning with the callings of their personal, family and community commitments.

## **Appendix B: People interviewed for this report**

### **Amistad case study**

- Randall Mosley, leader
- Jackie Conley, leader
  
- Susan Hooks-Brown, New Paradigm College Preparatory Academy
- LuVenia Perkins, New Paradigm College Preparatory Academy
- Mildred Jones, Perry Outreach Center
- Father Ed Zaorsky, Saints Andrew and Benedict Church

### **Brightmoor/ Wellspring Youth Adventure Leadership Programs case study**

- Peter Lisiecki, leader and Wellspring youth development specialist
- DeSean Myree, Wellspring director of recreation
- Cherie Bandrowski, Wellspring co-founder and co-director
  
- Jason Carter, youth participant
- Teddy Chandler, youth participant
- Demetrius Metcalf, youth participant
- Jamal Mitchell, youth participant
- Zarria Roberts, youth participant
  
- Sharla Carter, parent and Wellspring staff
- Sylvia Collins, parent
- Almeda White, parent
  
- Dorel Hall, PEEPS

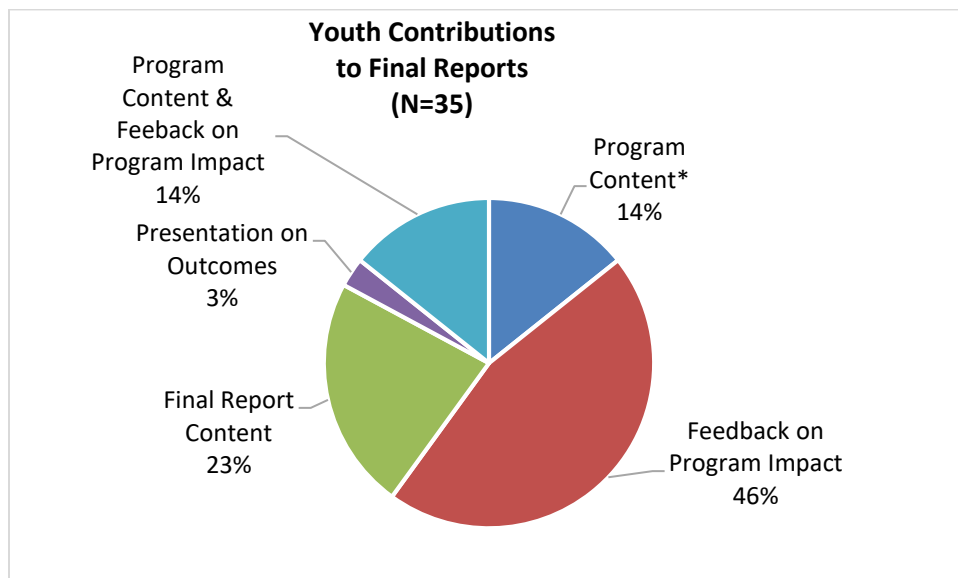
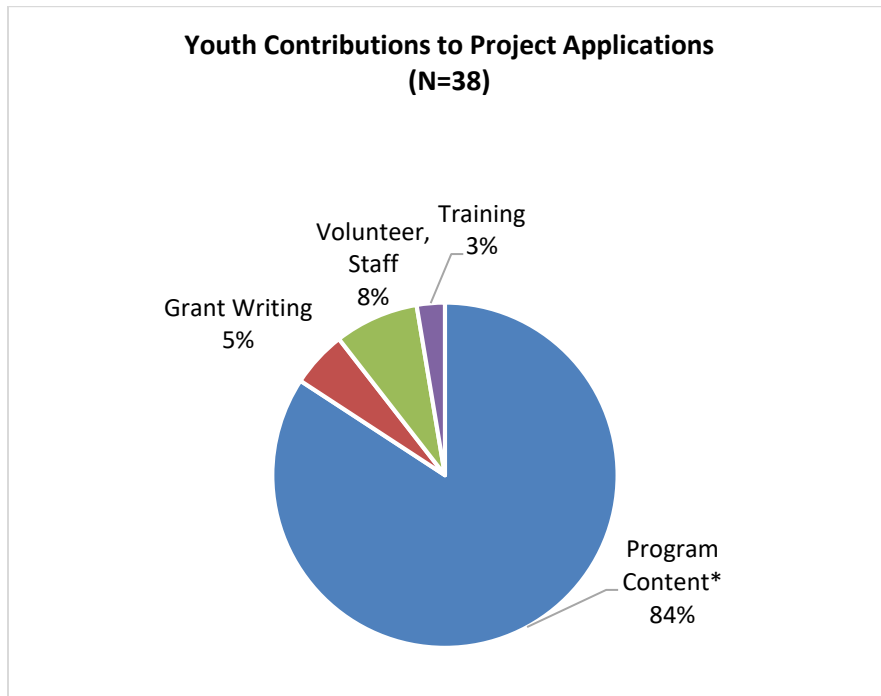
### **Developing KIDS case study**

- Kim Newberry, founder, president and CEO
- Tenecha “Toy” Bland, program director
- Denise Cranford Burke, youth services coordinator
  
- Semaj Moody, youth participant
- Christopher Suggs-Rivera, youth participant
- [2 young men interviewed by Ebony on Sept. 1, 2015]
  
- Cynthia Caldwell, parent
- James Coakley, parent
- Cheryl Suggs, parent
  
- Sara Plachta Elliott, Youth Development Resource Center

**JIRAN/ CCYC case study**

- Aswan Almakary, ACCESS JIRAN coordinator
- Anisa Sahoubah, ACCESS director of youth and education
  
- Ahmed Nasher, youth participant
- Alhan Nasr, youth participant
- America Yahya, youth participant
  
- Raya Yahya, parent
  
- Al Nasir, Yemeni American Benevolent Association
- Terry Whitfield, Southwest Partnership for Youth

## Appendix C: Youth contributions to project applications and reports





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