

Helping Cole Kids Succeed, continued from page 2

Making Connections—Denver. “It’s about building a web of relationships so that parents and teachers have a variety of ways to connect to the organizing work in the school. The parent liaison can help with the communication and connections that are essential to maintaining a healthy system.”

Reaching preschool children

Making Connections has also conducted research into the needs of family and friends caring for very young children to make sure caregivers get the help they need.

A door-to-door survey and focus groups were conducted to learn how to help Cole kids ages 0-5 be healthy and prepared to succeed in school. The results show that many home-based care providers need or want more resources and training on how to care for young children.

All caregivers were interested in help on such topics as preparing healthy meals on a small budget and how to make the house safe for children. About one-third of the childcare providers read to the children in their care.

“We need to read with them and play with them,” said Cole resident Ana Luisa Gallardo, a mother of two who sometimes watches her friends’ children. “When I play with my daughter, I ask her how many letters a word has, or to bring me the blue plate.”

“The focus groups showed that parents were feeling inadequate in a number of areas, from the food they provide to the toys and materials they give the kids in their care,” said Ophelia Mejia, director of the Early Excellence program.

As a result of the research findings, possible next steps include:

- Work with at-home childcare providers on mentoring, training and specific programs.
- Organize a yearly community event for at-home care providers where they can receive help and learn about classes and programs available.
- Develop a program where resident leaders visit at-home care providers regularly to determine whether the provider needs any more information or resources.

One thing nearly everyone agreed on was summed up by resident Maria Pasillas, at-home mother of two: “We need to start early. We are our children’s first teachers. And, most important of all, they need love—all of them. You need to take care of all the kids as if they are your own baby.”

For more information about the Cole neighborhood’s efforts on early school success, contact Emily Bustos of Making Connections—Denver at 303-825-6246.

What can YOU do?

Children are born learners. Here are some ways you can help your child, infant to age five, get ready for school.

- ✔ Talk to your children, even before they can talk back.
- ✔ Explain what you are doing, even while doing simple chores.
- ✔ Count everything: fingers and toes, forks, steps, cars.
- ✔ Play with your children: dig in the dirt, build with blocks, color and draw, play hide and seek or peek-a-boo.
- ✔ Read to your children. This is good to do even before they can talk to you.
- ✔ Read books, street signs, grocery lists, labels on food, a bedtime story.
- ✔ Sing songs to and with your children.
- ✔ Get regular check-ups and shots for your children.
- ✔ Encourage your children to ask questions.
- ✔ Give your children lots of praise and hugs.

**Making Connections Goal:
Children enter school ready to learn, succeed in school, and leave school equipped to enter the world of work or succeed in higher education.**

What Is Early Excellence?

The Early Excellence program works to increase student learning and achievement by helping parents prepare their young children for school.

How old does my child have to be to participate?

Early Excellence is open to all children ages 0-5, before they enter kindergarten, and to pregnant mothers. Proof of citizenship is not required.

Which schools have Early Excellence?

There are currently Early Excellence programs at four Denver Public Schools: Fairview, Harrington, Maria Mitchell and Wyatt-Edison.

How much does it cost?

It’s free! It’s actually paid for by a grant from the Piton Foundation.

What does the program offer?

Free programs every week, such as early learning groups, field trips, parent training workshops, home visits, toy and book lending, and kindergarten classroom visits.

How do I get more information?

Call Ophelia Mejia at 303-825-6246. Information at www.piton.org.

Find out more by visiting the Web

The Denver Public Schools Task Force on Early Education and School Readiness has prepared a report, *Ready for Kindergarten*. It describes the types of early skills and experiences children need to succeed. The report was produced with support from Making Connections (Annie E. Casey Foundation), the Piton Foundation and the Donnell-Kay Foundation. For a copy, go to <http://deesr.dpsk12.org> or call 720-423-8207.

New information has been added to the Making Connections—Denver website, www.makingconnectionsdenver.org. Visit “What’s New” to learn about the outcomes Making Connections seeks to achieve for residents and neighborhoods.

New Workforce Strategy Aims for More, Better Jobs

Making Connections—Denver and Mile High United Way have embarked on an exciting partnership to help residents in Making Connections neighborhoods climb up the career ladder. The goal is living wage jobs for community members. The strategy includes employer partners and education partners, along with other community organizations. It seeks to close the earnings gap through a two-step approach.

Moving up

The first step is to help entry-level workers with training and education so that they can move up the ladder at work. The second part is to fill those now-vacant jobs with other workers from Making

Connections neighborhoods.

“This is in direct response to what residents want,” explained Hi Howard of the Piton Foundation.

Howard works with Making Connections residents who

guide the Family Economic Success initiatives for Making Connections—Denver. “With a good, living wage job, so many other things then become possible.”

The workforce strategy combines work on the ground that Family Economic Success has started with Community College of Denver, Emily Griffith Opportunity School and social networks and combines it with a Mile High United Way program



called the Women Economic Security Agenda, or WESA. This program pulls together many private and public resources so that women who are stuck in low wage jobs can obtain training, education and support that lead to living wage jobs.

Gaile Weisbly, who runs WESA, has seen the results first hand. “Remarkable things happen when people achieve economic security. It affects the entire family. Kids see their parents studying and working for a better opportunity, and they study more too. It changes that cycle of struggle for the family.”

Expanding the Program

This new workforce program is an extension of WESA, to help both men and women who live in Making Connections neighborhoods.

So far, funding partners include Making Connections—Denver, Mile High United Way and the Women’s Foundation. Education partners include Community College of Denver, the Clayton Foundation and Metropolitan State College of Denver.

Employer partners will include large organizations where opportunities for training and promotion exist, and Making Connections residents are already employed. “We want to focus our efforts on employers where residents are already having some job success,” Howard explained.

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New Workforce Strategy, continued from page 1

Community Support

Key to the workforce strategy is another Making Connections—Denver initiative, building strong social networks. “We’re not simply putting people into jobs,” Howard explains. “We’re providing ways for them to stay connected with both people who can provide guidance and fellow neighbors who have similar goals.”

**Making Connections Goal:
Families feel economically secure, with stable
employment and income to meet basic needs.**

Howard expects the workforce program to ramp up after the first of the year. Once all the pieces are in place, Making Connections residents will have increased work and education opportunities.

For more information about the new workforce strategy, contact Hi Howard at the Piton Foundation, 303-825-6246, or at howard@piton.org

How it works

A woman we’ll call Maria lives in the Baker neighborhood. She has had a job for about six months. While it is a good job, she wants more. But to get a promotion, she needs more training. Through the new workforce strategy, Maria will get the training she needs and get the promotion she wants.

With better pay and better work, Maria’s life is better, and so is her family’s. The job Maria started out in is now empty, but her neighbor, Richard, is interested in the job. Through the new workforce program, Richard receives support so that he can apply for and get the job that Maria once had. Next, he too can receive training to get a promotion. And so on.

Campaign Strives for Good Jobs at Gates Site

Better paying jobs may be available for Making Connections residents in the near future. The Front Range Economic Strategy Center (FRESC), through a grant from Making Connections—Denver, has launched the Campaign for Responsible Development to focus on one idea: that if our tax dollars are helping to pay for private development projects, community residents should be paid back with affordable housing, good paying jobs with benefits and a clean environment.

The campaign is currently focusing on the \$1 billion redevelopment of the old Gates Rubber factory site near the Baker and La Alma/Lincoln Park neighborhoods. About 900

construction jobs per year are anticipated as buildings are torn down and new ones built. Once the development is complete, 1,150 permanent new jobs are expected.

The City of Denver has a First Source hiring policy, where local residents would have first priority in getting hired and trained for all jobs.

For more information about the campaign and how you can find out about possible job opportunities at the former Gates site, please contact the campaign organizers: Julie Gonzales, 303-477-6111 x17 or Katherine Hoff 303-477-6111 x15.

Cole Residents Prepare Kids for School Success

Cole residents now have more help to make sure their children are prepared to succeed in school. The Cole neighborhood is a Making Connections—Denver demonstration site on early school success. If the new strategies are effective, some may be used in other neighborhoods. Work is under way at elementary schools and with young children not yet in school.

A parent liaison is coming on board at each of three elementary schools: Harrington, Maria Mitchell and Fairview. These new staff provide another way for parents and teachers to communicate and connect with each other.

These new positions are the results of efforts by Metropolitan Organizations for People (MOP), principals at the three schools, Making Connections—Denver and the Early Excellence program, which helps parents and caregivers prepare their young children for school.

The liaisons will help bring together the many groups and forums already at work in the schools, explained Emily Bustos, deputy site coordinator of



Early Excellence, which involves parents and children, is one way to help prepare young children for school.

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From Laundry to Litter, Sun Valley Residents Are Taking Action

Residents of the Sun Valley neighborhood are knee-deep in a number of projects—all designed to make their community a better place to live.

A Sun Valley Laundry

Topping the list is bringing a laundry facility to the residents of Sun Valley Homes. As it stands now, very few of the Sun Valley Homes have a dryer because the units are equipped with 110-volt outlets, which accommodate only stackable washers and dryers. Most residents have a washer but end up hanging their laundry on their cabinets to dry in the winter and out on a line to dry in the summer. “If you hang your clothes outside to dry, you need to keep a watchful eye out to make sure



The lack of a laundry facility led Sun Valley resident Sharon Boyd to get involved.

nothing is stolen,” says resident Sharon Boyd, who has lived in Sun Valley with her four daughters for 12 years. The alternative is a 15-minute bus ride away—there are no commercial laundry facilities anywhere in the Sun Valley neighborhood.

The difficulty of getting such basic needs as laundry met led Boyd to get involved. She has passed out fliers to her neighbors and worked to focus leaders on the laundry issue. “A laundromat is just one of many things that this community needs,” Boyd says. Reliable public transportation and access to a grocery store are also basic needs. “But we’ve got to take this one step at a time.

DHA Seeks Solution

The community has tried to get laundry facilities at Sun Valley Homes several times in the last 30 years. Recently the Denver Housing Authority (DHA) agreed to look for a solution. As a result of the steady involvement of the Sun Valley Coalition, the DHA agreed to study whether an unused maintenance building at 10th Avenue and Decatur Street could be used as a laundromat. “As a group, we have power,” Boyd believes. “If we residents come together, we can make things happen.” She has focused on the laundry facility for a year, ever since she was contacted by Metropolitan Organizations for People (MOP). With support from Making Connections—Denver, MOP has provided community organizing assistance to the Sun Valley neighborhood since 2000.

Projects Helping Children

In addition to a laundry facility, the Sun Valley Coalition is focused on projects to help children. This is fitting since more than half of all residents are under 18. The coalition includes Sun Valley Youth Center, Sun Valley Neighborhood Association, Sun Valley Homes, Decatur Place and Fairview Elementary. They are working on a number of projects, including one to spruce up play areas. And the kids themselves are the ones taking the lead. With help from the DHA, which provided T-shirts, safety vests and trash-pickers, the Sun Valley corps of

**Making Connections Goal:
Residents succeed in advocating for their community.**

Trashbusters is taking a big bite out of litter in the neighborhood. Participants spend a Saturday morning each month on the grounds collecting trash. “I decided to do this because I want something better for my community,” explained 13-year-old Jocelin Espinoza. An eighth-grader at KIPP Sunshine Peak Academy, Espinoza came up with the idea for Trashbusters. “It’s pretty hard to feel good about your community if it looks trashy.” So Espinoza and her friends have been working to recruit fellow Sun Valley residents—youth and adults—to spend some time cleaning. As Phil Kaspar, president of the Sun Valley Coalition, says, “It’s all about taking pride in the community.”

To find out more about the Sun Valley Coalition, contact MOP organizer Sandra Konta at 720-338-7868 or by e-mail at Sandra@mopdenver.org.



The lack of dryers means residents have to hang their laundry out to dry. In the winter, residents string their clothes throughout their homes to dry.