

## Find Out What Will Work: Plan to Help Children and Families Thrive

What will work to get the results you want for your children, your family and your neighborhood? There are many things that can make your neighborhood stronger and many places to look for ideas. To put together a plan that will work, look at all the information and get creative. This section provides examples of strategies that neighborhoods are using to improve the lives of their children, families and other residents. Here, you will learn:

1. **How to find out what is likely to work in your neighborhood** – taking a look at the tried, the true, and new ideas.
2. **How to put your ideas into a plan for results** – working with each other to develop a general blueprint for a stronger neighborhood and a detailed action plan.
3. **How you can boost the chances that your neighborhood plan will work**--.questions to think about and steps to take.

"You are never given a wish without also being given the power to make it come true. You may have to work for it, however."

-Richard Bach

"Unless commitment is made, there are only promises and hopes; but no plans."

-Peter Drucker

# 1. What Will Work to Make Your Neighborhood a Better Place for Kids and Families?

Before you set off to change the neighborhood, you need to know what is likely to work. Taking the time to gather information for your plan is well worth the effort. Look before you leap: Try to figure out where the road will take you.

## Questions to Guide You

### 1. What do your neighbors think will work to achieve the results they want?

**Keep talking with your neighbors about the changes they want.**

What do individuals who residents trust and look up to think will accomplish the changes you want?

### 2. What has worked in similar neighborhoods?

**Find neighborhoods that are a lot like yours where people have worked together to improve their lives.**

Were the results they wanted similar to yours?

What worked for them?

What activities, resources and programs did they use?

### 3. What's missing and what is already in place in your neighborhood?

**Use what you've learned about your neighborhood – facts and figures, a resource map and other information.**

When you compare what has worked in other places with what your neighborhood has in place, what's missing?

What resources do you have that you can use in new ways?

### 4. What is most likely to work in your neighborhood?

**Put together all these possibilities and work together to figure out what has the best chances for accomplishing the results your neighborhood wants.**

When you look at what has worked in other places, what seems like it would work in your neighborhood?

What steps are the best fit with the results you and your neighbors want, your potential resources, and your neighborhood challenges?

## ***Ideas to Consider: The Tried, the True and Beyond***

People often feel most comfortable sticking with tried and true activities and programs. But this is also a chance to be creative! Here are some ideas and examples to consider.

► ***Reward People for Trying: Encourage Individuals to Make Positive Changes.***

You can offer rewards and incentives such as a scholarship fund for young people who complete high school on time. Personal attention and recognition are other powerful forms of encouragement.

A Des Moines, Iowa, bank has become a partner with a local elementary school to improve students' reading skills. Bank employees go to the school twice each week to read with students. The bank also started a "Save a Book" program by providing a book drop inside the lobby where employees and customers can donate books for the kids. Each year, the bank donates cash to the school principal to take students for a scenic train ride as a reward for their hard work and reading progress.

► ***Each One Teach One.***

People often learn best from others like themselves – spreading success from one individual to another and from one neighborhood to another.

*Our Piece of the Pie* is part of Hartford, Connecticut's plan for increasing residents' long-term attachment to good jobs. The community uses youth-led businesses to help young people get a start in the world of work. Teens are teamed with other young people, local business people who volunteer as mentors, and youth development professionals. The results? Ninety-six percent of program graduates are in school and/or employed.

*River Wrights Boat Builders* is one of the Hartford businesses where young people learn precision skills for building boats and other small wooden crafts. At the same time, they gain valuable work experience and life skills like team work, decision-making, and problem-solving. The boats are sold or donated to non-profit groups. Other youth-run businesses are a recording studio, drum making and performances, a local newspaper, an art production company, and a manicure and nail design business.

► ***Polish Your Treasures: Improve Existing Resources.***

Neighbors can work together to find strengths and positives, spread the word about help that's available, and improve neighborhood resources. There are countless ways you can make what you already have even better! For example, you might start a time dollars bank for people interested in exchanging their time to get help they need, ask the local library to add a special section and programs on parenting, offer workshops that help residents become qualified to offer quality child care in their homes, or hold a diversity training session for staff of local programs.

People in Hartford's Southend neighborhood started *Computers 4 Kids* to provide students

of all ages with access to computers and to help them gain the skills they need for the future. The group encourages businesses and others to donate used computers, refurbishes them, gives the equipment to participants, and provides computer training. Foundations, the state department of education and a local bank help by providing funds.

► ***Get Out the Word.***

Besides word of mouth, ads, posters, brochures, public service announcements, speakers, information hotlines, plays, street theatre, billboards, and murals are all ways to spread information around the neighborhood.

People in San Diego's Logan Heights decided that one of their priorities was to stop unprotected sex among young people. Six residents trained to be *Promotoras* (peer advocates). They organized small *Vecino-a-Vecino* (neighbor-to-neighbor) workshops in people's homes. Larger community education workshops were held in schools and other community centers. These meetings focused on factual information — including the workings of the human body, adolescent development, and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy. Because of traditional cultural reluctance to talk about sexuality, residents were encouraged to write their questions. The questions were then answered at a follow-up session. More than 1,300 adults participated in the workshops.

In Des Moines, residents bring attention to people who contribute to better results and spread good ideas. For example, the Principal Financial Group, a large corporation with its headquarters in Des Moines, was recently named by *Working Mothers* magazine as one of the nation's 100 best companies for working mothers. Neighborhood groups in Des Moines spread the word in local media and on the internet. By heaping lots of public attention on this family-friendly workplace, they hope to encourage other companies to take similar actions.

► ***Reach Out With a Helping Hand.***

Neighbors can accomplish great things when they offer each other a little help, both one person at a time and through more organized activities.

People in Lamoille Valley, Vermont, learned that too many of their elders were having accidents that forced them into the hospital--often never to return home. They found that falling was a major risk. Church groups organized to shovel ice from the sidewalks and driveways of elder neighbors. Grocery stores agreed to ask the workers who bag groceries to check the shoelaces of elders as they go through the check-out lines. It has become standard practice for grocery workers tie elders' laces.

An outreach campaign in 24 Louisville, Kentucky neighborhoods is helping to improve the finances of working families. At 12 sites, families can get free tax preparation and help claiming the Earned Income Tax Credit – payments that many residents are entitled to receive, but fail to claim. The tax preparers expect to save residents \$375,000 in tax preparation fees and to return \$2 million in Earned Income Tax Credits to families. Residents can also enroll in financial education programs, get help opening bank accounts,

and work on improving their credit.

► ***Get Confrontational – Carefully and Safely.***

Sometimes neighborhoods use political actions or media stunts to bring attention to an issue or directly confront people and problems. Strategies like marches, demonstrations, and street theatre make very strong public statements. However, some acts can have unintended, negative or dangerous consequences. Be sure you try to anticipate all the possibilities and work together to move beyond confrontation.

In Baltimore's Collington Square, one resident confronted 30 drug dealers and customers who had laid claim to a neighborhood street corner. When he asked them to leave, they responded by shooting up his van, the windshield of his truck and his family's car. But, because he was backed up by the police, his pleas carried weight. The empty building on the corner where the drug dealers gathered now is slated to become a community police substation and neighborhood association office.

A Collington Square pastor saw that his congregation could not get into church because of the drug dealers. He took the church out into the street and held prayer vigils in front of the crack houses. "What self-respecting addict would walk through a group of praying Baptists to buy drugs?" The pastor did not stop with confrontation. He went on to raise money for a community center and a recovery program. The neighborhood now has a new resource--a spiritually based program that helps victims of substance abuse, including ex-offenders, to re-enter society through intensive recovery and employment sessions.

The Collington Square Neighborhood Association also formed and made a commitment to rid the community of drug dealing, loitering and litter. People from five churches and an elementary school got together and started sweeping. One Saturday, 100 church volunteers and residents filled 11 dumpsters with trash from the streets and alleys and planted hundreds of flowers. A mural of city scenes appeared, and a playground was built.

## 2. How Will You Put Your Plan Together?

Once you pull together information about what might work, you must decide what to put in place in your neighborhood. As you look at the possibilities, keep your neighborhood and the results that neighbors want in mind.

*Remember: There is no silver bullet. No single activity or program is likely to improve the lives of children and families. It takes a mix of efforts by a lot of people working together toward the same results.*

A good approach is to start with one end result your neighborhood wants to reach. Then you can put together a general outline for how you'll reach that result. From there, you can develop a detailed action plan.

A strategic plan outlines:

- the results you want to achieve,
- the values that are important to you and your neighbors as you work together, and
- the general approaches you will use.

An action plan is a detailed tool for managing your efforts. It describes who will do what, when, and where – specific roles, responsibilities and activities for accomplishing the results your neighborhood wants.

**Results You Want** → **Strategic Plan** → **Action Plan**

*Here's an example.*

<b>Results your neighborhood agrees are priorities.</b>	<b>General Steps or Approaches</b>	<b>Details:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Who will do what</b></li><li>• <b>When</b></li><li>• <b>Where</b></li></ul>
---	------------------------------------	--

<p><b>Children in the neighborhood are safe.</b></p>	<p><b>Make the park a safe place for children to play.</b></p>	<p><b>Repair broken playground equipment.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jim will decide what repairs that are needed and do-able.</li> <li>• A fix-up day is scheduled.</li> <li>• Phyllis will be send notices to the neighborhood resource list and work to let everyone in the neighborhood know.</li> <li>• Martha will call people who volunteered at the community forum and be sure people get there.</li> <li>• Jim and Jose will coordinate the fix-up day, organize “jobs” and steps..</li> <li>• Martha will find people who agree to be responsible for maintaining the equipment and asking for help when they need it.</li> </ul>
		<p><b>Clean up the park and keep it clean.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actions are to be added.....</li> </ul>
		<p><b>Parents and other adults take turns supervising the playground.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actions are to be added.....</li> </ul>
		<p><b>Work with the city and neighborhood groups to develop organized activities in the park.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actions are to be added.....</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Prevent injuries to children caused by guns.</b></p>	<p><b>Arrange classes in gun safety.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actions are to be added.....</li> </ul>
		<p><b>Ask the police to help.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actions are to be added.....</li> </ul>
		<p><b>Organize a public education campaign on gun safety with radio announcements, posters, door-to-door fliers and conversations, etc.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actions are to be added.....</li> </ul>
		<p><b>Work with the city’s gang intervention program to keep gangs out of the neighborhood.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actions are to be added.....</li> </ul>

## A Planning Exercise

**Purpose:** To help you and your neighbors construct a plan for achieving the results you want.

### Participants:

- Everybody who has a stake in improving the lives of children and families and is a possible partner for the work.
- Representatives of the people of your neighborhood:
  - residents including young people, families, elders, cultural and ethnic groups,
  - neighborhood organizations like clubs and faith groups,
  - people and organizations that provide services like school staff, health care workers, youth workers, etc.
  - business owners and people who work in the neighborhood,
  - government agencies.

### Steps:

1. List the groups and interests that are represented and those that are missing. These are your partners.
2. Divide people into small groups of six to ten. Each group should include people who represent one group within the neighborhood. If the group does not look like the neighborhood as a whole, each participant agrees to represent his or her own “real-life” role and adopt another one for the exercise. If possible, each group of the neighborhood should be represented by one person in the small group (but not more than one).
3. Focus on one result that folks want to accomplish to improve the lives of people in the neighborhood. The participants in each group work together to create a plan that they think will work to achieve this result. Here are some questions to guide the work:

- What are the root causes of the current situation (the bad results) in the neighborhood?
  - What is contributing to this condition?
  - What are the factors at work?
- What are your three best ideas for what would work to improve this result?
- What will it take?
  - Who would do what, when, where, and how?

**Rules:** At least one idea must require little or no new money.  
Everyone at the table must identify at least one way that the people they represent would contribute.

4. The small groups come together to compare and discuss their ideas. The entire group works to reach agreement about the steps to be used.
5. This process can be repeated for each result people want to accomplish and with different groups of people.

### 3. What Can You Boost the Chances That Plan Will Work?

There's no guarantee that all your plans will work. In fact, you can count on altering the plan as you try things and learn. It's intended to be a roadmap for helping you reach the neighborhood results you want -- not a document that is written in stone.

At the same time, here are some steps that will help you come up with a strong plan.

#### ***Move Backwards From the Results You Want***

Picture the results you want to accomplish and work backwards to figure out what it will take to get there. Here are some questions to ask yourselves:

- How can these options help us achieve the results we want for children, families and other members of our neighborhood?
- How will our plan help to address root causes of the problems our neighborhood faces?
- Do the options fit our neighborhood? Do they fit with:
  - our values and beliefs?
  - our needs?
  - our strengths and assets?
- Will folks in the neighborhood embrace the plans, get excited about them, and take the steps necessary to make them work?
- What combination of steps is likely to work?
- How doable is our plan?  
Can we actually accomplish these activities or can we get the help we'll need?
- How will we know if people's lives are getting better?  
What information will tell us about the impact our efforts are having?

#### ***To Make Big Changes, Take Small Steps***

A resident of Denver's Decatur Place put it this way: "We're working on small things like social events and getting speed bumps. We want to get more police surveillance. Eventually, we will move on to bigger goals like getting rid of drugs."

#### ***Finding Your Path: Tips From Neighborhoods That Make a Difference***

- ❑ **Be Sure Everybody Has a Voice.** When choosing the paths you'll take, involve families, young people, elders, and residents who don't usually participate in neighborhood activities.
- ❑ **Find Ways Everybody Can Contribute.** Include steps for established neighborhood resources -- like schools, government agencies, community organizations, businesses, service professionals -- along with things that neighborhood residents can do on their own.
- ❑ **Mix It Up.** Include activities that require people from different groups and parts of the neighborhood and with different viewpoints to work together. Be sure that there are opportunities for people of different ages and backgrounds to do things together. Don't settle for a lot of disconnected activities that people do separately.
- ❑ **Bring the Whole Neighborhood Together.** Include neighborhood-wide activities that everybody can work on together.
- ❑ **Pave the Way for a Positive Future.** Be sure that the steps you take will help prevent future problems for children and families as well as contribute to better results for people who are already experiencing problems.
- ❑ **Find Ways Everybody Can Win.** Include plans that will make everybody better off -- including people of all ages and stages of life. Be sure to keep the interests of all neighborhood groups in mind.
- ❑ **Watch Out for the Forest and the Trees.** Help children by strengthening their families and the neighborhood as a whole. Don't forget that actions need to both benefit individuals and contribute to the greater good.
- ❑ **It's Not About Money.** Include no-cost and low-cost activities that require little or no new money.
- ❑ **Don't Try to Reinvent the Wheel -- Build on What Already Works.** Build on the strengths and successes of things that work in the neighborhood and improve on the weaknesses.
- ❑ **Develop New Assets.** Add new resources to the neighborhood and nurture new skills among residents.
- ❑ **Build Bridges to Other Neighborhoods.** Help connect your neighborhood to others and to state-level efforts focused on better results for children and families.
- ❑ **The Tried, the True, and the New.** Include some things that have worked in similar neighborhoods as well as some original ideas that excite people.

***Don't Be Afraid To Change Your Plans.  
(The Plan is Helpful Only if It Works.)***

A detailed action plan helps take your neighborhood from ideas to reality. But no matter how thorough and carefully developed your plan is, one thing is certain: Things change. You will have to make adjustments – maybe eliminate entire strategies, add new activities, adjust timelines, adapt to changing conditions and unanticipated events. Best of all, you and your neighbors will learn as you go along. The plan is meant to be changed, adjusted, and improved.

You can anticipate changes by planning to regularly review the plan. Every once in a while, take a look at how well it's working. This will help to keep the plan alive and to ensure that it's a useful tool for the road ahead.

**Rolling With the Changes**

One neighborhood put together a plan for reducing teenage pregnancy and increasing positive resources for youth. Their plan included using an existing family resource center. Before getting started, they learned that neighborhood support for the plan was in danger because a nurse would be located at the resource center. A small but vocal group of residents feared the nurse would distribute condoms and encourage abortions. Even though these claims were wrong, the neighborhood had no choice but to take the concerns to heart.

The neighborhood held a forum and decided to do without the nurse for the first year. They adjusted their plan, hoping to build support for the nurse by discussing people's concerns and learning more about what works to prevent teenage pregnancy.

## **Neighbors Making a Difference**

Twenty years ago, a preschool opened in the neighborhood with the highest crime rate on Los Angeles' west side. Three weeks later, a local gang, who viewed the new school as an intrusion into their territory, burned down the building. The preschool founders decided that they could succeed only if residents shared responsibility for the program and worked together to transform their neighborhood.

Today, the Mar Vista Family Center includes the rebuilt preschool, which operates year-round and always has a waiting list. Teens from the center's *"By Youth For Youth Leadership Program"* run an after-school program and summer camp that attract hundreds of neighborhood children. At night, adults come out for English language classes, leadership training, and parent groups. On weekends, residents gather at the center for festivals and community clean-ups.

When the center decided to expand into a second building, young people from the community were recruited as apprentice construction workers. Some of them were gang members who were once an obstacle to community efforts. Many were high-school dropouts who could not earn a degree because the only school they could attend was in a rival gang's territory. Working with the Los Angeles School District, Mar Vista opened an alternative high school in the building those young people had helped to renovate. Intended to serve 25, the school has more than 100 students.