

Austin's Promise Neighborhood Initiative

Frequently Asked Questions

(Updated 2-9-10)

What is the Harlem Children's Zone?

Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) is an innovative community initiative, with the aim of breaking the cycle of generational poverty, providing a network of social services to over 7,400 children and 4,100 adults in a 97-block area of New York City's Harlem. Founded by the visionary Geoffrey Canada, it began as the Rheedlen truancy-prevention organization in 1970, and has since expanded into a myriad of programs. The HCZ aims to address issues that keep families in poverty: inadequate educational opportunities, chronic health issues, substandard housing, limited employment and other barriers to success.

HCZ is structured as a "conveyor belt" of services, where a holistic programming model ensures that youth receive necessary services from early childhood through high school graduation. Key components of the model include "Baby College" parenting classes, best-in-class preschool and elementary/secondary charter schools, asthma and obesity health initiatives, and foster care prevention services.

The agency has adopted a "whatever it takes" attitude to overcoming obstacles and helping families and children succeed. Their results demonstrate the effectiveness of this strategy: 100% of students in the Harlem Gems Pre-K program have been school-ready for the past six years, while nearly 100% of the third graders in the two HCZ Promise Academies scored at or above grade level in math. The model focuses on using evidence-based results to constantly refine and improve programming.

For more information, please visit the organization website at www.hcz.org.

What is the Promise Neighborhood initiative?

Based on the successes of Harlem Children's Zone, President Obama and the Department of Education have created a federal initiative to replicate the model in up to 20 other cities across the country. \$10 million in funding from the 2010 federal budget will provide \$500,000 planning grants to create the necessary sustainable community infrastructure to replicate the successes of HCZ. In subsequent years, neighborhoods will be eligible for additional federal money to implement and sustain programming. Local funders will be required to match federal funding. While the exact criteria have not yet been released, eligible neighborhoods will need to demonstrate a high level of both need and capacity. High levels of childhood poverty (30-40%) and low academic achievement will be essential criteria, as will the neighborhood's ability to effect change through strong organizational collaboration, leadership, and evidence-based programming.

In early 2010, the Department of Education will release the criteria for applying for a Promise Neighborhoods grant, and the Request for Proposal (RFP) application will be available in Spring 2010. As the Promise Neighborhoods timeline moves relatively quickly, Austin will need to move efficiently through the planning process in order to be competitive.

Who is participating in this effort in Austin?

Many partners have stepped up to join start a Promise Neighborhood effort in Austin, including the City of Austin, Austin ISD, University of Texas, Seton Family of Hospitals, Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services, LifeWorks, Foundation Communities, Communities in Schools, St. John Community School Alliance, E3 Alliance, United Way of the Capital Area, Souch Foundation, Webber Family Foundation, Capital Area Council of Governments, East Side Social Action Coalition, and many elected officials.

Who are the leaders of this project?

A Steering Committee will be formed to lead the grant application process. This group will likely be 18 people, representing the focus neighborhood, municipal and school district officials and key service providers. Members of the Steering Committee will be determined in late January/ early February.

How and when will the neighborhood be chosen?

We are gathering input from the community (via community leaders and neighborhood meetings), collecting information about community needs (especially child poverty rates, immigration data, and school performance data) and evaluating neighborhood assets (existing services and networks). There is a Data Working Group that includes representatives of United Way Capital Area, E3 Alliance, CAPCOG, Seton Family of Hospitals, and the City of Austin. The goal is to make recommendations in mid-November about which focus neighborhood(s) will best fit the federal grant criteria.

(Update: The St. John neighborhood, as well as the surrounding northeast Austin area, was chosen in January, 2010 to be the focus of the Promise Neighborhood initiative. Community meetings were held in January and will continue through February. A separate effort is being led by Southwest Key Partners in the Govalle/Johnston Terrace neighborhoods).

What was the purpose of the November 9-10 conference in New York City and who attended from Austin?

A delegation of 10 people from Austin attended the Harlem Children's Zone conference in New York City on November 9-10. The purpose of the conference was to

hear directly from HCZ and Department of Education officials about the grant requirements, and to begin to develop a shared vision about how the HCZ model can be adapted to Austin.

The conference organizers required that the delegation be no more than 10 people from at least four of these six categories: social service providers; local/state government; public school district; community leader; funder; youth leader. The delegation from Austin included: Cheryl Bradley, AISD Board of Trustees; Sarah Buel, UT School of Law; Dr. Meria Carstarphen, AISD; Julian Huerta, Foundation Communities; Bert Lumbreras, City of Austin; Pastor Sterling Lands, East Side Social Action Coalition; Annette LoVoi, AISD Board of Trustees; Susan McDowell, Lifeworks; Rep. Mark Strama, Texas House of Representatives; and Allen Weeks, St. John's Community School Alliance. The delegation was selected by representatives of Sooch Foundation and Webber Family Foundation, with guidance from social service providers and other community leaders. The foundations paid the expenses of the conference. All members of the delegation volunteered their time to attend.

How can I get more information and/or get involved?

To be added to the email list and/or to volunteer to serve on a work group of the Steering Committee, please contact Caroline Newman at Sooch Foundation at cnewman@sooch.net. Several documents related to this initiative are available on Sooch Foundation's website at www.soochfoundation.org.