



*“When our youngest children
can learn, play and thrive,
the entire community benefits.”*

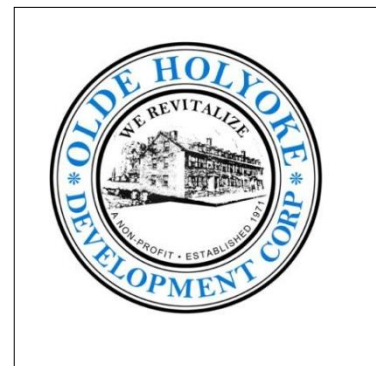
~ Olde Holyoke Development Corporation

*“We have two Holyokes:
rich Holyoke and poor Holyoke.
This is the reality.”*

~ Focus Group Participant, April 2016



Research for Learning in Place
Holyoke Massachusetts ~ May 2016



This report was prepared for the Old Holyoke Development Corporation and Nueva Esperanza by the students of GARP 391 Regional Planning Seminar, spring 2016, under the guidance of Associate Professor Marijoan Bull, PhD, AICP. Student members include: Patrick Burns, Mathieu Kolensky, Michael Orellana, Daniel Sabetti, Brien Spier, Jack Thornton, and Erin Walters.

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Pictures on cover from: Upper Left- Friends of Holyoke Public Schools website, <http://www.friendshps.org/about/>; Upper right- MIKE PLAISANCE / THE REPUBLICAN at http://www.masslive.com/news/index.ssf/2014/07/holyokes_impoverished_areas_to.html
Lower left- Nueva Esperanza Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/194830007215566/photos/a.685502271481668.1073741827.194830007215566/899423200089573/?type>, Lower right- DAVID MOLINAR/THE REPUBLICAN at http://www.masslive.com/news/index.ssf/2014/07/28th_annual_parade_features_da.html

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Agents of Change

Community Development Corporations (CDCs) are locally controlled, place-based agents of change. CDCs arose in the 1960s and 1970s as a non-profit response to the poor housing conditions, high crime rates, and advanced deterioration in the neighborhoods of low and moderate income households. The work of CDCs initially focused on brick-and-mortar initiatives such as repairing housing, installing sidewalks, transforming vacant storefronts, and providing funding for development projects.

While attentive to material conditions, CDCs have always done some social development with programming for job training, financial counseling, leadership development, and more. Many CDCs have tried to approach neighborhood revitalization comprehensively—realizing both physical and social conditions need to be addressed, as they are intimately connected. Restoring vacant factories is not enough if the workforce does not have job-ready skills; improved transportation routes are not enough if acute environmentally-induced asthma keeps one home.

Over the past fifty years, CDCs have had to adapt to fluctuating economic conditions and changing public programs and funding. CDCs have risen to this challenge and are known as innovative, collaborative organizations. They are behind the design of unique programs aimed at improving the quality of life and access to opportunity for those living in distressed neighborhoods. A recent article on tackling the health of children looks back at the success of CDCs and notes, “the most impactful investments have transformed neighborhoods by integrating across sectors to address both the built environment and the social and service environment.”¹

CDCs are uniquely positioned to work across program borders and institutional sectors in order to address the connections between physical conditions and social networks. A 2002 report by The National Center for Children in Poverty, lists these five qualities as the strengths of CDCs:

1. A stable community presence,
2. A network of relationships,
3. Leadership building capacity,

¹ “Neighborhood Adversity, Child Health, and the Role for Community Development,” Douglas P. Jutte, Jennifer Miller, and David J. Erickson, 2015, *Pediatrics*, S48. Doi: 10.1542/peds.2014-3549F.

4. Program management experience, and
5. Neighborhood planning, data gathering, and analysis skills.²

It is these qualities which bode well for the continued evolution and honed effectiveness of CDCs.

New Frontier: Education

According to Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies, "the most innovative of the new generation of community development projects [by CDCs] sprang from areas other than housing. Perhaps the most celebrated has education at its core."³ The "most celebrated" is a reference to the renowned Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ). Begun in 1997, HCZ is a highly successful and replicated model. The HCZ website states,

The Harlem Children's Zone® has always been driven by the belief that the success of our children and the strength of the community go hand in hand. Their needs are inseparable and must be addressed together in order to break the cycle of generational poverty and give our kids a real shot at the American dream.⁴

HCZ inspired the Department of Education Promise Neighborhood Program, which funded projects focused on breaking down silos and creating a "continuum of cradle to career" opportunities for children.⁵ This program sought to have a coordinated effort across federal agencies to support the education of children in areas of concentrated poverty.

Education is a key element to stopping the cycle of poverty. CDCs may choose to directly change educational programming by supplementing or even replacing the public education institution. Another approach is to realize classroom education is but one part of a young child's overall development. Head Start was designed to close the gap between students entering formal schooling, but much of a young child's life is spent outside of these programs and institutions.

² "The Role of Community Development Corporations in Promoting the Well-Being of Young Children," Jane Knitzer and Fida Adely, January 2002, The National Center for Children in Poverty, 18. Available at: http://nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_365.pdf.

³ "The Past, Present, and Future of Community Development in the United States," Alexander von Hoffman, December 2012, W12-6, Joint center for Housing Studies, Harvard University., p. 51. Available at: http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/jchs.harvard.edu/files/w12-6_von_hoffman.pdf.

⁴ <http://hcz.org/about-us/history/>

⁵ <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/promiseneighborhoods/index.html>

Research literature tells a “compelling story that the achievement gap is established primarily outside of the K-12 schools—in families and communities.”⁶ One report calculates students in the United States spend only 20% of their waking hours in formal school – the rest of the time is with families and in the neighborhood.⁷ Clearly, what happens in the classroom is directly linked to that happening outside of the school’s walls.⁸

Neighborhood and family conditions can affect children’s readiness for school. This can take the form of mental stress from family crises, absenteeism due to poor health, hunger that prevents concentration, crime that keeps children indoors, or school rotation due to housing relocation, evictions, and homelessness.

Research to Support Learning in Place

Olde Holyoke Development Corporation, in association with Nueva Esperanza, is poised to launch a new program, in the mold of the emerging directions within the field of community development. “*Learning in Place*” will bring these CDCs into the arena of education at a time when metrics for the South Holyoke neighborhood indicate a crisis. Third grade reading scores at the neighborhood elementary schools are even below the city-wide performance of only 21% of third grade readers scoring proficient or higher.

The receivership of the Holyoke Schools has meant a new direction with a six-point Turnaround Plan. Olde Holyoke Development Corporation has designed *Learning in Place* to be consistent with this plan and expand services and support for families and students in South Holyoke.⁹ By emphasizing community participation and collaboration, Olde Holyoke aims to establish a neighborhood where all elements are aligned to support young children and families. With an emphasis on community engagement, the voices of residents will shape the initiative and their particular needs and experiences will be identified.

The work in this report was undertaken in the spring of 2016 by students in the Westfield State University Regional Planning Senior Seminar. The assignment was to provide background

⁶ “Supporting the Education Imperative: The Role of Community Development”, Southern Nevada Strong, November 2013, p.10. Available at: <http://www.southernnevadastrong.org/img/managed/Document/326/SNS%20White%20Paper%2011%2008%2013%20cc.pdf>

⁷ “Poverty and Potential: Out-of-School Factors and School Success,” David C. Berliner, Boulder and Tempe: Education and the Public Interest Center & Education Policy Research Unit, March 2009, p.2. Available at: <http://epicpolicy.org/publication/poverty-and-potential>

⁸ “Opportunity-Rich Schools and Sustainable Communities: Seven Steps to Align High-Quality Education with Innovations in City and Metropolitan Planning and Development,” Deborah McKoy, Jeffrey M. Vincent, and Ariel H. Bierbaum, Center for Cities and Schools, University of California-Berkeley, June 2011, p.9. Available at: <http://www.urban.org/research/publication/opportunity-rich-schools-and-sustainable-communities> .

⁹ “Olde Holyoke Development Corporation-Community Investment Tax Credits.” Available at <https://macdc.org/sites/default/files/user14/Olde%20Holyoke%20Development%20Corporation%20CIP.pdf>

information for these CDCs as they ready themselves to launch *Learning in Place*. The work has three components:

1. Summaries of case studies of other CDCs involved in education;
2. Creation of a web-based map of resources in South Holyoke to support and enrich children and families; and
3. Focus group dialogues among relevant populations to hear the experiences, beliefs, and desires for nurturing families in South Holyoke.

Case Studies

Community Development Corporations, and other non-profits, in cities across the country have adopted their own initiatives focusing on early childhood development and community planning. To gain insight into what has already been implemented, we present six case studies, all of which have an underlying goal of promoting childhood development and stabilizing families. Ranging from early intervention in literacy and communication in Providence, to intergenerational learning in Oklahoma, education initiatives in the Oakland Housing Authority, youth involvement in community redevelopment in San Francisco, and community based approaches in educational reform providing cradle-to-college support services in Harlem and Las Vegas, a focus on childhood development and education is the link among all the case studies presented.

These case studies offer motivation and encouragement; with adequate support and community engagement, a *Learning in Place* strategy can be achieved in South Holyoke and strengthen the neighborhood commitment to a bright future for the next generation.

Project: **Providence Talks**

Location: **Providence, Rhode Island**

Introduction: For a child’s vocabulary to develop on an appropriate trajectory, children need to hear at least 21,000 words per day. But children in the lowest income bracket miss that benchmark by more than 5,000 words every day. The Providence Public School Department Office of Research state that only 52% of fourth grade students in Providence public school read at grade-level proficiency.

Objectives:

- **Intervene at a critically early age, from birth to age four, to close the 30 million word gap at a city-wide scale** and ensure that every child in Providence enters a kindergarten classroom ready to achieve at extraordinary levels. (never before attempted at the municipal level)
- Invest in early language which delivers the highest return, building the foundation for success in school. Research shows that the best way to build young brains is to increase verbal interactions with adults.
- **Close the vocabulary gap among low-income pre-kindergartners.**

Methodology:

- The effort uses the LENA System, a charitable research foundation which uses advanced technology to accelerate language development and close achievement gaps.
- With the LENA System, “Providence Talks” uses LENA technologies such as recorders, analysis software and LENA mobile.
 - The system is initially home e-visitor based, but includes a mix of home visitor and parent center implementations in the years ahead.
 - Participating families in Providence are paired with a trained home visitor, a “word pedometer” and information on resources like read-aloud programs at libraries. Over the course of several months, families conduct home recording, receive feedback reports on the number of words and conversational turns their child is exposed to during the course of a day and participates in a series of coaching sessions on topics regarding language development.
 - A pilot program was launched in February, 2014, after winning the Grand Prize the 2012-2013 Bloomberg Philanthropies’ “Mayor’s Challenge” competition, which allowed for a generous \$5 million investment.

Progress/Outcome:

- Already serving 170 families, set to expand its reach to 750 more families within the next year. 1,200 books have already been distributed to families and the program intends to distribute another 10,000 books over the next few years.
- “Providence Talks” published a report stating, those who start out at the lowest income levels have made impressive progress – on average, the number of words used at home increased by 50 percent. On average, those children saw a 4,222-word increase after participating in Providence Talks.
- Of the 39% families who responded to the survey, 97% of parents surveyed that they were satisfied with Providence Talks.
- Graduated from the program: 12%
- Remain enrolled: 58%
- Executive Director, Courtney Hawkins states that a 30% dropout rate was relatively low for an in-home visitation program.



Sources:

<http://www.providencetalks.org/>

<http://www.browndailyherald.com/2015/10/06/panel-surveys-providence-talks-impact/>

<https://www.lenafoundation.org/>

<http://wpri.com/2015/10/05/providence-plans-big-expansion-for-childhood-word-gap-program/>

Project: Y-PLAN

Location: San Francisco, California

Introduction: Young people constitute more than half of a public housing neighborhood's population, yet rarely are they involved in community redevelopment visioning and design process.

Objectives:

- Third- and fourth- grade elementary school students contribute their ideas to the redevelopment of their community in San Francisco, using the Y-PLAN (*Youth-Plan-Learn-Act-Now!*) at Malcolm X Academy. (Part of a larger city-wide redevelopment strategy called HOPE SF, which aims to transform the Bay View and other neglected parts of San Francisco)
- Encourage the process of critical inquiry which builds the capacity of young people to contribute their own data and insights to the planning and policymaking process in addition to mapping out the assets and challenges of the neighborhood.
- **Academic fit:** Y-PLAN projects are aligned to academic goals and designed to equip students with experience and tools for career, college, and community readiness. (At Malcolm X each year the teachers and facilitators have crafted the Y-PLAN curriculum to augment academic learning objectives focused on applied mathematics, sustainability, and cultural influences of design).
- **Project aims to change the status quo;** young people are recognized as critical actors in transforming current conditions, interrupting deep historic patterns of inequality.

Progress/Outcome:

- Students generated eight main ideas to improve the community: (1) Artistic & safe gateways and pathways, (2) Vegetable gardens, fruit orchards, flowers, trees, (3) Heroes Walls, walkways or sculptures, (4) Natural & wild places for play and enjoyment, (5) Gathering spaces and reflective circles, (6) 'Education outside' learning labs, (7) Intergenerational places for games and sports, (8) Linking housing, school and community resources.
- Many ideas about open/wild space, places for picnics and barbecues have been partially incorporated – (although scaled down to fit the budget). Fruit trees and sustainable plants that they (students) recommended have been planted as part of the original landscaping budget.
- Y-PLAN has offered a powerful case study about reciprocal learning between adults and young people (third- and fourth- graders), and authentic community engagement.

Sources:

“Blueprints for hope: engaging children as critical actors in urban place making,” Deborah McKoy, Executive Director; Shirl Buss, Y-Plan Creative Director; and Jessie Stewart, Research Specialist and National Y-PLAN Director, Center for Cities + Schools, University of Columbia, Berkeley, CA, USA. Available at:

http://citiesandschools.berkeley.edu/uploads/blueprints_for_hope_compressed.pdf

Project: The Grace Learning Center – Intergenerational Learning

Location: Jenks, Oklahoma

Introduction: The Grace Living Center, a nursing home in Jenks, OK, is home to two classrooms of about 60 kindergarten and prekindergarten students, as well as to 170 elders who are “grandmas” and “grandpas” to the students. Children attend the center in lieu of the first two grades at another school in the district, then switch at the start of first grade.

Objectives:

- The GLC works to eliminate loneliness, helplessness, and boredom in aging populations.
- The curricular vision is *“to make learning as engaging and purposeful as we can.”*
- Hands-on activities like cutting and pasting with the kids helps elderly residents retain their motor skills as well as promote language development for children as they interact with the elderly and expand vocabulary.
- Students develop a stronger and naturally reinforced level of compassion, responsibility and respect. For instance, they experience tolerance and acceptance of physical differences when there is a resident who carries an oxygen tank or has difficulty speaking.
- Elders gain sense of purpose

Methodology:

- Every four to six weeks, the group reviews the curriculum in all 30 of the district’s kindergarten classes, identifies unit objectives, discusses skills they should reinforce, and brainstorms activities in which grandmas and grandpas can help students learn.
- The main focus of the partnership is “book buddies” which pairs rotating groups of elders and kindergarten students who read to one another for about 30 minutes several times a week.
- Another program as part of the GLC is “shared study,” in which elders join small groups of kindergartners in hands-on activities.

Progress/Outcome:

- Proven results in reading and vocabulary.
- Jenks Public Schools has tracked the number of students entering first grade whose reading skills are below grade level. Consistently, a smaller percentage of students from the GLC have required reading intervention once they entered first grade than those who attended prekindergarten or kindergarten at the nearby West Elementary School, which does not have intergenerational partners.

- There has been a ten percent difference in reading levels of the two schools for the last three years.

Sources:

“Senior Citizens Help Young Children with Reading – and Relationships” Lisa Morehouse,
Available at: <http://www.edutopia.org/grace-learning-center-prekindergarten-community>

“How to Build Intergenerational Opportunities for Learning,” Available at:
<http://www.edutopia.org/grace-learning-center-prekindergarten-community-how-to>

Project: Oakland Housing Authority – Education Initiative

Location: Oakland, California

Introduction: OHA’s Education Initiative partners with the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), community-based organizations and other service providers with a focus on education after discovering an overlap of 5,700 students. Research, data and best practices indicate that these types of programs help support youth by preparing them for future academic and professional opportunities through the elimination of academic achievement barriers and by addressing critical needs as early as elementary school.

Objectives:

- Designed to increase school attendance, parent or caregiver engagement, academic achievement and life skills development for youth who reside in OHA residential communities.
- Geared for K-12 education, parent training, kindergarten readiness, and GED & Continuing Adult Education.
- Reduce “Summer Academic Loss,” the loss of as much as two months of learning due to summer vacation, by offering summer youth employment, summer camps, and summer lunch programs.

Methodology:

- An MOU to School Board was sent calling for a Sharing of Information between Oakland Unified School District and the Housing Authority of the City of Oakland. Both parties sought the ability to share confidential information, for example the school district revealing a student’s attendance record to OHA to facilitate the goals of the partnership.
- To meet the educational objectives, OHA created the Parent Ambassador Program which consists of participating parents of seven partner schools in the district that pilot the attendance improvement and parent involvement efforts.
- The ambassadors work in partnership with OHA staff and the principals at partner school sites to identify tasks and projects that contribute to the entire school community with an emphasis on increasing attendance for those struggling with chronic absenteeism.

Progress/Outcomes:

- Several ambassadors have been hired by OUSD as full-time employees, allowing these residents to fulfill their own personal goals of achieving employment and future self-sufficiency.

Sources:

<http://www.oakha.org/Residents/Resident-programs/Pages/Education-Initiatives.aspx>

Project: The Las Vegas Promise Neighborhood Initiative

Location: Las Vegas, Nevada

Introduction:

The Las Vegas Promise Neighborhood (LVPN) Initiative is a community-based approach to improving education opportunity and achievement partners with the Lincy Institute which conducts and supports research focused on improving Nevada’s health, education, and social services, especially on behalf of Nevada’s children, seniors, and families. Their research studies how social, political, and community contexts impact student learning and achievement. The research documents the impacts on learning of housing, food security, health care, and family support. ‘Promise Neighborhood’ is a competitive grant program that supports cradle-to-career service designed to improve educational and development outcomes for students in distressed urban and rural neighborhoods. This model was inspired by Harlem Children’s Zone (HCZ) – one of the most popularized examples of a community-based approach to educational improvement and reform. Impressed by this neighborhood-based approach to fighting poverty and creating a path for students to go to college, President Obama honored his campaign pledge to replicate the HCZ model by funding the creation of “Promise Neighborhoods” in 20 communities across the country. This number was expanded after officially becoming a grant fund administered by the Office of Innovation and Improvement. In 2011, The Las Vegas Promise Neighborhood Initiative with the help of the Lincy Institute, gathered community stakeholders in various assets to apply for the planning grant. Although the grant was not ultimately awarded, the feedback that was received was valuable for follow-up meetings and planning efforts for the initiative with or without federal funds.

Objectives:

- To provide cradle-to-college and career support services to children and families in Historic West Las Vegas through strong schools, leveraged resources, and coordinated community-building efforts that will allow all children in the LVPN to have a safe, healthy, and strong academic start in life.
- Improve access to prenatal care and parenting courses, quality health care, food, and security, family support services, and the leveraged community investments that have prepared students in similar circumstances to beat the odds, and collectively, uplift and transform their community.

Methodology:

- To ensure LVPN serves as both a site and strategy for neighborhood revitalization and community transformation, the planning process will include parents, children and

youth, neighborhood residents, services providers, researchers, community organizers, business leaders, and elected officials.

- The community needs assessment and segmentation analysis of the target area will determine levels of educational and development need according to the following life stages: Family Formation (conception to birth), Early Childhood (Infancy-5), Middle Childhood (6-11), Adolescence (12-18), Transition to Adulthood (19-29), and Adulthood (30-40).
- Assessment will measure neighborhood level indicators to track community health, and perceptions concerning access to education, recreational, social, and health related services, and overall quality of life.
- Data sources will include school reports, special service provider records, health district records, focus group interviews, citizen advisory panels, neighborhood surveys, and multi-case studies.
- Once data is collected, research team members will clean, analyze, and report the data to include the indicators and conduct a segmentation analysis to determine the level of need among LVPN's children and families.
- Rather than using demographic data points such as race/ethnicity, gender, FRL, and ELL, the LVPN Project Team aims to view its established indicators through a tiered system that will determine which children and families are in lowest to greatest need and how and when to make targeted investments that will achieve positive and measurable results.

Sources:

<https://www.unlv.edu/sites/default/files/24/LVPN-InitiativeReport-5-13-13.pdf>

Project: Harlem Children’s Zone

Location: Harlem, New York, New York

Introduction: Central Harlem is a New York City neighborhood with a child poverty rate more than double the national average. Assets that are available to middle-class communities are often taken for granted by users. Middle-class communities have successful schools, useable playgrounds, decent housing, supportive religious institutions, functioning civic organizations, and safe streets. The lack of assets in poorer neighborhoods makes it hard for children to reach their full potential. The children lack the means to overcome the forces and oppression placed on them as a result of poverty and their geographical location. The Harlem Children’s Zone (HCZ) Project focuses on fighting poverty, as well as improving the social, health, and educational development of children. HCZ provides programming to change both the children’s family and neighborhood environments.

Objectives:

- Serve an entire neighborhood comprehensively and at scale. Engaging an entire neighborhood helps to achieve three goals:
 1. Reach children in larger numbers and have an effect on the community, in particular it’s culture;
 2. Shape the physical and social environments that influences development; and
 3. Create programs at a scale large to meet the community needs.
- Create a pipeline of support. A pipeline of support can be created by developing efficient, accessible programs and schools. The pipeline of support starts from the moment of conception. This can be seen through HCZ’s prenatal programs for parents. The pipeline of support ends when the individual becomes a college graduate.
- Build relationships among residents, institutions, and stakeholders. These individuals can help to create the environment necessary for the healthy development of a child.
- Evaluate program outcomes and create a feedback loop that cycles data back to management for use in improving and refining program offerings.

- The goals of the HCZ Project include creating a culture of success by providing children with accessible quality resources.

Methodology:

The programs and services offered by the project are high-quality—and they are free. More than 20,000 children and adults use the programs and services offered by HCZ. The project received a budget of \$67 million in 2009, with roughly 80% of the budget going to direct program costs. Only 14% of the funding went towards management and general costs, while the remaining 6% went towards fundraising. The HCZ Project is funded through public and private partnerships. This money enables HCZ to create new programs where no public funding stream exists. For example, the funding has enabled them to create The Baby College, a program for toddlers that is 100% privately funded. The funding also allows HCZ to augment efforts that are in part publicly funded, such as extending the hours of pre-kindergarten programs from 2.5 hours to 10 hours per day. The funding of the project helps to maintain a healthy, supportive environment for children of all ages. The program seeks to aid in the overall development of the individual.

Progress/Outcome:

For FY 2015:

- Since 2010, HCZ's Family Support Center has helped 1,047 families stay stable and avoid placing their children in foster care.
- 5,400 parents and caregivers have graduated from The Baby College since its launch in 2000.
- HCZ's free Tax Preparation Program helped 3,504 residents earn \$5.3 million in tax returns in 2015.
- 19,000 books and 14,000 toys were distributed to HCZ children of all ages during the holidays thanks to Simon & Schuster, Pearson, and Hasbro, Inc.
- HCZ has actively worked with children through academic institutions: 93% of high-school seniors applied to and were accepted to college and 67 high-school students were sent to college-preparatory programs at elite schools such as Cornell University, UCLA, and

Carleton College during the summer of 2014. HCZ also exhibits success in sending students to the Bard Early College Program.

Visuals:

The pipeline of support



The image shows the pipeline surrounded by additional programs that can benefit families, as well as the larger community.

Sources:

FY 2015 REPORT (n.d.): n. page. Harlem Children's Zone, 30 Nov. 2015. Web. 2 May 2016.

Available at: <http://wac.edef.edgecastcdn.net/80ADEF/hcz.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/HCZ-Biennial-Report-2014-2015-single-pages.pdf>

"Whatever It Takes: A White Paper on the Harlem Children's Zone®." Harlem Children's Zone.

N.p., 1 Sept. 2009. Web. 2 May 2016. Available at:

<http://wac.edef.edgecastcdn.net/80ADEF/hcz.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/HCZ-White-Paper.pdf>

Web-Based Resource Map

In order to support *Learning in Place*, we have created an interactive web-based map displaying the major resources in the area for children (0-8 years) and families. This map is meant to be used both by residents searching for resources (for example looking for homework help for their children) and service providers who are doing referrals for families. The map application can be viewed here:

<http://www.arcgis.com/apps/PublicInformation/index.html?appid=e570d8b2ac5a43fbb6a1fa3571aece23>

This map application titled, “Resources for Children and Families in South Holyoke,” was developed from existing guides and web searches. Members of the organizations in the South Holyoke Safe Neighborhood Initiative provided feedback and corrections. As with any web based application, the key to this map remaining useful is keeping the data up-to-date.

There is always a trade-off between displaying information and having a simple and clear image, easy to navigate and view. This map application allows the user to turn off and on three general categories of resources:

- **Health and Wellness**- which includes medical, mental health, and nutrition/food access information.
- **Education and Literacy** – which includes homework programs, schools, and academic oriented after school options.
- **After school Programs** – includes the wider opportunities of recreation and social activities for outside of school hours.

Each point has a pop-up box that includes contact information (phone number, website, hours) and a brief description of what is offered. Also included are the most current PVTA bus routes, so users can determine access to the locations via public transit. A listing of all the points by category is included in the Appendix of this report.

This map also permits the display of social media applications in the area. So, for instance, Instagram or Flickr that is tagged in the neighborhood can be added to the visual display (or left turned off). This adds a local flavor to the site. The spatial display of this information reinforces the connection between places and social programs, and can help assess the adequacy and accessibility of these resource types for families in the South Holyoke area.

Focus Groups

Focus Groups are generally used to gather people's opinions, ideas, experiences, and beliefs on a certain topic or product. While surveys and questionnaires can be useful, they cannot capture what a person is thinking or feeling. This is where a focus group will come into play because responses in a focus group are open ended, broad, and qualitative. The personal and relaxed settings of Focus Group meetings encourage sharing and group conversation.

Focus groups have four characteristics: participants (5 to 10 people per group), a comfortable environment, a skillful moderator, and systematic analysis and reporting. The steps with focus groups are deciding whether the focus groups are appropriate for your research, determining who to involve, listening to your target audience, and putting your thoughts into writing. As an intentionally small gathering, focus groups are meant to promote interactions among participants so the researcher can hear the language used by the participants, how participants conceive of the issue being explored, and the degree of agreement among the group members. The size should be small enough so all can participate but large enough to have some variety expressed.¹⁰ Often focus groups are designed to represent a specific segment of a larger population, so for example, parents of young children or pet owners. The shared characteristic is used to surface conceptions of issues held within a group having a shared characteristic.

There are no right or wrong answers during focus groups, only different points of view. The first few moments in a focus group discussion are critical. "In a brief time the moderator must create a thoughtful, permissive atmosphere, provide ground rules, and set the tone of the discussion. Much of the success of group interviewing can be attributed to the development of this open environment."¹¹ Often times an assistant moderator is helpful to work with equipment, handle refreshments, arrange the room, and take notes. Focus Groups use open-ended questions. When ending the session, you want participants to reflect on the entire discussion and then offer their positions or opinions on topics of central importance to the researchers.

Once the transcripts and notes from the Focus Groups are finalized, researchers should "code" the conversations. Coding involves reading the dialogue to find common themes or topics

¹⁰ *Qualitative Research Methods for Community Development*, Robert Mark Silverman and Kelly L. Paterson, 2015, Routledge: New York, p.76.

¹¹ Add here

raised by the various participants. This step in the qualitative process involves a critical analysis of the conversations.¹²

In our case, Focus Groups were conducted to get opinions, ideas, experiences, suggestions, and reactions from subpopulations of South Holyoke. We sought to hold 3-4 sessions of relevant subpopulations centered on the question, “How can South Holyoke be a nurturing place for young children and families?” We began our work with hopes of meeting with 3-4 subpopulations in order to gain a variety of perspectives. Our efforts to convene a faith-based Focus Group and a Health Care Provider Focus Group were unsuccessful. Our semester deadlines and the difficulties of reaching enough key individuals meant these focus group did not materialize.

However, we were able to hold three different focus groups; two were with Latino residents of the area in English Language Learning classes, and a group of Holyoke based Early Educators certified by the state to provide care in their homes for infants and preschoolers. The table below indicates the locations and participation characteristics of these groups. It is worth noting that while many participants did not reside in Holyoke, some of these identified themselves as former residents, and others noted they were frequently in the City, living across the border in Chicopee. The questions used for these Focus groups appear at the end of this section.

<i>Date & Time</i>	<i>Group Name</i>	<i>Location Held</i>	<i>Number of Participations</i>
26 April 2016 9:45-10:30 am	Community Education Project ESOL3	Classroom 206 Maple Street Holyoke, MA	13 (4 current Holyoke Residents)
27 April 2016 9:45-10:30 am	Community Education Project ESOL	Classroom 317 Main Street Holyoke, MA	8 (3 current Holyoke residents)
10 May 2016 5:30-6:30 pm	Certified Early Educators Invited by Massachusetts Executive Office of Education, Department of Early Education and Care	Community Room Holyoke Public Library 250 Chestnut St, Holyoke, MA	4 4 current Holyoke residents)

¹² *Qualitative Research Methods for Community Development*, Robert Mark Silverman and Kelly L. Paterson, 2015, Routledge: New York, pp.29-30.

Findings

Coding of the three transcripts was completed by several members of the team. After reading through the transcripts, individuals generated recommendations for common categories to capture the essence of the conversations. Working together the recommendations were coalesced into one common list of major categories. Comments were grouped under each category. A general category of “other” is included to relay comments the group felt were significant enough to share based on the strong sentiment captured or unique position outlined by a participant.

The findings are summarized below:

1. Family Values & Family Quality Time

- a. Participants spoke about the importance of the family in shaping children and the need for parents to be more actively involved with children—and to take their positions as role models seriously. The power of a strong family bond was mentioned several times. One participant spoke to how this was true for her even as an Aunt (she is not yet a mother). She makes it a point to be a positive force in the lives of her nieces and nephews. She also said while programs are good, it is more important that families spend time together. Another said that while sports and other activities were good things, “children need to know they are valuable” and this comes from their family.
- b. Those providing early education & care said creating a larger family with the children in their care is what gives them satisfaction. A sense of belonging and family is something they strive for.
- c. Family and family networks also showed up in terms of the early education & care providers. One noted she became licensed after working at her sister’s home facility. Another stated her extended family all worked in the home facility making it easier to provide quality care. For this provider her large immediate family and extended family meant she had no need to advertise when slots are open. People are referred to her his/her family, when they make decisions for home care.
- d. Interestingly the two pairs of early education & care providers in our focus group were a women director and male assistant. This seemed to also reflect the model of home care being a family run business with relatives working together.

2. Safety & Violence

- a. Most participants felt Holyoke was not a good place to raise children. They noted safety as a primary concern and spoke about how families struggle to survive. The presence of violence and drugs was noted by many as a concern. A participant from Churchill noted there is a clear dividing line between the “safe” and the “unsafe” areas. One early education & care provider said her house was one of the safer places for children due to the required inspections and regulations requiring fire drills.
- b. None allowed children to walk on their own-either due to traffic or fear of the conditions the children would be exposed to. The early educator/care providers spoke of traveling in groups to nearby parks.
- c. Several participants noted the atmosphere in the area felt somewhat hostile. One said, “the body language is bad (intimidating)” and another said “it is noisy and people are angry.”

3. Communication

- a. Issues of communication were raised in terms of language barriers, with participants saying this is a powerful force in keeping some groups outside of the mainstream.
- b. Another communication divide that was mentioned was people not understanding institutional procedures involved in social programs, schools, and government. This was also referenced in terms of people not knowing where to go for assistance.
- c. The early education & care providers echoed this concern, noting parents are not familiar with the systems in place and how one of the greatest challenges they have is to get parents to fill out all the paperwork properly. Another issue was parents choosing to avoid or deny that a child should be assessed – and a participant noted she had never had a parent ask about additional programs and resources for a child (even when the child appeared to need them).

4. Incomes and Jobs

- a. Some noted while there are sports opportunities or other programs, they cost money and can be cost prohibitive.
- b. One participant stated you have to leave Holyoke to find employment – going to Chicopee, Westfield, Springfield, or Hadley. This is a limiting factor for those without a car.

- c. One noted the lower middle class suffered the most – not having enough to get by and not being eligible for all programs. It is difficult for many to cover the high costs of food, utilities, and housing.
- d. The early educators explained childcare is very expensive – especially for single mothers with more than one child. They said there is a great need for this service.

5. Church

- a. When asked about support for families, church came up a few times as a positive force. Participants told about summer camps and other events churches held to keep children involved in positive pursuits.

6. Other

- a. Within our participants were many who were actively using available resources to improve their life situation and those in their family and community. Whether improving their English, pursuing a Bachelor's degree, or getting training to change careers, these individuals were examples of residents making use of programs in place.
- b. Some participants told us they had moved out of Holyoke either in search of better schooling or a safer neighborhood—one without gunshots.
- c. The early education & care providers we met with exemplified a segment of local employment opportunities. But both teams spoke of how hard it is to get licensed and to maintain certification. There is extensive training required, and ongoing monitoring. Also there is excessive paperwork to be filed. The providers noted the work requires long hours, has limited pay, does not include vacation, and has no retirement benefits. However, this program seems an important one for *Learning in Place* to work with. The early education and care providers are trained to offer a detailed curriculum and the types of activities and programming they offer can complement the other Holyoke efforts on education.
- d. Several participants noted the PVTA is unreliable and its routes are of limited value in getting to jobs or for parents getting children to programs and activities.
- e. When asked about cultural traditions that support families several participants expressed disappointment in the American celebration of Christmas. They noted in Puerto Rico Christmas includes more than just lights – there is music, dancing, and great joy is expressed. They would like to see these traditions followed here as it is a special family time.

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER CLASSES

1. Do you feel like Holyoke is a good place to raise children?
2. What kind of support systems works best for families?
3. Do you feel that your kids are safe in the community walking around?
4. Is transportation a major issue? How has public transportation or lack thereof limited you and your family?
5. Are there any cultural traditions that help benefit families or any household raising children?
6. Where would you go/who would you contact to go about looking for programs that could be beneficial to your children?

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

EARLY EDUCATORS/DAY CARE PROVIDERS

1. You have all chosen to care for young children in your homes. What do you find most satisfying about this work?
2. How did the people you serve find you? Is it hard for families in Holyoke to find and pay for childcare?
3. What one thing could make your early education work easier to do? (program, activity, resource, training, etc....)
4. If you had a parent looking for assistance or programs for his/her child, where or to whom would you refer them?
5. What do you think is the biggest parenting challenge faced by the young families you interact with?
6. Are there any specific cultural traditions of your family that serve to nurture families/households raising children?
7. Do you feel that kids are safe in the community walking around? Would you let your child (or those you supervise) walk to school? Walk to the playground? Walk to the store?
9. Is transportation a major issue? How has public transportation or lack thereof limited the families you serve or your family?

Conclusion

This research has uncovered some valuable information for *Learning in Place*. The web-based resource map was very well received by the members of the South Holyoke Safe Neighborhood Initiative, and in fact has led to additional collaborations for customized map applications between Westfield State University and member organizations. The ongoing process of identifying and locating resources for Holyoke families offers new opportunities for networking among these groups.

Within the case studies there are several examples of CDCs successfully being involved in education programs, and using these social networking opportunities as a means of building social capital. There is documented achievement of improved educational outcomes and strengthened neighborhoods. Some of these case studies may spark some new elements to *Learning in Place*.

The focus groups provided us (the student researchers) an opportunity to learn the specifics of people's daily lives and the personal conversations were very powerful. While parts of the conversations told us about conditions that are well documented with statistics, things that are less well known did come out of these circles. The findings cover these items, but a key link *Learning in Place* can make is to connect with the early education and care program.