VITAL VILLAGE
NETWORK
BOSTON
MASSACHUSETTS

2017 CASE STUDY

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A PLACE-BASED INITIATIVE

Over the past decade, there has been a slow but steady increase in the number of "place-based population change initiatives." The goal of a place-based initiative is to bring overall change to a particular geographic area. Rather than implementing a particular stand-alone program or project, the focus has been on identifying particular neighborhoods, and taking a holistic/comprehensive approach to change.

For example, an organization may create an after school program, a food program, a gardening project, a lead paint abatement project, a tutoring program, or any number of individual stand-alone initiatives. And these projects may very well achieve their goals and provide measurable help to participants. But even in success, they do not necessarily change the underlying environment, or the social or service networks. However, in communities across the nation, there have been an increasing number of initiatives that look to developing a comprehensive approach and are investing in a defined place/neighborhood in order to fundamentally transform the entire neighborhood and its residents.

POPULATION CHANGE LEARNING COMMUNITY

In 2014, representatives from the Vital Village Network, Magnolia Community Initiative and Community Solutions gathered with a group of peers for the first Population Change Learning Community meeting. This community of learners now includes groups from areas across the US including the Brownsville Partnership – Brooklyn, NY; Brighter Futures – Hartford, CT; Community Studios – Sarasota and St. Petersburg, FL; Eastside Community - United Way of San Antonio, TX; Growing Together - Tulsa, OK; Magnolia Community Initiative - Los Angeles, CA; the Amani Neighborhood – Milwaukee, WI; Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation – Pine Ridge Reservation, SD; Vital Village Network – Boston, MA; as well as Avenues of Change, Guildford West - Surrey, British Columbia, Canada.

Formed to create an exchange between practitioners, researchers, and funders, the Population Change Learning Community aims to assist site-based practitioners supporting place-based efforts. Members of the Learning Community also include the UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families, and Communities, the Wisdom Exchange, Boston Medical Center, University of Wisconsin Extension of Milwaukee County, the Federal Reserve Bank of

Boston Working Cities Challenge, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, the Community Foundation of North Texas, and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families, and Communities provides coordination and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation provides the financial support for the Learning Community and provided funding for this case study.

It was through the Population Change Learning Community group exchanges, participating site based teams identified their common struggle to understand what roles and functions are being used to support a community change process, assess how well they are actually performing these functions, and ultimately determine which of these functions are necessary to actually drive positive change. While much has been written about the need for support entities for multi-sector place based endeavors, whether called backbone organizations, integrators, intermediaries, or lead agencies, little has been captured as to how best to organize and deliver on this role.

THE CASE STUDY PURPOSE

It was determined by the Learning Community that efforts to improve outcomes in place-based efforts would be greatly enhanced by sharing the progress and challenges of those who have assumed the support role for place based endeavors. Site based members of the Learning Community self-selected into a case study design team and/or volunteered to administer the case study within their respective communities.

We recognize that the decision-making process in each place-based initiative is different; the demographics in each initiative are unique; and the range of the specific programs and projects for each initiative vary. However, the goal of this case study for each community is to better understand the practice of how best to respond to the on-going development and delivery of the support and services needed for multi-sector place based endeavors. And in each case, this study is informed by the collective experience of, and written by, those actually responsible for the place-based work in their community.

The case study was designed to better understand how, and what, the Learning Community members have determined to be the support roles and functions, and how each site has organized to accomplish their work. In order to best understand this, the Population Change Learning Community intended to answer these key questions:

- **What are the roles/functions necessary to support a multi-sector initiative trying to improve a place based population?**

- **What operating or management structures are the most promising for organizing and sustaining this work (delivering on the functions)?**

- **How do we know (assess) if we are effectively delivering on these functions?**

- **How do we effectively resource (human, financial, technical) this support?**

By relying on local stakeholders to share their experiences and perspectives, and make meaning of those insights, the aim was to strengthen our shared understanding of the elements of effectiveness for those supporting multi-sector place based endeavors.

Through our use of a guided exploration of what has happened and what has been learned from those responsible for supporting a place-based endeavor, the Population Change Learning Community has now generated 9 site-specific case studies.

What follows is a case study of Boston's efforts in the three priority neighborhoods where Vital Village Network is focused. Representatives from the Vital Village Network entered into this process with a commitment to ask questions and gather the perspectives of participating agencies, residents, and others, that would allow for a deeper level of understanding of the full range of functions and capacities of support entities for multi-sector place based efforts.

Significant effort was made to gather information from a diverse range of participants. Nevertheless, we acknowledge and recognize that it was not possible to speak with everyone, and as a result it is impossible to represent everyone's views and experiences in our local efforts. We recognize that there are many people within the within the three neighborhoods in Boston: Dorchester (Codman Square), Mattapan and Roxbury (Dudley), and throughout our community who contribute their time, effort, and resources to improve these neighborhoods and the lives of their residents.

THE VITAL VILLAGE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT NETWORK

Vital Village was established in 2010 when an interdisciplinary group of practitioners at Boston Medical Center, New England's largest safety net hospital, began to search for different approaches to improving equity. They began with building nontraditional partnerships between community residents, service providers, and community-based agencies to identify and address early childhood adversities. Over an 18 month period, the group engaged in conversations with community residents and diverse community-based agencies to learn more about the solutions to complex social threats to child wellbeing, and began to develop collaborative relationships among educators, clinicians, service providers, legal advocates, and residents to promote child, family, and community well-being.

In January 2013, with support from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the Vital Village Network launched a formal strategic planning process that prioritized three areas: promoting family strengths during the prenatal through early childhood period; peer-to-peer legal advocacy aimed at addressing material hardships; and innovations in early childhood education. Releasing small innovation pilot grants, Vital Village used a microfinance strategy to support new cross-sector collaborations to enhance existing efforts and supported 10 pilot projects; each focused on one of the three priority areas.

The Vital Village Network also created a set of tools to support learning, leadership, and collaboration across diverse programs and groups

(i.e., 90-Day Challenge, and Service Learning/ Leadership Model). Systematically enhancing existing community resources with trauma-informed practices was a second strategy to build community capacity to improve socio-emotional wellbeing for children. The Network engaged this process using a co-design strategy to involve residents, educators, and service providers. Residents and members from partner organizations across the network learn skills around setting realistic aims, using an iterative change process, and making shared agreements through summits and workshops. Partners then take these skills back to their own organizations to spread these tools to help drive forward change in their own respective projects.

https://www.vitalvillage.org/data-dashboard/customize/student-transportation-equity-map
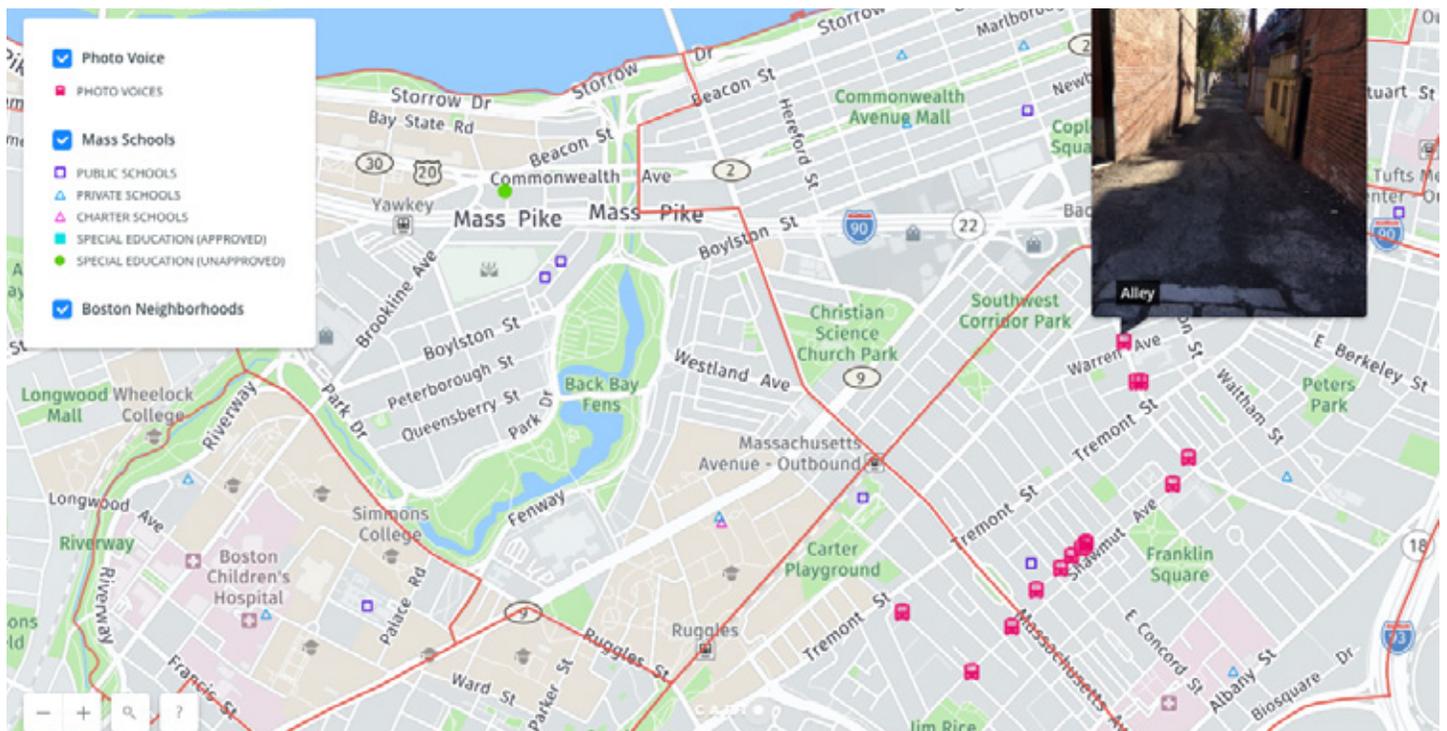
COMMUNITY CONTEXT

With an estimated population of over 610,000, Boston is the largest city in New England. The City of Boston encompasses a broad cultural and ethnic diversity. One quarter of the city's residents immigrated to the United States and over a third speak a language other than English as the primary language in the home. Boston is comprised of racial/ethnic groups other than white: 23% Black, 18% Hispanic, and 9% Asian and 47% White non-Hispanic.

The Vital Village Network partners with community stakeholders within three neighborhoods in Boston: Dorchester (Codman Square), Mattapan and Roxbury (Dudley). These three communities have the highest percentages of the 38,000 children aged 0-5 in Boston, with 20% in Dorchester, 11% in Mattapan, and 11% in Roxbury. Each community boasts an array of well-established and innovative early childhood enrichment and family engagement programs and services. They also all have several current and/or recent coalitions focused on improving child health, development, and educational outcomes.

There are well-documented social, economic, educational, and health inequities within and between neighborhoods in Boston. Using the Child Opportunity Index, a relative measure of opportunities across neighborhoods that are conducive for healthy child development and wellbeing, demonstrates an unequal distribution of children in opportunity areas by race/ethnicity, and an unequal distribution of

affordable housing and transportation. The Child Opportunity Index varies somewhat among the three communities that form the focus of Vital Village partnerships although all three tend to experience a lower relative neighborhood opportunity structure for children in comparison to the greater Boston metro area. This Index does not capture the rich network of community coalitions and partnerships that support child enrichment, but rather captures metrics of educational, health, environmental, social and economic opportunities as measured by proximity, access, and performance.

A central goal of our network is to develop hubs of innovation within, and a learning system across neighborhoods. Therefore, we embraced the unique characteristics of each community, the connections between these neighborhoods, and the fluidity and mobility of residents between them, for health and education services, social networks, enrichment, and life experiences.

Our focus has evolved to include not only the footprint of each neighborhood, but the corridors—routes of social networks, commerce, and information—between these places. Neighborhood assets and strengths are not fully captured by standardized indices even those as robust as the Child Opportunity Index. We are uniquely interested in both opportunity structures and social connections and collective actions— neighbors helping neighbors, which are numerous in our partnering communities.

THEORY OF CHANGE

Vital Village is a community engagement network that mobilizes residents and organizations to co-design strategies to promote child wellbeing. Emerging understanding of the far-reaching consequences of early-life adversities and toxic stressors on child development, health, and educational outcomes motivates a paradigm-shift toward the use of innovative approaches that harness collective capacities.

THE VITAL VILLAGE NETWORK THEORY OF CHANGE IS THAT BUILDING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY TO WORK MORE EFFICIENTLY ACROSS SECTORS AND CULTIVATING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WILL GENERATE A HIGHER DEGREE OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND DEVELOP SOCIAL NETWORKS.

Combined, these efforts will create opportunities to build protective factors at the family and community level that promote child wellbeing and prevent childhood adversities.

Through a rigorous community engagement approach, the Vital Village Network sought to support deeper collaboration among educators, clinicians, social service providers, legal advocates, and residents. Vital Village developed 'hubs of innovation' within and a formal collaborative network across the three community identified Boston neighborhoods:

Dudley (Roxbury/North Dorchester), Mattapan, and Codman Square (Dorchester).

As of February 2017, the network consisted of 80 organizational partners and a mailing list of nearly 750 individuals. Approximately 300 community members regularly participate during in-person meetings and nearly 75 individuals are actively engaged in community service efforts. The Vital Village Network's strength is considering how systems of health may best support and partner with community-driven innovations.
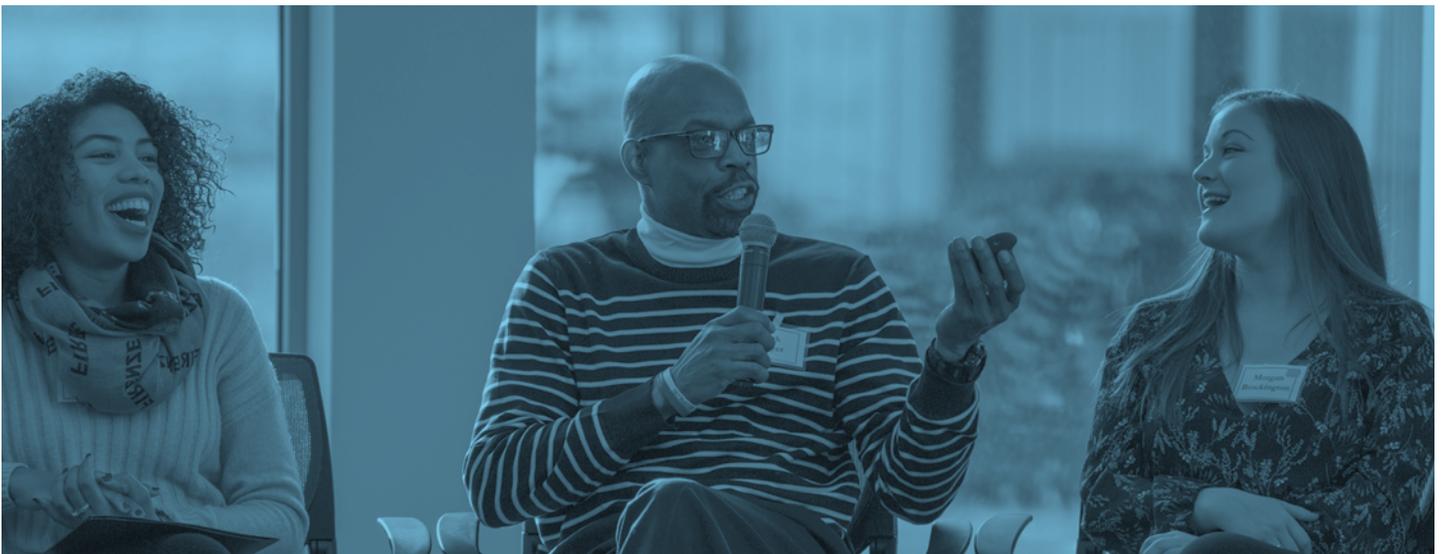
The Network uses a trauma-informed lens to support alignment of community systems and collaboration across community-based early childhood health and education efforts. In an effort to build family and community-level resilience, there are three priority areas that focus on enhancing existing efforts and leveraging missed opportunities, and include: promoting family strengths and social connections during the preconception and prenatal period; peer-to-peer advocacy aimed at addressing social and material hardships; and innovations in early childhood education.

Our service-learning model (Credit for Service) intentionally links skill-building and volunteerism through a service learning commitment. By leveraging formative organizational partnerships and providing coordination and support through the Vital Village core team, we have been able to invest in community leadership development, increase civic engagement, and rapidly scale and spread innovations to improve community wellbeing. Next, we support continuous improvement of local collaborations and programs by using the 90-Day Challenge.

The 90-Day Challenge weds community-based participatory methods with quality improvement to support iterative improvement cycles. Using an equity lens, this process uses an orientation that prioritizes co-design, collaborative leadership, and shared decision-making in community partnerships. Micro-financing pilot innovations is an associated strategy. Finally, Village Vital Signs is a publicly available community data dashboard that leverages multiple sources of data to track benchmarks of child wellbeing with respect to neighborhood opportunity structures. A human-centered design process informs this data commons. Uniting education, healthcare, public health, crime, childcare, and engagement data promotes cross-sector alignment and collaboration by visually linking opportunity structures, systems, and outcomes in geographic areas in blank space image of Village Vital Signs data dashboard.

THEORY OF CHANGE

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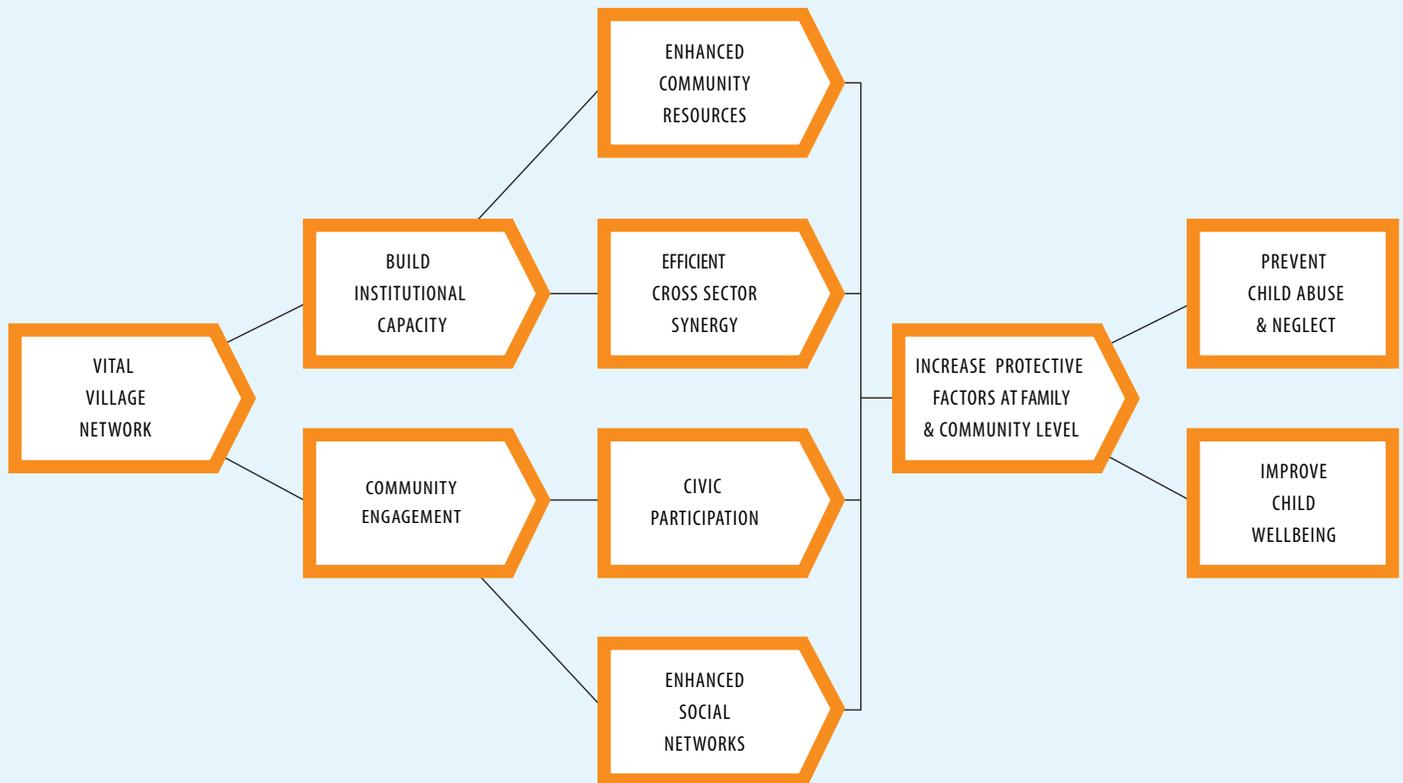
Our Theory of Change is based on two central actions: to build institutional capacity and community engagement to increase protective factors that will improve child well-being and prevent adversity

CASE STUDY EXPLORATION

Focused Areas of Discovery

Findings from the interviews are summarized in the following focus areas of discovery: network climate; interaction with data and information; innovation and learning; and practice change. These focus areas of discovery are based on the analysis of qualitative interviews that queried five domains for learning (improve outcomes through a shared vision; using data to guide the efforts;innovation through participation in change effort; human element of change; networks to sustain, scale and spread) , the associated data coding process (see Addenda), and analysis.

Emergent Themes

Across the areas of discovery outlined in the interview guide, three salient themes emerged from the thematic analysis of the interviews. First, engagement on a personal and professional level is driven by a concept of mutuality and reciprocity. Next, acknowledging community wisdom as valued expertise is important to creating shared decision-making opportunities and leadership trajectories. Finally, the network influences a shift in perspective that can be associated with collaborative work for collective action and shared responsibility for child wellbeing. These themes will be described in depth after each area of discovery.

NETWORK CLIMATE

Vital Village Network has cultivated an environment of mutual respect, transparency, humility, compassion, and joy. These feelings are shared among core team members, network partners, and community residents alike. All three make unique contributions to the network and comments

reflected a shared sense of feeling that their participation and input is valued.

The collaborative nature of the network shifts resources and power where it matters most: the community. One network partner commented, "I mean I think that's how you build respect for underserved communities; you give them the power to speak. You give them the opportunity to speak, and you treat them with respect and their ideas with respect; and you give them the opportunity to ask for help, and you give people the opportunity to help."

The experience of being validated is essential for individuals who are often overworked and underappreciated. Reflecting on a memorable encounter she had at a meeting, one network partner remarked, "She's asking me about my life as a parent and having real deep conversation around communities and what communities need, and appreciating what I have to offer in terms of conversation, never minimizing or belittling or making me feel anything other than validated

and respected about what I've brought to the table. And for me that means things are changing because that's not where I traditionally would be. And I'm in the air of people who don't get to hear this in a real way."

The network is also a very accessible space where the hierarchy common in many professional spaces is non-existent, as expressed by a community resident: "[At] first I was kind of shy, I didn't know if I belonged. Because I'm like whoa, probably everyone is living a normal life and here I am trying to build myself up. But in Vital Village, I found comfort with all of the folks in Vital Village.

And you guys have helped me to re-establish my self-esteem simply because I was accepted."

Similarly, a network partner commented, "The mix in the room was like does she know these people don't even work in the same worlds for one? Or these people don't associate with other people because they don't have that title behind their name? Or this would not happen on any other level at any other industry, right, or systems? When you think about systems, there's typically a hierarchy. And hierarchies know their position, and hierarchies tend to acknowledge who's in their realm. And in this case I walked into a room of people who had varying degrees of either education, experience, or titles. But in this room you didn't feel it.

Reflections on the absence of hierarchy and the presence of equality of voices were common across interviews. Several interviews discussed network experience as one with an equality of voices and diversity of participants that stands in contrast to other efforts in the Boston area.

One partner reflected on the importance of this approach and how it varies from the larger social context of work in Boston: "I think what is also very valuable is that it's sort of a level table. Whether you're a one person operation hoping to get something started, or at Boston Public Schools; or a very large organization like the Children's Museum or a very small organization like Urban Pride, that the table is level, that one voice isn't louder than the other or more well regarded or respected.

IT WAS LIKE OKAY WE'RE ALL HERE, AND EVERYONE'S ON THE SAME LEVEL, EVERYBODY HAS SOMETHING TO SHARE, EVERYBODY HAS SOMETHING TO GIVE; AND EVERYONE CAN COLLABORATE WITH ANYONE HERE TO GET SOMETHING DONE.

I think that's what valuable, which can be very, very, difficult in Boston; which is a very, very, stratified—a very, very, stratified city—and how well regarded you are, many times has to do with not just the letters and numbers behind your name but who you work for, and whether politically you're perceived as having some power. And the Vital Village is not that place. Everyone is equal." One out of network partner described his perspective on the network as

an orientation towards allowing community voices to lead: "So even our view of community engagement, it's not - - we're trying to engage them in our process. We're asking them to be allowed to engage in their process."

Individuals are eager to share both their challenges and triumphs; the network provides valuable insight on responding to challenges and is committed to celebrating success. Furthermore, success is viewed as a collective effort as many shy away from taking sole credit for their achievements. Also, people feel energized and rejuvenated by the compassion present in the network. One network partner commented, "It also lets you know that there's a network of people that care about you and what you're doing. So that's always hopeful, especially when you're engaged in difficult work. Sometimes the work can get lonely, and it can suck you dry. So to understand that there are people that care for you, and engage in your mission, and also in you being successful."

Network involvement allows for ongoing connections. Partners reflected on the value of the network and efficiency for connecting with multiple change agents to accelerate their work: "You know I think that is the big deal here, . . . you know we had the opportunity to partner with a lot of different people in the city, you know, and to come to Vital Village because of their unique role. . . Rather than go to one direct care provider, we came to Vital Village, and through that partnered with 3 providers so you know, we can get more work done and kind of spread the worth around more. And we didn't have to create that system, it was already there."

One-to-one interactions are critical to the network's success. In an expansive network with many moving parts, these relationships ensure that individuals remain engaged in the network

so that it can continue progressing towards its goals. Describing the importance of these inter-actions, a core team member explained, "I think at the end of the day, a lot of it is one-to-one communications. People want to be missed. They want to know that they're not just getting a mass communication. They want to know that you thought of them. I think that is a very real thing, but it also can't be dictated in artificial ways."

 Furthermore, these relationships flourish through reciprocity. Core team members serve as resources to network partners by volunteering for events, assisting with data collection, and attending meetings, among other activities. In turn, these network partners become more deeply engaged in the network and are also eager to serve as a resource. Another core team member described it in terms reflective of familial relationships more than business partnerships: "The role of the core team, I would say, is making sure that everyone is comfortable, not excluding anyone or making anyone feel superior to any other organization. We are all a network. We're all a family of organizations, and we all share the same goal."

However, the fluid, flexible nature of the net-work can pose challenges, particularly for those who are new or attending a meeting or event for the first time. The network does not have a for-mal membership structure with rigid roles and expectations. Reflecting on a poorly received meeting, a network partner explained, "And I think everybody on your side was like "oh, okay that didn't work". It was just awkward and it was a little unclear what the point of the meeting was. Again it was the ambiguity. So they didn't come back after that; I just think they're so busy."

This structure can also pose challenges for the support staff (the core team) as well. One core

team member described network engagement as driven by needs of the community partners: "I feel like the sustained involvement doesn't look how people would expect it to. It's not predictable, it's not consistent, it's just like they're not detached from the network but they're also not deeply engaged in what's happening either. But sustained, I think the involvement, like I said, depends on the need." This less traditional approach is associated with modified expectations for what success may look like.

EMERGENT THEME:
MUTUALITY DRIVES ENGAGEMENT

Community residents described the leadership opportunities as avenues to help them more effectively support their neighbors. This was framed in reciprocity and mutuality. A community resident described his experience as follows, "I look forward to every meeting. And I just hope it's ongoing because I want to be part of Vital Village. I can only see myself growing and Vital Village growing in terms where I get to use myself as a vehicle to help somebody." Another community resident partner also described her actions following participation in the Social Justice Mediation training with the lens of mutuality. "Well, because this is my community. I'm Boston. And so if I have something to offer then I'm supposed to offer it. I feel that if you acquire something that you're supposed to share it. And I don't know how not to."

The theme of mutuality also emerged around network collaborations. One network partner discussed a bi-directional series of trainings that allowed for expanded services for both organizations with and without additional funding in order to not duplicate efforts. "We can more effectively advocate for appropriate services and supports and approaches. . . for those children because we will have the benefit to that knowledge and information. So, that's really important. So, not just the collaboration, how does the mutual collaboration improve our respective ability to better support families and kids; like what are the outcomes?", she asked.

A network partner who leads a new non-profit organization described the benefit of collective responsibility for engaging clients and developing their leadership capacities: "And one thing that has changed since I've been involved in the network, is that I realized the philosophy that I can't do anything by myself. Being a part of the network is very supportive."

I wanted to kind of implement that with the men, and how they engage with some of the men that they engage with through our agency. So we group our men, in villages, where it's not just one person's responsibility to engage with a young man, or follow up with a young man, it's actually the group's responsibility," he explained.

In describing the value of the 90-Day Challenge, one partner directly referenced mutual accountability as essential. "I think what was good about sort of giving it a timeline is it's really easy, even after returning back to the office after a really great meeting, to not just close the folder; put it aside, okay... So, getting the notices on the big tent, oh celebrations, this happened, isn't that great? And having the monthly meetings and knowing, oh okay, they're going to be checking in. So, what can I do before—between now and the next meeting? Who do I need to call? It's sort of the mutual accountability piece I think, is what's important. And it was good, and it really helped me think, okay-- and frankly even my staff--every week we'd sit down in a staff meeting, and this is what we wrote on the Ninety Day Challenge", she explained.

The sense of reciprocity and mutuality were the foundation for authentic, valuable partnerships. One network partner explained, "But this partnership feels authentic. And I go to so many meetings, with partners where it's like a raging waste of time. Often "partners" means that somebody wants something from me, but they're not… I feel like it's very rare to find partnership that is symbiotic, and so I feel like Vital Village is that, and yet I still don't know exactly what it is. Like to me right now, it's just really smart people doing really badass, humbling work."

INTERACTION WITH DATA AND INFORMATION

Interviewees consistently identified data collection as one of the most challenging aspects of their work. Nearly all recognized the value of collecting process and outcome measures but have failed to identify metrics that meaningfully capture the impact of their work. One network partner expressed, "How do I get the data that shows the stuff that's tangible to me, not just to the people who are

using it for whatever their reasoning?" Similarly, many expressed a desire to collect metrics that focus more on assets than deficits but recognize that this rarely aligns with funding requirements. Across interviews, partners reflected a sense that they often feel confined to standardized measures that lack depth and breadth around assets and strengths.

Also, the importance of reciprocity was frequently expressed and individuals have struggled to identify data collection procedures that benefit both the community and their respective organizations. They recognize that this information can enhance the services and resources they provide to the community, but they want this process to enrich the community in more tangible ways.

Several interviewees expressed that Vital Village Network has been influential in helping their organizations to think more creatively about data.

THE VITAL VILLAGE NETWORK PROMOTES AN ASSET-BASED APPROACH TO DATA COLLECTION AND SEVERAL INDIVIDUALS EXPRESSED THAT THIS DEPARTURE FROM MORE CONVENTIONAL APPROACHES IS REFRESHING.

Expressing her disdain with deficit-driven data, a network partner commented, "Hearing all this negativity is unproductive and distracting. And neglects to comment on the many kinds of opportunity and the richness of many kinds of wealth in communities that are marked on maps as hot zones for violence or whatever the negative color is on opportunity maps. . . . to me it brings us back to how we lead with the positive and address the lived reality, that is what people come to the Village to improve. Because, let's face it, people

don't come to the Village because everything's working great. People come to the Village because there are still issues that need to be addressed and are not being adequately addressed. So I still don't know how to balance that."

CORE TEAM MEMBERS HAVE DEVELOPED DATA COLLECTION TOOLS THAT REFLECT THE COMPLEXITY OF THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE, SUCH AS A DATA POSTCARD TO GENERATE CONVERSATION ON QUANTITATIVE DATA AND AN OBSERVATION TOOL TO CAPTURE PARENT-CHILD INTERACTION AT A FAMILY FUN EVENT.

One network partner explained, "I think this is huge, this different way to think about collecting and measuring data. I think from Vital Village its way more human, and the way that you all collect data seems to really understand how humans operate, and its data for the best kind of way."

Data and information shared at meetings were useful for more than tracking outcomes. They served as tools that encourage collaboration. One network partner stated: "I think the content in the meetings is—it really pushes that angle of collaboration, it's not just the coming together, but it's like that the purpose of the coming together is if you're serious about collaboration, this is the place you come together to do it. So, it isn't just the convening, it is the content; whether it's you sharing your data snapshot and what you learned, and what you would do differently. This is what we learned from you, and because this is what did differently, and now we have this data and this is more meaningful data. It constantly

reinforces the mutual benefit of coming together specifically for the purposes about how we can collaborate together. It's sort of creating a space for it there."

INNOVATION AND LEARNING

Vital Village Network fosters innovation and learning in several ways: 1) utilizing moments of adversity as opportunities for improvement; 2) supporting cross-sector collaboration to enhance existing efforts; 3) holding space to share challenges and celebrate achievement; and 4) using quality improvement to establish accountability, transparency, and a collective identity.

The network embraces the idea of failing forward, or responding to adversity by identifying areas for improvement. Challenges such as staff transitions, an ineffective meeting, or interpersonal conflict spur moments of reflection and conversations on how to modify our approach. One core team member explained, "I think what's been really cool is the endurance of these innovations despite the transitions in staff and people, and the changes in neighborhood. I think part of that is because there's been a tremendous amount of flexibility. They weren't programs that had to exist one way."

The network thrives on collaboration and is committed to fostering relationships between non-traditional partners. In a city saturated with non-profits, this process is essential to enhancing existing efforts and reducing duplication and replication. "Something that I've kind of taken away; there's this constant mantra of Boston being over-resourced, and I think that Vital Village offers kind of a physical and intellectual space throughout network meetings where we can actually connect different entities that are focusing on different things all having to do with childhood well-being. And then that way, we can address the problem through kind of like this multi-dimensional perspective and really get to our main goal, which is like I said, childhood well-being," one core team member articulated.

Commenting on the 2015 Leadership Summit, one core team member explained, "I think having those partners [that] attended the Leadership Summit the first time around share their work and act as experts and act as teachers rather than learners was an empowering process. So being able to recognize the work that's been done over the last year and to acknowledge the growth that has happened and also give the people an opportunity to share the skills and tools that they learned was really great[.]"

Quality improvement has transformed how the network operates. The 90-Day Challenge, in which individuals were challenged to achieve a goal in 90 days, was birthed out of the 2014 Leadership Summit on quality improvement and revitalized the work of several network partners. In the '90-Day Challenge' resident teams developed aims to achieve their broader visions and change ideas that they approach through a series of tests or cycles of testing and learning. By merging improvement methods with facilitative leadership strategies and participatory approaches, the Network supports meetings in which residents share lessons learned from successes and failures and plan work towards the next step to achieve their aim. The emphasis on accountability, transparency, and a collective identity during the 90-Day Challenge allowed ideas to evolve into thriving programs and services. These values transcended this 3-month period and now shape how the network functions. One network partner described the experience in this way:

"I also think the 90-day challenges are effective and they're effective because they push people to make bite sized progress in a specific and fairly short period of time. . . Like I don't want to admit it but if it weren't there, I'm overextended, I procrastinate."

The 90-Day Challenge provided an opportunity to enhance existing efforts and promoted shared actions. "The 90-day challenges are huge. I think the training that comes out of there, like the mediation training opportunities, allow to continue to push the envelope for agencies around what more can they be doing to really ensure that people and the community are growing from their work?", one network partner explained. In addition to professional growth, the 90-Day Challenge was personally beneficial. One network partner explained,"I think what the 90-day challenge did on the first one is it really allowed people to kind of break down into groups that they were passionate about.

So you want to talk, you want to focus on housing, you want to focus on legal issues, right. There was those kind of things. But then it allowed us to come up with our bylaws, because that's where I really hone in. I was like, all right, we've got a challenge, and we know we want to get something formal. It fit perfectly. And, God, it happened. But it really kind of highlighted for us how challenging it is to get stuff done. . . It definitely taught me a lot, but a lot came out of it. But it set the stage for how I can really get things done. So you guys have a 90-day challenge, but I have one in my life all the time for a different activity. So it's like I have a financial 90-day challenge."

EMERGENT THEME:
COMMUNITY WISDOM AS EXPERTISE

One community resident described the network's innovative, strengths-based approach to community engagement: "The other thing I really like about it is how it really does try to get from people themselves what they consider they need and what they feel are the strengths in their lives. It's not sort of going in as experts telling people 'here's what you need to do', it's more supporting resilience and positive value to people's lives that they know is already there, but maybe others haven't recognized, or haven't supported." These reflections tap into a network climate and processes that inspire hope, build resilience, and maintain wellness through an engagement that considers individuals and the work with dignity.

Rather than optional, the support from others with lived experience seems essential for continuity in the work. One network partner discussed the process of creating and sustaining opportunities to build strengths as essential to learning: "So the more that we cultivate that [leadership] and ensure that whatever it is we're doing . . . We can bridge some of our adults that come to play group into roles that they sit on boards or advisory councils or as a Children's Museum ambassador, right. So connecting them to the resources in the community, allowing them to just kind of go and explore what those are and find their niche, find the place that allows them to bring out their skill set but cultivates it in a way that we can ensure that they're going to be well taken care of, and that it's going to build their strength and their knowledge and skill base, right, so that's it's employable." This orientation towards ensuring that every action involved an intentional opportunity for cultivating civic engagement and leadership rather than providing an event, experience, or service alone. Removing the ceiling on the community resident leadership trajectory is an important part of mobilizing community change.

Finally, acknowledging community wisdom as expertise within and outside of the local network was also important. One community resident partner expressed the following after participating in a national expert meeting. "I was so ready. But that's what I'm talking about. He's asking me what I think. He's asking me this. So it's like when do you start seeing yourself as an expert? When do you start valuing what you have to offer? When and where are people giving you the opportunity to be in the same room with people who are like not only established, this man is like the voice in the medical field around a multitude of things. . . . So what it was like to be there, and then it was like for me that was the moment. That was the moment when I knew Vital Village was it. This is it. . . pushing through barriers. . . recreating a world where people who traditionally don't see themselves in the same room are not just in the same room. They're conversing."

PRACTICE CHANGE: APPROACH, ACTION, AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In a field that is primarily deficit driven, Vital Village Network embraces asset-based thinking. Conversations from the early days of the network emphasized the need for this shift. One core team member explained, "I think another thing that the network was very vocal about from early on was initially we were very oriented, and even had in our name, trauma informed community engagement network, which people didn't like. They felt like it was deficit based model, victimized model. And people felt like they wanted to be a part of something that really highlighted and accentuated assets and strengths."

Though the conversation on assets often center around issues such as data and shared language, the focus on strengths has also contributed to personal and professional growth for network partners. This experience was captured in the following quote from a network partner: "And so here is what's been birthed out of this is this whole strength-based initiative within myself, acknowledging my own strengths and also believing in myself, believing that I have an expertise. I have something to offer."

The network also views trainings and workshops as an opportunity to meaningfully engage community residents long after the conclusion of these events. For many organizations, there is little emphasis on developing leadership opportunities for these attendees and exploring their untapped potential. Examples of this are engaging participants from a lactation training as parent leaders at breastfeeding support groups and creating a community mediation program for graduates of the Social

Justice Mediation Institute. Commenting on a participant of the Mediation Institue, a network partner explained, "It's amazing how he's grown because we've watched it, but I think it was something about that mediator training. I think that's it. Also just coming to the meetings, it's doing something for him. He came to my office recently and he was writing up some stuff about fatherhood, and some things that he's been thinking about, and I was like "wow, [man] this is awesome". And it's like he started believing, and he started dreaming again. It's cool, and when you see that, you know it's something. You know it's beautiful."

Building capacity with an orientation towards the generalizability of these skills for everyday life. One out-of-network partner reflected this sentiment "I've always tried to think about how – how else are we supporting folks so yes their finances are getting better but how does that – what does that mean for their day-to-day lives. What does that mean for the interactions that they have with their families. What does that mean about their – what does that mean about their self-confidence and what does that mean – how are they essentially being better citizens?" Sentiments such as these reinforce the importance of grounding the work in the daily experiences and lived reality of community members.

EMERGENT THEME: SUPPORTING A SHIFT IN MINDSETS

The shift in expectations for what the community could achieve for children by working together serves as a motivator for participation. One network partner explained, ""I just think there's real collaboration that happens in Vital Village that's not like waste-of-time collaboration, and I think the focus is always on the work, so, on the work and with a real understanding that everybody brings value and it's going to be so much easier if we do it together."

The importance of the network space for cultivating mindset shifts towards a strengths-based orientation, as one network partner noted, "We're different and if we focus on the positive things, not just the residents, but the organizations that are here, realizing the vibrancy of Roxbury, then maybe we would succeed more." This mindset was also critical to finding value in existing community assets and building capital, as was reflected by community residents in the network: "Because it's like there's this dependency of eight people who really respect the work and really understand the importance of the relationship. So regardless of what comes out of it,

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What's being cultivated is this really strength-based relationship. And those are the things that go much further than any event or activity we could do to support others, right. The fact that we're supporting each other, the fact that we see each other as social capital, the fact that we depend on one another when we're in our communities."

The importance of a shared vision of community successes is also important, as another network partner described it as the following: "So I still feel like even as adults we have certain schemas in our head and I feel like if we replace it with positive ones in the community, that's going to have huge impacts on how we envision our own community, and also how we parent and raise our kids." Another community resident described around her role in the network: "And I work with like-minded people in my community, who have a real vested interest in wanting to see things change for the positive. I work with folks who are committed to the growth and development of their children and ensuring that they're ready for school, and they're excelling, not just thriving but excelling."

Central to this effort was the challenge of navigating competing priorities and limited funds. As one network partner described, "And so one thing the network does is say can we create a space that is not burdensome, that doesn't ask that much, that actually supports groups that have these largely unfunded mandates to be greater than the sum of their parts? Because if we put it all together, if we put all these crumbs together maybe we can get somewhere. And I feel like we have seen some getting somewhere in the network. There are a variety of innovations that have been really effective."

One network partner described the network as filling a void in public policy and associated programming. She explained, "The reason the network needs to exist is because the vision of weaving a rich tapestry of support for the children of Mattapan, Codman, and Dudley to grow up in, which is the tag line of the mission statement, there's boundless evidence that that is not shared by policymakers.

That's the whole reason we need to have this network because most of the network members relatively speaking in the grand scheme of things, are working with crumbs to achieve effectively unfunded mandates."

Interviews also reflected on the spread of a trauma-informed framework through convening, emergence of a common language, and group actions such as the 90-Day Challenge.
One partner described it in this way: "I think the role that Vital Village has played is bringing people to the same place, like physically in the same place. And I do feel like Vital Village has, I don't know if this is deliberate, but there is common language that is coming out of Vital Village. . . I feel like everybody was basically talking about trauma at the last… [Vital Village Leadership

Summit], so I think that that actually, again a little bit of a mindset shift, just thinking about, and not in like a patronizing way, but thinking about that like for the most part, if you were in a community of color that is poor, you're dealing with trauma all of the time. . . .but it just makes you see things very differently I feel like. So again, our attendance. First of all, we work with parents, so it doesn't matter if they're low income or of color, it's impossible to get to everything even if you want to. But I think especially taking into account trauma, and this is definitely something I walked away with from the last 90-Day challenge. Again it's not a lowered expectation, it's just like a realistic sense, that actually like First Teacher feels the most important to us."
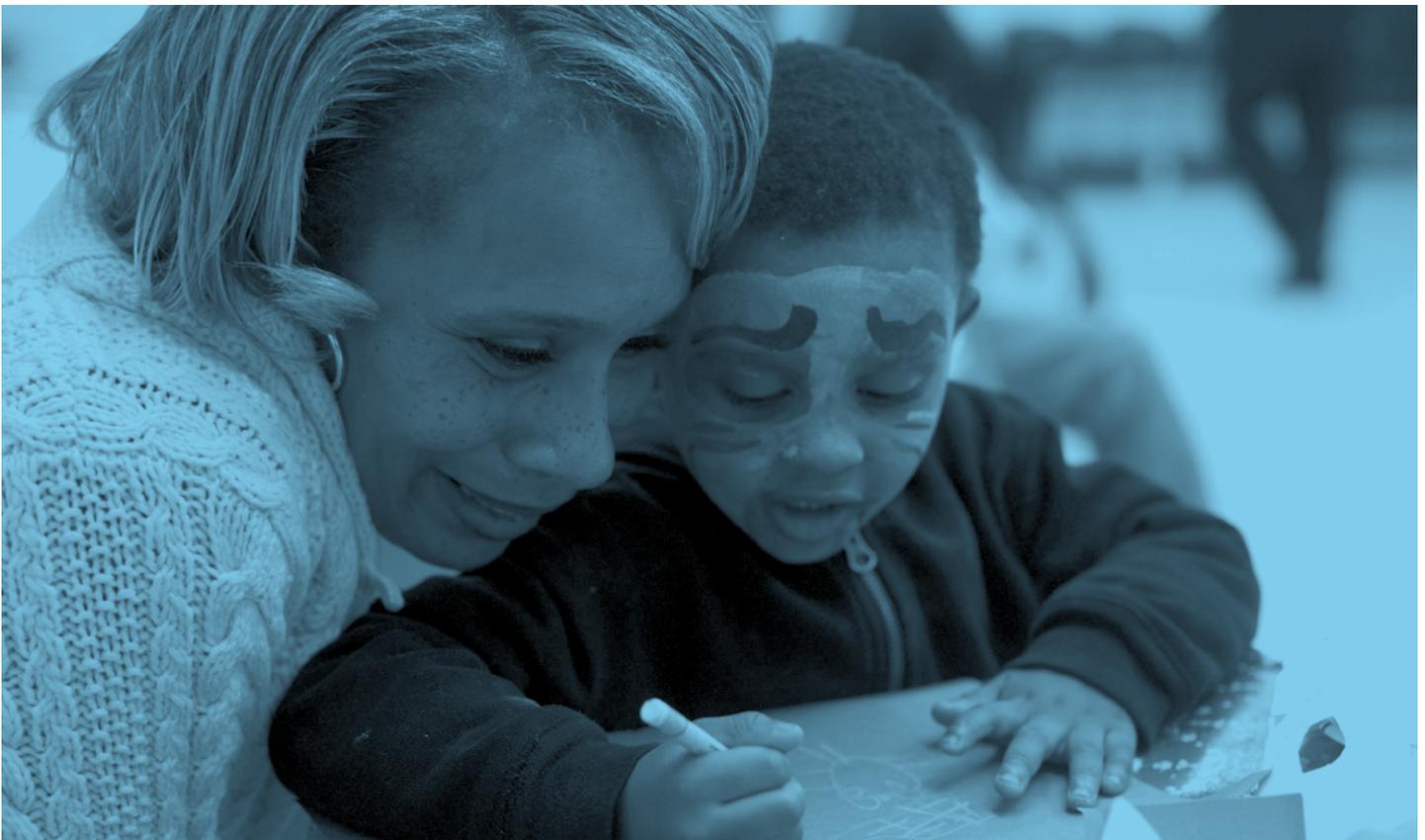
CONCLUSION

Vital Village Network aims to strengthen community capacity to promote optimal child wellbeing, by supporting partnerships between community resident and community based agencies. This case study allowed us to explore diverse perspectives from within and outside of our network on the impact of network roles, functions, ways of being, and processes on engagement, participation, and challenges. The preliminary findings of our case study can be summarized by the three themes that emerged: mutuality and reciprocity drive network engagement; acknowledging community wisdom enables shared-governance and co-design; the network helps support mindset shifts that embrace community assets and motivate participation in collective actions. Network engagement on a personal and professional level is driven by a concept of mutuality and reciprocity. Mutuality both drives and reinforces participation, but also serves as the bedrock for engaging in a network process to improve child wellbeing. Next, acknowledging community wisdom as valued expertise is important to reducing hierarchies and creating shared decision-making opportunities and leadership trajectories. The network supports a shift in perspective that can be associated with collaborative work for collective action and shared responsibility for child wellbeing. Mindset changes that allow reconciliation of adversities with positive assets and strengths of the community and individuals motivate participation in collective actions and engagement in the network. This first analysis provides a foundation for further inquiry, as well as, a springboard for refinement of network processes and tools.

METHODS

RECRUITMENT

In total, 18 interviews were conducted between February 2016 and June 2016. Interviews were conducted with the following stakeholders: Vital Village Network partners affiliated through a partner agency (N=7) or personally affiliated as a community resident (N=4); out-of-network partners (N=2); and network support organization staff (N=5). Participants were recruited via personal calls and email messages explaining the nature of the case study and interview request. Qualitative interviews were conducted privately by one team member (EL) using the semi-structured questionnaire. Interviews ranged from 30 to 90 minutes and were conducted in English. Participants received a gift box several weeks after the interview as a token of gratitude but were not provided with incentives.

This case study was approved by the Boston University Medical Campus Institutional Review Board (Boston, MA). Ethical issues in relation to confidentiality were adhered to throughout this study. Informed consent was waived as no personal identifiers were collected.

INTERVIEWS AND QUESTIONNAIRES

The interviewer utilized modestly adapted versions of the questionnaires developed collaboratively by the Population Level Change Learning Community Case Study development team and learning community partners. We piloted the interview guide in the first 4 "condensed" interviews of network partners (abbreviated to 30-40 minutes in length).

After the first 4 condensed interviews were conducted, the questionnaire and interview approach was reviewed to discuss new topics raised by interviewees, feedback on interview style, and potential areas to probe in future interviews. All interviews were audio-taped. Interviews were transcribed by an independent agency (New England Transcription Service).

ANALYSIS

Three members of the researchers (EL, KB, RBJ) performed an initial review of the transcripts to develop analytic codes based on key words and phrases. This process defined major codes that followed questions from the interview discussion guide and minor codes driven by the data. The resulting codebook included the code, definition of the code, and guidelines for using it. Authors (KB, EL, and RBJ) coded transcripts independently using Dedoose software (version 4.12, SocioCultural Research Consultants, LLC, Los Angeles, CA). Dedoose is a web-based qualitative and mixed-methods analysis software used to organize and code the data and later for data analysis (http://www.dedoose.com).

To ensure data reliability, two of the coders (KB and RBJ) met as a group to compare coding for agreement with the codebook and among the coders. Discrepancies in interpretation of coding were verbally discussed as a group until consensus was reached. In Dedoose, tables were used to compare occurrence and co-occurrence of codes, distribution of codes by network case study participant type, coder, and interviewee. An iterative process was used to identify emergent themes.

CODE CO-OCCURENCE CHART

Codes	Assets	Communication	Community Change	Community Narrative	Conditions for Fa	Connections	Evidence of Scale and Sp	Innovation and Learning	90 Day Challenge	Leadership Sum	Interaction with Data/Infor	Knowledge	Resources	VVN	Needs	Network Climate	Decision making	Origin of Relationship	Practice Change	Approach/Action	Theoretical Fram	Quote	Representation	Visions and Values	Totals
Assets		7	1	6		25	4	8	2	1	9		1	3	9	23		3	4	18	15	9	9	28	185
Communication	7		2	2	1	35	18	18	17	9	20		1	4	15	32	6	3		14	9	2	15	22	243
Community Change	1	2		3	6	4	3	6					6	1		11		6		6		3	3	8	73
Community Narrative	6	2	3		6	2	4	4	3		2			2	13	2		6		6	6	3		9	87
Conditions for Families and		1	6	8		1					1				5			6			5	2	2	2	39
Connections	25	35	4	2	1		29	41	17	6	20		3	3	28	48	6	14	6	47	12	5	24	62	439
Evidence of Scale and Spread	4	18	3	4		29		38	6	2	7		3	3	3	2	3	4	4	21	13		6	25	187
Innovation and Learning	8	18	6	4		41	38		43	9	22	1	9	3	20	30	2	8	7	49	22	2	6	38	385
90 Day Challenge	2	17		3		17	6	43		7	2				12	17		3	1	16	6			17	168
Leadership Summit	1	9				5	2	9	7		2				7	8							1	4	55
Interaction with Data/Information	9	20		2	1	20	7	22	2	2			3	4	39	19	1		3	29	4		9	21	217
Knowledge								1					1	2											4
Resources	1	1	6			3	3	9			3			9	6	7		6		9	1	2	9	3	76
VVN	3	4	1	2		3	3	3			4	1	9			12		16	2		3		5	4	75
Needs	9	15		13	5	28	3	20	12	7	39	2	5			13	3	2	2	20	9	8	20	35	268
Network Climate	23	32	11	2		48	2	30	17	8	19		7	12	13		6	30	7	44	32	14	26	67	490
Decision making		6				8	3	2			1				3	6				2		1	2	2	35
Origin of Relationship	3	3	8	9	6	14	4	8	3				6	16	2	30			7	18	30	10	4	32	203
Practice Change	4					6	4	7	1		3			2	2	7		7		16	8	6	2	2	77
Approach/Action	18	14	8	9		47	21	49	16		29		9		20	44	2	18	16		26	12	15	56	429
Theoretical Framework	15	9		6	5	12	12	22	8		4		1	3	9	32		20	8	26		10	9	47	256
Quote	9	2	3	3	2	5		2					2		8	14	1	10	6	12	18		8	25	120
Representation	9	15	3		2	24	5	6		1	9		8	5	20	26	2	4	2	15	9	8		51	223
Visions and Values	28	22	8	9	2	62	25	38	17	4	21		3	4	35	67	2	32	2	56	47	25	51		560
Totals	185	243	73	87	39	439	187	385	168	55	217	4	76	75	268	490	35	203	77	429	256	130	223	560	

POPULATION CHANGE LEARNING COMMUNITY

Purpose

- Create a learning environment that accelerates learning and progress, and builds camaraderie and shared purpose, across various sites and communities working to improve population outcomes within their respective geographies.

- Connect Community/Initiative Teams with researchers, innovators and problem solvers (from various sectors) to further inform the learning process, overcome barriers and improve local actions.

- Identify and improve the necessary capacities to be successful in this work - including the organizing strategies, operational structures and measurement system needed to achieve population level success.

Learning Areas

- How did we create the conditions that lead to positive change?

- Are we getting better results?

Case Study Design Process and Approach

The goal of the case study is to better understand the practice of how best to respond to the on-going development and delivery of the support needed for multi-sector place based endeavors, informed by the collective experience of those actually responsible for the place based work. Local teams entered into this process with a commitment to ask questions and gather the perspectives of participating agencies, residents and others, that would allow for a deeper level of understanding of the full range of functions

and capacities of support entities for multi-sector place based efforts.

While what was learned through the sharing of our experience in this role, and from the stories of those involved with us, is intended to benefit each local effort, we believe the case studies can also contribute to other's collective efforts on behalf of children, youth, families and communities. To that end, the Population Change Learning Community has adopted a two-phase approach for the case study process.

In phase one, we sought to document the collective experience of those actually responsible for and involved in the local place-based work. Each case study is intended to be a feedback source for those sites participating in the Population Change Learning Community. The process provided the opportunity for those involved to reflect on and make sense of their individual and collective action. The findings from each locale allow us to articulate the on-the-ground experiences of the support entity, or entities, that provides one or more support functions. By relying on local stakeholders to share their experiences and perspectives, and make meaning of those insights, the aim is to strengthen our shared understanding of the elements of effectiveness for those supporting multi-sector place based endeavors. Through our use of a guided exploration of what has happened and what has been learned from those responsible for supporting a place-based endeavor, the Population Change Learning Community has now generated 9 site-specific case studies.

In phase two, these 9 site-specific case studies serve as source documents with which to collec-

tively analyze place based work. Sites within the Population Change Learning Community participate in other well recognized place based efforts such as Promise Neighborhoods, StriveTogether, Working Cities Challenge, IHI SCALE initiative, Purpose Built Neighborhoods, United Way, Avenues of Change in British Columbia, Mobilizing Action for Resilient Communities (MARC), among others. Each of these endeavors have been informed or influenced by at least one, if not many more, theories or frameworks on how to change at a neighborhood or community level. By applying some of these different theories or frameworks on how to drive community or systems change, this subsequent analysis of the collective work of the 9 sites will provide new perspectives for the sites within the Population Change Learning Community to deepen their learning, as well as provide information and insight on the support role to the larger field of population based community initiatives.

For more information regarding this Case Study or the Population Change Learning Community, please contact Alexis Moreno, Case Study Coordinator at alexisgeemoreno@gmail.com or Patricia Bowie, Population Change Learning Community Project Lead at patriciabowie@me.com.

DOMAINS EXPLORED WITHIN THE CASE STUDY

INCREASE THE ABILITY OF NETWORK PARTNERS TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES AND PRACTICE A SHARED VISION

Information was gathered about:

- Impetus for working together
- Initial goals
- Membership criteria and member roles/responsibilities
- Network coordination
- Development of a shared vision and guiding principles
- Necessary knowledge and skill sets
- Decision making processes

MEASURE AND SHARE DATA TO GUIDE THE EFFORT

Information was gathered about:

- Local insights generated through data
- Motivations for using data
- Data sharing processes
- Use of data
- Additional data needed
- Resident involvement in data-related efforts

INNOVATE AND IMPROVE THROUGH ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE CHANGE EFFORT

Information was gathered about:

Information was sought about how and what changes, improvements and innovations happened throughout the effort:

- Major phases and developments
- Most significant changes
- Detecting a need for change
- Taking initiative to make a change
- Moving through a change process
- Roles of partners and missing partners
- Results of change efforts
- Inventions and innovations
- Enablers and inhibitors of change

SUPPORT THE HUMAN ELEMENT OF CHANGE

Information was gathered about:

Information was asked about the different aspects of working collectively and the various resources and tools used to support the effort:

- Relationships
- Diversity
- Asset vs. problem orientation
- Conflict Resolution
- Managing emotions

- Leadership
- Funding
- Technology

USE NETWORKS TO SUSTAIN, SCALE AND SPREAD

Information was gathered about:

Information was sought about the ways the effort has been sustained and the ideas or actions scaled or spread throughout the network and the community:

- Spreading the vision
- Scaling the efforts
- Spreading the efforts
- Sustaining or perpetuating the efforts
- Specific role of the support/operating entity in scaling, spreading, and sustaining
- Functioning as a Learning Community
- Networking beyond the local community