



COMMUNITYWORKS

A FRAMEWORK OF

GREAT LAKES URBAN RESTORATION NETWORK

POWERING FLOURISHING NEIGHBORHOODS
AND CITIES SINCE 2008

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THE COMMUNITYWORKS APPROACH

Becoming a Force for Good

If you are interested in creating long-term, positive impact in your neighborhood, city, or community, our *CommunityWorks* framework may be right for you.

This article explains how it has been successfully implemented in the neighborhoods of one West Michigan city and how it can work in yours.

Great Lakes Urban

Great Lakes Urban is a Zeeland, Michigan based non-profit organization on a mission to connect and convene leaders to work together for the improvement of their neighborhoods, cities, and communities.

From our base in the cities of Holland, Grand Rapids, Wyoming, and other West Michigan communities, Great Lakes Urban scales the *CommunityWorks* framework across North America through certified Regional Coaches.

***CommunityWorks* framework**

CommunityWorks incorporates a structured approach to supporting neighborhood and city leaders and a four phase, step-by-step

process for implementation.

Field-tested for more than a decade, *CommunityWorks* has evolved into a proven method for bringing residents together to create a preferred future for their neighborhood.

The average community will complete the four phases in two to five years, but the completion of the process is really about establishing structured relationships that cultivate a more vibrant community far into the future.

Asset Based Community Development

The *CommunityWorks* framework is founded upon the principles and practices of Asset Based Community Development (ABCD). ABCD is a growing movement that considers local assets as the primary drivers of lasting community improvement.

Building on the skills of local residents, the power of local associations, and the supportive functions of local institutions, ABCD draws upon existing strengths to inspire the thriving neighborhoods and flourishing cities of tomorrow.



5 COMMUNITYWORKS IMPACTS

While every neighborhood story is unique, cities implementing the *CommunityWorks* framework in their community can expect to see the following emerge.

A shared vision and sense of community

An increased sense of pride, belonging, solidarity, and attachment will emerge. Shared values, a common identity, and a collectively determined change agenda will produce greater neighborhood stability.

Increased social capital

Relationships will be strengthened between and among neighbors, resulting in increased exchanges of reciprocal acts of kindness, increased participation in local activities, and greater levels of trust.

Local leadership and ownership

Residents will begin to understand that they can achieve their preferred future.

Capable and confident resident leadership will surface, as well as increased engagement in city functions. Over time, leaders and residents will begin to identify things they want to improve regarding established policies and systems.

Increased harmony and security

Neighbors will begin to look out for one another, leading to reductions in crime. Better relationships between residents will improve their relationship with city hall, the police, and other institutions.

Improved quality of life

Although the impact will vary between neighborhoods, quality of life factors will improve in such areas as the social and academic achievement of youth, the availability of affordable housing, business and job growth, health outcomes, and increased food security.



4 COMMUNITYWORKS BUILDING BLOCKS

The CommunityWorks framework establishes the following four key roles that become the key building blocks of neighborhood strengthening.

Neighborhood Teams

Neighborhood Teams are composed of residents that provide support to the Neighborhood Connectors, helping to engage as many people as possible in the process. They help identify boundaries of the neighborhood and give input to the agenda for change. The team fundraises for, recruits, and financially supports a Neighborhood Connector to ensure the long-term sustainability of their efforts.

Neighborhood Connectors

The Neighborhood Connector is typically a resident of the neighborhood they serve. They have a heart for the neighborhood, and believe it already has the resources necessary to drive their desired change. Their primary function is to listen to, engage, and connect neighbors to work

together on things they believe will help them and their neighborhood flourish.

Regional Team

Regional Teams are composed of city leaders and representatives from the business, civic, nonprofit, education, and other sectors that care about long-term, sustainable, approaches in their region. The Regional Team promotes and advocates for ABCD approaches in their region, and fundraises to financially support a Regional Coach. A region might be a city, a county, or another definable geographic area.

Regional Coach

Regional Coaches are typically embedded in independent, regional organizations with a proven track record of developing relationships within their region. They are the front-line multipliers of ABCD approaches in their region. They discover, train, coach and support community leaders and Neighborhood Connectors.



Community Works provides leaders a roadmap for establishing meaningful resident-driven improvements through the following phased process.

Phase 1: Initiating the Change

(Expectations for Months 1-12)

In Phase 1, you will gather residents, community leaders, and partners from the civic, business, education, faith, and other sectors to form a Regional Team. Together, you will learn about the principles and practices of ABCD and the benefits it can bring to your neighborhoods and city. You will secure resources to hire and support a certified Regional Coach.

Phase 2: Asset Mapping for Change

(Expectations for Months 12-18)

In Phase 2, the Regional Coach will discover where there is energy for place-based change. Activities focus on discovering leaders in the neighborhoods. This phase results in establishing a pilot neighborhood in which to start.

Boundries are identified and and common aspirations defined. A Neighborhood Team is formed.

Phase 3: Mobilizing for Change

(Expectations for Months 18-30)

In Phase 3, the Neighborhood Team engages as many residents as possible in decision-making, aiming for broad and meaningful participation and consensus. Neighbors are mobilized around shared interests and common concerns, all resulting in activities and actions that benefit the common good.

Phase 4: Sustaining the Change

(Expectations for months 30 to 60)

In Phase 4, the Neighborhood Team develops a stewardship plan and raises the resources to pay the Neighborhood Connector to sustain the work of discovering and connecting local assets. The Regional Coach develops additional neighborhoods to establish a growing network of Neighborhood Connectors.



2 COMMUNITYWORKS INDICES

Two Key Measurements of Progress

We measure our progress through two key indices: The personal progression of the Neighborhood Connector through the Stages of Leadership Development (below) and the progression of the neighborhood through the Stages of Neighborhood Development (shown on right).

Stages of Leadership Development

1. Engaged in individual betterment
2. Completed ABCD training
3. Applying habits of community listening and asset mapping
4. Bring collaborators alongside residents to get more done in the neighborhood
5. Evidence of applying community development practices (e.g. breaking isolation, increasing assets, naming and changing systems that perpetuate poverty)
6. Consistently applying ABCD principles and practices

Stages of Neighborhood Development

1. Method and system are in place for ongoing listening with the community that results in discovering what residents care about enough to act on
2. A community group/association forms and residents build power to act
3. Community action groups form to work on the things they care about
4. Neighborhood gift info is transparent, accessible and shared with the community for the common good
5. Evidence emerges of cooperation and collaboration while keeping residents at the center
6. There is growing capacity to monitor and celebrate progress, evaluate results, and improved practices through reflection on actions taken
7. There is evidence that the residents are working together using their voices and power to change the systems that perpetuate poverty or other issues



A COMMUNITYWORKS CITY

The City of Holland, Michigan

A community of just over 33,000 residents, the City of Holland sits on the shore of Lake Michigan. Known for its rich Dutch American heritage and award-winning downtown, Holland is striving to build another legacy by living the motto, "As go the neighborhoods, so goes the city."

ABCD takes root

Begun over a decade ago in the neighborhood of Holland Heights, the successful implementation of ABCD has been replicated with success in a growing network of neighborhoods. Each neighborhood supports a Neighborhood Connector who facilitates good neighboring and resident engagement. Residents in these neighborhoods have done everything from advocating for zoning changes, to starting community gardens, to fixing up the house of their neighbors in need.

The story solidifies

A Regional Coach regularly convenes the Neighborhood Connectors for peer learning and mutual support. The emerging Regional Team is organizing itself to assess impact, coordinate efforts, pursue funding to support existing ABCD work, and listen for the opportunities to replicate the framework in new neighborhoods.

Impact for today, hope for tomorrow

The successful implementation of the *CommunityWorks* framework in Holland has made observable, positive impact. Holland has seen increased resident participation, decreases in crime, increased local business support, and much more. Great Lakes Urban provides the energy and support structures required to replicate the framework across West Michigan, the Great Lakes region, and North America.

A COMMUNITYWORKS STORY



At 82, Mama Fran sometimes feels worn out, but like her family and her neighborhood, there's no keeping her down. Mama Fran and her multi-generation family of 14 live in a home in the Washington School neighborhood, a community of 500 households nestled in a 27-block radius near the heart of downtown.

Mama Fran's doesn't qualify for home repair assistance. That's meant living with badly chipped paint and a broken window that would let in cold air all winter. Despite these conditions, Mama Fran adds heart and soul to the neighborhood. When the Hislops moved in down the street, for example, Mama Fran's family was the first to bring around a meal to welcome them.

When the city raised concerns about the condition of the house, the neighborhood responded. Over the course of a weekend volunteers turned out to paint the exterior

and replace the window. By Monday, Mama Fran was in tears, overwhelmed by the outpouring of support and care. "I can't believe it. In year's past, this wouldn't have happened."

Stories like this only happen in neighborhoods where the fabric of community is strong. For the Washington School neighborhood, the social fabric has been rebuilt through ice-cream socials, a community garden, clean-up days, a quarterly neighborhood newsletter, and safety workshops. What makes these points of interaction possible are the efforts of a network of volunteer Block Connectors who meet together, connect with neighbors, and take responsibility for the quality of life on their block.

There's always a spark that starts the flame of good neighboring, and in the Washington School neighborhood that spark is Lisa. Lisa, a resident of 24 years was recruited to be a Neighborhood Connector. Today, she provides leadership to the Washington School Neighbors, a successful, independent, and self-sustaining micro-organization. "This job was no accident," Lisa will tell you, "I've been invited into these people's lives, and that has given me life."

A COMMUNITYWORKS NEIGHBOR



After struggling to feel at home for many years, Paul Bowles decided to take a chance and relocate to Holland, MI. Since moving to his current neighborhood in Westcore, Paul's life has improved in ways that he never would have imagined. He found a community and forged connections that transformed his mental, emotional, and physical health. We were fortunate enough to chat with Paul and learn more about his story.

How did you get involved?

Through my involvement with Circles USA, I was able to form concrete relationships with people in the community which have been really impactful on my life. I'm now involved with the organization Westcore Neighbors as a block connector and my

job is to be available for members of this block and help them find solutions for problems that arise. I also have the privilege to develop block parties and ultimately try to get people to come out of their shell and become neighbors.

Can you talk about the relationships you have formed in this community?

My friendship with Jay [of Great Lakes Urban] has been really important. He has helped me to prosper in life in so many ways. He's the one that pushed me to get to know others in the area by saying, "Paul, be a neighbor. Go knock on the door and introduce yourself and say hi." So, I did, and now I have a great friendship with my next-door neighbor, and they have become just like family.

How does having a stronger sense of community improve your life?

I know I'm not alone. Growing up, I came from a family that wasn't very sociable and didn't have any community or relationships with extended family. When I got to Holland, I started developing significant and loving relationships with people that I had never had before. I've planted roots and found myself at home.

A COMMUNITYWORKS CONNECTOR



Doris Perez was born and raised in the Dominican Republic, where her parents were both heavily involved in their community. They ran a medical clinic out of a trailer that they were able to move all over the island to bring assistance to many people. Every person that they helped was treated with dignity and love – a value that was very important for their family to uphold, and one that Doris continues to practice in her work today.

In 1979, Doris came to Michigan to study psychology and social work at Spring Arbor University. These four years taught her a lot about social work in America and inspired her to continue working with people. Eventually, Doris was offered a position as a Neighborhood Connector in the Godfrey Lee neighborhood through Great Lakes Urban.

Every week, Doris and other residents participate in a walking club, in which they walk weekly and talk with one another. After walking, they meet at someone's home to cook, share stories, talk about goals and hopes for the future, and uplift each other. They also like to come together and look for ways to help others in the community that are in need. In one instance, there was a woman that was at a low point both emotionally and physically and was unable to care for her garden. Doris and the walking club came along to help with the garden and show support.

Uncovering that potential has been Doris' favorite thing to do and she calls this "treasure hunting." She goes out into the community, getting to know and appreciate what every person has to offer. She says, "Every person has a distinctive, beautiful thing to contribute to society."

By practicing what she believes in, Doris has inspired others to want to connect with their neighbors and volunteer their time in the community. She has been committed to providing the training and support that the residents need to lead the growth and transformation of their communities.

A COMMUNITYWORKS COACH



Jake Norris graduated from DePaul University with a degree in sociology, where he learned about Asset Based Community Development. He and his family moved to Holland in 2018 and live in the Eastcore neighborhood.

Jake directs 3sixty, which is strengthening the Eastcore neighborhood. Jake also serves as the Holland-Zeeland Regional Coach. Jake and his team are dedicated to replicating the Neighborhood Connector program in new neighborhoods across the region. Recently, we caught up with Jake to learn more about his vision.

What's a favorite story from the work?

I have many favorites, but I will share one from our Neighborhood Advocacy Team

member Lori. Lori and her husband Dave moved into the Eastcore neighborhood 30 years ago. In that time, they have built community around them by reclaiming a neglected alley behind their home for a community garden. Lori and Dave have connected their neighbors by organizing events in the alley and using the gifts of the whole block. What was formerly a littered eyesore has been transformed into a gathering place where neighbors can connect and care for their shared space. At its best, 3sixty is the support system to help bring dreams to life.

What inspired you to work regionally?

Simply put, I love the work and want to see more of it happening in the Holland-Zeeland area. I see how challenging it is for resident leaders to sustain the work over the long haul, and how hard it is for individual neighborhood organizations to tell their story to a broader audience; I'd like to build the support structure to free up neighbors to focus on their neighborhood! My dream is to incubate and support neighborhood connector entities in every neighborhood. Every neighborhood has intrinsic value and unique gifts; I want to see those resources leveraged for collective flourishing across our region.



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