The Skillman FOUNDATION

Good Neighborhoods and Good Schools

The long-term goals are for young people to be safe, healthy, well educated, and prepared for adulthood.

Background*.* The Skillman Foundation has spent nearly 50 years working to improve the lives of children in Detroit, investing in worthwhile programs and strategies that created positive outcomes for many children. The limited scale of these programs and the persistence of poor indicators of child well-being, however, led the Foundation's leadership to a decision to develop a more strategic framework including comprehensive community change and education reform — the Good Neighborhoods and Good Schools programs

Good Neighborhoods. Launched in 2006, Good Neighborhoods (GN**)** is a ten-year, $100-million program that focuses on six Detroit neighborhoods where nearly 60,000 children live, roughly 30% of the city's child population. Good Neighborhoods involves a range of neighborhood development and system change strategies in concert with various public and private partners, as well as with residents and other stakeholders. Believing that resident engagement and leadership is critical to sustained, large-scale change for children, GN is anchored in a community partnership process. The Foundation plays a significant role in the design and implementation of the work along with two intermediaries that facilitate the community engagement and planning process (National Community Development Institute) and provide on-going technical assistance in each neighborhood (University of Michigan School of Social Work). The community process is designed in the three stages listed below.

1. <u>Community Planning </u>(2006-2007) – The Foundation convened meetings with neighborhood stakeholders and residents to begin planning and outreach. The community came together in a series of meetings to decide on the key goal and strategies for improving lives of children in their neighborhoods.

2. <u>Readiness</u> (2008-2010) – The focus is on strengthening the leadership and capacity for neighborhoods to make and sustain change. Action Planning Teams consisting of residents and nonprofit stakeholders developed and implemented strategies for achieving short-term goals. The neighborhoods engaged in a yearlong process in which they identified and elected residents (including youth) and agency representatives to form resident-stakeholder organizations, loosely referred to as governance groups — sustainable, results-oriented neighborhood-based planning and advocacy bodies that will identify the strategies, outcomes and indicators that will guide and inform child-centered neighborhood revitalization efforts through 2016.

3. <u>Transformation</u> (2011-2016) – Resources will be aligned, activities connected and scaled, community strategies will be fully implemented, and improvements demonstrated.

Foundation support for individual, organization and community readiness includes a robust small grants program in which a resident-panel makes decisions on grants to grassroots organizations in amounts up to $5,000; a Leadership Academy for residents, technical assistance to individuals, grassroots organizations, and established nonprofits provided by the U-M Technical Assistance Center, and support to nascent governance entities. In addition to the neighborhood development work, the Foundation operates a complementary grantmaking strategy to support the development of a strong neighborhood-based system of supports and opportunities for young people, focusing on comprehensive, high-quality youth development programs.

Good Schools. The goal of Good Schools is to have children attend high-quality schools and to graduate from high school college and work ready. In order to address the structural changes necessary to provide high-quality educational opportunities for Detroit youth, Good Schools is citywide in scope but focuses on the six Foundation-targeted neighborhoods wherever possible. After a long history supporting schools in Detroit, the Foundation's recent strategies have focused on creating high-quality small high schools; identifying and rewarding high-performing schools and providing information to parents to help guide their school selection; and transforming the conditions for school reform to be successful and sustainable in Detroit. The Foundation worked with Mayor Dave Bing, the Detroit Public Schools Emergency Financial Advisor, and an alliance of civic and philanthropic organizations in Detroit to establish a bold new education plan for the city. The Excellent Schools Detroit education plan is designed to improve educational opportunities for all Detroit children, and to dramatically increase high school graduation rates. Good Schools also includes a focus on school readiness through an initiative to increase the quality of child care delivered to children in the six targeted neighborhoods.

Change Making. Recognizing that the Foundation's resources are grossly inadequate to reach its ambitious goals, Skillman is also pursuing an aggressive change-making strategy. Change making in this case refers to non-grantmaking practices and roles through which the Foundation serves as convener, broker, public educator, problem-solver, and/or advocate to advance an agenda for Detroit children.[1] The Foundation works — formally and informally — to align diverse interests and players around a common agenda; ensure that those typically excluded have a seat at the civic table; draw attention to needs and opportunities for investment; insert new ideas and knowledge into the civic discussion; develop support for change and mobilize political will; and wield influence — behind the scenes and more publicly — with key leaders and institutions. To date, the Foundation has invested approximately $55 million in the neighborhoods and leveraged about $370 million in commitments.

Evaluation and Learning. Implementing multi-site community change and education system reform work with so many moving parts in so many different arenas creates "thinking, doing and learning" challenges for all involved. Foundation management understands these challenges and has worked hard to find ways to support staff and bring discipline to the Foundation's efforts. Leadership created a new position, Knowledge Management Officer, to oversee learning and evaluation. Recognizing the lack of available neighborhood-level data, the Foundation partnered with the Kresge Foundation to create a community data system, Date Driven Detroit. The Foundation selected an evaluator, The Center for Youth and Communities in the Heller School at Brandeis University, whose role included learning and capacity building for evaluation, as well as more traditional evaluation activities. Objectives for the evaluation initially included: developing an evaluation framework for the Readiness Phase, supporting a culture of reflection, learning and data-based decision-making at the Foundation, and conducting an implementation evaluation.   Developed through a yearlong iterative process with Foundation staff and partners, the Readiness Phase Evaluation Framework served both as a critical vehicle for enhancing clarity and strategic focus as well as the basis for implementation evaluation.[2] In 2009, Foundation staff and partners identified 2016 goals and 2012 benchmarks, which are incorporated into the framework. In 2010-11, the evaluation expanded to include a cadre of evaluators who assessed implementation in five domains, four of which mirror the theory of change and one that leads and supports the work[3]. The evaluation assessed the status of the initiative at the conclusion of the readiness phase and laid the groundwork for its expansion and further study during the Transformation Phase. [4] Work is currently underway developing the next phase of evaluation and performance monitoring.

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[1] Prue Brown, "Changemaking: Lessons from Foundation Practices, The Foundation Review, Vol 4, Issue 1, Winter 2012

[2] Brown, Colombo & Hughes, Foundation Readiness for Community Transformation: Learning in Real Time, The Foundation Review, Vol. 1, Issue 1, Winter 2009

[3] Resilience, Resolve, Results: A Compilation of Readiness Phase Studies of the Skillman Foundation's Good Neighborhoods and Good Schools Initiative: 2008-2010, November 2011. www.skillman.org

[4] Leila Fiester, Good Neighborhoods, Good Schools and Skillman's Strategy for Place-Based Change, December 2011. www.skillman.org