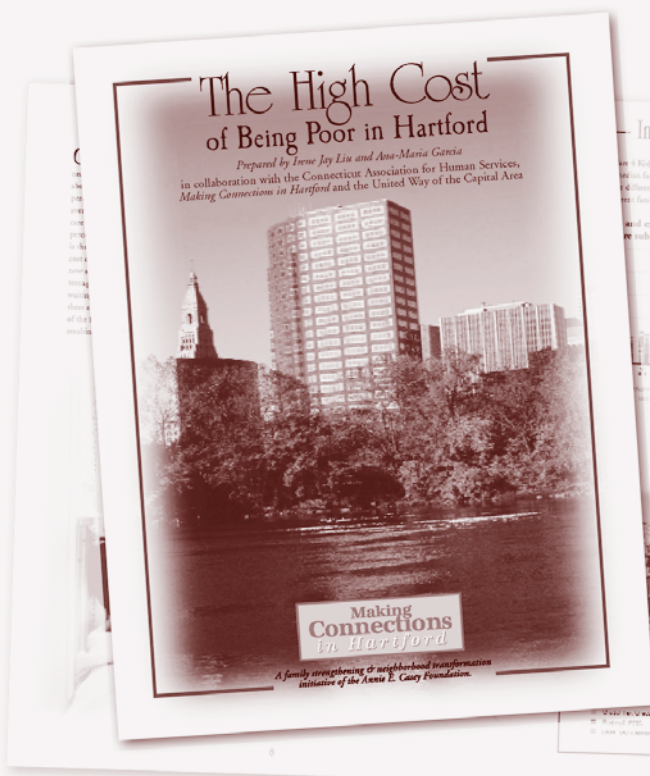


# REFLECTIONS

on Making Connections

## Making Media Matter

**How and Why Making Connections in Hartford Stressed Communications to Explain Its Work and Pursue Its Neighborhood Transformation Goals**



Hartford's Media Advocacy Task Force saw an opportunity to influence thinking about poverty by localizing a national Kids Count study about the high cost of being poor.

An early emphasis on communications has helped clarify what *Making Connections in Hartford* is all about, provided an opportunity for people from two very diverse neighborhoods to work together on common issues and developed a group of residents and community organization leaders who understand both the importance of media and the way to get a community's messages out through the media.

*A Reflection by Michael Salius, Hartford Communications Partner and diarist for the Hartford site team*

*“Community transformation is most possible  
where a robust communications infrastructure exists.”*

—Frank Gilliam

One of the early steps Debra Delgado took soon after Making Connections came to Hartford was to identify a local communications consultant to help develop, implement and continually refine a communications strategy for the initiative. Fortunately, at least from my perspective, it turned out to be me!

Working with Debra, a senior associate at the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Hartford site team leader, has been both challenging and rewarding. From the start in 2000, Debra has placed considerable emphasis on the role of public communications in the initiative, on strategic thinking and on making sure that our specific communications materials and activities have direct relevance to the big picture — that is, that they moved the needle in the direction of *Making Connections*’ primary goals.

She advised me early on that I’d need to have a high tolerance for ambiguity because the initiative would take on new shapes and dimensions as it moved forward. This certainly proved true and so did the need to keep an up-to-date handle on *Making Connections in Hartford*’s evolving strengths, limitations, opportunities and concerns, and to be responsive to changing local conditions and emerging Casey Foundation priorities.

The process of helping develop and implement a communications strategy for Hartford *Making Connections* has been very interesting and instructive for me. For much of this time I have also been working as *Making Connections* Hartford’s diarist. This gave me an opportunity to observe and reflect on this



*Early on, Making Connections in Hartford’s Site Team Leader Debra Delgado emphasized communications. She thinks it is “absolutely essential to mobilizing a community around a specific subject area.”*

process as it was evolving. This report tries to capture both what we did and what we were thinking and learning as we carried out a communications strategy in Hartford.

The broad communications goals for Hartford were developed early on and remain in effect today. They are three-fold:

1. Impact the “public will” by encouraging residents to take ownership of the change pro-

*“Effective communications and media advocacy can make a big difference in how you get people to start thinking about entrenched poverty in ways that address the root causes and the systemic changes that are needed.”*

—Debra Delgado

cess that will improve the well being of their families and neighborhoods.

2. Influence public policies, procedures and practices to be more responsive to the wants and needs of residents.
3. Leverage *Making Connections*' commitment of resources to gain additional resources and commitment from local, regional and national entities whose interests intersect with ours.

Unlike these goals, the specific objectives, strategies and actions to support them have been in a constant state of flux. This reflects the complexity involved in not only building awareness and understanding of a multi-faceted initiative like *Making Connections*, but in gaining broad-based local acceptance of, support for and commitment to its principles and values.

**W**e always operated under the assumption that our communications strategy would have to have both a mass communications and a personal interaction component. The mass communications pieces included newsletters, flyers, brochures, case studies and placing stories in the media. The personal interactions included:

- *Making Connections*-sponsored events.
- Participation in existing community forums.
- One-on-one meetings with potential partners, co-investors, residents and media representatives.

- Training sessions for residents and resident-serving organizations on how to better communicate their *Making Connections*-related messages.

Debra advocated this two-pronged approach because she felt a mass media component was necessary to build community-wide awareness and knowledge of the *Making Connections* work. But she also recognized that people wouldn't change their attitudes and behavior about community building based on something they read, heard on radio or viewed on TV. She knew it would take a lot of personal interaction and dialogue to get people beyond awareness and knowledge and actually change their minds, form new ideas and adopt new behaviors.

“From my experience with Casey Foundation's Plain Talk initiative, I've learned that communications is absolutely essential to mobilizing a community around a specific subject area,” says Delgado.

“In many ways, it was counter-intuitive to *Making Connections*' entry point strategy to place an early emphasis on communications,” says Delgado. “While we did do a lot of low-key, one-on-one reconnaissance at first, my early conversations within the community confirmed for me the strength and power of *Making Connections*' messages.

“I also realized, after seeing how these *Making Connections* messages resonated with many residents, that they would be the perfect messengers. So the question for me became, ‘How do we build their skills to en-

*“Delgado recognized that people wouldn’t change their attitudes and behavior about community building based on something they read, heard on radio or viewed on TV. She knew it would take a lot of personal interaction.”*

sure that we have a confident group of resident-messengers delivering these powerful messages?’ ”

## Workshops on communications and community

This thinking eventually led Debra to speak with Joy Moore at the Casey Foundation about arranging to have Frank Gilliam of UCLA’s Center for Communications and Community (CCC) work with our site team to organize a series of communications workshops. Gilliam is a nationally recognized authority on how the media covers issues related to race, class and power.

“I wanted to engage Frank’s unique technical resources because he convinced me that effective communications and media advocacy can make a big difference in how you get people to start thinking about entrenched family and neighborhood poverty in ways that address the root causes and the systemic changes that are needed to make a difference in people’s lives,” Delgado explained.

The purpose of the introductory workshops conducted in November 2001 and February 2002 was to help local service organizations and residents to integrate a proactive media relations approach into their ongoing policy advocacy work.

“A central lesson of these workshops was that community transformation is most possible where a robust communications infrastructure exists,” says Frank Gilliam. “We emphasized the importance of integrating communications concerns into ongoing policy activities; of working to widen the journalistic lens when the media reports on the inner city; and of building alliances among community stakeholders, neighborhood residents, journalists, policymakers, scholars and opinion leaders in order to influence public policy.”

Gilliam and George White of the CCC staff as well as other presenters on their team used many tools to convey these messages. There were presentations from professional communications practitioners and scholars as well as simulations, break-out sessions, films and informal gatherings that enhanced the communications connections among the Hartford folks who attended the workshops.

In an advanced follow-up session that took place in February 2003, Gilliam and White hammered home the point that bringing about favorable social changes, such as those sought by the participants in the workshop, starts with evoking a different way of thinking among the media and among the public that follows the media.

This new thinking must go beyond simply moderating the stereotypes that appear in the coverage of local urban news events to create a focus on changing the way poverty is viewed by mainstream society. Alternative policy choices need to be aired and illuminated in ways that stir a multidimensional public debate.



*"I also realized, after seeing how these Making Connections messages resonated with many residents, that they would be the perfect messengers."*

—Debra Delgado



*Hartford Site Liaison Ana-Maria Garcia believes that getting community people to invest in communications is "just as important as getting them to invest in the results of the work."*

In situations simulating interaction with the media, the Hartford participants enthusiastically grappled with the problems and opportunities inherent in getting out their messages in ways that registered their organizations' values as well as values the general public can embrace.

The workshop leaders also shared an analysis they conducted over several months of how the media covers Hartford and its neighborhoods. This analysis made it clear that spokespeople of Hartford's minority communities were underutilized and that the media that covers Hartford is under-

represented by African American and Latino news people.

Correcting this situation is not just the job of the media, according to Gilliam and White. They asserted that it would take a concerted effort by the community to document their concerns through studying the media coverage and informing media outlets when they make factual errors, demonstrate bias and lack diverse viewpoints. As a follow-up to this workshop, the participants agreed to act upon these suggestions.

## Putting learning into action

Soon after this workshop in the winter of 2003, a subset of its participants formed a media advocacy task force. At first the group was made up of social service professionals from organizations that serve the target population of *Making Connections in Hartford*. This group eventually joined forces in the fall of 2004 with a resident-led communications collaboration called Voice for Change/Voz de Cambio.

The media advocacy group focused its initial attention on:

- Improving their advocacy and communication skills.
- Forming working relationships with key local media and gaining practical experience

*“The residents I spoke with did not follow the media. They were not very interested in trying to change the way the media covered their neighborhoods. They didn’t see the relevance to their lives and didn’t think they could have any influence.”*

—Marlene Berg

working with the media by regularly submitting material such as news items, opinion pieces, letters to the editor and ideas for feature articles.

- Engaging residents in the media advocacy work in ways that address the wants and needs residents have for their families and neighborhoods.

The first few gatherings of the media advocacy task force were essentially brainstorming sessions that analyzed what the group hoped to accomplish and how they might do it. These sessions also assessed the task force’s existing skills, knowledge, experience and resources that could be brought to bear on the way the local media covered

Hartford’s neighborhoods. The group identified both problems and opportunities associated with empowering neighborhood spokespeople.

While it was relatively easy for the group to agree on its objectives of advocating for change through the media and of connecting the media with the voices of residents, it had much more difficulty in settling on the best strategies for reaching these objectives. Between meetings, the group agreed to conduct informal research with some residents with whom they had working relationships.

What they learned was that residents from *Making Connections*’ target neighborhoods generally expressed distrust, dislike and disinterest of the local media. These resi-



*“Negative media coverage can scare away potential investors, a key reason there is little economic development in these neighborhoods.”*

dents had many more pressing concerns in their lives than how the media covered their neighborhoods. On one hand, they seemed to feel that the media did a poor, unfair job and, on the other hand, they didn't think it mattered much to them.

As Marlene Berg of the Institute for Community Research said at the time, “The residents I spoke with did not follow the media. They were not very interested in trying to change the way the media covered their neighborhoods, mostly because they didn't see the relevance to their lives and because they didn't think they could have any influence on changing it anyway. They don't think the media will listen to them even if they do get involved. What the residents care about are issues like the availability of good jobs, good schools, access to quality health care for their families and safety concerns.”

In response, the media advocacy task force decided that they needed to adopt a longer-term approach. They realized it was too early in the process to bring residents in to work with the media. Before this would be productive, the group agreed that its own members needed to learn more about how to form effective media relationships. They also agreed that the pathway to resident engagement with the media must start with the specific issues that motivate specific residents to become civically involved.

Once residents were engaged in media advocacy based on their interests, the next step was to provide these residents with ongoing education about how the media operates and how media coverage influences

public opinion and public policies about a range of issues that residents care about. For example, negative media coverage can scare away potential investors, a key reason there is little economic development in these neighborhoods.

To begin this long-term effort, the media advocacy group decided to do more intensive media training combined with real-life experience in trying to get messages placed in the media. After consulting with Debra Delgado and Frank Gilliam about the type of training that might be most beneficial at this point, the decision was made to bring Gilliam's group back to provide a workshop that reinforced *Making Connections'* broader strategies for strengthening families' connections to economic opportunities, stronger social networks and improved services.

And, since health care issues were of central concern to many task force members (and Gilliam's group has done extensive research in this area), the workshop focused on presenting evidence that effective advocacy and communications efforts can improve health care for families.

Invitations to the workshops were sent community-wide to service providers, funders and residents. Approximately 30 people attended, mostly service providers along with a handful of resident activists.

Using the health care issue to illustrate how any difficult issue can be addressed, the team from UCLA's CCC examined the relationship between media and community transformation and provided interactive

*“This coverage instilled a sense of optimism that a planned media relations effort can have a positive impact on the way the media covers Hartford’s families and neighborhoods.”*

training designed to help the participants increase their communications capabilities. The participants were led through an exploration of how strategic messaging strategies can be applied to health care advocacy.

They also reviewed how the *Hartford Courant* (the city’s only major daily newspaper) covers health care issues to determine what needs to change.

In the end, the participants learned how to frame value-oriented messages that can advance their personal and organizational goals as well as how to become more effective sources for print and broadcast media.

The workshop also identified local opportunities to foster stronger connections between the media and neighborhood residents, including participation in the Media Advocacy Task Force. The Task Force presented a report on its recent activities and discussed its plans for building better connections with established news organizations.

The workshop infused the media advocacy group with new enthusiasm as well as with some new members, including a few residents who signed on to work to improve the way their neighborhoods were depicted in news articles.

Building on this momentum, a number of media initiatives were quickly acted upon with the help of task force members. John Murphy, an original member of the task force and the general manager of the WHUS radio station, worked with the task force and the *Making Connections* site team to create a

regularly aired public affairs radio program dealing with topics related to *Making Connections*’ result areas.

These airings included an initial program where Debra Delgado joined with the co-leaders of *Making Connections*’ local governance body to provide an overview of what *Making Connections* is all about — the vision, the mission and the core principles. Subsequent programs dealt with specific community-building activities related to health care, family economic success, child protection services and civic participation.

The task force spotted a media opportunity related to a study that the site team published under Debra Delgado’s direction, called the “High Cost of Being Poor in Hartford.” This study localized information presented in the Casey Foundation’s national Kids Count report from the previous year.

A plan was developed in conjunction with the site team for reinforcing the study’s recommendations with local, state and federal policymakers and for holding forums where residents would be presented with the findings, recruited and armed with information to effectively speak out in favor of the recommendations.

As a result of inviting the media to attend these forums, the *Hartford Courant* did an in-depth article on the study’s topic that was the front-page lead in its widely read Sunday edition. *The Hartford Advocate*, a popular newsweekly, also published a comprehensive story. Both pieces were fair, balanced and comprehensive reports that extensively



*“At first, I was skeptical about being listened to by the media, but after seeing that my conversation with the reporter resulted in a story that was fair, I saw first hand that my voice as a resident can make a difference in the way the media talks about my neighborhood.”*

—Magdaly Font Díaz



Joy Moore (left), who directs the Making Connections communications work, says that “the beauty” of Hartford’s approach is that it has been an “organic process,” growing out of the concerns of neighborhood residents. Site Team Leader Debra Delgado (right) believed this was crucial.

quoted residents from our target neighborhoods and members of our site team.

This coverage powerfully endorsed what the service providers and residents learned from their training. It instilled a sense of optimism that a planned media relations effort can have a positive impact on the way the media covers Hartford’s families and neighborhoods.

“At first, I was skeptical about being listened to by the media,” says Magdaly Font Díaz, a Frog Hollow resident at the time and now a relatively new member of the *Making*

*Connections in Hartford* staff. “But after seeing that my conversation with the reporter resulted in a story that was fair and that described the need for some positive changes, I saw first hand that my voice as a resident can make a difference in the way the media talks about my neighborhood.”

This positive activity captured the attention of Frank Gilliam’s CCC team. They decided to create a brief documentary of the task force’s accomplishments following their workshops. The idea was that Joy Moore could share the documentary with other *Making Connections* sites and that the Hart-

*“When these neighborhoods do get covered in the news, the emphasis is usually on the negative, things like crime, violence, gang activity and drug use.”*

—Timathea Taylor

ford site could use it to motivate more residents to join in their community’s communications work.

Debra Delgado and Ana-Maria Garcia (the local site team liaison), local leaders, *Making Connections* task force members and reporters were interviewed. All of them broadly endorsed the value of developing working relationships between residents and the media. (Copies of this documentary are available by e-mailing mikewsal@aol.com.)

“Executed properly, what Frank Gilliam espouses is the sustainable part of the *Making Connections* work,” says Joy Moore. “The impact of one resident standing up and speaking out is powerful. It has a ripple effect on the entire community. Once a resident finds his or her voice, it leads to a symphony of voices within the community. And this is what signals real, sustainable change.”

## Voice For Change

At the same time that the task force’s thinking and involvement began to gain traction, the residents’ communications collaborative (which later became Voice For Change/Voz de Cambio) formed on a separate but parallel track. It resulted from resident involvement in a participatory action research program of the Institute for Community Research (ICR) funded by *Making Connections*.

As a result of their individual research, three residents — Magdaly Font Díaz, Teresa Rosario and Timathea Taylor — developed a mutual understanding that residents of the Frog Hollow and Upper Albany neighborhoods face many of the same challenges and have many of the same opportunities to overcome them. This realization led them to conclude that residents from the two neighborhoods should join forces and begin working together to improve conditions in both neighborhoods.

“It was one of those ah-ha moments that once-in-a-while comes along in life,” says Font Díaz.

ICR had involved four small groups of residents from the two neighborhoods (two groups from each neighborhood) to research issues that were important to them and then to report their findings and recommendations to all participants at the end of the research period. The Frog Hollow group of Hispanic residents, in which Font Díaz and Rosario participated, addressed the issues of employment opportunities for non-English speaking people and of parental involvement in the schools. Taylor’s Upper Albany group, which was made-up of African and Caribbean Americans, also dealt with parents and schools.

When these three residents heard the presentations, it became clear to them that there are concerned citizens in each neighborhood doing positive work to improve conditions for children and families. But this good news is seldom reported.

*“This is the sustainable part of the Making Connections work. The impact of one resident standing up and speaking out is powerful. It has a ripple effect on the entire community.”*

—Joy Moore

“When these neighborhoods do get covered in the news, the emphasis is usually on the negative, things like crime, violence, gang activity and drug use,” says Taylor. “We decided to unite by creating one unified voice for Frog Hollow and Upper Albany residents in the form of a community newsletter that would highlight the good work that’s going on in our neighborhoods and how we’re solving existing problems and working together to prevent future problems.”

This was the genesis of the *Voice For Change* residents’ communications collaborative. As other Frog Hollow and Upper Albany residents were recruited to participate (including youth from both neighborhoods), plans began to come together for developing

an ongoing multi-lingual newsletter called *Voice For Change* or *Voz de Cambio*.

The more this group met to discuss the newsletter, the grander their communications plans became. Through the group’s link with *Making Connections in Hartford* and its ultimate collaboration with members of the media advocacy task force, the group learned about and began to take advantage of opportunities to:

- Become trained to produce their own *Voice For Change* programs on Hartford public access TV.
- Orchestrate regular appearances of concerned Frog Hollow and Upper Albany residents on *Making Connections’* WHUS public affairs radio program.

Partners with *Making Connections in Hartford*, a family strengthening & neighborhood transformation initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

# Voice for Change A forum for Hartford families. Voz de Cambio

Un foro para las familias de Hartford.

Socios de *Making Connections en Hartford*, una iniciativa de la Fundación Annie E. Casey para fortalecer a las familias y transformar a los vecindarios.

*“We are people from different backgrounds living in Hartford’s diverse neighborhoods. We have joined forces to speak out in a unified voice to improve the well being of our children and families.”*

*“We are not going to let this unified accomplishment of our two different neighborhoods fall apart like most past efforts have. We care too much about it to let it fail.”*

—Magdaly Font Díaz

- Plan regular guest appearances on commercial radio talk shows.
- Mobilize and train a network of Frog Hollow and Upper Albany residents to become credible media sources who will contact the media in constructive ways whenever biased, unbalanced or sensationalized neighborhood reports appear.
- Provide the media with proactive, solution-oriented article ideas about the challenges and opportunities associated with community change activities.

At the time Font Díaz said, “Our plans are ambitious, which means we need to continuously recruit more Frog Hollow and Upper Albany residents to help us implement them.

“Too often in the past it seemed like our two neighborhoods were working at cross purposes. We’re now confident that the folks behind the *Voice For Change* movement have the conviction and ability that will change this and create a more cooperative, unified spirit dedicated to improving conditions for families in both of our neighborhoods.

“We believe that the power to create positive change involves effective, consistent communications as well as the participation and commitment of a lot of residents.”

**W**hile this optimism remains largely intact, the road forward has had many ups and downs and detours.

The initial issue of the residents’ newsletter took a long time to get produced

and it was not as substantial as originally envisioned. The efforts to produce a more substantial second issue that would contain more news for neighborhood residents have also been plagued by procedural and personnel problems.

These include such things as volunteers leaving the group, new people joining who bring new and different ideas to the table, personality conflicts, and some people accepting responsibilities who either did not or could not meet their commitments.

As a result, there have been a lot of stops and starts that required considerable hand holding and supportive resources from the site team.

The site team provides support such as convening meetings and training volunteers on how to plan, write, edit and design publications. But it has been steadfast about not unduly influencing any important decisions. While the site team has provided resources to support effective decision making, the decisions have been made by the residents.

Great care has been taken by the resident leaders to gain consensus before moving forward. This has contributed to a generally friendly and cooperative atmosphere. The group has taken pains to be inclusive of all participants and to embrace differences of opinions as a healthy and constructive reality.

While there has been conflict and some finger pointing that contributed to uncomfortable moments at meetings, the group



*“We believe that the power to create positive change involves effective, consistent communications as well as the participation and commitment of a lot of residents.”*

—Magdaly Font Díaz



*Frog Hollow resident Magdaly Font Díaz says that common communications concerns have helped pull two diverse neighborhoods together.*

worked through these moments by enforcing an atmosphere of open and honest dialogue.

As Font Díaz recently said, “We are not going to let this unified accomplishment of our two different neighborhoods fall apart like most past efforts have. We care too much about it to let it fail.”

The resident leaders have decided to confront head-on issues of mutual respect surrounding race, culture and ethnicity. As a result, both the black and Hispanic volunteers have expressed a great deal of pride

about working together in a congenial, if not entirely strife-free, team environment.

In a certain sense, this inclusive, interpersonal approach has somewhat distracted from the work of producing the newsletter, the TV program and radio broadcasts on a regular schedule. The most recent meetings have addressed new rules and procedures for keeping group projects and individual assignments on course.

The hope is that the right balance can be struck between maintaining a process that’s respectful of and responsive to diverse views while also sticking to a schedule for getting the newsletters and the TV programs produced.

In the final quarter of 2004, the Media Advocacy Task Force, still made up of mostly CBO representatives with a couple of residents, invited the Voice For Change group to discuss their work at a joint meeting. The meeting had a very upbeat mood to it, mostly because everyone felt great about having a mechanism in place that brings residents from both the Frog Hollow and Upper Albany neighborhoods together in such a productive and meaningful way.

Spontaneously, the two contingents agreed that it would be mutually advantageous to join forces. It naturally developed that the media advocacy task force members would play an advisory role and the residents would take center stage as the media spokespeople.

*“Hartford’s communications work has grown out of the understanding of neighborhood residents that if they don’t tell their own story, then the story being told won’t be fair and accurate and won’t reflect their wants and needs.”*

—Joy Moore

Their role would be to convey the stories that bring to life positive family and neighborhood messages, such as residents who display courage by standing up against violence or who fight for fair and just treatment from policymakers. They would push to get these messages included in news stories to better reflect the whole story rather than just the typical media snapshot that reinforces stereotypes.

It was understood that this effort will take time and that the resident-produced materials (i.e., the newsletter, TV show and radio programs) can more immediately convey relevant and consistent messages to their neighbors who don’t always follow or trust the mainstream media.

Procedures were established to maintain the momentum. One is the formation of a

rapid response team to respond to inaccurate, biased or negative coverage concerning the neighborhoods. The members of this team agreed to contact each other as needed via e-mail or phone to collectively decide how best to respond to objectionable reports.

Another action will be to produce at least one written piece each month— an op-ed, a letter to the editor or a feature article — that will allow the group to frame a topic that’s actively being covered in the news in a way that advances the interests of the neighborhoods’ families.

Next on the group’s agenda is to begin the process of forming positive working relationships between the media and residents and community-based organizations. The group is now planning how to organize a learning exchange between the local media and the members of our communications collaborative.

“The beauty of Hartford’s communications work is that it has been an organic process,” says Moore. “It has grown out of the understanding of neighborhood residents that if they don’t tell their own story, then the story being told won’t be fair and accurate and won’t reflect their wants and needs. This understanding wasn’t taught to them or imposed on them.



*Hartford’s first step was to create a general level of awareness about its mission and values.*

*“If events like this are to stop happening, we need to start with the recognition that the community itself will solve the problem of its young people killing each other. We — not the police — have the power to inculcate a different set of values in our youth.”*

—Timothy Cole

## Nurturing Neighborhood Voices

*Making Connections in Hartford's* communications strategy has long emphasized the importance of building residents' capacity to give their perspectives about news and issues concerning their neighborhoods. One way to do this has been letters to the editor, including this one from a member of Hartford's Voice for Change collaborative.

Editor  
The Hartford Courant  
285 Broad Street  
Hartford, CT 06115

Re: Shooting of Jashon Bryant

The recent killing of Jashon Bryant by Hartford police officer Robert Lawlor is disturbing from several perspectives.

Besides the untimely death of an apparently unarmed young man whose greatest offense at that moment may turn out to have been that he was young, black, and male, there is a tragedy here of even greater significance — the risk of profound damage to years' worth of work on improving police-community relations by a split-second decision by one street officer with an unclear relationship to the community he is charged with protecting.

If events like this are to stop happening, we need to start with the recognition that the community itself will solve the problem of its young people killing each other. Ultimately, neighborhood mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles, grandparents and clergy, teachers and community leaders hold the keys to ending the violence. We — not the police — have the power to inculcate a different set of values in our youth. It is incumbent on other stakeholders, including the police, to provide helpful support to get the work done — and at all costs not do things that make the task harder.

At the recent Upper Albany Unsung Heroes celebration, many speakers mentioned how the community is taking responsibility for working on its problems. The police's job is to create public safety by working with the public, not by trying to impose it at the point of a gun. Alone, the police cannot bring peace to the streets any more than an occupying army can. What police can do is provide the operational and tactical support to back up the community's initiatives.

Sadly, a messed up drug bust may now cause a setback in dealing with the insidious problem of a homicidal gang culture. It is a case where wrong-headed approaches to the drug problem create threats of even greater seriousness — such as maintaining the largest incarcerated population in the developed world, with long-term negative consequences for inmates, families, and communities. As a matter of policy, HPD should be doing everything in its power to help the community with the real crisis, not turning tense situations into murderous ones.

Despite much progress, HPD still has unclear priorities respecting its proper role in the community. Possibly, Jashon Bryant and Brandon Henry were, as alleged, engaged in illegal activity. But the police officer's behavior turned it into a matter of life-and-death. With a wavier, more patient approach, the confrontation could have ended with a less heartbreaking outcome.

Finally, an obvious question arises: Why are the officers involved in events like this generally white,

*(continued on next page)*

*“We first tried to create a general level of awareness about who we are, what we’re doing, and why we’re doing it. We then tried to build support for our work by communicating how various individuals and groups have integrated their activities with ours.”*

—Debra Delgado

### Nurturing Neighborhood Voices (cont.)

and why are the victims typically black, or Latino? The conventional answers – “The officer believed his/someone’s life was in danger,” or “Black and Latino youth are more likely to commit drug and firearm related offenses,” beg this question. Until we are willing to look at police culture on the one hand, and gang culture on the other, we will never get beyond talking about symptoms, when we should be talking about causes.

Here are few suggestions:

- 1) If HPD intends to continue to rely on deadly force as a response to challenging situations, it should define the rules of engagement and very thoroughly and persistently make sure the community understands what they are.
- 2) HPD needs to determine that all armed police officers are psychologically equipped to handle the stresses of dealing with ambiguous situations and are personally devoted to the well-being of the citizens of Hartford; and then it needs to assure the community this is the case.
- 3) As a matter of policy, all officers should be required to do civilian community service working with our kids and youth, our parents and seniors, as a regular part of the job.
- 4) And last, but not least, hiring and promotional preference should go to officers willing to live in and love our community.

Timothy Cole

Member Hartford Voice for Change Collaborative,  
Making Connections Hartford

They came to their own conclusion that they needed to step up and respond to negative depictions of their neighborhoods and to unfair public practices and policies.”

### Top down, bottom up

This report has described the work to involve *Making Connections in Hartford’s* partners (individual residents and service providers alike) in strategically communicating their views through the mainstream media and their own communications vehicles. The purpose is to pave the way for and help sustain these grassroots efforts to affect public opinion and ultimately public policy.

At the same time, the site team has implemented an awareness-building campaign targeting community leaders as well as elected and non-elected government officials — local, state and federal.

Through a regularly published newsletter and brief updates, as well as special reports and studies, the site team has kept the vision, mission and values of *Making Connections* in the eyes of these leaders and officials. Under Delgado’s direction, these vehicles consistently emphasized *Making Connections’* focus on achieving results and local ownership in sizeable, measurable and sustainable ways.



***“Now we’ve begun to tell the story about how key entities throughout the community have made the commitment to partner with us and to allocate significant resources to bring about discernable changes in the community.”***

—Debra Delgado

“We first tried to create a general level of awareness about who we are, what we’re doing, as well as how and why we’re doing it,” says Delgado. “We then tried to build support for our work by communicating how various individuals and groups have integrated their activities with ours in mutually beneficial ways. Now we’ve begun to tell the story about how key entities throughout the community have made the commitment to partner with us and to allocate significant resources to bring about discernable changes in the community.”

To the extent possible, *Making Connections* in Hartford has conveyed these messages through the voices of its various stakeholders. “The only possibility for change is if residents are aware of the need to change conditions and encouraged to take appropriate action,” says Moore in endorsing Hartford’s awareness-building efforts. “If people can see problems in terms of their own value systems and have a support structure in place, they will act to solve the problems that affect them.”

This two-pronged communications strategy — top down and bottom up — began very early in *Making Connections in Hartford’s* existence. Because the top-down effort was controlled by the site team, we were able to get our awareness-building communications campaign started very quickly. While it yielded few tangible results at first, the consistency of the campaign eventually influenced how our stakeholders viewed *Making Connections*.

“As result,” says Delgado, “what happened is that some people who did not initially feel that our work aligned with theirs

did remain aware of our work and always curious and sometimes even critical about it. Some of these organizations remained on the edge a long time and then all of a sudden decided to join forces with us in a few areas. In other words, our communications led progressively to increased awareness, curiosity, understanding, acceptance and an active interest in our work over time.”

Clearly the more challenging communications work has been the bottom-up effort to empower residents and resident-serving organizations to communicate strategically. As Ana-Maria Garcia, our local site coordinator says, “People get and lose interest and we always have to work hard to get and keep residents engaged in this work, which is one reason that communications is so critical.”

While difficult, we have also come to see communications work as critical in sustaining *Making Connections* and allowing it to have a large-scale impact on our neighborhoods.

Community building is not a linear process. It goes through many cycles. People come and go over time. Communications can help keep a long-term community-building initiative focused on its values. It can help new people understand those values. It can help attract those new people and institutions and help motivate them to take action. Communications successes can reinvigorate long-time supporters.

To accomplish all this, communications ultimately needs to be in the hands of the people who are affected by the changes that the initiative is trying to achieve. They are the

*“People get and lose interest and we always have to work hard to get and keep residents engaged in this work, which is one reason that communications is so critical.”*

—Ana-Maria Garcia

people who need to keep the process going by attracting and motivating new partners. They are the ones who need to educate their neighbors about the importance of the media as well as educate outsiders about the realities of their neighborhoods.

In other words, community activists need to become effective communicators if communications that support community building is to be sustained over time.

“Getting people in the community to invest in the communications piece of the *Making Connections* work is just as important as getting people to invest in the results focus of the work,” says Garcia. “I think that helping key people in the community to communicate about *Making Connections* in concrete and clear ways has created more interest in and commitment to our result areas throughout the entire community.”

## Reflections on the challenges

Since becoming site liaison in 2003, Garcia tackled a number of communications challenges while taking the implementation of the site’s communications strategy to a new level.

“The biggest communications challenge I saw after becoming the site liaison was how to maintain and raise the level of commitment of our local partners. I felt that our

communications with partnering organizations and with our resident partners needed to emphasize the idea of reciprocity. If they were aligned with one or more of *Making Connections*’ result areas and they were receiving our support, we needed to clearly communicate that we also needed them to demonstrate their support for us in ways that measurably moved the work forward.”

Garcia was also instrumental in recruiting city government to visibly champion a number of *Making Connections*-supported Family Economic Self-sufficiency (FES) activities. Most notably, her efforts to get Hartford Mayor Eddie Perez to champion the 2005 Earned Income Tax Credit outreach campaign yielded unprecedented citywide support and significant financial results for our target population and for the entire community.

“In looking back, I can see that our strong communications strategy has been effective in helping us address three of the biggest communications challenges we faced here in Hartford,” says Delgado.

“First, a local foundation, which is one of the largest in the country and very powerful in Hartford, presented us with a real communications challenge.”

Delgado says that she quickly discovered that this local foundation had a strong set of assumptions about how a national foundation like Annie E. Casey should and can work. “They weren’t shy about sharing their opinions with a broad audience. This created a hurdle we had to overcome by also telling our story broadly and diplomatically, and by

*“Community building is not a linear process. It goes through many cycles. People come and go. Communications can help keep a long-term community-building initiative focused on its values. It can help attract new people and institutions and help motivate them to take action.”*

backing up our communications with actions that were consistent with our messages in order to earn a level of trust.”

The second big communications challenge that Delgado cites is that Hartford is a racially, socially and economically divided city. “We had to think very clearly about how to craft messages that resonate with a variety of audiences in a community that’s very, very divided. To the extent possible, we try to test our specific messages with different audiences before placing them before the general public.”

Third, for being a relatively small city, Hartford has huge distinctions between the neighborhoods. “Not only did we have to deal with the racial, cultural and economic divides, but we had to deal with these neighborhood boundaries that are extremely pronounced,” says Delgado.

“Given these three challenges, we recognized that the importance of how we communicated was equally important as what we communicated. This is why from day one we focused on identifying and working with the right set of messengers. We continue to pay a lot of attention to this work.”

**D**elgado’s emphasis on the importance of both top-down and bottom-up strategic communications from the very start has been critical to Hartford’s ability to move the work forward. It has drawn a link from residents to policymakers that includes every stakeholder sector in between—and it also has strengthened the capacity of residents to make their own case for change.

This remains Delgado’s vision for what communications can make happen in the long run if we maintain the discipline to consistently pursue our strategic goals and if we alertly adapt our specific tactics to changing priorities and realities. There’s still a much longer row to hoe, but her clearly articulated vision and the flexibility she has given the site team to realize it seems to have us headed in the right direction.

*Hartford’s newsletter has been a key tool to keep the initiative’s vision, mission and values in the eyes of Hartford community leaders and public officials.*



*“Our communications led progressively to increased awareness, curiosity, understanding, acceptance and an active interest in our work over time.”*

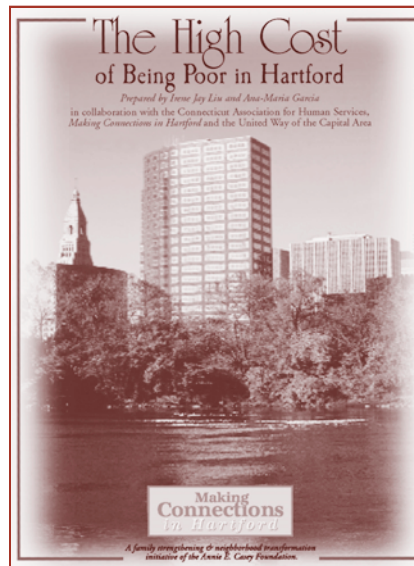
—Debra Delgado

## The Diarist Project

This is one of a series of stories and reflections about the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Making Connections Initiative. They come through The Diarist Project, a new approach the foundation is using to learn from its efforts to strengthen families and transform struggling neighborhoods.

Diarists work to capture strategies and insights of the people who are leading the neighborhood transformation work. In Making Connections, the diarist works most closely with the Casey staff person who leads the work in each city, the “Site Team Leader,” as well as the “Local Site Coordinator.”

This reflection was written by Mike Salius, diarist to the Hartford Site Team as well as Hartford’s Communications Partner.



**Making Connections** is a Casey Foundation initiative to support work that demonstrates the simple premise that kids thrive when their families are strong and their communities supportive. What began in 1999 as a demonstration project in selected neighborhoods in 22 cities is now an intricate network of people and groups committed to making strong families and neighborhoods their highest priorities.

- **The Annie E. Casey Foundation** ([aecf.org](http://aecf.org)) works to build better futures for disadvantaged children and their families in the United States. Its primary mission is to foster public policies, human service reforms and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today’s vulnerable children and families.

For more information about The Diarist Project or to receive copies of its publications contact:

The Diarist Project  
c/o Charitable Choices  
4 Park Avenue, Suite 200  
Gaithersburg, MD 20877  
240-683-7100  
Tim@CharityChoices.com  
[www.DiaristProject.org](http://www.DiaristProject.org)

*Photos by Mary Ann Dolcemascolo except page 13 (Irene Liu).*