



# AMANI NEIGHBORHOOD MILWAUKEE WISCONSIN

## 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.

Beginning in 2010, a number of organizations and individuals in Milwaukee began looking at ways to transform the Amani neighborhood – one of the most distressed areas of the City of Milwaukee. As was noted, “We can keep treating people for malaria, or we can drain the swamp so people don’t get malaria.” Or as the oft-repeated story goes, “We can jump into the river and keep trying to rescue the drowning children, or we can go upstream to figure out why children are falling into the river and prevent it.”

## POPULATION CHANGE LEARNING COMMUNITY

In 2014, representatives from Milwaukee’s Amani initiative were invited to participate in the Population Change Learning Community. This community of learners 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 Milwaukee's efforts in the Amani neighborhood. Representatives from the Amani "anchor agencies" 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 Amani neighborhood and throughout our community who contribute their time, effort, and resources to improve the Amani neighborhood and the lives of Amani residents.

# AMANI'S LOCAL STORY

The Amani neighborhood was originally a working class neighborhood of duplexes and bungalows. Many industrial companies chose to locate their businesses here in the heart of the 53206 zip code, located northwest of downtown Milwaukee and immediately east of the former 30th Street Industrial Corridor. Therefore, Amani neighborhood residents were close to a major center of employment, and as a result residents and neighborhood-based businesses thrived during the first half of the 20th century.

Milwaukee's industrial fortunes began to wane during the mid-1960s, as did the Amani neighborhood. The 1980s and 1990s brought significant disinvestment as companies, including A.O. Smith and Tower Automotive, downsized or closed their doors. The subsequent national subprime mortgage crisis and the Great Recession dramatically affected the Amani housing market.

In a November 2014, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Center for Economic Development described this area as the "bellwether for poverty in Milwaukee and the nation". The 53206 zip code (of which the Amani neighborhood is a significant part) is characterized as the "epicenter of social and economic disadvantage in Milwaukee". During the period from 2000 to 2012:

- **There was a 21.7% increase in the overall poverty rate and 66.8% increase in the child poverty rate**
- **The high rent burden increased 64.1%**
- **Vacant homes increased 84%**
- **There was a decline in the number of jobs in the area; and the male employment rate decreased from 47.8% in 2000 to 36.3% in 2012**
- **There was a 30.4% decrease in aggregate income**

Today, the Amani neighborhood is 96.6% African-American. There are almost no employment opportunities for Amani residents within walking distance. The neighborhood has some of the lowest performing schools, lowest high school graduation rates, and highest crime rate in the City of Milwaukee. 52% of the 53206 population lives in poverty and 40% of these residents live in "deep poverty", defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as a family of three living on an annual income below \$9,425. According to the Center for the Study of Social Policy, families living in deep poverty are more likely to remain poor year after year, and face multiple, persistent challenges.

## THE AMANI INITIATIVE

**Anchor Agencies: COA Youth & Family Centers and the Dominican Center**

The Amani initiative is somewhat unique in that there is no one single "organizing entity." There are two: COA Youth & Family Centers (COA) and the Dominican Center. The partnership to create the Amani "place-based population change" initiative was sparked by the support provided to COA from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and their invitation to join the Population Change Learning Community. This coincided with the federally supported Building Neighborhood Capacity Program led by the Dominican Center. Both initiatives brought the Dominican Center and COA closer together.

COA and the Dominican Center are both independent nonprofit organizations in the Amani neighborhood. Prior to the Amani place-based initiative, relations between the two agencies, while friendly, were limited because each agency was providing a different set of programs and services. However, when each began looking at providing a more comprehensive array of services and seeking a comprehensive approach to transforming the entire neighborhood, the two agencies began working closely together.

While these organizations each provided a very different array of services, the two Executive Directors, Sister Patricia Rogers, Executive Director of the Dominican Center; and Tom Schneider, Executive Director of COA Youth & Family Centers, recognized the value and synergy created by the differences in these two agencies. The array of programs and services provided by the Dominican Center gave them some specific areas of knowledge/expertise and relationships with those residents connected to those programs and services (e.g. adult basic education/GED and housing issues). Likewise, the array of programs and services provided gave COA some specific areas of knowledge/expertise and relationships with residents connected to these programs and services (e.g. youth and family programs).

The role of the two executives is in some ways derivative of the roles played by the two agencies in the neighborhood. COA has large constituencies who participate in its early child education center, family resource center, after school and summer youth programs, and family events. The COA Goldin Center is largely seen as the Amani neighborhoods “community center” hosting early child, youth, family, and communi-

ty programs. Likewise, the Dominican Center is largely seen as a key leader in Amani focusing on a wide range of programs and issues including food, housing, adult education, resident engagement, and community events/activities. The Dominican Center also brings linkages to the faith-based community in Amani.

The two Executive Directors talk regularly and participate jointly in the Population Change Learning Community.

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**THE LONG-TERM INVOLVEMENT AND LEADERSHIP BY BOTH SISTER PATRICIA ROGERS AND TOM SCHNEIDER HAS ENGAGED RESIDENTS, BUILT NEIGHBORHOOD ASSETS, AND BROUGHT COLLABORATION TO THEIR AGENCIES.**

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They are both well recognized by the community. It is extremely rare for either of these two Executive Directors to miss a community meeting.

It is important to acknowledge and emphasize that no one initiative or project took place in a vacuum, disconnected from other efforts in the community. Each participating agency had its areas of focus, each initiative had/has its areas of focus, and frequently the wide variety of participating partners had their own special areas of focus.

However, the anchor partners were intentional about, and usually able, to work together with each of the individual partners and their projects, viewing them in the context of how they “fit” into the overall comprehensive approach. While much of the work described occurred over the past four to five years, some of the accomplishments detailed herein are the results of groundwork laid years earlier.



*Dominican Center*



*COA Goldin Center*

## THE DOMINICAN CENTER

Since 1995, the Dominican Center has provided adult education, housing programs, and a platform for identifying and addressing resident concerns. The mission of the Dominican Center is to work with Amani residents and partners to build a better future. A longtime key element for the Dominican Center has been the development of an Amani community organization comprised of residents working together to solve neighborhood education, healthy affordable housing, and safety problems. The approach is based on their recognition that social change efforts must be an inclusive process for all Amani residents. To accomplish this, the Dominican Center works closely with residents, and with other Amani community partners, such as COA, Hephatha Lutheran Church, and Bethesda Baptist Church.

In 2012, the Amani Neighborhood received a Building Neighborhood Capacity Program designation and funding, with the Dominican Center designated as the community anchor organization. This effort was part of the White House Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative with the

purpose of identifying and developing leadership and training for a broad cross-section of residents in distressed neighborhoods. It promotes public and private partnerships to support capacity building in the five interlocking issues of education, employment, health, housing and safety, to coordinate a place-based resident-led revitalization plan.

In addition to a federal level partnership with the Department of Justice, the Center for the Study of Social Policy provided technical assistance. Local cross-sectors partners included the Milwaukee Police Department (as the fiscal agent), the Northwestern Mutual Foundation, Greater Milwaukee Foundation, Zilber Family Foundation, Children's Hospital of Wisconsin, and the City of Milwaukee Mayor's Office. The federal funding ended September 30, 2016; however, local cross-sector partners including the Dominican Center, COA and others remain committed to moving forward on the work of building neighborhood capacity.



*The Dominican Center's Talibah Mateen, Brenda Hart Richardson, Patricia Ott, Augustine Parker*

## COA YOUTH & FAMILY CENTERS

COA was founded in 1906 as part of Wisconsin's first "Settlement House." Modeled after Jane Adams Hull House in Chicago (the nation's first Settlement House), Wisconsin's Settlement House and its youth division, the "Children's Outing Association," created an array of programs and services designed to give families the tools to become self-sufficient. While the Settlement House division closed in the 1920s, the Children's Outing Association continued to serve low income children and grew. In the beginning, the focus was on overnight "fresh air" camp programs for youth, but by the 1960's COA was providing an array of youth and family-serving programs. To reflect this broader range of services, the agency became "COA Youth & Family Centers," and today COA serves more than 10,000 low income children and families at 11 locations throughout the City of Milwaukee and at COA's 206 acre camp in central Wisconsin. COA programs are focused on early child, youth, and community development, with an overall focus on family-centered programming.

By 2005, youth programming had expanded beyond the capacity of COA's existing facilities and COA purchased a bankrupt 54,000 square foot building at 24th Street and Burleigh Street in the heart of the Amani neighborhood. This facility became the COA Goldin Center.

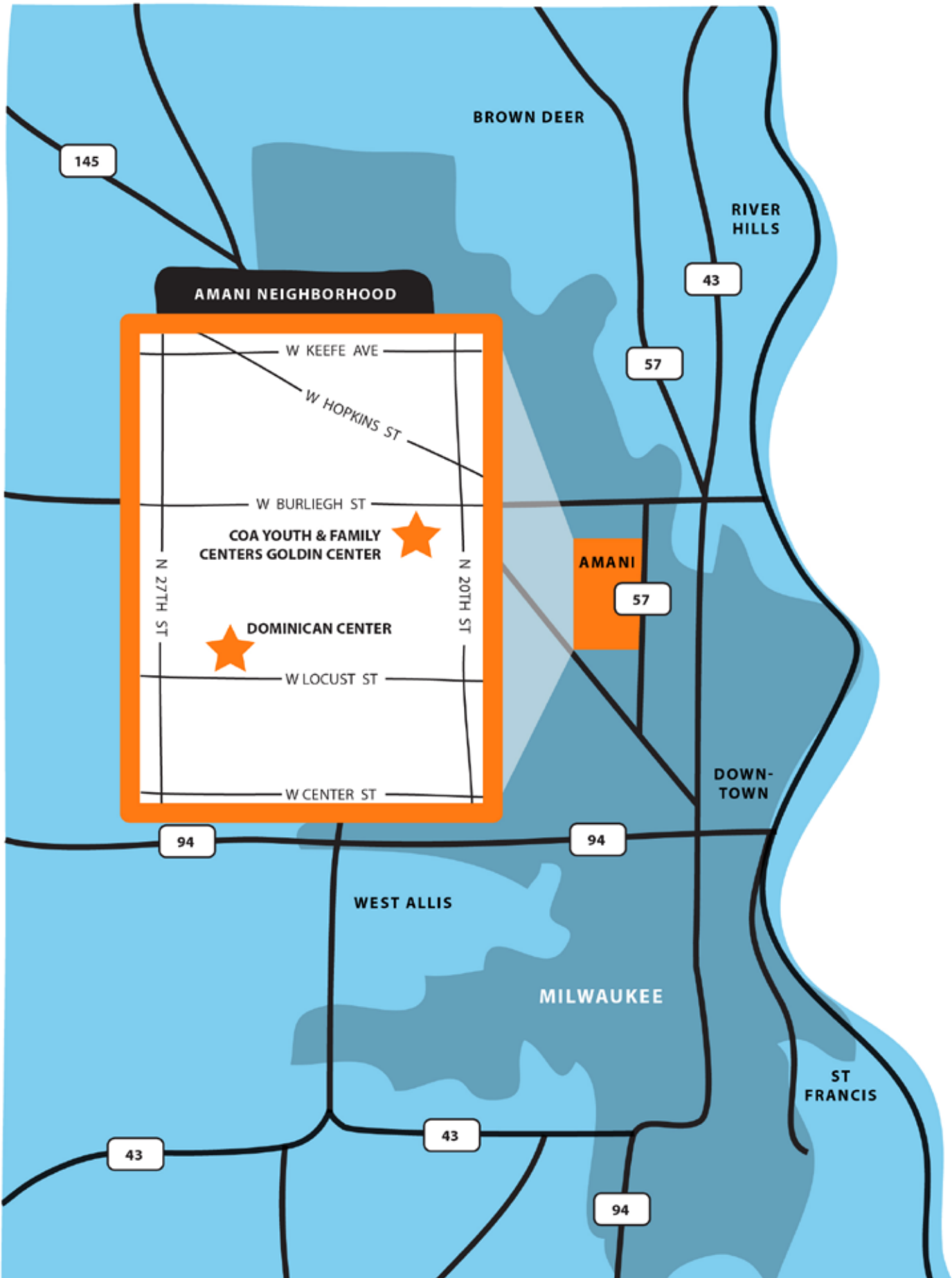
The area surrounding the Goldin Center had the highest crime rate in the City, the highest infant mortality rate, and the highest percentage of boarded up homes. For the first five years, COA focused solely on providing quality after school and summer youth programs, engaging the parents/caregivers of these youth, and becoming deeply rooted in the neighborhood. Although the youth programming provided opportunities for youth to become engaged and to learn and develop life-long skills, this did not change the environment that wrapped around these youth every day, including intense poverty, hunger, violence, racism and unemployment.

Recognizing that more than quality youth programming was needed, COA began an initiative to fundamentally transform the Amani neighborhood. Beginning in 2010, COA formed a wide variety of public and private partnerships, both formal and informal. These partnerships included the Dominican Center, Milwaukee County Parks Department, Children's Hospital of Wisconsin, Auer Avenue School, NOVA School, Marquette University School of Nursing, Safe & Sound, and many others.



COA Family Program Coordinator Lisa Petzak in the Family Resource Center





# THEORY OF CHANGE

The theory of change for accomplishing the transformation of the Amani neighborhood was built on two fundamental organizing principals: 1. Building resident engagement 2. Building neighborhood assets

Many theories of community organizing and development begin with “building resident engagement.” Meetings are held, residents come up with great ideas, and “training” occurs. However, in many cases, as time passes there are few tangible results and the initiative ends. COA had carefully observed numerous other attempts at “community organizing” and “community development” and in most cases there was initial success in bringing together a core group of residents. But after many meetings, the efforts produced little change on the ground, residents saw little accomplished, and many residents developed an even deeper sense of cynicism about how “nothing ever changes, so why bother.”

COA had also observed a wide range of community initiatives aimed at solving one particular problem. For example, funding would be granted for residents to develop gardens, or funding would be granted to reduce neighborhood crime. And while these initiatives had temporary significance, they did not address underlying problems or create long-term change in the neighborhood.

However, by 2014 the Executive Directors of COA and the Dominican Center began participating in the Population Change Learning Community organized and sponsored by UCLA and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. The twice-a-year meeting (and regular phone conference calls)

with other place-based neighborhood transformation initiatives provided an opportunity to see what other communities were doing and provided an ongoing exchange of information. Significantly, all shared their theories of change, as well as their specific initiatives to support this change. A review of the Boston Vital Village model of change led the Amani Initiative anchor partners (COA and the Dominican Center) to adopt a similar two-pronged approach to simultaneously (1) engage residents and (2) build neighborhood assets.

## MOVING FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

While the Dominican Center focused primarily on resident engagement, COA focused on the key linkage between resident engagement and building neighborhood assets.

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**THEREFORE, COA BEGAN TO WORK WITH RESIDENTS AND PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS TO IDENTIFY ESSENTIAL ASSETS THAT WERE “MISSING” IN THE AMANI NEIGHBORHOOD.**

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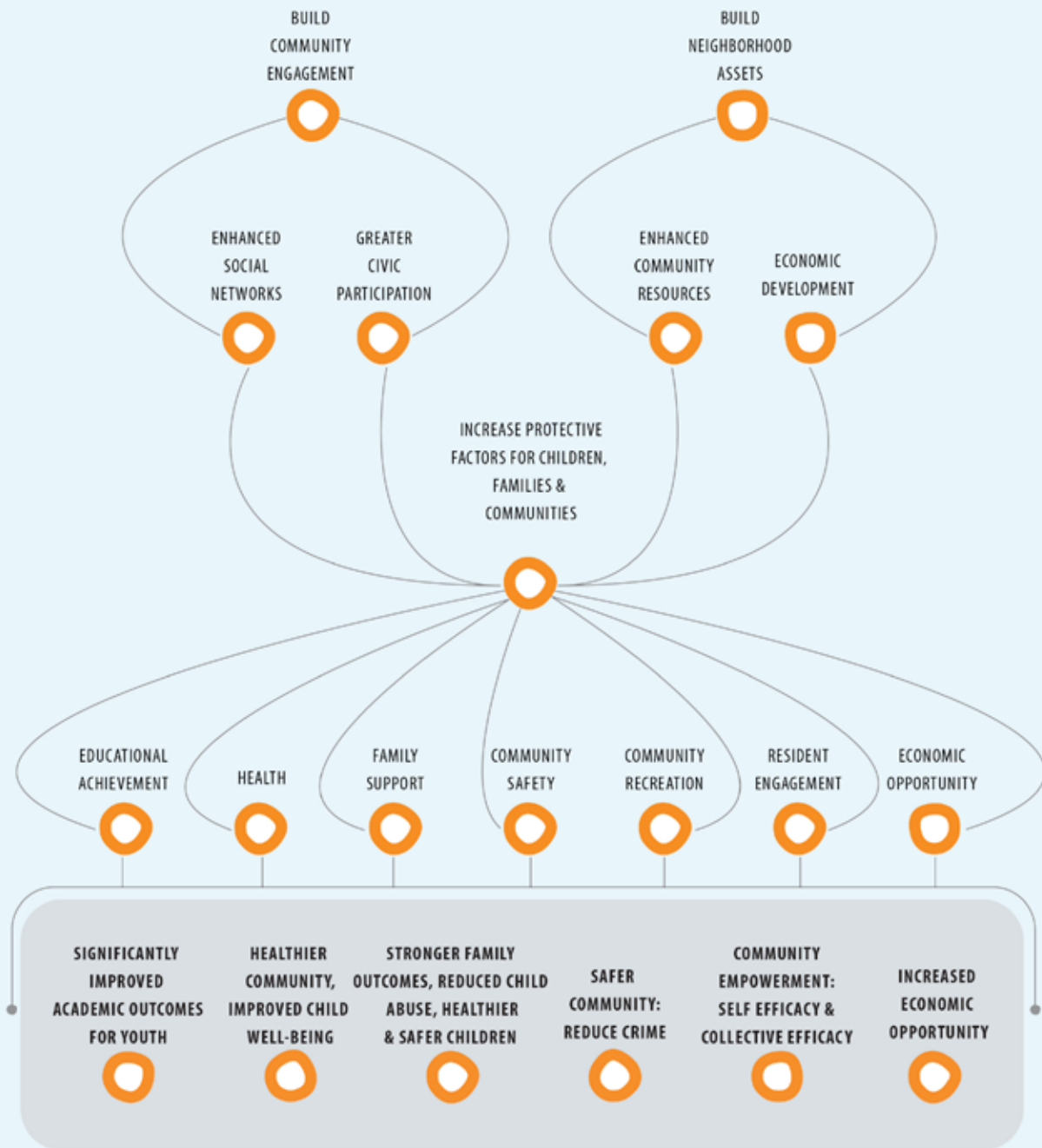
This included a lack of community green space, limited access to health care, no quality early child education, no family programming, and a very low performing public neighborhood school. Or, put positively, residents identified what was needed: a community green space, quality early child education, a health care facility, etc.

### Access to Green Space

There was no community green space in or near Amani; however, there was a large, long-abandoned boarded up former indoor pool building (Moody Park/Moody Pool) immediately adjacent to the Goldin Center. This parkland (owned by Milwaukee County) had become a haven for gangs, crime, and drug dealers. COA initiated several meetings with representatives of the Milwaukee County Parks Department, and ultimately worked together with the Milwaukee County Executive to secure a \$2 million Milwaukee County commitment for the Milwaukee County Parks Department to demolish the old pool building, and to build an entirely new Moody Park.

The creation of the new Moody Park provided an opportunity to mobilize and engage residents, and to build a great new neighborhood asset. During this initial phase, several meetings were held to get resident input.

# MILWAUKEE AMANI NEIGHBORHOOD THEORY OF CHANGE



This included making a choice between (a) fighting for renovation of the pool, and hoping that ultimately the County might allocate the \$7 million to rebuild and open the pool, or (b) seeking funding of \$2 million to demolish the old building and create a whole new park. After many meetings (and a vote) residents supported the latter. To accomplish this, COA partnered with the Dominican Center and the Milwaukee County Parks Department and began a multi-year process of convening residents to participate in the new park design and the component parts of the new park. This resident input involved numerous community meetings, debates, and discussions about what should be included in the new park (and what should not be included). For example, a vote by residents narrowly approved inclusion of basketball courts in the new park. The result of this process was the design and construction of a new Moody Park that included a community building (which is leased to COA to provide daily park programming), a children's splash pad, sports field, walking track, basketball courts, a small performance venue, and community gardens. The new Moody Park formally opened in late August 2015 with a full array of daily park programming beginning June 2016.

Building on the success in creating Moody Park was only the first step. Making the new Moody Park a success was then essential. COA received a private grant to provide daily programming in the park, and the County leased (at no rent) the community building in the park to COA. At this point COA and the Friends of Moody Park resident group met to plan the first summer of activities in the park. Ultimately, summer of 2016 Moody Park programming included the splash pad, a free community meal program (lunch and dinner) in the park, daily wrap-around arts and crafts programming for children and families, sports programming for youth (soccer, lacrosse,

rugby, and basketball), new community gardens (involving both teens and seniors), a summer concert, and a closing event.

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**AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SUMMER  
APPROXIMATELY 525 RESIDENTS  
CELEBRATED THE PARK OPENING,  
AND AT THE END OF THE SUMMER,  
APPROXIMATELY 600 RESIDENTS  
GATHERED TO CELEBRATE A “SUM-  
MER OF PEACE” IN THE PARK.**

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#### **Access to Healthcare**

The lack of medical care in Amani was identified as a key deficiency - there was no medical care facility within 28 blocks of the heart of the neighborhood. To address this, COA partnered with Children's Hospital of Wisconsin to bring more than 125 residents to “community cafés” held at the Goldin Center to discuss what residents wanted. From these cafés, residents created the Amani Community Advisory Group and after two years of Advisory Group meetings and discussions, COA built and Children's Hospital operates a pediatric and family clinic in the Goldin Center. The clinic opened in August 2013, and there is now access to medical care in Amani.

#### **Family Programs**

While residents discussed and debated the creation of Moody Park and the lack of health care, the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation provided support to COA to (1) increase the capacity of COA's existing Family Resource Center [located in the Riverwest area of Milwaukee and now serving more than 15,000 parent child visits annually], and (2) to establish a new Family

Resource Center in the Amani neighborhood at COA's Goldin Center. This new Family Resource Center and the new pediatric and family clinic both opened at the same time and residents participating at either are cross-referred to the other.

#### **Quality Early Child Education**

Under Wisconsin's “YoungStar” rating system, there were no 5-Star or 4-Star early child education facilities in Amani, and only one 3-Star childcare program serving 8 children. Overwhelmingly, children in Amani were starting school without the essential social, emotional and literacy foundation. Too many children were so far behind when they started school that they never caught up. With resident input and support, along with a \$2 million grant from the Burke Foundation, one of COA's three gymnasiums at the Goldin Center was converted into a brand new state-of-the-art early child education center. Serving up to 116 young children (ages 6 weeks to 6 years old), the new COA Burke Early Education Center is designed and built to meet all 5-Star early child education standards.

#### **Resident Leadership**

As projects were developed and became successful, this success itself attracted new resident participants, new agency partners, and new funders. The success in two years of meetings to plan the health clinic was important in demonstrating to residents that their involvement could in fact change their neighborhood. The success of years of planning and neighborhood meetings regarding the old boarded up Moody Pool - and the ultimate success in obtaining the funding, creating the design, and building the new Moody Park - demonstrated even greater impact of resident engagement. Residents planning and building community gardens continued to develop the sense of “resident ownership.”

At the beginning of this process, two separate groups of residents were meeting and discussing neighborhood issues: the Amani Community Advisory Group formed by COA and Children's Hospital of Wisconsin to discuss health care and other community issues; and the First Saturday group formed and coordinated by the Dominican Center to discuss a wide variety of neighborhood issues. COA and the Dominican Center worked to bring these two neighborhood resident groups together, and after only two meetings the residents voted to create the Amani United Neighborhood Association. Amani United continues to meet every month. Engaging between 30 and 110 residents and community partners at every meeting, Amani United participates in all aspects of neighborhood development.

While COA and the Dominican Center and residents were looking at the overall place-based initiative, other agencies and individuals with a specialized agenda were welcomed and provided their pieces of the holistic framework. Amani United, COA, and the Dominican Center partnered with a wide variety of community service providers including Safe & Sound, Hepatha Church, Bethesda Church, Milwaukee Police Department (5th District), Milwaukee Public Schools – Auer Avenue Community School, NOVA School, Milwaukee Succeeds, Pepp Nation, the Hunger Task Force, Alverno College, University of Wisconsin Extension, Teens Growing Greens, etc. While many of these organizations specialized in providing a particular service (e.g. creating gardens, door-to-door anti-crime efforts, food pantries, etc.) each was welcomed as a part of the overall place-based plan.

### **New Financial Resources**

The place-based approach attracted more participation and financial support. The basic model for most funding by foundations and government is program or project specific (e.g. a great reading program, arts program, tutoring program, housing project, youth program). And while each may be an outstanding program that helps participating individuals succeed and grow, separately these individual programs do not usually change the underlying environment / neighborhood. The place-based concept appealed to funders who were looking for ways to fundamentally change the neighborhood and, in doing so, lift everyone. The successes in attracting and engaging residents, together with the successes in building neighborhood assets, attracted a variety of financial and organizational supporters.

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**THE DORIS DUKE CHARITABLE FOUNDATION PROVIDED SUBSTANTIAL SUPPORT TO CREATE THE FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER, DEVELOP DATA MEASUREMENT SYSTEMS, ASSIST WITH COMMUNITY ORGANIZING; AND INTRODUCED COA AND THE DOMINICAN CENTER TO THE POPULATION CHANGE LEARNING COMMUNITY. THIS ALLOWED BOTH COA AND THE DOMINICAN CENTER TO ACTIVELY ENGAGE WITH OTHER NATIONAL MODELS FOR PLACE-BASED CHANGE AND LEARN FROM THEIR SUCCESSES (AND FAILURES).**

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**The Zilber Family Foundation** had a lead role in obtaining the Building Neighborhood Capacity Program.

**The Northwestern Mutual Foundation** continues to provide substantial annual financial support for the Amani initiative and for daily youth, family, early child education, and community development initiatives, and Foundation representatives actively participate at Amani meetings.

### **Milwaukee County**

(including both the Milwaukee County Executive and the Milwaukee County Parks Department) ultimately provided more than \$2 million dollars to build the new Moody Park.

**The Burke Foundation** provided \$2 million to support construction of the new early child education center.

**Children's Hospital of Wisconsin** played a key role in partnering with COA to host community cafés to discuss health issues in Amani, create the Amani Community Advisory Group, co-host the regular Amani Community Nights, and to fund the operation of the pediatric and family clinic at the Goldin Center, as well as a provide a full time neighborhood Community Health Navigator.

**Safe & Sound**, a community wide anti-crime initiative, participated by assigning one of its neighborhood community organizers to help engage residents in a variety of special projects in Amani.

# CASE STUDY EXPLORATION

The case study is organized around five key domains as a way to explore the roles and responsibilities of the support entities within the Amani Initiative: COA Youth & Family Centers and the Dominican Center.

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

The anchor agencies, participating partners, and residents came to the table with a broad range of interests, areas of expertise, experience levels, and motivations. The challenges needing attention in the Amani community and the possible ways to approach them were many.

But focusing on the overall impact on Amani allowed for and encouraged individuals and agencies with a wide diversity of agendas and interests to come together, and each could see how their specific focus could play a role in transforming the neighborhood. In other words, while the discussions and ideas involved a huge range of issues and problems and suggestions, the “place-based” focus on making Amani a better place provided structure and context and helped to set priorities.

Emphasizing the vision – the “big picture” – created a rallying call and helped to engage a wide diversity of individuals, agencies, and funders. It brought together people, agencies and funders with a multitude of agendas. The big picture transforming the Amani neighborhood created both vision and a framework that welcomed this diversity. This brought together housing advocates, arts programmers, youth serving agencies, adult education and employment programs, etc. And within this big picture vision, each had a role to play.

The planning and implementation of specific Amani asset-building projects became an important “point of entry” and “rallying point” for a wide variety of residents and agencies. It provided a mechanism to bring people together. This included those who were already participating in the neighborhood efforts, along with people who had not previously been engaged. For example, the “community cafés” held at the Goldin Center brought residents together to discuss the lack of health care in Amani. This then led to a much broader discussion about unemployment, crime, etc. This, in turn, led to the creation of the Amani Community Advisory Group, which later merged with The First Saturday group to create the Amani United neighborhood association.

The success in bringing residents together to create the Amani United neighborhood association provided a forum for resident engagement, and helped further develop resident leadership.

The theme of “resident-driven” was at the core of the entire Amani initiative. Yet, being resident-driven was not sufficient by itself. Building neighborhood collective efficacy within Amani required successes such as working together to create a new park, and then achieving that goal. And with each new achievement residents were (1) even more empowered to take responsibility for their neighborhood, and (2) took “ownership” of their park, their clinic, their neighborhood. That every interviewee mentioned Moody Park

as a milestone and success in the community made it clear that having real change is important for ensuring that progress and success are observable.

The importance of bringing people into the same place to interact face-to-face was talked about in a variety of ways. Interviewees mentioned that meetings held by Amani Community Advisory Group, The First Saturday Group, and Amani United were valuable points of entry and places where things happened. For example, Reverend Mary Martha Kennass from Hepatha Lutheran Church emphasized that there was no substitute for being together and interacting with people, and that most forms of outreach – such as sending out flyers, were merely a means to get people together in the same space. Linda Bowen (Technical Assistance provider for the Amani community), commented, “I do think that this is really difficult, difficult work, and when people start asserting their voice, it’s not always pleasant to the ears of people who have been working in these communities and feel that they’ve been doing what needs to be done there. To have that challenged isn’t pleasant at all. And there’s always a lot of frustration and anger both on the parts of the residents and the parts of partners. And that’s one of the reasons I think having people really try to sit down and do visioning together, to do work together. This starts to tear down some of those kinds of barriers that are normal barriers to be expected but hard barriers to go through.”

As the place-based initiative developed momentum and demonstrated some success, community leaders (from anchor agencies and residents) noted that it was important that “outside” organizations did not come into the Amani neighborhood with a pre-determined agenda. This was largely due to observations of both residents and established organizations in the community that several well-intentioned groups began coming into the community to implement whatever it was that they had to offer – without taking the time to determine if it was a genuine need or appropriate for the community – and then leaving once their resources were exhausted. This does not mean that outside agencies were not welcome. Many came, and participated in their area of expertise, and created real value. But a few looked to the success of Amani as a way to attract funding and piggyback on Amani’s success, without really engaging with the community or sharing the overall project goals.

Throughout this process, resident engagement and “ownership” were continually stressed by the anchor agencies, funders, and residents. Comments by interviewees included:

“...I’d say our priorities or strategies at the foundation include resident leadership and helping build their capacities. If change is going to happen in neighborhoods over a period of time, it’s going to come from the residents, with or without funding. So I would say that’s a key driver.” (Darlene Russell, Sr. Program Officer, Greater Milwaukee Foundation)

“...we don’t take credit for the overall improvements in a neighborhood but we think that all of us being on the same page and working together toward a common goal is what’s going to make the difference.” (Katie Sanders, Executive Director, Safe & Sound)

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***“I think a big lesson for all of us that continues... is to always be sure that we’re not just deciding a plan for a community but rather that its community driven. And so a lot of listening and a lot of making sure that persons being served are also the ones doing the serving.”***  
***(Mary Martha Kannass, Pastor, Hepatha Lutheran Church)***

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“It was interesting because you can see a transformation from residents talking about particular interests they had, to understanding that they needed to develop a common agenda so that resources could be focused to deliver impact in specified areas.” (John Kordsmeier, former president of the Northwestern Mutual Foundation)

## **MEASURE AND SHARE DATA TO GUIDE THE EFFORT**

A key element in developing the Amani place-based initiative led to basic questions about the need to measure successful outcomes and how to measure success. Initial success measures looked at resident participation and engagement. How many residents came to meetings? How many voted to have basketball courts in the new park? How many participated in the Children’s Hospital – COA Community Cafés? How many residents attended community events? For example, 640 residents attended the Amani Family Night at the end of the first summer of programming in the new Moody Park.

Other measures looked at the success in building community assets. This included working with residents to establish the Amani United neighborhood association and Friends of Moody Park. And it also included building new physical assets

such as the new pediatric and family clinic, the new Family Resource Center, the new Moody Park and the new Burke Early Child Education Center.

Measures were also gathered on resident self-efficacy and ultimately community collective efficacy. This has, to date, included: neighborhood surveys of residents, documenting the substantial increase in voting by residents, documenting resident participation as a measure of self-efficacy, and tracking the decrease in crime in Amani.

In 2016, additional support from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation substantially increased COA’s capacity to capture data and measure change. A full time Data Assessment Coordinator provided the technical skills and ability to look at a more comprehensive set of measures and to gather data from other available data sets. New data sets were able to isolate and identify infant mortality rates, resident income levels, access to prenatal care, percent of children in single parent households, percent of disconnected youth (ages 16 – 19 not in school), specific to the Amani neighborhood.

## **Demonstrating Positive Change**

Between 30 and 100+ residents attend each of the monthly Amani United neighborhood association meetings. Amani Family Nights at COA’s Goldin Center attract between 225 – 650 people to each event. Over 500 residents came to the Moody Park groundbreaking ceremony, 500+ attended the park opening in May 2016, and 600+ attended the end of summer event in the park in August 2016.

Voting participation dramatically increased in Amani. The Goldin Center is a polling place for a large section of the Amani neighborhood, and in the past two November elections for Governor voting (November 2010) at the Goldin Center increased from 589 voters to 1072 voters (November 2014). In the 2008 and 2012 November Presidential elections voting increased from 1,000 voters in 2008 to 1,572 voters in 2012. However, in 2016 only 973 votes were cast, reflective of the overall significant decrease in voting throughout Milwaukee, especially in low-income neighborhoods.

Many interviewees attested to the growth in resident participation, self-efficacy, and collective efficacy: "You feel, like oh we have all these vacant houses, we have all this failing infrastructure, but we want a co-op credit union for the neighborhood. We want a grocery store for the neighborhood. So they're starting to think more large scale of addressing other needs in the community,...then getting those small victories under your belt to build up to the larger ones." (Fatima Benhaddou, Building Neighborhood Capacity Coordinator and Technical Assistant 2015-16)

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**A 2017 ANALYSIS OF MILWAUKEE CRIME DATA FOUND THAT FROM 2012 THROUGH THE END OF 2016 THERE WAS A 26.36% DECREASE IN CRIME IN THE AMANI NEIGHBORHOOD. DURING THE SAME PERIOD, THERE WAS A 10.86% DECREASE IN CRIME OVERALL IN THE CITY OF MILWAUKEE.**

**DURING 2016, CRIME IN AMANI DECREASED 10.42% VS 2015; AND FOR THE SAME PERIOD CITY OF MILWAUKEE CRIME DECREASED BY 4.66%. IN RAW NUMBERS, THERE WERE 899 OFFENSES IN 2012 AND 662 OFFENSES IN 2016: 237 FEWER CRIMES PER YEAR.**

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In 2015 and 2016, Safe & Sound, a Milwaukee nonprofit organization dedicated to public safety, commissioned the Medical College of Wisconsin to conduct an evaluation of its 8 priority highest-crime Milwaukee neighborhoods. The researchers evaluated the results of more than 3,000 resident surveys measuring collective efficacy, and the Amani neighborhood surveys showed the highest improvement in the collective efficacy scores of all 8 of the neighborhoods evaluated, and this improvement was accompanied by sustained decreases in crime rates.



*Amani Community Family Night*



## INNOVATE AND IMPROVE THROUGH ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE CHANGE EFFORT

From day one, the anchor agencies emphasized the critical priority of engaging residents. Too many projects and agencies had created wonderful programs without engaging residents and had seen that the lack of “community buy-in” and the lack of a sense of “community ownership” resulted in failure. These examples demonstrate the essential role of resident engagement:

Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin was clear from day one that while they were interested in partnering with COA to create a health care facility in Amani, the critical first step was to engage Amani residents. This meant holding “community cafés” at the Goldin Center that attracted more than 125 residents, and creating a core of residents to participate in the Amani Community Advisory Group. The value of this process became clear when Children’s Hospital proposed creating a pediatric clinic in Amani, and the resident participants said they didn’t support this. When asked why, the residents said that if the clinic was only “pediatric” how would the parents know about the clinic, without doctors themselves or any other relationship to the clinic. The leadership from Children’s Hospital recognized this concern and ultimately opened a pediatric and family clinic by partnering with the Marquette University College of Nursing and bringing in a nurse practitioner to treat adult residents as well as children.

After almost two years of Advisory Group meetings to help plan for the new health clinic, the Group had shrunk to about a dozen residents. At the end of one meeting Mrs. Leatha West, a longtime participant, privately indicated she had enough. Believing that the clinic would never happen, she said this would be her last

meeting. She was assured that the process was almost done, the clinic construction would be announced and begin within a few months, and she was told by an executive from one of the anchor agencies that the clinic was definitely going to be built and that “she would be able to tell her children and grandchildren that she helped create the clinic for this community.” She stayed and was at the ribbon cutting when the clinic was opened. More than a year later, Mrs. West was a regular participant in meetings to plan for the new Moody Park. These planning meetings had been going on for more than three years and a group of about 12 people were talking after the meeting and several residents were saying that nothing was ever going to happen and they weren’t coming to any more meetings. At this point, Mrs. West stepped up and told them that they needed to stay and keep participating because the park was going to be built and “they would be able to tell their children and grandchildren that they helped create the new park.” They all stayed.

Again, the theory of change in Amani involved both engaging residents and building neighborhood assets. At some stage in community development work, there is a need for action and tangible evidence of progress in both physical and behavioral forms. As one resident stated, “People need to feel like their efforts have produced something.” (Yvonne McMaskill, Coordinator Central City Tri-Angle Neighborhood)

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**COUPLING RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT WITH BUILDING NEIGHBORHOOD ASSETS PAID HUGE DIVIDENDS IN INCREASED RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT. BRINGING RESIDENTS TOGETHER TO SEEK CHANGE IS ENERGIZING, BUT PARTICIPATION WITHOUT RESULTS IS ULTIMATELY DISILLUSIONING. THEREFORE, RESIDENT MEETINGS BROUGHT RESIDENTS TOGETHER NOT JUST TO MEET, AND NOT JUST TO COME UP WITH IDEAS FOR THE FUTURE; BUT ALSO TO ENGAGE DIRECTLY IN PLANNING SPECIFIC ACHIEVABLE RESULTS.**

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One change that was referenced throughout the interviews with residents was the creation of the new Moody Park. It was made clear that physical change to the spatial environment has a substantial impact – this change served as evidence that their efforts made a difference and the community had power. For example, COA had already battled with Milwaukee County and secured the appropriation of \$2 million for building a new park. But all parties started with the basic assumption that residents needed to play a key role in planning what would go into the new park. As Mario Higgins (Housing Program Officer, City of Milwaukee) stated, “I think Moody Park was a big win in the sense that I don’t know that it happens without their input. I don’t think that was something that county was saying - oh we’re just gonna do that...I think that those...

funds would have went to some other park.” There were many, many meetings where residents discussed and debated (and sometimes voted) over what elements would be incorporated into the park. And of course, the more residents met, and debated, and selected what they wanted, the more it became their park. This sense of community “ownership” (not legal ownership – but emotional/psychological ownership) played two critical roles. First, it created a new park environment – not the same old Moody Park that was run by gangs and drug dealers – but a new park that was safer and brought residents of all ages into the park to participate. Second, the success achieved after years of fighting for the new park created a “we can do it” attitude.

After years of work, Milwaukee County scheduled the Moody Park groundbreaking event for Friday, August 29, 2014. Four days before the event, during the Amani United meeting, a text was received from the County Executive announcing the groundbreaking was being postponed. Residents reacted with anger, immediately began planning to hold the event anyway, and residents promised they would bring their own shovels and hold the groundbreaking event with or without the Parks Department. Residents then began calling the County Executive’s Office and the Milwaukee County Parks Department to demand the event go on as planned. Three days later the event did take place – as planned – with the County Executive and the Director of the Parks Department. More than 500 residents attended to help break ground on their new park.

“... there were 500 people at Moody Park when it opened last summer, and to see the smiling faces of the people that were there, because I think the visible tangible sign that we can do something, and we can, the thing is can we

create a space in our neighborhood that’s attractive and safe and is it a place people can feel comfortable coming to. Because once you build that, then people become more secure in their ownership of homes, in what’s going on in the community, they begin to take more responsibility for things like reporting crimes...” (John Kordsmeier, Northwestern Mutual Foundation)

One of the most significant observations regarding the increased capacity of Amani residents was expanding the range of issues the residents engage with and the degree to which they approach them. The residents involved, particularly those involved in Moody Park and/or Amani United, have evolved from being divided and disjointed to being self-organized and dynamic.

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***“... through Amani United getting stronger, their (resident) voices are heard, like they will say this is not fair, and then right now with the political elections that are going on... Dominican Center’s doing a really good job of having these forums where the residents are put in front of these candidates and they’re able to ask them questions, they’re able to hold them accountable for what they’re claiming they’ll bring. ...”***  
***(Fatima Benhaddou, Building Neighborhood Capacity Coordinator and Technical Assistant 2015-16)***

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In 2014, The Hunger Task Force of Milwaukee determined that the Amani neighborhood was the largest “food desert” in the City of Milwaukee. Surveying all of the local corner “grocery” stores, they were unable to find a single piece of fresh fruit or any fresh vegetables within 15 blocks in any direction from the Goldin Center. Discussion at Amani United meetings focused on how the corner stores were basically selling alcohol, tobacco, and a few highly marked up grocery items. However, in the fall of 2016 the police department began looking at these stores and sought resident help. When two of the stores were cited for violations and brought before the City of Milwaukee Common Council Licensing Committee, five Amani residents and executive directors from the Dominican Center and COA showed up. One of the stores was put on probation for a review, and the other store’s license was revoked for three years with a prohibition on any other store being opened at that location for three years. And the next issue of Amani United was distributed with a frontpage headline: “Amani Residents Speak Out – Nuisance Store is Closed.”

“Those kinds of things when you see people really coming together, you’re really encouraged that your work is really working, it’s really helping the neighborhood.” (Yvonne McCaskill, Coordinator Central City Tri-Angle Neighborhood)

“And what I see now, is the residents taking ownership in their community, you know, being at the table, having their voices heard, bringing, building those social connections among themselves to identify what change they want in their neighborhood, what they’ve identified and that they’re using their voices and their human resources to bring that change.” (Darlene Russell, Sr. Program Officer, Greater Milwaukee Foundation)

A central focus in engaging residents was to communicate, publicize, and celebrate success. To this end, a number of steps were taken to promote awareness and engagement including creating the Amani United neighborhood association with monthly meetings, publishing the Amani United Community Newsletter (a quarterly 4-page color newsletter), holding regular community family nights at the Goldin Center, engaging residents at meetings to build neighborhood assets, distributing information door to door, and hiring community organizers to go door-to-door.

As successes were achieved in Amani, the perception of the community began to evolve into more of an asset-based as opposed to deficit-based view. Celebrating successes big and small became a key strategy for sustainability. Celebrations included:

- **The groundbreaking for the new Moody Park**
- **The opening of the new park**
- **The opening of the new clinic**
- **The opening of the new family resource center**
- **The opening of the new early child education center**
- **Regular (4 – 6 times a year) “Family gathering nights” at the Goldin Center**

In Milwaukee, and in many communities, what dominates the mass media is the “bad news” especially focusing on homicides, gangs, fires, etc. It was extremely rare to have the citywide news broadcast the “good news” in Amani. In Amani, when the clinic was opened, it was not covered; and when the new park was opened, it was mostly not covered.

The key was to “get the good word out”. As part of the Amani initiative, COA and the Amani United neighborhood association created and began publishing the Amani United Community Newsletter, distributed quarterly door-to-door in Amani and at neighborhood locations (COA, the Dominican Center, Auer Avenue Community School, NOVA School, churches, corner stores). Headlines and stories featured meetings to plan the clinic and the park; the opening of the clinic, the opening of the park, the new early child education center; programming in the park; community events; neighborhood news; and community residents. This played an important role in “getting the word out” to residents. When residents became aware that other residents were engaged, and real results were being achieved, this encouraged even greater participation.

Through these means, residents became aware of the changes in their neighborhood and were familiar with the aim of revitalizing the neighborhood and the priority to make the community safer. They could name neighborhood partners such as the Dominican Center, COA, Hephatha Lutheran Church, and they are familiar with various meeting opportunities: Amani United, First Saturday group, COA Family Nights, and neighborhood safety meetings.

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***“You hear the police department talking about what’s happening within the Amani neighborhood and the transformation that’s happening.” (John Kordsmeier, Northwestern Mutual Foundation)***

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“... I think what’s been unique about the Amani United meetings is that it’s such a shared platform. So everyone’s hearing about the improvements on the park or their hearing about the improvements in COA... And then actively as things occur, if a resident says this thing happened on my block, the police officer in the room’s gonna talk about how they can respond to that. ... So it’s like everyone kind of has this shared role. I think everyone’s seeing themselves as a piece of the process, not oh that’s gonna be my thing solely.” (Fatima Benhaddou, Building Neighborhood Capacity Coordinator and Technical Assistant 2015-16)

“I think giving the residents visibility and voice has given them more power with some of the larger systems in the city... There’s a way in which their voices got heard, and the fact that there are people doing evaluation, people paying attention, foundations in town who are involved in this...” (Susan Lloyd, Executive Director of the Zilber Family Foundation)



*Children’s Hospital Pediatric/Family Clinic*

“... from an organizational perspective there’s been training for organizations to the value of having residents involved from the beginning. And I’m seeing this happen more and more across the city, but definitely some of the large governmental institutions and large institutions that want to go in and make change, and they don’t always want to see how that change should play out from the resident perspective.” (Katie Sanders, Executive Director, Safe & Sound)

The Building Neighborhood Capacity Program also provided some technical assistance mostly delivered by the Center for the Study of Social Policy. During an interview with Linda Bowen, one of the Technical Assistance providers for the Amani community, she shared the five stages of community development that she has observed through her work, including her work with Amani:

- **Mobilization: mobilize people to address a specific issue**
- **Community Organizing: get people to sit down together, talk and get to know each other, begin to build coalitions and collaborations**
- **Community Building: have people actually working together on hard and deep issues**
- **Community Engagement: residents able to work with partners on more divisive issues like class, race, and gender**
- **Civic Engagement: residents more proactive, concerned about political representation and their needs, hold elected officials accountable or run for office themselves**

However, it is important to note that residents entered the process at different times, so the

steps above may have happened at different times for different residents. Very few were involved in the initial training and most residents did not participate in any formal training at all. Many were simply attracted by the project at hand (the new park, or the new clinic, etc.) and became regular and committed participants through the process and the successes achieved.

“Once you empower residents and they know who to talk to and feel that their voice is being heard, they will let you know.” (Mario Higgins, Housing Program Officer, City of Milwaukee)

“... you start seeing residents turn into thinking this is my program, and ... feeling pride that came with ‘I made this change, I made these things happen.’” (Fatima Benhaddou, Building Neighborhood Capacity Coordinator and Technical Assistant 2015-16)

## SUPPORT THE HUMAN ELEMENT OF CHANGE

Interviewees emphasized the importance of genuine and real face-time with community members by any individuals or organizations already involved or looking to get involved in the neighborhood. One anecdote shared by several interviewees compared police-community relations today versus in the past and the notable difference when police officers stop to talk to community members rather than just drive through looking for problems to solve.

This need for genuine face-to-face interaction applies to the residents themselves as well, noting the importance of opportunities for residents to work successfully together and celebrate those successes. Residents also expressed the importance of having an understanding of a community that is developed through real experience. Some resident interviewees stated

that, in reality, their neighborhood and the people in it are not that much different than in other neighborhoods.

Many of the achievements in Amani took much longer than most are aware of. Identifying problems is only one step. Bringing people together, reaching consensus, and finding resources all take time. And this means persistence.

For example, when COA first purchased the bankrupt building at 24th and Burleigh and began providing youth programs at the COA Goldin Center it was 2005. Next door to the Goldin Center was the huge boarded-up former indoor pool facility – the Moody Pool.

Identifying the problem was easy: Moody Pool was a boarded up building and the area was a haven for gangs and drug dealers, and gunshots were heard frequently; and it was adjacent to COA’s youth center. Construction on the new park began 10 years later (in 2015) and full community park programming began in the spring 2016. The Parks Department was asked to rebuild and open the pool building, but a \$7 million price tag made this impossible. Discussions about giving the land back to the city for redevelopment met with opposition by park advocates. Battles between the Milwaukee County Executive and the County Board made finding a solution (and any appropriation of funding) difficult. However, with ongoing pressure from COA, support from the residents to “do something” and support from the Parks Department to “do something”, ultimately something was done.

Residents must not only be engaged, but they must be engaged continually and consistently over time. Furthermore, there is a real need for visible and tangible progress in order to sustain resident involvement. “I think any time you start to engage residents, which is the best thing and

the way to go about changing neighborhoods, it takes a while though. . . it's this consistent engagement that you have to do." (Mario Higgins, Housing Program Officer, City of Milwaukee)

Resident meetings were convened and took place regularly over three years. Residents debated (and voted) over what to do. Support (narrowly) favored demolishing the pool building and building a new park. Debates and votes were held about what features should be in the park and where in the park. And now, after years of seemingly endless meetings and debates, Amani has a park. And while it is officially (and legally) a Milwaukee County Park, Amani residents take great pride in "their" park. Amani residents living around the park have security cameras to help protect the park. Amani residents have also formed "Friends of Moody Park" organization to look at all aspects of Moody Park programming, safety and upkeep. Most important, Amani residents participate at events and activities in their park.

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**MANY OF THE ACHIEVEMENTS THAT OCCURRED DURING THE AMANI NEIGHBORHOOD INITIATIVE TOOK A SIGNIFICANT PERIOD OF TIME. FOR EXAMPLE, THE STRUGGLE TO CREATE MOODY PARK LASTED ALMOST 6 YEARS, AND THE CREATION OF THE NEW CLINIC TOOK ABOUT TWO YEARS. DURING THIS PERIOD, RESIDENTS WERE NOT ONLY ENGAGED, BUT THEY REMAINED ENGAGED CONTINUALLY AND CONSISTENTLY OVER TIME.**

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### **Responsive Change in Local Funders' Focus**

Actual and real resources are required to achieve positive community change. Many (probably most) funders have a specific focus, e.g. arts funding, or youth services, or health initiatives, etc. And a large majority of nonprofit agencies have a specific focus, or arts programming, health services and early child education. A foundation, or government, or an individual provides funding for "X", the funds are spent on that specific program, and the provider reports on the achievements of "X".

For example, funding is provided for an after school program, tutoring program, or sports program; and the provider agency reports on how this grant was spent and how it has affected the individual participants. And in a best case scenario, the recipients are in fact helped and benefit from the grant. However, the success of individual participants is very different from changing the underlying circumstances of a low income distressed neighborhood. In other words, program specific funding may very well help individual participants achieve and rise above their circumstances, but it does not change the underlying circumstances, i.e. it does not change the neighborhood and the conditions that breed overall failure for many.

The practical steps required for the Building Neighborhood Capacity Program provided an additional structure for change and helped to accelerate the pace of change. For example, there were several funders in the Milwaukee area that wanted to support and see positive change happen in Milwaukee neighborhoods; or who wanted to combine their resources in order to more effectively do so. The application and delivery requirements for this program acted as a vehicle to make this happen by requiring funders to write letters of support, meet together, and discuss how the project

would be implemented. The application and implementation process provided a narrow focus within a complex objective that led to real and identifiable change.

There were at least two significant changes in local funders' focus. The excitement generated by the successes of the Amani Initiative attracted substantial new resources for Amani. The success of a comprehensive approach to transforming Milwaukee's most distressed neighborhood cast a strong light on "place-based population change" initiatives and influenced more funders (and more neighborhoods) to take this approach.

"...it would be hard [to overstate] how much I have learned by listening carefully on a regular basis to people who are living in neighborhoods... about just what the challenges and difficulties are, what their real relationships with systems are..." (Susan Lloyd, Executive Director of the Zilber Family Foundation)

"I'm talking about the blood, sweat, and tears that the people and Amani United are putting in. They need to see a visible improvement in what's going on within the community. To the degree that they do that and obviously you show progress, it's easier to attract other resources both locally and nationally to efforts like this... There comes a time when you pass a threshold when people want to be involved because it seems like you're making a difference and it's cool. And so then you can attract more people to do that." (John Kordsmeier, Northwestern Mutual Foundation)

One substantial change that was shared was in how funders awarded money. Prior to the Amani place-based initiative and the Building Neighborhood Capacity Grant, the Northwestern Mutual Foundation had limited involvement in the Amani community. However, their engagement in Amani has resulted in a long-term commitment to supporting the community. Previously, Northwestern Mutual was not funding specific geographical areas of the city.

Other Milwaukee funders are also engaged in place-based initiatives. The role of the Zilber Family Foundation is noteworthy for their leading role in selecting and supporting place-based initiatives in the Lindsay Heights, Clarke Square, and Layton Boulevard neighborhoods. Harley Davidson, Aurora Healthcare, Marquette University and others are focusing on the Near West Side neighborhood. In 2016, Johnson Controls International announced that it is providing support for place-based initiatives in three other Milwaukee neighborhoods: Thurston Woods, Havenswood, and Westlawn.

The Anchor Agencies are also garnering more attention locally. In 2016, LISC (Local Initiatives Support Corporation) awarded its MANDI (Milwaukee Award for Neighborhood Development Innovation) Cornerstone Award to COA for its “commitment and effectiveness over time” in the Amani initiative.

### USE NETWORKS TO SUSTAIN, SCALE, AND SPREAD

The circumstances “on the ground” are always changing: leadership at participating agencies changes, resident leadership changes, participants come and go, funding comes and then ends. The only certainty is that during the process there will be innumerable uncertainties. For many persons interviewed, this was seen as a sign of the strength of the network’s structure. They noted continually emphasizing and reemphasizing the vision is essential to long term sustainability and that celebrating successes, big and small, is essential.

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**AS SUCCESSES WERE ACHIEVED IN AMANI, THE PERCEPTION OF THE COMMUNITY BEGAN TO EVOLVE INTO MORE OF AN ASSET-BASED AS OPPOSED TO DEFICIT-BASED VIEW.**

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“...now it’s like, as a community network, if someone gets word of something going on, they’re gonna bring it to the community and say, hey, did you know they’re actually planning on doing this to this building over here, who approved that? And that’s right next to my what-ever, and so they’re bringing that forward. And then the community’s reacting to it and saying we’ll get them to our next meeting, they’ve got to talk to us first.” (Fatima Benhaddou, Building Neighborhood Capacity Coordinator and Technical Assistant 2015-16)



*Amani United Neighborhood Association Meeting*

In the Amani initiative, it was often said that apathy and cynicism were the greatest enemies. Previous disappointments often led residents to avoid participation. For example, while over 125 residents attended the community cafés to begin conversations about health care and the need for a clinic in Amani, fewer than 25 residents “stuck it out” for the entire 2-year process. To combat this attrition, two strategies were identified.

**One strategy was to “keep positive” and be prepared for the long haul**

It was essential for resident and agency leaders to be “up front” about the fact that change takes time, and to keep emphasizing positive steps forward. From the beginning, leaders from the anchor agencies stressed the need to be in it for “the long haul.” Avoiding unrealistic expectations of immediate change was essential.

**Second, and perhaps most important was the need to note and celebrate community victories, big and small.**

125 residents turning out for a meeting was a success. Having between 200 and 500 residents turn out for the regular Amani Family Nights was huge, and helped build the sense of “community.” Getting the \$2 million appropriation for the new Moody Park was a success. Having residents vote about the park was a success. Sticking it out for several years and then having the new Moody Park groundbreaking was a huge success. The ceremony opening the new clinic was a huge success, as were the grand opening of the new Moody Park, the opening of the new early child

education center, and the opening of the new Family Resource Center. All of these events and meetings brought residents together and were a cause for celebration.

While there were many reasons to celebrate, the simple fact is that the mass media tends to mostly cover the negative news. There was little mass media (television, radio, newspaper) coverage of Amani events such as the park groundbreaking, clinic opening, the new early child education center, etc. Recognizing this, early on the decision was made to create Amani’s own newsletter: the Amani United Community Newsletter. Distributed door-to-door and at local agencies, it helped to “spread the word”, promote Amani local initiatives, demonstrate visible and tangible progress in order to sustain and promote resident involvement, and help build the community’s sense of “collective efficacy.”

In this funding environment it is very difficult to attract “place-based” funding designed to transform an entire neighborhood. However, the success of some place-based initiatives nationally (and locally) has begun to change the approach for some funders. In a very direct example, the Northwestern Mutual Foundation had not been directly involved in the Amani community. But as a result of their direct involvement in Building Neighborhood Capacity Grant and the overall Amani initiative, they are now committed to supporting the community long-term and direct a number of their grantees to focus their work

in the Amani neighborhood. And Northwestern Mutual is now focused on three distinct distressed Milwaukee neighborhoods: Amani, Metcalf Park, and Muskego Way.

Over the past 5+ years, Milwaukee has seen the development of more than 10 place-based initiatives with substantial support from the Zilber Family Foundation, the Northwestern Mutual Foundation, and now the initial support from the Johnson Controls International Foundation. The funders learned or reinforced their views that resident engagement and place-based investment is the direction that they want to go. One possible indicator of sustainability – or at least continuity after the end of the Building Neighborhood Capacity Grant – is that three major foundations in the city are now investing in Amani, which they would not have done otherwise. Some have shifted or have considered shifting their portfolios and funding approach specifically to include Amani as a result of this project.

On a national level, the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation played a major role in its support for COA and the Amani place-based initiative. This support went far beyond significant funding for programming, and included introducing COA to the Population Change Learning Community. And this support has continued as COA worked (with support from Doris Duke) to bring Milwaukee’s 10 place based initiatives together to begin a citywide place based learning community.

## SUMMARY

While this case study of the Amani neighborhood has focused on the linkage between resident engagement and building neighborhood assets, a critically important outcome of achieving both engagement and building assets was strengthening the fabric of a tightly knit community. Fifty-six years ago (1961) Jane Jacobs wrote *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* and noted, “The public peace – the sidewalk and street peace – of cities is not kept primarily by the police, necessary as police are. It is kept primarily by an intricate, almost unconscious network of voluntary controls and standards among the people themselves, and enforced by the people themselves.”

Most recently, (2016) Matthew Desmond noted in his bestseller, *Evicted*, which focused on the Milwaukee zip code of 53206 of which Amani is a part, “...a prerequisite for this type of healthy and engaged community was the presence of people who simply were present, who looked after the neighborhood” and that “disadvantaged neighborhoods with higher levels of ‘collective efficacy’ – the stuff of loosely linked neighbors who trust one another and share expectations about how to make their community better – have lower crime rates.”

Engaging residents and building relationships were the key elements in the Amani initiative in at least three ways.

- The process of meeting helped bring people to the table, and the process of meeting together over significant time periods (e.g. two years to create the clinic and more than three years to create the new park, etc.) helped to introduce people to each other, create relationships, build shared goals, and ultimately celebrate shared achievement.

- This relationship building also applied to participating agencies. For example, The Dominican Center and COA were aware of each other’s work and programs in the area; however, there was little or no interconnected or shared programming. But the two agencies worked closely together throughout the entire process (and continue to do so), and in the process found a wide variety of ways to support each other. However, it is important to note that some agencies who provided a specific type of service or program (an arts project, or a gardening project, etc.) participated solely to the extent that they provided their specific program in Amani and some did not participate in Amani meetings and projects outside of what their specific agency was providing.

- The relationships with funders were also strengthened. As the Amani initiative achieved success, other funders began looking at Amani as a model that produced tangible results, and this attracted new funders and funding. And while many of the funders continued to take a “hands off” approach (providing the funds and then requiring a report on results), some funders began to regularly attend and participate at community meetings and events. An exemplary role was played by the Northwestern Mutual Foundation that provided substantial funding for Amani agencies and projects, but also participated in identifying needs and requiring more detailed outcome measurements.

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***“... to the extent that Dominican Center had already been working with COA and some of the other organizations, those relationships solidified through this process. And then, in the foundation world, Northwestern Mutual made it a practice of its philanthropy to encourage its other grantees to actually do their work in connection with the resident-led work that was going on in Amani.” (Susan Lloyd, Executive Director of the Zilber Family Foundation)***

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In a similar sense, the presence of resources must often be accompanied with knowledge of how to access those resources. Having high profile partners also served to garner positive attention to the community as well as to attract badly needed resources. Since “building neighborhood assets” was half of the equation, bringing resources to the table was essential. And having both engaged residents and credible respected anchor agencies allowed access to resources. For example, The Dominican Center already had the Building Neighborhood Capacity grant. And COA already had relationships with the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the Northwestern Mutual Foundation, and many others. And the successes in Amani attracted other major funders such as the Burke Foundation, Milwaukee County, Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin, and many individual funders.

“Having funders involved is significant; financial resources are not insignificant. When you have major funders at the table, the community groups will show up... that’s an incentive for some organizations that wouldn’t otherwise plug in.” (Katie Sanders, Executive Director, Safe & Sound)



- Access to data has increased the ability to “measure change.” The ability to document success is essential to funders (existing and potential new funders) and to agencies committed to effective programming and who are looking for impact. But perhaps even more important, documenting success also creates the opportunity to inform residents of success, which in turn enhances collective efficacy and resident engagement.
- Technical assistance and information were also highly valued and necessary in this project, and this applied equally to both organizations and individuals. It was especially in this area that the Population Change Learning Community was of great assistance. Having the opportunity to hear and see what was being accomplished (including both successes and failures) in other place-based initiatives (in Boston, Brooklyn, Hartford, Tulsa, San Antonio, and Los Angeles) was a huge advantage.



*Burke Early Education Center Grand Opening*

# CONCLUSION

There have been significant measurable changes in Amani, e.g. a sustained reduction in crime, access to healthcare, access to community green space, access to quality early child education, access to family programming, increased voter turnout, and creation of a strong neighborhood association. Yet there is still much to be done, for example, improving housing, increasing home ownership, creating a local grocery store, increasing employment opportunities and continuing to reduce crime.

- Because a place-based initiative encompasses such a wide range of issues (health, housing, youth, green space, employment, etc.), no single agency has all of the skill sets and/or resources to accomplish this. Therefore, success requires agencies to recognize that intra-agency and inter-agency collaboration is essential. At the root of this collaboration is the recognition and belief that one plus one equals three: that working together makes it possible to accomplish what one agency alone cannot do.
- Having a strong committed anchor organization (or in the case of Amani, two anchor organizations) is essential. In many ways the anchor organization(s) provide the continuity and the “glue” that hold things together.
- Initial successes in having residents achieve visible tangible results (e.g. the new park, the new clinic, etc.) are essential to attracting and retaining widespread resident engagement.
- It is essential to “celebrate success”. Publicizing and celebrating success is essential to building individual’s self-efficacy and the neighborhood’s collective efficacy. The initial successes in Amani have led to even greater resident engagement, greater community collective efficacy, increased attention to Amani by political leaders, and increased community investment in Amani.
- Failure is an orphan, and success has a thousand parents.” When something fails, no one wants to take the blame. But when there is success, everyone wants to take credit. And in community building it is important to let everyone take credit – no matter how much or how little they actually did.
- It takes time. While individuals (and sometimes funders) are often impatient, changing an entire distressed neighborhood takes time...and a commitment for the long haul.
- While the focus day-to-day is usually on the details of a specific project, or holding a specific event, or planning yet another meeting; the long-term goal is not just engaging residents and building assets. It is building and weaving together the fabric of the neighborhood: having residents who are involved, know their neighbors, look out for each other, and take pride in their neighborhood.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Amani case study is based on and incorporates the work and dedication of our many community partners, and of course the participation, work and commitment of so many Amani community residents. Listing, thanking and acknowledging everyone who has contributed to the Amani initiative is impossible. Among the many who stand out are the following:

- Every step of the way, Sr. Patricia Rogers, Executive Director of the Dominican Center, has been my Amani partner and collaborator. Rarely are decisions made without consulting her; and her dedication and commitment to the residents, the Dominican Center, and making Amani a great place for children and families is inspiring. This Amani Case Study was written in consultation with Sr. Patricia Rogers.
- Every day the dedication, commitment and resiliency of the residents of the Amani neighborhood inspires me. Without their participation and leadership there would be no way to fundamentally build neighborhood assets, engage residents, and weave together the fabric of Amani – the key to Amani change.
- The support and leadership from Lola Adedokun and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation was the catalyst – a key factor - that introduced me, Sr. Patricia, and COA Youth & Family Centers to the Population Change Learning Community; and was a leader in supporting COA's family-centered initiatives, and asking the essential tough questions that led us forward.
- The staff from the Population Change Learning Community and the UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families, and Communities facilitated the Learning Community discussions, introduced us to new ideas and opportunities, and prodded, assisted and inspired us to write this case study.
- To our local funders, I can never thank them enough – their support helped turn ideas into new realities. Their support made change possible. The support from the Northwestern Mutual Foundation and their staff was/is amazing, and they not only provided support but are present and participate at almost every Amani event. Special thanks to the Burke Foundation who supported and made a new early child education center possible. And special thanks also goes to Susan Lloyd, Executive Director of the Zilber Family Foundation, who first introduced me to the concept of place-based change and played an important role in the Amani initiative.
- Thanks to our many local agency partners working together with us in Amani including Children's Hospital of Wisconsin, Safe & Sound, the Auer Avenue Community School, NOVA School, Milwaukee County Parks Department, Milwaukee Police Department, The Hunger Task Force, and so many more.
- And special thanks to COA Youth & Family Centers' staff and Board of Directors. It is your daily work and tireless support that make COA a very special place, serving more than 10,000 children and families, building on more than a century of service since 1906, and always innovating and finding ways to reach out to those in need, provide the tools for self-sufficiency, and make our community a better place to work, live and raise a family.



## AUTHOR'S BIO

**Thomas P Schneider** is the Executive Director of COA Youth & Family Centers, a nonprofit organization serving more than 10,000 low income children and families at 12 locations in Milwaukee and at COA's camp in central Wisconsin.

Tom began as COA's Executive Director in 2001. Prior to this, Tom served as the United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Wisconsin (1993-2001), Deputy District Attorney for Milwaukee County (1981-1993), and Assistant District Attorney for Milwaukee County (1972-1981) including service as Director of the Organized Crime, Controlled Substances, and White Collar Crime Units. Tom is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin (BA with Honors 1965, and Juris Doctor 1972).

# 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 collectively 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](mailto:alexisgeemoreno@gmail.com) or Patricia Bowie, Population Change Learning Community Project Lead at [patriciabowie@me.com](mailto: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