

# investment summary

## *Making Connections Denver*

For nearly a decade, the Annie E. Casey Foundation has worked with a broad range of partners in Denver to demonstrate through the *Making Connections* initiative that when families are strong, outcomes for even the most disadvantaged children will substantially improve.

JULY 2009

Our work in Denver and in other sites across the country seeks to help:

- *Families work, earn, and save their way toward self-sufficiency; and*
- *Ensure that their children are healthy, prepared to succeed in school, and read proficiently by the end of third grade.*

These goals advance a “two-generation” approach—promoting parents’ economic success and ensuring that their children get a good start in life. Casey’s investments in Denver since 1999 have demonstrated how these results can be achieved by building communities’ capacity to connect families to economic opportunities, strong social networks, and effective services and supports.

Casey investments in 2009–11 for *Making Connections Denver* will build on both Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper’s ambitious Economic Prosperity Task Force agenda and the adoption by Mile High United Way—the Local Management Entity for the initiative—of school readiness and grade-level reading

proficiency as key priorities. Through a major reorganization, including the creation of an Innovation Division, MHUW is positioned to advance two-generation strategies at greater scale through additional place-based initiatives across the city and region.

### A PLATFORM FOR SUCCESS

In the early days of the initiative, *Making Connections Denver* formed partnerships that would seed successful result- and capacity-building strategies long term. MHUW, the City of Denver and the Office of Economic Development, Denver Public Schools, the Piton Foundation, Metropolitan Organizations for People (MOP), the Chinook Fund, the Community College of Denver, Front Range Economic Strategy Center (FRESC), Denver Community Federal Credit Union, and many others provided the base of support that helped *Making Connections* achieve the following hallmarks:

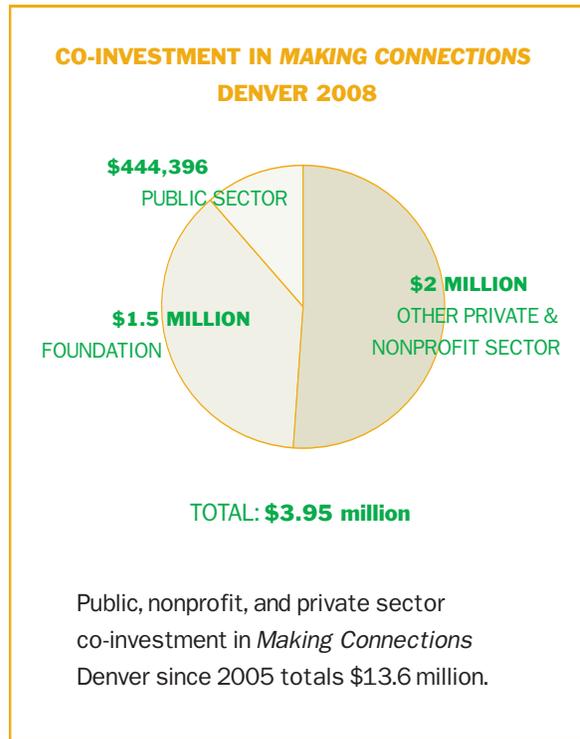
## *Making Connections Denver Local Management Entity*

### **Mile High United Way (MHUW)**

Established in 1887, MHUW helped launch the United Way movement nationally and is the oldest local agency in the country. MHUW has championed the ideas and aspirations of *Making Connections Denver* for nearly a decade, and its United Communities initiative provides a strong vehicle for replicating successful FES and CHAPPS strategies in suburbs just outside the city’s metro area, where increasing numbers of families live in poverty. Denver’s Oversight Council—which includes resident leaders as well as representatives from city government, the Piton Foundation, Metropolitan Organizations for People, and others—helps MHUW advocate for policy and practice change at the city and state levels.

- *Community mobilization and organizing efforts that build civic capital and help achieve results for children and families.* *Making Connections* Denver's investments in resident leadership and organizing strategies have helped demonstrate how a mobilized community, allied with committed public and private sector stakeholders, is essential to long-term neighborhood transformation, family strengthening, and system change. These efforts were key to establishing a community-led Local Learning Partnership and strong resident roles in the management of *Making Connections* Denver, and in building the capacity of residents to successfully advocate for policy and practice change. In 2004, the Ford Foundation recognized this work with grants to establish the Colorado Community Organizing Collaborative, which engages funders and advocates for improved health care, job training and employment, education, and enforcement of immigrant rights. Members of the collaborative include MOP, FRESC, the Piton Foundation, and other *Making Connections/MHUU* Denver partners. Local funders have committed more than \$150,000 through the Philanthropic Community Organizing Collaborative, which was developed with support from the Casey Foundation and local partners.

- *Expanding access to quality preschool and early education opportunities.* A public awareness campaign funded in part by *Making Connections* on the importance of early education and lessons learned from the Piton Foundation's Early Excellence Program were instrumental in building support for the Denver Preschool Program. Passed by voters in 2006, the program now supplements state preschool and Title I funding with tuition subsidies to assure universal access to quality early learning. *Making Connections/MHUU* will continue to help families surmount language and other barriers that could prevent eligible children from enrolling in the program. This effort also builds on *Making Connections* Denver's investments in Play and Learn Groups; home visitation programs such as Parents as Teachers and Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters; Family, Friend and Neighbor care; and parent training and organizing.



- *Assuring that residents living in the initiative neighborhoods benefit from a community redevelopment project.* *Making Connections* supported successful efforts to secure community benefits from one of the city's largest economic development projects. In 2006, the City Council approved measures sought by residents and FRESC to make sure the \$85 million redevelopment of the former Gates Rubber Company includes more than 200 units of affordable rental housing, hiring preferences for residents living adjacent to the project—including the *Making Connections/MHUU* neighborhoods of Baker, La Alma Lincoln Park, and Sun Valley—prevailing wage construction jobs, and remediation of groundwater pollution that has migrated from the site to nearby neighborhoods.

#### A TRACK RECORD OF RESULTS

Backed by an increasingly mobilized community, strong resident leaders, loyal and influential partners, *Making Connections* Denver has accelerated efforts to increase family income, assets, and success in the early grades.

## More Families Have Increased Earnings and Assets

*Making Connections* Denver's steady partnerships with the Denver's Office of Economic Development (OED), community colleges, organizing efforts, and other partners has helped assure that:

*More residents from the initiative neighborhoods are getting connected to jobs.* Through *Making Connections*' partnership with OED, nearly 700 residents were placed in health care, construction trade, service sector, and other jobs in 2007–08. About a third of these jobs offered health benefits.

RESULT	2007	2008
Residents from the initiative neighborhoods are placed in jobs	362	336
Percent placed in jobs that offer health benefits	32%	33%

*More residents are opening savings accounts.* Building on MHUW's strong asset development efforts and a partnership with the Denver Community Federal Credit Union to open a branch office in one of the initiative neighborhoods, nearly 330 families with children have opened a savings account since 2006.

## More Children Are Healthy and Prepared to Succeed in School

*Making Connections* Denver has worked with MHUW, the Piton Foundation, the city, MOP, Denver Public Schools, and other partners to assure that:

*More children are gaining a preschool experience.* Since 2005, more than 732 children in the initiative neighborhoods have gained a quality preschool experience. Today, roughly half of all children in the initiative neighborhoods are enrolled in preschool, compared to 40 percent in 2000.

## PROMOTING FAMILY ECONOMIC SUCCESS: PRIORITY STRATEGIES FOR 2009–11

- *Protect jobs, create opportunity for career advancement and asset development through a new network of neighborhood-based Prosperity Centers.* *Making Connections/MHUW* is working with the mayor, City Council, the Office of Economic Development, and the Denver Housing Authority to establish up to three Prosperity Centers in the initiative neighborhoods—with the first opening in the Cole neighborhood at the King Trimble Center. Providing comprehensive support for low-income job seekers, the Centers will bundle career assessment, job training, and sector-specific referrals and placements, as well as provide connections to financial education, credit repair, and housing assistance programs. Through this strategy, *Making Connections/MHUW* will seek to place more than 640 residents in health care, construction trade, energy, service sector, and other jobs in 2009–11, and help more than 400 families open savings accounts or Individual Development Accounts. MHUW's United Communities Initiative may also use the Prosperity Center strategy in other city neighborhoods.
- *Assure residents benefit from American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and city transit expansion.* *Making Connections/MHUW* is working with SkillBuild, the Front Range Workforce Funding Collaborative, and other partners to maximize ARRA dollars. In addition, work will continue to help local partners create additional economic opportunities associated with a major expansion of Denver's commuter rail system. A Program Related Investment from the Casey Foundation will be explored to develop affordable housing and other transit-oriented development along proposed rail corridors in the initiative neighborhoods.

*More parents are engaged as their children's first teachers and best advocates.* Since 2006, parent liaisons funded by *Making Connections* and MOP at neighborhood elementary schools have connected families to resources and support, and helped launch a strong parent organizing effort, including a pilot program at Harrington that boosted math and reading scores for more than 50 families with limited proficiency in English by providing comprehensive outreach and support.

*More children are enrolled in health insurance and have had a developmental screening.* Through a health insurance enrollment campaign, 97 percent of Harrington children in pre-K to third grade received a developmental screening, 89 percent have health insurance, and 93 percent had a medical home. *Making Connections/MHUW* will continue to make sure that these families have follow-up health services and that they are linked to job and asset building opportunities.

#### SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES TO BUILD FOR THE FUTURE

With the emergence of Mile High United Way as a champion locally and nationally for two-generation strategies to reduce family poverty and increase opportunities in isolated, underserved neighborhoods, *Making Connections/MHUW* Denver is well positioned to sustain at greater scale work to increase families' incomes and assets and their children's success in early grades. In addition to embracing third-grade reading proficiency as a shared goal of multiple partners, *MHUW's* recent reorganization and creation of a new Innovation Department—to test new ideas, promote a results-driven approach to grantmaking, research best practices, and develop accountability mechanisms—is especially timely given the recession, the city's economic prosperity agenda, and the urgency both impart for demonstrating new and better ways to improve outcomes for children and families.

#### PROMOTING SUCCESS IN EARLY GRADES: PRIORITY STRATEGIES FOR 2009–11

- *Increase the number of children in the initiative neighborhoods who are reading proficiently in third grade. A strong partnership with Harrington Elementary, the focus school for *Making Connections/MHUW's* early grade success strategies, has helped put the following interventions in place: formation of a Literacy Action Committee to monitor progress for striving readers in second and third grades; one-on-one and small group instruction; after-school and summer school programs aligned with in-classroom instruction; and an attendance paraprofessional who works with parents to reduce chronic absences. This builds on the Reading Recovery Program for striving readers in first grade, started several years ago with funding from the Morgridge Family Foundation. *Making Connections/MHUW* has set a preliminary target of increasing third-grade reading proficiency at Harrington Elementary to 68 percent in school year 2009–10 and to 85 percent in 2010–11.*

- *Substantially increase the percentage of children from the initiative neighborhoods with preschool experience and who are assessed as ready for kindergarten. Through a strengthened partnership with the Denver Preschool Program (DPP), *Making Connections/MHUW* will seek to provide an additional 536 children from the initiative neighborhoods with a quality preschool experience during the next two years. This will boost the overall percentage of preschool enrollment in the initiative neighborhoods to 60 percent in 2010. Working with the DPP to set clear performance targets, the initiative will seek to assure that 75 percent of children are assessed as ready, up from 53 percent currently. In sustaining health outreach efforts, *Making Connections/MHUW* will work to decrease the neighborhood rate of chronic absenteeism in the early grades from 10 percent currently to 6 percent in 2009–10.*