



Case Statement

Our Vision

Every child and adult in Sharpstown/Gulfton will lead a healthy, prosperous life in a safe and vibrant neighborhood, in which residents choose to live, learn, work, worship and play.

WHAT IS CONNECT COMMUNITY?

Connect Community is a broad-based and expanding coalition of best-in-class service providers who are working in partnership to provide aligned education, literacy, career, and spiritual, health, and wellness services in the Sharpstown/Gulfton community, a high-poverty area of Houston. The founding organizations—KIPP, YMCA, Legacy Community Health Services, and St. Luke’s United Methodist Church—are working together with additional collaborating partners, including Houston Center for Literacy, Sutton Elementary, Collaborative for Children, and Breakthrough Houston, to help families break down barriers to accessing resources so that they can build confidence, accountability, and success.

The work of Connect Community started when KIPP co-founder Mike Feinberg realized many of the students entering KIPP’s new school in Sharpstown/Gulfton were facing daunting challenges as a result of their families’ lack of access to essential services. Driven by a strong desire to address the situation, KIPP’s leadership met with Purpose Built Communities in Atlanta and other partners that were already working with area families and together they learned more about the Purpose Built model. As a result, they decided to come together in a strategic and coordinated way to provide education, health care, literacy support, faith life, and other resources so that residents could create better futures for themselves and their children. Believing that a collaborative initiative would have a much greater impact than any one entity on its own, these organizations formed a nonprofit called Connect Community to purposefully coordinate their collective resources and engage stakeholders around collective impact. In 2016, Connect Community will be incorporated and receive its nonprofit status as a 501c3 organization.

Our Mission

Connect Community is a collaboration of best-in-class organizations that builds healthy neighborhoods in Sharpstown/Gulfton by partnering with residents to advance their educational, economic, spiritual and physical wellbeing and improve outcomes for every person, every step of the way.

Our Values

- Children and families will succeed.
- Families are the change leaders.
- Change happens at “the speed of trust”.
- Relationships are the crux of our work.
- Diversity is an asset that is woven into our processes and systems of support/service.
- Partnership creates spiritual, behavioral and economic prosperity.
- Partners have made a conscious commitment to improve outcomes.
- Data drives leadership efficacy.

THE NEED

Over the past few decades, cheap rents have attracted many first-generation immigrants to settle in Sharpstown/Gulfton. As a result, this has become the most densely populated and culturally diverse communities in Houston. It is also one of the most economically challenged.

Connect Community is focusing its efforts and measuring its impact within a clearly delineated geographic area called the Impact Zone, which encompasses an approximately one-mile radius around the Connect campus at 6700 Bellaire Boulevard. Within this Impact Zone, approximately 65 percent of the residents are from Central America and Mexico, and 30 percent are refugees from around the world (primarily Iraq, Afghanistan, Burma, and the Congo).

Statistics for the census tracts within the Impact Zone (see the accompany data table) underscore the economic and other difficulties that this community is facing. Due to low levels of educational attainment, limited English literacy, low wages, high crime rates, and lack of awareness about opportunities, families in the Connect Community Impact Zone face significant challenges to building thriving families and a flourishing community.

Census Data For Connect Community Impact Zone

Category	US Census Tract		
	4227.01	4227.02	4213
% who did not earn a high school diploma	40%	35%	31%
% who lack health insurance	51%	34%	43%
Median household income	\$39,375	\$48,738	\$25,515
% at or below poverty level	24%	13%	46%
% who are U.S. citizens	19%	42%	16%
% Single Parent Households	15%	34%	25%

Source: U.S. Census Survey 2013 estimates

Although the community has access to social service resources, service providers lack sufficient capacity to address the level of needs. The services provided by Connect Community partners are in huge demand. There are over 8,000 students on the KIPP Houston waitlist and almost 1,100 on the KIPP Connect waitlist; Houston Center for Literacy has just expanded to eight ESL/GED classes on the Connect campus; and Legacy Community Health delivers over 300 babies per month just at its Southwest clinic.

Furthermore, the existing system of social services in most communities – and Sharpstown/Gulfton is no exception – is fragmented, confusing, and poorly integrated. Traditionally, social services have been delivered by separate organizations with little cross-sector communication or alignment. This creates significant challenges for clients who are trying to access services. Those who need help often do not know where to access it. Or if they do, they may have to spend large amounts of “seat time” going from organization to organization seeking help in addressing their multiple needs.

In addition to being confusing and cumbersome for clients, the existing system also creates major inefficiencies in the investment of societal dollars. Worst of all, investing in isolated, uncoordinated programs has not resulted in the desired outcomes. Clearly, the time has come for various community organizations to work together to achieve shared, community-defined goals.

THE MODEL

Connect Community is committed to addressing these needs to improve the quality of life for those living in the Sharpstown/Gulfton community. Our theory of change is that when organizations are collaborating and aligning their efforts, they will be better able to mobilize and leverage their assets to address the needs of local residents. As a result, residents will be able to create better lives for themselves and their families, thus strengthening the community as a whole.

Connect Community is based on the innovative and highly successful Purpose Built Community model initiated by an Atlanta real estate developer and philanthropist named Tom Cousins with financial backing from Warren Buffett and Julian Robertson. The first purpose-built community was created in Eastlake, an Atlanta suburb, more than 20 years ago. Its three service components include cradle-to-college quality education, mixed income housing, and wraparound health and wellness services. Partners commit to focusing on achieving a single set of goals and to measuring and evaluating progress in a consistent way over time.

A key to the success of the purpose-built community model is having a strong independent community 'quarterback'. This is the role that Connect Community is fulfilling here in Houston. The community 'quarterback':

- Serves as a single point of accountability for partners and funders,
- Guides partners toward common goals,
- Ensures that community residents are engaged and served,
- Ensures a sustainable funding stream of public and private resources, and
- Drives the community development initiative to ensure that education, health/wellness, and spiritual components are aligned, successful, and sustainable.

In the Connect Community effort, the collaborating partner organizations include public school systems, social service providers, adult ESL and workforce development programs, career centers, refugee resettlement agencies, employers, and government agencies, as well as the social support networks of residents themselves. Collaborations are also being forged with neighborhood associations, faith-based organizations, school boards, developers, nonprofits, elected officials, local housing authorities, and other public and private stakeholders. In short, this is truly a broad-based effort that touches every facet of the community.

As Connect Community works to align goals, core competencies, resources, strategies, and data collection around a common agenda, it will achieve greater impact related to the three areas that are of the utmost importance to the majority of area residents, who are new immigrants and refugees: linguistic, economic, and civic.

Essential to Connect Community's success will be an exceptional and highly committed ground team that successfully leverages partners, wins the trust of the community, and connects outside resources; a strong program delivery model; and the right technology to gather data, coordinate efforts, and track outcomes. Connect Community partners are committed to providing a "high-touch" approach by consistently engaging community members to identify the solutions they need to support themselves and their children along the path to success. The Connect partnership will also be accountable to the community through a "high-tech" approach focused on evaluating outcomes and using data to make continuous improvements in program delivery. We believe that together we can put knowledge to work and build a vibrant 21st century community for all.

OVERVIEW OF THE CONNECT COMMUNITY CAMPUS

A Connect Community campus is being created to serve as the hub for partner activities and the center around which a family-friendly, safe neighborhood will grow. When fully implemented, this 15-acre neighborhood hub will include the following:

- ❖ A 155,000 sq. ft. school building serving 1,800 students by 2021 from Pre-K3 thru 12th grade. Over the next two years, KIPP:Connect will construct a one-story “cafegymtorium” for its new high school, which will begin with ninth graders in the fall of 2018. Connect Community partners will share this facility initially in order to be able to begin local programming.
- ❖ A 33,000 sq. ft. church building and outreach facility with a new soccer field developed by St. Luke’s United Methodist Church/Gethsemane that will be accessible to Connect Community and its partners for use.
- ❖ A community garden and landscaping across the campus, to create an attractive community green space;
- ❖ A two-story Connect Community center to be built adjacent to the KIPP: Connect and St. Luke buildings. This multi-purpose facility will house a welcome center, community health clinic, recreational facilities, classrooms for literacy and other types of classes, space for performing arts activities, community engagement programs, immigration services, and administrative offices. Programs will evolve as residents identify priorities for their neighborhood. If needed, a parking structure for daily visitors will be built.

The master plan design and related costs are being developed. The anticipated new community center construction will be led by Connect Community. It will seek funding from an array of individuals, foundations and corporations who embrace the mission of this unique project that will have a transformative impact on one of Houston’s most challenged communities.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE

- Key organizational accomplishments during 2015-2016 include developing the vision, mission, and strategic plan for Connect Community.
- A new Founding Director for Connect Community was hired in January 2015.
- Schematic master site plan drawings for the Community Center were completed in March 2015 and are currently being value engineered to ensure maximum efficiency and utilization of space.
- A plan for ongoing community engagement was developed and over the past year eight major community engagement initiatives have been carried out, using over 200 volunteers and engaging over 500 residents through a Community Walk, Parent Workshops, Fall Festival, Thanksgiving Dinner and a Valentine’s “Connecting through Love” Pop-up event.
- Regular outreach to adjacent apartment complexes is underway to engage property managers and residents.
- Breakthrough Houston will establish a second site at KIPP:Connect to do an intensive academic program for gifted 7th graders from KIPP, Jane Long and YES Prep in Summer 2016.
- Houston Center for Literacy expanded its ESL/GED classes from three to eight and serves clients at both SLUMC and KIPP:Connect.
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Thank you for your interest in this project, which will transform the Sharpstown/Gulfton area into a safe, healthy community. We are grateful for your interest and support. For further information, please contact Anne Whitlock, Founding Director, Connect Community, at 281.879.3042.