

Meriden Family Zone (MFZ)

A Blueprint Project of the Meriden Early Childhood Council (MECC)

A Place-Based Strategy to Improve the Lives of Children

The Meriden Family Zone (MFZ) serves a 10 block distressed, low-income residential neighborhood. A majority of families rent, paying 35% more today than in 2000. Over half of the housing stock is 50 years old. The target area has a population of 600 people (300 families), including 200 children under 18 years old. 55% of households in the Zone are single-headed. **The residents of the MFZ are increasingly young, diverse, poor and isolated.** There are diminishing job opportunities with the decline of Meriden as a manufacturing center.

Roger Sherman Elementary serves Zone children. It is a Title I school serving 85% of the MFZ's pre-kindergarten through fifth grader students. None attend full-day kindergarten. Student enrollment is 554, a decline of 16.6% over the past five years, with one in four students attending a different school the year before. **Sherman is diverse, with 15.3% Black, 51.4% Hispanic and 28.7% White.** Two in three students are eligible for free/reduced-price meals (vs. 34.2% in CT). One in three students come from homes where English is not the primary language. While there have been some academic gains, **only 31.6% of Sherman 4th graders meet state goal on standardized state reading and math Mastery Tests** (vs. 43.2% for district and 60.7% for State).

Despite these challenges, the MFZ boasts assets including three churches, four preschool programs, a community health center, library, City Hall, health department, Board of Education, Child Guidance Clinic and Meriden Children First, the project's lead agency. There is also strong base of parents and community leadership, a long history of collaborative action, and a powerful desire and commitment to improve the lives of children and their families.

Inspired by the Harlem Children's Zone, Meriden launched a small pilot MFZ project in January 2010, engaging ten families to date. To support families in their pursuit of improving the education and lives of their children, we have engaged several part-time bilingual/bicultural outreach workers. The MFZ uses a home-visiting approach and works with families to develop action plans around a range of key indicators. Family goals are advanced through key partnerships including the Board of Education, the United Way and philanthropic community, numerous youth-serving agencies, and parent leaders. The City of Meriden has pledged to focus infrastructure improvements such as sidewalk and housing renovation in the Zone. **As a mid-size City with big-city social ills, ours is a community that is 'right-sized' for a focused, coordinated project that can model and sustain significant improvements in academic and family measures.**

Project Partners Include:

Meriden Board of Education
United Way of Meriden and Wallingford
Community Health Center
Meriden Health Department / WIC
City of Meriden
Head Start

New Opportunities of Greater Meriden
Family Resource Centers
Child Guidance Clinic
CT Works
Meriden Public Library
YMCA

Boy's and Girl's Club
Napier Foundation
Cuno Foundation
Meriden Econ. Development Corp.
Naugatuck Savings Bank
Parent and community leaders

For more information contact Meriden Children First at dwradcliffe@juno.com or 203-630-3566, or visit www.meridenchildrenfirst.org

The MFZ will lead to the following improvements:

- More children in the Zone with **health insurance**.
- More mothers receiving adequate **prenatal care**.
- More children 'ready' for **kindergarten**.
- Improved **literacy skills** for children in the early grades.
- More children involved with **quality preschool** programs.
- More parents with **high-school diplomas** and thus more 'job ready'.

- Concentrated **physical improvements**: lighting, housing, sidewalks, roads, landscaping.
- **Community building** by connecting families, raising hope.
- **Children will feel safer at school** and traveling to and from school.
- **Decreased student mobility**.
- **Greater access to broadband internet** at school and home.

Longer term, MFZ will also incorporate strategies and partners that lead to improvements of:

- Attendance in grades 6-9.
- Student Graduation Rate.
- Graduates with diploma and obtain postsecondary credentials.

Meriden Family Zone (MFZ): Overview of Planning Year Logic Model 2010-2011

Year 1 Objectives

1. Convene and manage a 12-month process to build a comprehensive community plan for kids 0 through high school.
2. Address and resolve 10 academic and family/community indicators that will underpin the Zone plan.
3. Build financing/sustainability plan components, and data management and operational plans.
4. Rollout, test, and improve Meriden Family Zone pilot program.

Goal

Create a community-driven Action Plan to address academic and family/community indicators by engaging families to improve the lives of children in the Meriden Family Zone (MFZ).

Activities & Partner Roles

Leadership. Form strong management team, led by CFI, with demonstrable MFZ resident leadership involvement.

Planning Process. Implement broad-based community assessment, environmental scan, and plan process.

Indicators. Develop quantifiable, measurable indicators to track progress, measure success.

Pilot Program. Fully implement pilot program to engage 20 families, test prototypes.

Partner Expansion. Implement ongoing systems to engage all existing partners and attract new partners, including an interactive communications program.

Data/Evaluation. Work to refine systems to collect data, understand, and evaluate the initiative.

Rationale for Place-Based Strategy

National research shows working comprehensively in a defined community to address its problems and harness its resources has the potential to stabilize and improve the lives of its people and the physical environment. Holistic focus on families -- especially those with young children -- can influence the capability of children to be ready for school, to prosper, and, in turn, contribute to a more vibrant neighborhood and community.

Community Needs & Assets

Needs:

- ✓ Integration of social services
- ✓ High poverty/unemployment
- ✓ Poor academic test scores
- ✓ Pre-K students unprepared for school
- ✓ Low high school graduation rates; and low adult education proficiency

Assets

1. Strong indigenous community leadership, spirit
2. Elevated engagement of local government and school officials
3. Accessibility of health services.
4. Geographic location, and elementary school at center of community

Desired Results

(Outputs, outcomes, impacts)

Outputs:

- System developed to engage, significant numbers of resident families in the MFZ.
- Establish array of evidence-based programs that work in concert to address needs.
- Articulate comprehensive neighborhood stabilization plan.

Outcomes:

- Majority of at-risk families and children identified
- Roger Sherman Elementary School strengthened as core educational/community center MFZ.

Impacts:

- Children, and their families, more resilient
- More children prepared for school, with cradle to career paths in place.