

Meriden Children Zone

Project Overview

REVISED DRAFT
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Project Summary

The Meriden Early Childhood Council will create a ‘**Meriden Children’s Zone**’ (MCZ) in a targeted, lower-income Meriden neighborhood to improve health, early learning and self-sufficiency outcomes for young children. These three priority areas mirror those as developed in the 2008 “Meriden Blueprint For Young Children” (www.meridenchildrenfirst.org). The MCZ will focus a coordinated, comprehensive array of wrap-around services for 50 participating families. There will be a special emphasis on early literacy skills.

The target Zone is in Meriden’s center city, includes Miller Street, Twiss, Liberty, Pratt and the Mills public housing development. This area has these characteristics:

- Only 1 in 3 live in the same place as they did five years ago
- 50% of the mothers have high school diplomas
- Nearly ½ speak a language other than English
- Median household incomes are just 1/3 to ½ of Meriden’s median income
- 70% of eligible Meriden babies are enrolled in the State’s HUSKY health insurance program
- 1 in 3 children meet proficiency goals in reading and math at 4th grade

The Meriden Children Zone builds on the proven track record and culture of collaboration in Meriden. The project is community-led, with all levels of government as major partners. Project partners are under no illusions that this will be easy. It will take time to see interim outcomes achieved. MCZ will attempt to create a community of self-reliant families working together to do the best they can for their children and to build a common future through their own best efforts.

This project will coordinate with a new City of Meriden effort that targets this same Zone to improve neighborhood stability through the purchase, renovation and sale of foreclosed homes to local owner-occupants.

Anticipated benefits to the community and your organization including the number of people served:

The MCZ is based on the experiences of Harlem Children’s Zone (www.hcz.org), the ChildFIRST behavioral health model in Bridgeport, ‘Making Connections’ of Hartford and other similar efforts. The HCZ was built on the notion that:

“Most traditional poverty-fighting approaches are narrowly focused. Hampered by a lack of resources, many are not able to provide high-quality programs, or if they do so, it is only for a few hundred children. Others attend only to a single issue or single age group, approaches that fail to address all the developmental needs of children throughout their childhood. The great majority of approaches neglect the neighborhood environment that surrounds children and affects them profoundly.”

The theory of change underlying this model requires the coordinated application of the following core principles. To create change it is necessary to:

- **Serve a targeted neighborhood comprehensively and at scale.** Reaches children in numbers significant enough to affect the culture of a community; it transforms the physical and social environments that impact the children’s development; and it coordinates and creates programs at a scale large enough to meet the local need.

“[The Harlem Children Zone] **eliminated the achievement gap.**”

- *David Brooks, New York Times columnist, May 8, 2009*

- **Create a continuum of support.** The MCZ will build on the existing portfolio of local child and family services with a refocus of some existing resources in the target zone, coordinated case management and data sharing. Where needed, MCZ will develop additional excellent, accessible programs and link them to one another so that they provide uninterrupted support for children’s healthy growth. Meriden has the advantage of having some very good programs serving young children, but the effects of a few good programs serving small numbers of people are easily diluted in otherwise underserved neighborhoods.

- **Build community** among residents, institutions, and stakeholders, who help to create the environment necessary for children’s healthy development. Another benefit of the Zone is that staff can provide on-going support to a family whose children may ‘age-out’ of or be too young for a particular service. For example, infants and toddlers are too young for Head Start but can still benefit from exposure to basic early literacy techniques, helping them be more ready when they do connect to a formal preschool program.

- **Program oversight and management.** Outreach workers will be closely supervised by Meriden Children First with the support and guidance of a MCZ advisory group that will include MCZ residents, area providers, faith and civic leaders, educators, law enforcement and policy makers.

Project Action Steps

1. Initial Recruitment of Families

Meriden Children **Zone Outreach Coordinator** (*to be hired and supervised by Children First and key Zone partners*) will meet with area agency non-profit and public service staff that currently serve and have relationships families who live in the Meriden Children Zone target area.

Many of the first Zone families will be referred through the Health Department’s WIC (Women Infant and Children) nutrition program. The rationale for this is that many of the more than 1,900 Meriden families connected to this program benefit primarily from its nutrition services. It is believed that enrolling some in the Zone will allow other supports, such as early literacy skill building and connections to job training, to be connected to a family. Other families may be recruited through CT Works, Department of Children and Families, and New Opportunities of Greater Meriden. This initial contact will identify 50 families who are willing to enroll and participate in the Zone.

2. Assessment and Enrollment of Family Interest in Joining the Zone

Two **Zone Outreach Workers** will be hired. Preference is for outreach workers to be certified in Parents as Teachers (PAT), Ages/Stages and/or Born to Learn curriculums. Workers will reach out to the recommended families to talk with them about the Zone and its benefits, their interests, goals and challenges. At this time, an initial home-based intake/strength and needs assessment will be conducted to determine if a family wants to participate and to develop a baseline of information for referral and data measurement purposes.

Over time, a second, more comprehensive assessment will be done asking a variety of questions about where that family is and wants to be in relation to early learning, health and development and family economic security.

3. Family Engagement, Referral and Retention

The **Outreach Coordinator and Zone Outreach Workers** will meet on a regular basis with the Zone Family Support team (including the Zone Outreach Workers and in-kind outreach staff from the agencies listed below). An individualized family plan will be created for and with families that connects them with services and supports. Other issues related to how to improve outreach to families, on-going support/mentoring, referral mechanisms, addressing service gaps and other Zone issues will be discussed.

The following is a beginning list of those that have agreed to be Zone partners:

- WIC / Health Department
- Department of Children and Families
- School readiness programs
- Meriden Police Department/Community Police Officers and the local Neighborhood Association
- Families involved with City of Meriden housing revitalization effort in Zone
- New Opportunities
- Meriden Housing Authority
- Child Guidance Clinic
- Head Start
- Community Health Center/Nurturing Families
- Family Resource Centers
- Connecticut Works
- Board of Education; Roger Sherman Elementary School
- Women and Families Center
- Churches

Outreach Workers will use home visits to help families strengthen their early literacy skills (as with the ‘Read With Me’ home literacy model) with their children, to connect them with other services and to follow-up on a regular basis for support and encouragement. Incentives (such as gift cards and other goods and services from Meriden business partners) will be used to recognize effort and progress.

Other back-office supports and data will be maintained by a **Zone Support Person** to track participation levels in programs and impacts on range a child and family’s health, learning and sufficiency outcomes.

Program Evaluation

Evaluation of program outcomes will be based on a Results Based Accountability framework. Outcomes will be focused on how well a child improves on the indicators noted in this box:

Baseline data on where a child and family are at in relation to each of these indicators will be gathered in an initial assessment.

<i>Intended Outcomes</i>
<p>Over time, the MCZ will lead to improvements on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• % of eligible children enrolled in HUSKY health insurance program• % mothers who receive quality prenatal care• % of children considered ‘ready’ for kindergarten based on early literacy skills as measured by the kindergarten assessment• % improvements with District Reading Assessments in school system• % of children involved with quality preschool program• % of mothers who achieve a high-school diploma and are thus more ‘job ready’• % parents getting job training and placement• Developmental and health screenings for young children

Outreach workers will revisit these measures on a regular basis to determine progress or challenges.

Funding Plan

While much work can and will be done by volunteers and in-kind support from existing outreach staff from various service providers, the Zone will hire dedicated staff to conduct outreach and track impacts. **Funding of \$277,000 over three years from a variety of public and private sources is required to build MCZ capacity and to plan and execute project strategies in a quality and expeditious way.**

This exact proposal is being submitted for consideration to the foundations noted below and in the following amounts. The ideal is to have local sources comprise 60%, or about \$50,000 annually, of the total proposed budget. This funding level would align this project to Federal resources that will become available later in 2010. The Federal funds (either through the US Department of Education’s Innovation Funds and/or Promise Neighborhoods initiative) require a local contributions, thus Meriden would be well-positioned to access these resources.

The recently passed state budget also includes community planning money for communities that have completed Blueprint plans as in Meriden. Some of this resource can be used to support Zone efforts. There is also strong potential for other private funding for this project through the Graustein Memorial Fund’s Discovery Initiative. It is our belief that Meriden will be very competitive for these funds, which will be available in January 2010.

Other local funding partners may include the United Way of Meriden and Wallingford and MEDCO.

This chart shows the revenue that is being sought from a variety of sources for the first year and projections for three years. Depending on the source, the three year totals may not be Year 1 x three years.

Revenue Sources	Year 1	Three-year total	Status
CDBG*	5000	5000	Committed
Meriden Foundation	15000	45000	Pending
Napier Foundation	10000	30000	Committed
Cuno Foundation	15000	45000	Committed
Naugatuck Savings	10000	30000	Committed
Tremaine*	7500	15000	Committed
American Savings	5000	15000	Pending
MEDCO			To be submitted
Graustein Memorial	11970	42410	To be submitted
Fed. (Innovation Fund, Promise N'hood)		50000	To be submitted
In-kind outreach worker staffing	8000	24000	
In-kind office and meeting space	5000	15000	
Total (cash + in-kind)	92470	316410	
Total (cash only)	79470	277410	

This chart shows total project expenses for one year and projected for three years.

Expenses	One year	Three Year Total
Staffing		
Zone Coordinator (10 hrs @ \$22/hr)	11440	34320
Zone Outreach (12 hrs @ \$15/hr)	9360	28080
Zone Outreach (12 hrs @ \$15/hr)	9360	28080
Zone Support (10 hrs @ \$13/hr)	6760	20280
Administrative/Supervision (30% of full-time CFI Director)	17050	51150
Incentives, family supports	7500	22500
Meetings - food	2500	7500
Printing/Publications	2500	7500
Postage	500	1500
Office supplies/materials	1500	4500
Internet, data management	10000	30000
Purchase of service (bookkeeping, audit)	1000	3000
In-kind staffing from other non-profits (2 hours a week x 40 weeks x 5 outreach workers @ \$20/hr)	8000	24000
Rent & Utilities (in-kind)	5000	15000
Grand Total Expenses	92470	277410

Notes

1. CFI's total operating budget for 2010 is project at \$240,000.
2. Office space and utilities are provided to Children First in-kind by the Meriden Public Library.

One Year Budget (November 1, 2009 through October 31, 2010)

This project budget shows one year of expenses and supporting revenue from several key funding sources.

	REVENUE				
	<i>Cuno</i>	<i>Napier</i>	<i>Meriden Foundation</i>	<i>Other Sources</i>	<i>TOTALS</i>
EXPENSES					
Zone Coordinator (10 hrs @ \$22/hr)		2500	3000	5940	11440
Zone Outreach (12 hrs @ \$15/hr)		2000	3000	4360	9360
Zone Outreach (12 hrs @ \$15/hr)		500	1000	7860	9360
Zone Support (10 hrs @ \$13/hr)		1500	2500	2760	6760
Administrative/Supervision (30% time of full-time CFI director)		3500	5500	8050	17050
Meetings - food	2500				2500
Incentives, family supports	7500				7500
Printing/Publications	2500				2500
Postage				500	500
Office supplies/materials	500			1000	1500
Internet, data management	2000			8000	10000
Purchase of service (bookkeeping, audit)				1000	1000
In-kind staffing from other non-profits (2 hours a week x 40 weeks x 5 outreach workers @ \$20/hr)				8000	8000
Rent and Utilities - in-kind				5000	5000
<i>Grand Total Expenses</i>	15000	10000	15000	52470	92470
<i>Total, cash only</i>	15000	10000	15000	39470	79470