Parramore, Orlando: Leveraging Local Strengths

When a city invests in local strengths, young people in under resourced neighborhoods can be put on trajectories toward a successful future.
The Center for Promise, in collaboration with Tufts University’s School of Arts and Sciences, is the research center for America’s Promise Alliance. The mission of the Center is to develop a deep knowledge and understanding about what is needed to help create the conditions so that all young people in America have the opportunity to succeed in school and life. The Center’s work will add to the academic exploration of these issues and help give communities and individuals the tools and knowledge to effectively work together to support young people.

**Foreword**

Great progress has been made in the United States on increasing academic proficiency and high school graduation rates, and reducing teen pregnancy rates and homicides. In the low-income, urban centers of our nation, however, progress often stagnates. When a high school diploma becomes less of a norm than violence and incarceration, more needs to be done to transform the lives of young people. Our belief is that this transformation occurs when government, schools, non-profits, and community members come together a common goal, plan together around a common agenda, and act together around common tactics to support their young people.

The Center for Promise series on comprehensive community initiatives (CCIs) is meant to provide guidance to communities ambitiously seeking to embark on and currently pursuing these multi-sector, community-wide actions. In the case studies, the reader will find the stories about the why and the how. Why the community decided to create and implement a CCI and how the community was able to move from an idea to substantive action.

We know that those working day-to-day and week-to-week to implement a CCI can often feel hopeless and disheartened, not seeing that progress is being and often feeling as if they are taking two steps back for every step forward. Our goal is for the lessons from these case studies to help communities strengthen their work and, maybe more importantly, give communities hope that hard work can, in fact, result in success. The lives of young people in economically disadvantaged and marginalized communities can be transformed. We do not believe, nor would evidence suggest, that there is one way for a community to support its young people. Rather, there are overarching principles that increase a community’s chance for success. Here, we start to tell the story of how.
The aptly named Division Avenue remains a demarcation line between predominantly white and predominantly black neighborhoods—and a stark reminder of the city’s segregated past.

In the beginning of the 21st century, approximately 73 percent of children and youth in Parramore, Orlando’s historically African American neighborhood, lived below the poverty line, with alarmingly high rates for child abuse and neglect. The neighborhood’s high school had received five consecutive Fs on its performance, and only 66 percent of youth graduated from it during the 2007-08 academic year. Teen girls were more likely than girls in the rest of the city to become mothers, and the juvenile arrest rate in Parramore was 250 percent higher than the rate for Orlando overall. The majority of babies and toddlers were not enrolled in early learning programs or pre-kindergarten. Few resources were available for high quality early childcare or youth programming. With few other opportunities, children resorted to their own games, often playing along the streets. Teens congregated on corners. Two gangs pitted youth from either end of the neighborhood against each other. According to Parramore teens, violence was so rampant that young people ventured outside at their peril.

Today, statistics and stories illuminate real progress. Although poverty remains a problem, a sense of hope permeates the 1.4 square-mile neighborhood. In one part of the neighborhood, a mixed-income housing development replaced dilapidated, crime-ridden public housing. Families enjoy afternoons at the refurbished Z.L. Riley Park. More young children in Parramore attend childcare and pre-k. Academic achievement and graduation rates have improved. Fewer girls are having babies. Rather than gathering on street corners, youth regularly fill the community centers, where they tackle school assignments, work with tutors in “homework roomz,” conduct online research for school in modern computer labs, or practice with a basketball league in a gym or with a football team at the well-maintained field across from the center. Juvenile crime has decreased precipitously. Gangs, while still present, are less territorial and co-exist more peacefully. In fact, members from opposing gangs now play basketball together at the community centers’ gyms. “One Parramore, one PKZ,” said a young male who has lived in the neighborhood since he was a child.

How did conditions for young people in Parramore improve so quickly? In this case study of community change—based on interviews with community members, reviews of documents, relevant research and observations from a site visit, and reflections on existing research on community efforts to promote child and youth well-being—we will distill key lessons from the experience of Parramore Kidz Zone (PKZ) that can inform other community change efforts across the country. As more communities attempt to develop their own initiatives, the community-level outcomes in Parramore, with a focus on outcomes for young people and their families, provide an especially important guide to how such an effort unfolds and what it can achieve.
How and why the Parramore Kidz Zone began

Prior to the 1960s, Parramore boasted a robust African-American middle class. Wallace’s Beauty Mill, Washington Shore Savings and Loan Association, and Prices’ Sewing School were among the neighborhood’s many flourishing, African American-owned businesses. South Street Casino attracted patrons for its arts performances, and the Wells’ Built Hotel hosted famed musical performers such as Ella Fitzgerald and Ray Charles. Mount Zion Baptist Church has served as an anchor for the faith community since it became the neighborhood’s first African-American congregation in 1890. Jones High School has educated generations of Parramore residents since its founding in 1895; for many years it was the only high school in Orange County that African-American students could attend.

Neighborhood leaders are memorialized in the names of Parramore institutions: The Dr. J.B. Callahan Neighborhood Center honors the first African-American doctor at Orange General Hospital, and the John H. Jackson Community Center and Pool recognizes the city’s first African-American recreation superintendent.

During the 1960s, Parramore followed a pattern familiar in many urban communities struggling with wider socio-economic trends. Desegregation enabled the neighborhood’s African-American middle class to move to more affluent areas. The construction of Interstate 4 isolated Parramore from downtown Orlando. Unemployment and poverty became widespread. Seven homeless shelters opened in the neighborhood, and two elementary schools closed. Between 1960 and 2010, Parramore’s population shrank by nearly two-thirds, from almost 18,000 to just over 6,000. Today, the neighborhood’s much smaller population is still predominantly African American, though its demographics are more diverse with a visible Haitian Creole, Caucasian, and multiracial presence.

Efforts to revitalize Parramore began in the 1990s, when city commissioner Nap Ford galvanized support for a comprehensive plan targeting education, social services, safety, training, housing rehabilitation and construction. Unfortunately, progress was difficult and conditions remained bleak. Following his election in 2003, Mayor Buddy Dyer again summoned the city’s political will to address the neighborhood’s needs. He convened the Parramore Task Force, comprised of both residents and city government officials, which outlined key areas for improvement. In 2005, Mayor Dyer and District 5 City Commissioner Daisy W. Lynum joined together to start Pathways for Parramore, a city-led initiative that translated the task force’s recommendations into five core vehicles for comprehensive change: safe and affordable housing, public safety, business development, children and education, and quality of life. Orlando addressed each of these core areas through the city department whose responsibilities most closely aligned with the work; for instance, the Housing and Community Development Department focused on producing new affordable housing and restoring older units in Parramore.
During this time, Lisa Early, who now oversees the entire Department of Families, Parks, and Recreation, was serving as the Mayor’s Director of Children & Education. Prior to that, she worked at a local child welfare organization. In this role, she led a study that spotlighted the prevalence of child abuse and neglect, culminating in a “call to action” presented to Mayor Dyer. Early’s deep commitment to children echoed the mayor’s vision; he soon appointed Early to a new children and education position within his office.

In this new position, Early embarked on an extensive two-year planning process, identifying the current needs of children and families as well as effective models for addressing them. With Mayor Dyer’s backing, Early led a visit to the Harlem Children’s Zone (HCZ) in New York City to learn how HCZ had been created, developed, and begun to have an impact on the children, youth and families in its 100-block footprint.

After returning, Early experimented with pilot projects while simultaneously setting the stage for a formal, community-wide initiative. Pilot projects included an effort to enroll hundreds of Parramore youth in summer camps, a youth advisory committee to shape programming and recruit their peers, and field trips and events. While some projects were successful (camp enrollment was hugely popular, and youth were eager to share their perspectives on the advisory committee), others saw lackluster responses. For instance, an event organized at one of the community centers aimed at publicizing childcare subsidies drew only a few families. Of the residents who did attend, Early noticed that they flocked to one table where a local nonprofit played upbeat music, offered coffee and held a raffle. “That place had a buzz,” Early recounted. To remedy the issue of low attendance, she contracted with the nonprofit to manage recruitment and marketing, and adapted similar grassroots outreach as HCZ. The nonprofit broadcasted programming by driving a colorfully painted car throughout the neighborhood that blasted music, and disseminated fliers to residents, as well as deploying tactics such as door knocking and peer-to-peer marketing.

During this pilot period, the mayor tasked Early with launching an official initiative called Parramore Kidz Zone (PKZ) in 2006. This initiative became the primary pathway for addressing the needs of children (even as city officials recognized that the other core areas of focus, such as housing and public safety, also impact children).

A $500,000 grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, matched by local charitable foundations, provided essential seed funding. After the three-year grant expired, Early not only sustained the effort but also gradually built up the organization’s capacity so that by 2014, PKZ employed a nine-person staff (not including youth employees), which she refers to as a “team of insiders,” conveying their level of connection to the community. Brenda March works closely with Early as the manager of the initiative.

The larger landscape: Applying the potential of CCIs as change agents

Efforts to transform distressed communities are hardly new; in fact, they go back more than 100 years. In the 1990s, comprehensive community initiatives (CCIs) began to gain popularity. Recently, CCIs have been implemented more widely, through both federal efforts such as the Promise and Choice Neighborhoods grant initiatives and place-based initiatives funded and run by local organizations throughout the country. Because CCIs foster cooperation, instead of allowing programs to operate in individual silos, and because they recognize that the work must occur within broader, structural and interrelated systems, they offer the potential to bring about transformative change.

This collaborative approach aims to create what is now often referred to as “collective impact.” Moreover, empirical evidence has identified the defining attributes of CCIs as essential to successful community transformations. Drawing on this information and on the experiences of other communities, the leaders of PKZ sought to achieve collective impact by integrating these evidenced-based CCIs best practices into the structure and processes of their initiative.
A blueprint for change

Starting with the research-supported general principles for comprehensive community initiatives (CCIs), Early and her team ultimately developed a blueprint for improving youth outcomes through Parramore Kidz Zone that would be built atop several foundational pillars:

• Assessing and understanding the community’s needs;
• Evaluating other comprehensive, place-based efforts—most notably, the HCZ—and developing a theory of change for Parramore;
• Leveraging existing resources and local supports to the greatest extent possible;
• Bringing in additional supports as needed;
• Engaging the broader community—including and especially residents of the Parramore neighborhood—into the effort;
• Creating a “cradle-to-career pipeline” of supports to help young people succeed;
• Relying on a lead organization to coordinate the work of partners, provide administrative support, drive the overall effort and promote accountability;
• Leveraging and learning from data; and
• Securing flexible and diverse funding.

Assessing and understanding the community’s needs

Before establishing a model for supporting Parramore’s youth, PKZ recognized that it was necessary to understand the specific needs of the community. Early initiated a process of systematic research, collecting data from the census, city and state government departments, and neighborhood resident surveys, and documenting multiple, interconnected barriers to success for local young people. In addition to cataloging the high rates of crime, child abuse and neglect, teen pregnancy and obesity, and lack of access to quality youth programming noted earlier, her team found complex challenges that included a learning gap that began soon after birth and persisted through high school. Families also struggled to meet basic needs such as food and health care.

Early and her colleagues recognized that previous efforts at revitalizing Parramore had fueled distrust among residents because conditions did not visibly improve and residents experienced few concrete benefits. Locals also suspected that earlier efforts to gather data on poverty and academic achievement (among other indicators) made residents little more than subjects to be studied and shamed rather than active participants in neighborhood improvement. “That data is their suffering, [and there was a sense that] that data was being used for the benefit of outsiders,” Early explained. Sensitive to this history, PKZ has diligently strived to ensure that resources remain in the neighborhood for the long-term rather than be used to pay outsiders to come into the neighborhood, only to leave once funding evaporates.

Early’s team also engaged a diverse set of stakeholders, including Parramore residents, child services organizations, school officials, and the private and philanthropic sectors, to understand pressing needs and generate ideas. This collaborative planning stage was facilitated by Early’s familiarity with, and existing relationships within, the field of child welfare.
The data from this research shaped PKZ’s decision to focus on education. As PKZ has matured, the emphasis on education has deepened. An analysis by the Health Council of East Central Florida, which has conducted an external evaluation of the initiative since its beginning, revealed that the percentage of Parramore youth who performed at or above grade level generally lagged behind both the district and state. Initially, PKZ concentrated on building capacity for youth programming by coalescing partners so it could leverage neighborhood resources and enhance them when necessary. Once these relationships were crystallized, the initiative used multiple forms of data to guide its strategic focus on education.

These data included statistics compiled during PKZ’s planning stages, as well as from evaluation efforts and families’ own perspectives.

Evaluating other comprehensive, place-based efforts and developing a theory of change

During their trip to HCZ, Early and her team evaluated to what extent adapting elements of that model might be appropriate for Parramore, focusing on HCZ’s cradle-to-career support pipeline. The model is grounded in the theory of positive youth development (see box on page 8), which recognizes and seeks to build upon the strengths of young people and targets multiple developmental contexts (family, school, community) and the “whole child” (cognitive, social, emotional, physical). Early’s team proposed a similar model for PKZ, with cradle-to-career supports focusing on education, expanded learning opportunities, and health.

In other ways, PKZ departed from the HCZ model. Most notably, Early and her team decided to leverage, invest in, and, as much as possible, scale up the nascent, under-resourced assets that already existed in the neighborhood. Only when resources in the neighborhood did not align with the needs derived from the ongoing assessment of the neighborhood did PKZ draw on additional supports. Moreover, instead of paying well-funded outside organizations to come into the neighborhood to serve Parramore children, these organizations were offered matching funding and/or free or low-cost space to locate their services in the neighborhood—but only if they also invested their own resources. This balance of leveraged and new resources was meant to enhance community strengths, bringing outsiders into the community only if needed; and to ensure that outside organizations working in the neighborhood had “skin in the game.” In addition, PKZ determined that the city would serve as the lead organization to align the work of various partners involved in the effort and to promote greater accountability.

“That someone else that you don’t even know wants to see you do good and provide something for you...that was like a homerun for me... I took off with it.”

In order to guide neighborhood transformation, PKZ followed a concrete theory of change: if a critical mass of young people experience the benefits of data-driven investments from cradle to career, then a community can positively affect a range of outcomes, improving education while reducing juvenile crime and teen pregnancy. A parenting education program, for example, would boost school readiness. Expanded health and wellness programs would address the child obesity and teen pregnancy rates. In a fashion similar to HCZ, PKZ would employ grassroots recruitment strategies to engage young people and their families. Since every facet of the educational pipeline is interconnected, PKZ channeled resources into each component simultaneously rather than sequentially.
Leveraging existing resources

In making their decision to leverage (and strengthen) local resources—and to identify which new resources they might need to bring into Parramore—Early and her team located assets already in the neighborhood. These included the two community centers (Callahan Neighborhood Center and Jackson Community Center), the Downtown Recreation Center, youth development organizations, early learning providers, and local schools, including a charter elementary school and a public middle and high school. The community and recreation centers represented a natural alliance since they operated within the city’s Department of Families, Parks, and Recreation, which Early directed. Her city-level position also enabled her to successfully recruit other organizations and schools as key partners.

PKZ established a formal governance structure and processes. For example, to create clear expectations for partners, the initiative decided to allocate grants to partners through a trust established by the city at the Community Foundation of Central Florida, and to utilize contracts that stipulated specific reporting requirements that align with PKZ’s goals. In this way, expectations of partners and specific responsibilities (such as the number of PKZ youth they must serve per year) are explicitly defined. As lead partner, PKZ meets with other partners mostly on an individual, as needed basis, and shares updates about resources, events, and other important information through informal channels, such as via telephone.

Creating cradle-to-career supports

Early childhood

Recognizing that quality early learning represents a significant component of a cradle-to-career pipeline, PKZ sought to target children’s readiness to succeed in school. Its earlier needs assessment had shown that Parramore families encountered a long wait list for early learning programs, with little chance of securing a slot. Less than half of young children were enrolled in childcare or pre-kindergarten. To increase enrollment, PKZ expanded childcare subsidies, providing matching funds that brought in available federal and state childcare dollars. The money was managed through a public-private partnership led by the Early Learning Coalition of Orange County, an umbrella organization. This greatly expanded the number of vouchers available for Parramore families. PKZ also offered additional space to the Orange County Head Start at the Callahan Neighborhood Center, effectively doubling the number of Head Start slots in the neighborhood.

Bolstering enrollment in childcare and pre-kindergarten programs (and enlarging the pool of available providers, as in the example of Head Start) became PKZ’s primary early childhood focus during its first several years. However, data demonstrated that young children continued to lag behind their peers on district and state benchmarks that measure school readiness. In response, PKZ partnered

Positive youth development and building a ‘supportive youth system’

In thinking conceptually about the work, the organizers of Parramore Kidz Zone were guided by the theory of positive youth development. Rather than focusing solely on “deficits” to be ameliorated, a positive youth development perspective views young people from a strengths-based perspective, seeking to build upon their individual human assets and the resources in the community to help them lead healthy, successful lives. This theory, moreover, rests on a recognition that children develop across such varied and overlapping contexts as family, schools, neighborhood; what we call a “youth system.” Extensive research suggests that enabling children to experience a “supportive youth system,” which aligns key supports across these contexts and applies them to the needs and strengths of each young person, will produce positive effects in their lives. For example, PKZ leveraging local organizations and programs both inside and outside of school delivers a seamless, sustainable continuum of support.
with the Early Learning Coalition to explore the possibility of emulating HCZ’s parent education series known as Baby College.

A visit to Harlem and participation in technical assistance training for community-based organizations offered a blueprint for starting a similar program in Parramore.

In 2011, expanding its partnership with the coalition, the University of Central Florida (UCF), and Nap Ford Community School, PKZ launched the Baby Institute, a nine-week parenting education session offered three times per year. “We’ve been able to build a strategy that’s much broader than what any of us could have done by ourselves,” remarked Karen Willis, chief executive officer of the Early Learning Coalition, which operates the Baby Institute. Like similar programs that range from structured parent groups to one-on-one home visiting services, the Baby Institute focuses on improving school readiness by engaging parents of young children. In addition to enhancing parents’ knowledge about their children’s cognitive and social-emotional development, the Baby Institute equips families with important information about choosing high quality early learning providers. During Pilot Year 3 in 2012-13, a total of 57 infants, toddlers, preschool, and school-aged children and 79 parents “graduated” from one of the three series.

The UCF partnership was instrumental in designing the Baby Institute’s evidence-based curriculum, which integrates research on cognitive and social-emotional development. Dr. Judy Levin, a professor at the University of Central Florida’s College of Education and Human Performance and an early childhood expert, translates relevant research into applicable lessons. On a rainy Saturday morning, parents in one classroom watched an educational video about infant language development, while others joined a dynamic conversation about various disciplinary practices and their effects on toddlers’ cognition and emotional regulation. Meanwhile, their children participated in supervised activities with similar-age peers.

Additionally, addressing parents’ psycho-social needs, the Baby Institute brings in a psychologist to offer support. “We knew that our focus was child [school] readiness, but we [also] needed to strengthen the parents,” explained Dr. Nina White, manager of the Baby Institute.

Elementary, middle, and high school

PKZ invested in local programs and Parramore’s two community centers in ways that expanded their capacity to serve school-age children and create a comprehensive educational pipeline. Funding from PKZ enabled the programs to hire tutors to offer free academic support to elementary, middle, and high school students in both after-school and summer programs at neighborhood organizations such as Page 15, a literacy-based nonprofit, and New Image Youth Center, which offers an array of youth programming, as well as at the two community centers. Additionally, the initiative provides funding for FCAT (the mandatory state standardized test), SAT, and ACT preparation courses. Before PKZ was formed, only two neighborhood sites offered youth programming; now, 10 do. Greater capacity in turn enables increased enrollment.
New Image Youth Center provides a seminal example of working symbiotically with community organizations to create a continuum of support for the youth of Parramore. New Image served only a handful of children in a dilapidated Parramore church in 2005. The organization lacked non-profit status and had neither staff, board, nor funders. Although the founder, Shanta Barton-Stubbs, was an outstanding children’s services practitioner beloved by Parramore children and their parents,39 the lack of non-profit status, annual audits, and grant writing staff presented barriers to mainstream public and philanthropic funding. As a result, Barton-Stubbs paid for New Image’s work from money she earned at her night job. Without better funding to maintain the facility, New Image regularly faced the threat of closure due to building code violations. By 2011, because PKZ had leveraged its relationship with donors, New Image had a robust array of donors and served some 55 children daily in an expanded, renovated facility.

These programs are conducted in alignment with Orange County Public Schools (OCPS) to bolster schools’ ability to meet students’ needs both inside and outside of the classroom. Educational partners include Grand Avenue Primary Learning Center, Nap Ford Community School (an elementary charter school that opened in 2000), Howard Middle School, and Jones High School.

**Student advocates: Caring adults to help young people overcome obstacles**

In addition to forging a connection between school and after-school programs, PKZ sought to integrate academic assistance into Parramore’s schools. Here, PKZ’s leaders made caring adults a core element in the transformation of the neighborhood and the improvement of outcomes for young people. Importantly, PKZ’s definition of a caring adult goes beyond protecting or supervising youth; caring adults also help young people navigate their way through school, the broader community and life.

This effort involved adapting another component from HCZ’s model, the Student Advocate program, which PKZ piloted during the 2013 spring semester at both Howard Middle School and Jones High School. Each week during the regular school day, advocates (who are paid PKZ staff) provide tutoring and advising, both one-on-one and in small groups, to caseloads of 15-26 students.40 Advocates consult teachers to find the most feasible and least disruptive period to meet with students and work with youth mostly in “pull-out” sessions. Each semester, in addition to academic assistance, advocates help students identify “SMART” (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely) goals, and devise effective strategies for attaining them through an “Academic Success Plan” (ASP).41 SMART goals relate to both academics and social development (such as healthy decision-making and organizational skills).42 Advocates track progress along key indicators such as attendance, grades, and suspensions, as well as monitor their ASP growth.

Developing a rapport with students entails simple but crucial steps: listening and offering a consistent presence...
in their lives. Others build this relationship by personally connecting with students’ experiences. “I grew up in a similar situation,” said Marvin Peoples, a student advocate at Jones High School. “That’s my unique way to relate to them.”

In a neighborhood where the student population has acute needs, the program appears particularly helpful. “There are so many opportunities for [students] to say, ‘I can’t do it,’” said Latasha Greer-Adawale, coordinator of the program, noting that some face chronic homelessness and live in families that are unable to provide basic resources. “It’s the advocates’ job to help them identify roadblocks ahead of time and navigate around them.” For instance, one advocate noticed that a student was frequently missing school. When she investigated, she learned that the student was living in transitional housing lacking a washer and dryer. If the student didn’t have time to take his laundry elsewhere, he often skipped school out of embarrassment over his unwashed clothes. The advocate helped to resolve the issue by informing the student’s family that they could use laundry machines for free at the Rec Center.

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In another case, a student was struggling with her assignments. The advocate soon noticed that she was missing important instructions because she could not clearly see the board in her classroom. The advocate linked her family to a resource for free eyeglasses. “A lot of our students need that extra care,” said Dr. Valeria Maxwell, principal of Jones High School. “[The advocates] are very supportive of our students with the greatest needs.”

The advocate program’s benefits are not restricted to students who are struggling academically. Stronger performing students also sometimes require a greater level of individual attention. For example, advocates can encourage these young people to enroll in more challenging classes or expose them to opportunities that align with their interests and strengths, such as accompanying a stellar math and science student to a magnet school fair to learn about high schools specializing in these subjects.

**Post-secondary education and career**

Recognizing that many students will need continued support to succeed after high school graduation, PKZ provides additional resources. These supports include college tours, college and financial aid application support, and granting scholarships. “Growing up, I didn’t think about college,” one youth said. “[The tour] gave me a college experience that I never had.” The initiative also assists youth with the college registration process, and even drives some to campus. Once students enroll in college, PKZ continues to interact with them.

For instance, a young woman currently attending an Orlando-area college works part-time as a PKZ intern, enabling her to continue working with her student advocate on areas such as writing. Accountability is embedded into this relationship. If the student does not maintain her grades, she will not be able to work as many hours at her internship. PKZ also retains regular contact with students attending college beyond the Orlando area. A 22-year old who attended college in another state received regular care packages and phone calls about his grades, creating a sense that “someone cares about you.” In 2013, a record 27 PKZ youth participants entered post-secondary education programs.

PKZ’s paid internship program also helps to prepare youth for careers by equipping them with marketable skills and linking them to job opportunities. Interns, who receive a stipend from the city, provide administrative support, tutor younger children, and assist with childcare for parents participating in the Baby Institute, among other duties. A male youth shared that he finds a sense of purpose in his intern role that stems from his own childhood. “It’s more than just being an intern,” he emphasized. “Growing up, I didn’t have an older sibling to look up to. … I want to be able to show the kids that you can do whatever it is that you put your mind to.” The Simeon Resource and
Development Center for Men is another resource for Parramore youth, offering GEDs, vocational education referrals and enrollment support, and job placement assistance.

PKZ partners also offer enriching artistic experiences for school-age youth. For instance, youth can participate in the Digital U Program, a digital media course that teaches video production and editing skills at the University of Central Florida’s Center for Research and Education in the Arts (CREATE). “I’ve always liked to write, so this was right up my alley,” said a female teen who created a digital story that juxtaposed a recent experience with both violence and faith. “It felt good to release everything,” she added. “That’s when I knew I want to do digital media.”

PKZ also enables youth to explore interests that might not be offered by partner organizations. For example, the initiative enabled resident Lacary Williams’s son to develop his dance talent by providing tuition to participate in a professional studio. “He fell in love with [dance],” she said.

“That’s how I got him to take school seriously.” Williams’s son went on to earn fifth place in the national America’s Got Talent competition. Other options for artistic expression include an after-school piano program at the Steinway Society of Central Florida, pottery classes at the Orlando Pottery Studio, a summer slam poetry camp at Page 15, and the Parramore League of Artistic Youth (PLAY), which supports budding artists.

PKZ connects older youth to an array of age-appropriate activities, including mentoring, educational and cultural experiences, and community service projects. PKZ’s partner, Simeon Resource and Development Center for Men offers mentoring and case management support for youth up to age 24. “What does a boy need? What does a man need? We make adjustments as necessary,” said Bobby Lyons, a consultant at the organization. PKZ also arranges field trips that expose young people to new opportunities, such as an “eco-safari” in which high school students traveled to a wildlife conservation park in Central Florida with PKZ staff and their science teachers and rode horses for the first time. Outside of structured activities, teens

Beyond schools: Youth development throughout the community

Beyond academic, postsecondary and career support, PKZ connects youth to recreational, cultural, and educational opportunities—all of which can have a positive impact on school performance. School-age children can participate in mentoring, life skills support, and community service projects at the New Image Youth Center. Simeon Resource and Development Center for Men provides a “Rites of Passage” program for 12-17 year-old boys. The Callahan Neighborhood Center and Jackson Community Center have greatly expanded their offerings and more than doubled the number of Parramore participants since 2006, when PKZ began. They now offer numerous opportunities, including the Boy Scouts, a girls’ empowerment group, a piano program, the Boys & Girls Club, various games, arts and crafts, summer camps, and access to modern computer labs.

Montaius Stewart of New Image Youth Center, a PKZ partner, proudly displays his full scholarship award letter from Claflin University, alongside New Image’s executive director Shanta Barton-Stubbs

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can enjoy their own “hang-out” spots at both community centers and the Rec Center.

**Health and wellness**

Knowing that healthy children perform better in school, PKZ’s health and wellness initiative aims to address pediatric health concerns in the community. When PKZ launched in 2006, approximately 32 percent of Parramore youth were obese (the rate for adults was even higher). In response, the Health Council of Central Florida formed a consortium—including PKZ, Hebni Nutrition Consultants (HNC), and Get Active Orlando—to identify barriers to healthy lifestyle behaviors and propose recommendations. This collaborative effort documented 22 convenience stores in the neighborhood but not a single full-service supermarket.

HNC, which has offered nutritional services in Parramore since 1995, sought to address the lack of access to affordable, healthy food by partnering with Sunlife Grocery, a local convenience store, to expand its offerings to include fresh produce. Today, shoppers find a variety of vegetables and fruit strategically located at the front of the store, where shelves formerly were stocked with chips and other junk food. HNC is working to provide even greater access to fresh food through a mobile farmer’s market, adapted from a similar program in Chicago.

In close cooperation with PKZ, HNC also teaches classes on healthy eating and cooking specifically for the African-American community, which is disproportionately affected by diet-related diseases. In a gleaming, state-of-the-art industrial kitchen, Parramore residents—both young people and their parents—learn basic nutrition facts and cooking techniques.

During a recent class, PKZ youth prepared their own turkey burgers, following a recipe dubbed “porcupine sliders” that included an intriguing combination of spinach, cranberries, and brown rice (students were surprised that the final product was so delicious). Meanwhile, parents in the Baby Institute learn about healthy alternatives to red meat and the nutritional value of brown rather than white rice. PKZ reinforces these dietary lessons by providing a wholesome snack to all students in its after-school programs. Recently, as part of a federal grant award, the initiative began to offer a full meal after school in addition to the snack. Students also receive opportunities to learn about nutrition during activities at the community centers. Addressing nutrition in another way, PKZ encourages Parramore’s young people to participate in two community gardens that they helped design and several youth now grow vegetables there. Youth also help maintain a modest garden plot behind New Image’s building.

In order to stimulate more physical activity by young people, PKZ established basketball, baseball and football leagues in the neighborhood. It also enhanced students’ access to cheerleading, golf and swimming, among other activities. Partners like New Image complement PKZ’s health and wellness programming with their own fitness activities, such as karate and yoga.

Finally, PKZ works to expand neighborhood residents’ access to health care by granting referrals. A teen pregnancy prevention program offers safe-sex education at five sites, while the Simeon Resource and Development Center for Men, which serves approximately 50 PKZ youth, provides STD prevention and counseling and individualized case management.
Economic assistance
While focusing on young people, PKZ recognizes that families often need additional support to navigate unexpected financial challenges. The persistently high poverty rate in Parramore further attests to families’ ongoing economic needs. Accordingly, the initiative offers up to $500 per year to families in order to help them cover past due rent and utility bills, among other things. In 2011-12, the families of nearly 300 Parramore children benefitted from this service.

Relying on a lead organization to align the work of partners
Empirical evidence underscores that strong, visionary leadership is vital for setting concrete goals, articulating theories of change aligned with these goals, mobilizing stakeholders and effectively implementing strategies.

PKZ serves as the lead organization that coalesces partners synergistically around a collective goal of promoting positive outcomes for young people. This approach also creates a system of accountability among partners.

The initiative promotes collaboration through mutually supportive relationships among its partners. The initiative has cultivated a close relationship with Orange County Public Schools (OCPS), allowing PKZ to deliver its Student Advocate program at neighborhood schools and to facilitate the implementation of OCPS-instructed academic programs at the community centers after school and during the summer. Prior to PKZ, students at Nap Ford Community School attended non-academic after-school activities at the Callahan Neighborhood Center. After deciding to focus on education, the collaboration explored strategies for partners to reinforce each other’s work. To this end, PKZ approached the Nap Ford Community School and proposed that teachers identify struggling students who were attending after-school programs at the Callahan Neighborhood Center—a step that would enable these programs to work more effectively with the young people who needed the most academic help. The Jackson Community Center and Grand Avenue Primary Learning Center work together in a similarly structured public-private partnership.

In another instance, OCPS collaborated with the community centers in Parramore to offer summer academic programs at Callahan and Jackson rather than in the traditional school environment. This shift appealed to parents, whose schedules did not always coincide with summer programs available at schools, and to youth who preferred the project-based learning format offered at the centers. “We’re giving students the option to explore their own thinking and knowledge, at their own level, at their own pace,” said Katrina Summerville, OCPS specialist, who hopes to extend this approach to after-school programs during the year. In this way, schools and youth programming strengthen each other’s work.

“We’re giving students the option to explore their own thinking and knowledge, at their own level, at their own pace”

Another example of reciprocal relationships involves PKZ’s partnership with the University of Central Florida (UCF): PKZ participants benefit from UCF’s expertise, while university students acquire practical professional development experience.

Parramore youth participate in the university’s digital media program, while UCF students volunteer in many PKZ programs, such as tutoring youth in after-school programs and assisting at the Baby Institute (whose curriculum was designed by a UCF professor). UCF students pursuing master’s degrees in elementary education augment youths’ literacy skills during a Saturday “Reading Camp” and a summer reading loss prevention program at the community centers (while both of these literacy programs existed before 2006, PKZ helped to expand them).

In addition to forging and maintaining partnerships, PKZ fosters collaboration by brokering solutions among stakeholders. For instance, many Nap Ford Community
School students said they felt unsafe traveling on foot to the after-school program at the Callahan Neighborhood Center from their school, about a five-minute walk away. Nap Ford’s principal communicated this concern to PKZ, which facilitated a meeting between the principal and the Callahan Neighborhood Center director. Together, they strategized a feasible solution: Callahan staff would walk Nap Ford students to the center after school.

In addition to forging and maintaining partnerships, PKZ fosters collaboration by brokering solutions among stakeholders.

One of the inevitable challenges that accompany managing a broad network of partners is that their level of collaboration varies. An example of intensive connection is Parramore’s Head Start program, which is situated in the Callahan Neighborhood Center. This co-location leads to regular interaction; the partners refer families to each other’s programs and to other resources available through PKZ. Toinette Stenson, director of the Head Start program, described the partners’ collaboration as a “constant rotation of open communication.” “It’s almost a seamless transition,” echoed Callahan director Joseph Caesar. “We all work together.” Some programs, however, function more independently. Julia Young, executive director at Page 15, an after-school, literacy-based program that serves approximately 100 PKZ youth, observed that communication can be challenging among so many partners, and she is not always aware when another organization is offering a program similar to hers. “[There’s an] opportunity to share more info so [we’re not] operating in silos,” she said.

To complement its strong alignment of partners and community residents, PKZ has developed relationships with diverse public and private institutions (see Appendix 2 for the complete list). One notable partnership involves the local NBA franchise, the Orlando Magic, which has helped sponsor several capital projects. The basketball team remodeled the computer lab, renovated the outdoor basketball court, rebuilt the playground in collaboration with KaBOOM!, and built a brand new Teen Room at the Jackson Community Center. It also funded renovations to New Image’s space; among the improvements is a colorful mural that brightens the façade of the otherwise plain building.

PKZ has also initiated a close partnership with the Orlando Police Department and launched an innovative activity dubbed “Cops and Kids” that pairs cops and youth together in dragon boat races. “In the past the only relations I’ve had with cops was arresting someone I know,” said one Parramore youth. “[This allows me] to get to know them and build a relationship.”

Engaging the broader community

Community engagement efforts in Parramore reflect a number of CCI best practices. Prior to PKZ’s inception, Mayor Dyer solicited community input regarding the needs of Parramore’s children and youth through resident participation in the Parramore Task Force, while Early and her team reached out to a wide range of sectors. As noted earlier, in addition to engaging neighborhood adults, PKZ organized a youth advisory committee through which young people could shape programming and recruit their peers.

PKZ continues its commitment to engaging families and youth today. In 2007 and 2012 the initiative surveyed neighborhood households in order to assess current needs.
and priorities, and findings directly influenced programming. For example, in response to the surveys, PKZ created a mechanism for offering economic assistance to families. Surveys also revealed tutoring as a number one priority for residents—a finding consistent with neighborhood-level data indicating a need for more academic support. As it did during the planning phase, PKZ strives to empower youth to steer programming. “Kids inform all our work; our older youth programs have always been youth-driven,” Early said. She pointed to an example. At one time, she said, teens had packed the cramped PKZ office because they had no other space at the Rec Center where they could casually spend time. After discovering an old locker room that was no longer being utilized, the youth suggested transforming the musty area into their own hangout headquarters.

Next, they presented a formal plan to PKZ’s partner, the Orlando Magic, and obtained a $25,000 grant from NBA basketball star Dwight Howard to redesign and paint the space. Today, the Teenz Shack is seldom empty except during school hours; youth relax with their peers and regularly host movie and game nights.

Finally, PKZ builds community by investing in neighborhood-based organizations. Strategic investments cultivate local leadership. In some instances, the initiative provided crucial resources to help a program, such as Page 15, to establish itself. “[PKZ] was instrumental in helping us get off the ground,” said Julia Young of Page 15. In other cases, PKZ scaled up longstanding organizations like the Simeon Resource and Development Center for Men, which has served Parramore for decades. With new funding from PKZ, the center has reached more young people in the neighborhood, and its leaders have been able to enhance their knowledge and skills by attending national conferences and availing themselves of other professional development opportunities.

Leveraging and learning from data

From the beginning, and in keeping with CCI best practices, PKZ has followed a data-driven approach. As noted previously, Orlando conducted research on neighborhood-level indicators to ascertain which community within the city had the gravest needs.

“All data pointed to Parramore,” Early said. In similar fashion, PKZ relied heavily on data to inform programming once the initiative began, contracting with the Health Council of East Central Florida to monitor aggregate academic performance, juvenile crime, and teen pregnancy.

PKZ’s decision to focus more and more on education, as described earlier, was driven by data. As another example of the ongoing role of information, PKZ initially collaborated with a partner on youth workforce development. However, mandatory reports revealed that few youth in the program had secured jobs. As a result, PKZ terminated the relationship, instead opting to execute its own employment program (discussed in the Postsecondary education and career section).

Soon, data will facilitate programming in Parramore even more systematically. PKZ is working with its evaluators to implement a database that will provide the central team—and all partner organizations—with readily accessible information about program participation. This information in turn will enable more targeted interventions. For instance, participant records stored in a shared location will permit an after-school program like New Image to know if a youth is participating in the Student Advocate program; if not, New Image can refer the student to the program. In this way, partners can more effectively ensure that young people benefit from the full range of PKZ resources. The new database will also enhance both accuracy and efficiency in record-keeping. “When you spend a lot of time manually manipulating data, it takes away from the analytics,” said Renee Jackson, fiscal manager at PKZ. “As we move forward into a more automated environment, we will be able to step back and say, ‘We know this now, so what else do we do?’”
As part of this database build out and enhancing the existing partnership with the schools, PKZ is working with OCPS to formulate a formal data-sharing agreement. Through this milestone agreement, PKZ and its partners will be able to track not only students’ program participation but also their academic progress—significantly increasing the ability of programs’ staff to deliver appropriate support to each student. For example, student advocates will gain access to information that youth might not share with them (such as inconsistent housing), and be able to connect them with helpful resources, while tutors in after-school programs can utilize students’ grades to inform in which subject areas youth could benefit from extra support. Currently, PKZ has access to data at the individual student level for approximately 200 of the more than 1,600 youth enrolled across its programming.

Flexible and diverse funding

As the principles behind effective CCIs dictate, PKZ aims to build a broad base of funders to secure sustainability. Thus far, the initiative receives the majority of its support—an estimated two million dollars—from the city of Orlando. AmeriCorps represents another government funder, and recently awarded PKZ an approximately $280,000 grant to expand its Student Advocate program. PKZ garners about $400,000–$500,000 annually from corporations and foundations. The initiative’s association with Mayor Dyer has also sparked other sponsorship opportunities. Early and her team express a steadfast confidence in PKZ’s long-term viability because the program aligns with the city’s data-driven approach and is demonstrating its ongoing impact. Nonetheless, fundraising presents challenges; city government possesses limited capacity to engage in development activities and apply for grants.

Further, PKZ has worked to create a sustainable model by leveraging local resources in Parramore. For instance, PKZ has augmented the capacity of organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club at the Jackson Community Center. This illustrates a powerful example of PKZ’s use of assets already present in the neighborhood, rather than funneling funding into brand new programs (except for the Baby Institute and Student Advocate programs, which did not exist previously). In turn, PKZ strives to ensure that youth participate in these programs, which possess a greater number of slots for Parramore youth.

CCI principles also underline the importance of utilizing sources of flexible funding, working with funders to gain some leeway in how their financial support is used. PKZ discovered the importance of such flexibility firsthand when a grant award prohibited money from being spent on food. However, as most youth development organizations have learned from experience, offering snacks increases youth participation.
Measuring success

Since PKZ’s inception, evaluation reports have consistently shown positive trends across a number of key indicators, including juvenile crime, teen pregnancy, and educational performance.57,58 The most recent report available (fiscal year 2011-12) documented a 56.5 percent decline in the proportion of Parramore juvenile arrests as a percentage of juvenile arrests for Orlando as a whole.59 This significant shift parallels a changing dynamic for gangs and even for what it means to live on opposite ends of Parramore. “Now I go to the other side of Parramore and see someone I used to fight every day in middle school, and it’s like, ‘Let’s go play basketball,’” said a young male who has lived in the neighborhood since he was nine years old. “That didn’t change until the PKZ program came.”60 Meanwhile, the teen pregnancy rate declined by nearly 30 percent between 2006 and 2012 (this drop also mirrored a similar pattern in Orange County as a whole).61

“The Florida ACT (FCAT) reading and math scores from 2010 (based on a score of 3 or above, signifying either at or above grade level) offer the most recent data for examining year-over-year progress at the elementary and secondary levels.66 FCAT scores between 2007 and 2010 reflect generally positive trends, evidenced by reduced reading and math gaps between Parramore students and the averages for students at the district and statewide levels (for detailed comparisons see Appendix 1).67,68

The improvement was especially dramatic at the elementary school level, where the math and reading gaps shrank by roughly 50 percent.69 In fact, in both math and reading, the gaps narrowed between Parramore students and the district and state averages across the entire K-12 spectrum, with one exception: the middle-school reading gap actually widened slightly.70 Despite the gains across all grade levels between 2007 and 2010, Parramore students’ scores sank when FCAT revisions were introduced in 2011, similar to results for both the district and state.71

The graduation rate at Jones High School (where roughly half of Parramore youth attend72) has increased by 26 percentage points since the early years of PKZ.73 During the 2011-12 academic year (the most recent year available), 92 percent of students graduated at Jones High School compared to only 66 percent in 2007-08.74

The Early Learning Coalition monitors the impact of the Baby Institute through pre- and post-tests and by videotaping parent-child interactions. The most recent evaluation report observed measurable gains related to parents’ knowledge, especially among infant and preschool parents, as well as increased positive behavior between parents and their children.75 Reflections from parents during an informal group conversation about their experiences in the Baby Institute also illustrate this growth. For instance, one mother has noticed that she exhibits greater patience with her young children, while another parent shared that she reads more often to her daughter as a result of the program.76

“Now I go to the other side of Parramore and see someone I used to fight every day in middle school, and it’s like, ‘Let’s go play basketball.’”

Evaluating the changes in educational outcomes is more complicated. The state assesses school readiness according to the Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener, which utilizes the Early Childhood Observation System (ECHOS) and the Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading (FAIR).62 ECHOS data showed that Parramore’s school readiness gap closed from 2008-09 to 2011-12, with scores surpassing the district and state averages (though Parramore’s significantly smaller sample size, compared to the district and state, might have affected the validity of results).63 On the other hand, FAIR revealed that the gap in reading had widened compared to both the district and the state.64 Again, a small sample might have affected these outcomes.65
Recently, ELCOC introduced new standards to measure provider quality. Once these benchmarks are uniformly utilized, the coalition will be able to track more rigorously outcomes related to school readiness. However, PKZ children attend nearly 80 early learning programs; many are located outside of the initiative’s designated zone, making them difficult to evaluate. Arguably, a clear need exists to better assess provider quality given that only 20 percent of PKZ children were enrolled in high quality child care during 2012-13 (this was the same percentage for the Baby Institute parents). The coalition is optimistic that providers will improve their quality once they adapt the new assessment tools; it plans to train PKZ staff to refer families only to programs working toward these standards. Meanwhile, the Baby Institute has developed an alumni portion of the program in order to sustain gains made by its graduates.

As for health and wellness, the most recent evaluation report showed that 818 youth—representing the largest number of participants in all types of PKZ programming (including academic, early childhood, and youth development)—participated in athletic and related activities. However, program participation is currently the only factor assessed. When the initiative is able to further extend programming in this area, PKZ expects to monitor health indicators, such as body mass index (BMI). “We need to drill into the data and see how effective we are,” Early said, adding that PKZ plans to hire a health and wellness coordinator to strengthen this work once funding has been identified.

Reflecting on PKZ’s success to-date, Early attributes progress to both “investing in community strengths and building the capacity of those strengths,” which she concludes are key to the initiative’s sustainability. Other lessons for communities considering a similar initiative include starting small in order to target resources in neighborhoods with the greatest needs (PKZ serves a 1.4-mile radius), employing simple strategies such as providing space (often free of charge) to organizations (in Parramore’s case, Page 15 and Head Start are prime examples) to attract programs to the neighborhood and enhance available resources, and pursuing long-term solutions that recognize the depth of problems that low-income communities face.

At the same time that PKZ has helped to address the educational needs of children, Pathways for Parramore, Orlando’s broader neighborhood revitalization effort, has produced important strides for the overall community. For example, a neighborhood park has been restored and beautified, a Hope VI mixed-income housing development replaced former decaying public housing, and construction and transportation projects to connect Parramore to the rest of the city are underway.

**Parramore’s place-based model in the midst of neighborhood change**

Currently, the city of Orlando is spearheading several upcoming large-scale projects in Parramore—including a major-league soccer stadium, a dynamic mixed-use development showcasing the digital media industry, and new public transportation infrastructure—which will likely transform both physical and economic dimensions of the neighborhood. The city has also contracted with an urban planning firm to produce a new comprehensive plan for the neighborhood (slated for completion later this year). These multiple forces of change elicit varied responses from community members. Some residents and youth
have voiced concern about potential negative effects from the projects, such as fear of losing their homes; others have expressed tentative hope that these investments might revitalize the Parramore community.

As a city-level initiative, PKZ is well-positioned to advocate on behalf of children and youth in Parramore, ensuring that the neighborhood’s comprehensive plan prioritizes projects that help young people thrive. To that end, PKZ will engage with the city’s urban planning team during its one-year planning process, and propose ways to enhance the lives of children and youth in Parramore. For example, Early recommends educational linkages that connect the new mixed-use, digital-media space to opportunities for local youth.87

Looking ahead—and beyond the neighborhood

Looking forward, PKZ aspires to replicate its place-based model to serve more young people throughout the city. First, the initiative would expand to Holden Heights, a neighborhood that abuts Parramore, but not currently included in the zone. On a broader scale, Early envisions the model outgrowing its name. “This has never just been about kids in Parramore,” she said. “It’s about all kids struggling in the city.” However, funding remains a formidable obstacle for executing these plans.

Meanwhile, PKZ remains committed to leveraging local resources to improve outcomes and prospects for Parramore’s young people. Specifically, the initiative aims to fortify facets of its current programming—including programs to improve health and wellness, more programming for older youth, and greater academic support and wraparound services.88 Previous economic analyses of similar place-based efforts that have invested long-term in education demonstrate tremendous savings from reduced juvenile crime and anticipated higher earnings from educational attainment.89

Although a cost-benefit analysis has not yet been conducted in Parramore, these findings suggest that PKZ would experience gains similar to those achieved by other such initiatives. The initiative embodies a promising model for other communities inspired by HCZ’s approach but that share PKZ’s financial constraints and lack access to Harlem’s level of private funding. Leveraging local resources and strengths offers a powerful pathway toward strengthening communities for children, youth and families.

The lessons of Parramore

Parramore’s remarkable experience suggests several overarching lessons:

1. **Concentrating investments in a defined area drives neighborhood transformation.** Place-based community change models have multiplied in recent years, inspired by the examples of the Harlem Children’s Zone and others. Parramore Kidz Zone reveals that starting small and investing resources in a defined geographic radius that displays the greatest need can “move the needle” on community-level outcomes, such as juvenile crime, education, and teen pregnancy.

2. **Investing in local resources is a sustainable pathway toward neighborhood transformation.** Place-based initiatives can leverage community strengths and augment capacity to deliver key programming. Parramore’s experience demonstrates that such a strategy avoids reinventing the wheel by utilizing and scaling up existing community assets, as well as builds a financially sound model that is consistent with the economic reality of many communities. Additionally, local investment nurtures long-lasting community relationships based on mutual trust.

3. **Change efforts should be based on what research suggests will work yet adapted to local conditions.** The PKZ team applied a data-driven approach to develop its theory of change, undergirded by best practices from the Harlem Children’s Zone and other efforts, as well as sound empirical evidence. This research led to the initiative implementing a cradle-to-career pipeline model that has been systematically monitored. At the same
time, PKZ was not merely an attempt to replicate the model of Harlem Children’s Zone that had so influenced their thinking. Instead, PKZ adapted the model—and in some areas departed from it significantly—because they recognized that conditions in Parramore were not exactly like those in Harlem. While low-income neighborhoods face many similar challenges, no two are precisely alike.

4. **A youth system is important to improving outcomes for young people.** All young people grow up multiple contexts (families, schools, and all aspects of a community) that potentially possess the key developmental supports they need to thrive. Parramore’s experience reinforces the importance of putting young people at the center of their planning, ensuring that they are embedded within these developmental supports and that these assets are applied to the needs and strengths of each young person. PKZ’s transformation of a neighborhood with few supports to one with numerous resources has profoundly impacted the young people of Parramore.

5. *Finally, Parramore’s experience demonstrates that, when a city invests in local strengths, young people in impoverished neighborhoods can be put on trajectories toward a successful future.* Parramore’s story is especially relevant to the work of youth-focused organizations such as America’s Promise Alliance. Our theory of action has always centered on the belief that improving outcomes for young people with limited resources and opportunities necessitates drawing on the entire community to infuse neighborhoods with more of the Five Promises—the fundamental resources all children need to succeed: caring adults in all areas of their lives, safe places, the essential elements that make for a healthy start and healthy development, an effective education and opportunities to help others. Some have wondered whether systematic attempts at such neighborhood revitalization were practical, or even possible—and whether, if successful, they could yield the results for young people that proponents sought. The answer from PKZ is an emphatic “yes,” which should give both encouragement and guidance to those urgently seeking to change the odds for the least advantaged young people in other cities.
Postscript: A Point of Community Pride

Late in the BCS Championship football game on January 6, 2014, freshman Levonte Whitfield returned a kickoff 100 yards for a touchdown that put Florida State ahead of Auburn. The Seminoles went on to win the game and the national championship.

Levonte, who is affectionately known as “Kermit,” is a longtime participant in Parramore Kidz Zone and a graduate of Jones High School. In a way, the whole community had helped Kermit get from Parramore to Pasadena, California, where the championship game was played.

Numerous donors had helped cover the cost of Kermit’s participation in PKZ’s youth football program since 2007. For the past three years, contributions from the Heart of Florida United Way had financed tutoring, mentoring, college prep classes and a job for Kermit (and others) so he could attend a university like Florida State.

After Kermit’s touchdown, wrote Lisa Early, cell phones buzzed all over Parramore. “Orlando must have heard me screaming from my home, because I was just that excited,” said Valeria Maxwell, the principal at Jones High School.

When Kermit scored, Early wrote, “It was a dream come true for a young man who faced many challenges but dared to dream anyway, and for all the people who were there for Kermit along the way. It is hard to put into words how much that play meant to Kermit and to his friends in the neighborhood.”

Because so many in the community had invested in the success of PKZ, the cheers in Parramore that night were not only for Kermit Whitfield but for a neighborhood where young people now have real hope of reaching their dreams.
## APPENDIX 1

### Parramore, District, and State FCAT Scores, 2007–2010


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2006–07</th>
<th>2009–10</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elementary School FCAT English Scores</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parramore</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>60%</td>
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<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elementary School FCAT Math Scores</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parramore</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle School FCAT English Scores</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parramore</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle School FCAT Math Scores</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parramore</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High School FCAT English Scores</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parramore</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
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<td>44%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>High School FCAT Math Scores</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parramore</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX 2

Parramore Kidz Zone’s broad base of partners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PUBLIC SECTOR PARTNERS</th>
<th>WHAT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City of Orlando, Downtown Recreation Complex, John H. Jackson Community Center, and the Dr. J.B. Callahan Neighborhood Center</td>
<td>Offers free academic tutoring, after-school, and summer programs to PKZ youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange County Public Schools</td>
<td>Collaborated with PKZ to offer academic support at the community centers, and to launch the PKZ Student Advocate program at Jones High School and Howard Middle School.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nap Ford Community School</td>
<td>Students attend PKZ academic programs and the school offers free space to the Baby Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Learning Coalition of Orange County</td>
<td>Partnered with PKZ to launch the Baby Institute, a parenting education series to increase school readiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange County Head Start</td>
<td>Offers early learning care and education to Parramore children in PKZ-provided space at the Callahan Neighborhood Center</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNERS</th>
<th>WHAT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orlando Magic NBA team</td>
<td>Generous supporter of numerous capital projects, including a “Teenz Shack” and updated computer labs at the community centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steinway Society of Central Florida</td>
<td>Offers a free after-school piano program to PKZ youth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHILANTHROPIC</th>
<th>WHAT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United Way of Central Florida</td>
<td>A supporter of PKZ programming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayne M. Densh Charities, Inc.</td>
<td>Donations to PKZ enable the initiative to expand resources for youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orlando Community and Youth Trust, Inc.</td>
<td>A chief supporter of PKZ’s Youth Employment program, as well as provides emergency economic assistance to families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Foundation of Central Florida</td>
<td>Grants enable PKZ to deliver funds to key partners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Parramore Kidz Zone’s broad base of partners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NONPROFIT</th>
<th>WHAT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Boys and Girls Clubs of Central Florida</td>
<td>Partnered with PKZ to offer youth programming at the John H. Jackson Community Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Think! Foundation Page 15</td>
<td>Enhances literacy-skills of PKZ youth in PKZ-provided space at the Downtown Recreation Complex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simeon Resource and Development Center for Men</td>
<td>Provides mentoring, case management, health education and counseling, and GED and job search assistance to PKZ youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Father’s of Central Florida</td>
<td>Offers pregnancy prevention and other health services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Start Coalition</td>
<td>Another partner that provides pregnancy prevention services to PKZ youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Central Florida (UCF)</td>
<td>The University provides student volunteers to support PKZ programming, PKZ partners with UCF to offer the Baby Institute, PKZ youth participate in UCF’s digital media program, as well as enrich their literacy skills in a UCF reading camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Image Youth Center</td>
<td>Offers an array of free after-school and summer programming, including tutoring, mentoring, and recreational activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebni Nutrition Consultants, Inc.</td>
<td>Offers hands-on classes to PKZ youth and parents on healthy cooking and nutrition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridge to Independence</td>
<td>Provides after-school academic assistance to PKZ youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Council of East Central Florida, Inc.</td>
<td>Maintains PKZ’s database and has evaluated the initiative from its inception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Coordinated Care for Children, Inc. (4C)</td>
<td>Partners with PKZ to distribute childcare vouchers to families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orlando Pottery Studio</td>
<td>Enriches the artistic skills of Parramore youth with free pottery classes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 3

List of key informant interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>TITLE &amp; ORGANIZATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shanta Barton-Stubbs</td>
<td>Director, New Image Youth Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Caesar</td>
<td>Center Manager, Dr. J. B. Callahan Neighborhood Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaine Cauthen</td>
<td>Assistant Director, Health Council of East Central Florida, Inc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara Cartee-Kennedy</td>
<td>Health Council of East Central Florida, Inc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natasha Dial</td>
<td>Student Advocate Coordinator, Parramore Kidz Zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa Early</td>
<td>Director, City of Orlando, Families, Parks, and Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith Elam</td>
<td>Student Advocate, Parramore Kidz Zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latasha Greer-Adawale</td>
<td>Academic Coordinator, Parramore Kidz Zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renee Jackson</td>
<td>Fiscal Manager, City of Orlando, Families, Parks, and Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Judy Levine</td>
<td>Professor, University of Central Florida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobby Lyons</td>
<td>Consultant, Simeon Resource &amp; Development for Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stacy Mahar</td>
<td>Executive Assistant, City of Orlando, Families, Parks, and Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brenda March</td>
<td>Children and Education Manager, Parramore Kidz Zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valeria Maxwell</td>
<td>Principal, Jones High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Roundtable</td>
<td>Baby Institute parent participants, Parramore Kidz Zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marvin Peoples</td>
<td>Student Advocate, Parramore Kidz Zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Jennifer Porter Smith</td>
<td>Principal, Nap Ford Community School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ericka Ransom</td>
<td>Student Advocate, Parramore Kidz Zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toinette Stenson</td>
<td>Director, Orange County Head Start</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katrina Summerville</td>
<td>Program Specialist for NCLB Services, Orange County Public Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth participant</td>
<td>Parramore Kidz Zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Nina White</td>
<td>Baby Institute Director, Parramore Kidz Zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacary Williams</td>
<td>Resident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larry Williams</td>
<td>Executive Director, Simeon Resource &amp; Development for Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen Willis</td>
<td>CEO, Early Learning Coalition of Orange County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia Young</td>
<td>Founder and Director, Urban Think! Foundation, Page 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth participant</td>
<td>Parramore Kidz Zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth participant</td>
<td>Parramore Kidz Zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth participant</td>
<td>Parramore Kidz Zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Roundtable</td>
<td>10 youth participants, Parramore Kidz Zone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


Interim findings from Chicago’s New Communities Program (n.d.). New York, NY: MDRC.


These efforts include the Settlement House movement of the early 1900s, the War on Poverty in the 1960s, and the rise of community development corporations (CDCs) in the 1980s. Since that time, the field of community change has become more sophisticated, moving beyond organized community development to other approaches such as community capacity building, collaborative, community change initiatives, and community organizing.

Several key attributes distinguish Community Capacity Initiatives (CCIs) from previous approaches to community change:

- a collaborative, comprehensive approach, with carefully constructed alignment contexts (e.g., family, school, the broader community) and across institutions (e.g., after-school programs, community health centers, community recreation centers, schools, early child-care facilities), instead of piecemeal, uncoordinated efforts;
- participation by diverse partners instead of single-sector initiatives;
- a lead organization that drives the effort instead of a leaderless coalition;
- a theory of change aligned with the effort’s goals and use of evidence-based strategies/programs;
- ongoing use of data to guide the effort;
- an asset-based approach that builds on existing resources and strengths of a community and its residents;
- engagement of residents as active participants in the effort rather than as passive recipients;
- a focus on geographically defined areas instead of being too broad in scope; and
- flexible, non-categorical funding from diverse sources instead of restricted funds that constrain nimble actions.

For a review, see Zaff & Smerdon, 2009.

A meta-analysis of 77 evaluations on parent training programs documented positive effects related to improved parenting skills and fewer child behavioral problems (Kaminski et al., 2008). However, these effects were associated with specific program components, such as time-out strategies and parent-child role-playing (Kaminski et al., 2008). A home visiting program, the Nurse-Family Partnership is widely recognized for its long-term effectiveness in ameliorating parent and child outcomes (Olds, 2006). Generally, the track record of parent education suggests positive effects from some types of programs.
38 This graduation number does not include parents who may have graduated and participated in another session (Early Learning Coalition of Orange County, 2013).
39 L. Early, personal communication, November 1, 2013.
40 Parramore Kidz Zone internal document, 2013.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 A complete list of PKZ partners is provided in Appendix 2.
44 L. Williams, personal communication, November 25, 2013.
46 Ibid.
47 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013.
50 Kubisch et al., 2010.
51 CCI best practices suggest that community-building and community engagement efforts are important for stimulating positive relationships among partners and residents, increasing resident involvement, and expanding local leadership capacity (Kubisch et al., 2010; Trent & Chavis, 2009; Walker et al., 2010).
53 L. Early, personal communication, December 20, 2013.
54 Ibid.
55 R. Jackson, personal communication, October 31, 2013.
56 L. Early, personal communication, October 31, 2013.
58 When assessing community-level outcomes, it is important to consider a neighborhood’s mobility (representing the percentage of residents who move in and out of a neighborhood) since a high rate can distort the actual effects that have occurred (Auspos, 2012). Parramore’s mobility rate is approximately 14% and is derived from the Orange County Public Schools (OCPS) district and includes schools that serve Parramore youth, including six elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school (L. Early, personal communication, December 17, 2013).
59 Even more striking, juvenile arrests in Parramore decreased by 87.5 percent, with a similar though slightly smaller downturn of 71.3 percent in Orlando from 2006 to 2012 (Health Council of East Central Florida, Inc., 2013).
60 PKZ youth, personal communication, October 31, 2013.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
64 The gap in reading had widened by 17% compared to the district and by 29% compared to the state (Health Council of East Central Florida, Inc., 2013).
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 Parramore elementary, middle, and high school students faced a set of revised standards when the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) was updated in 2011. In 2014, they will again be evaluated under new, more demanding criteria when Florida bases its curriculum on the Common Core State Standards (Health Council of East Central Florida, Inc., 2013).
69 Specifically, the elementary school reading gap between Parramore and the district shrank by 50 percent; the gap between Parramore and students statewide decreased by 56 percent between 2006-7 and 2009-10. In elementary school math, the gaps between Parramore students and their counterparts in the Orange County School District and statewide diminished by 48 percent and 53 percent respectively (Health Council of East Central Florida, Inc., 2013).
70 Similarly, among middle schoolers the gap in math scores between Parramore students and the average scores for OCPS and the state during this same period decreased by 30 percent and 31 percent respectively. At the same time, the middle school reading gap broadened by 11 percent compared to the district’s scores and by 5 percent compared to the state average. At the high school level, the reading gap between the neighborhood’s students and those for the district as a whole declined by 19 percent; it shrank by eight percent compared to the state. Compared to district and state averages, the math gap contracted by approximately 51 percent and 37 percent (Health Council of East Central Florida, Inc., 2013).
72 About 50 percent of Parramore youth attend Jones High School, while the remaining attend Edgewater and Boone High School, as well as other high schools and charter schools (L. Early, personal communication, December 17, 2013).
73 Florida Department of Education, 2007-08.
74 Florida Department of Education, 2011-12.
75 Ibid.
76 Baby Institute Parent Roundtable, personal communication, November 2, 2013.
77 Early Learning Coalition of Orange County, 2013.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
82 L. Early, personal communication, November 26, 2013.
83 L. Early, personal communication, October 31, 2013.
84 L. Early, personal communication, October 31, 2013; Parramore Kidz Zone presentation, 2012.
86 Ibid.
87  L. Early, personal communication, November 26, 2013.
88  Parramore Kidz Zone presentation, 2013.
89  Selig Center for Economic Growth, 2008.
90  America’s Promise Alliance e-newsletter, 2014.
About the Center for Promise
The Center for Promise, in collaboration with Tufts University’s School of Arts and Sciences, is the research center for America’s Promise Alliance. The mission of the Center is to develop a deep knowledge and understanding about what is needed to help create the conditions so that all young people in America have the opportunity to succeed in school and life. The Center’s work will add to the academic exploration of these issues and help give communities and individuals the tools and knowledge to effectively work together to support young people.

Our Vision
Every child in America has the opportunity and support to reach their full potential and pursue their American Dream.

Our Mission
Inspire, engage, and unite individuals, institutions, and communities to create the conditions for success for every child in America.

The Five Promises

Caring Adults
Young people need to be surrounded by caring adults providing love, challenge, active support, a vision for a brighter future and opportunities for them to take responsibility for their own lives.

Safe Places
Young people need physical and psychological safety at home, in school, online and in the community.

Healthy Start
Young people need the conditions that make it possible to grow physically, socially and intellectually starting at the earliest ages.

Effective Education
Young people need not only a high school diploma, but a high-quality learning experience that prepares them for college and career.

Opportunity to Serve
Young people need service opportunities to help them develop belonging in their communities, empowerment to be positive contributors and a sense of personal responsibility.