

THE HOPE IN HOPE VI

BUILDING COMMUNITY ACROSS GENERATIONS
IN PORTLAND, OREGON



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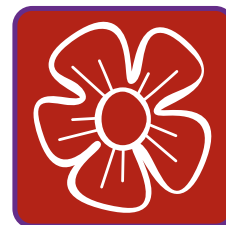
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Photos courtesy of New Columbia/Housing Authority of Portland

Forewords

Welcome to New Columbia's Story

Every day, decisions are made in our communities that remold the landscape and resonate across families and neighborhoods. This case study helps us understand how such decisions can *let everyone win* – families, neighborhoods, agencies, and the larger community – even when previous history spawned initial skeptics. We thank stakeholders in New Columbia for the opportunity to learn how the state's largest public housing site, which was transformed into a modern, sustainable, and award-winning neighborhood – was able to build community across its generations and cultures using the **Viable Futures Toolkit**. We invite you to download the Toolkit at www.viablefuturestoolkit.org and visit the website regularly for updates about emerging practices across a range of community challenges.

Paula Dressel, Vice President
JustPartners, Inc., Baltimore, MD, www.justpartners.org

From the Housing Authority of Portland, Oregon

As the lead agency with responsibility for developing and overseeing New Columbia, the Housing Authority of Portland (HAP) witnessed first hand the benefits of a collaborative planning process. We were faced with some public skepticism about the success of our bold mixed-use and mixed-income development and the challenge to build community among 2,500 diverse residents from 22 countries. What follows is a guide on how we used the **Viable Futures Toolkit** as a catalyst for discussions to find common ground and to develop new ways of thinking across agencies, disciplines and service areas.

The Toolkit played an invaluable role in:

- enhancing interaction among generations and racial/ethnic groups;
- identifying and implementing initiatives that are improving quality of life in the areas of environmental stewardship, community safety; healthy lifestyles and youth development;
- building our capacity and that of organizations with a mission to serve North Portland to meet and adapt to the evolving needs of the community; and
- extending community beyond the New Columbia campus.

With the assistance of the *Toolkit*, we are now closer to realizing our goal of building community together.

John Keating, Assistant Director for Community Building
Housing Authority of Portland

From the Lead Author

Working with New Columbia has been an exceptionally rewarding experience, and a highlight of my years devoted to community organizing. The planning process exemplified what can happen when community agencies take the opportunity to stretch beyond their day to day responsibilities and current comfort levels to look at societal needs through a more inclusive perspective. It was especially satisfying to witness the excitement, creativity and synergy of ideas that were generated by use of the **Viable Futures Toolkit**.

In tight fiscal times, the folks in Portland have an important lesson for communities throughout the country. Instead of the too-often response of inter-agency competition and retrenchment, they demonstrated how collaborative planning and programming can result in a "win-win" for all parties. I invite you to learn from the dedicated New Columbia staff and all of the partner organizations, who have sculpted a new path for our challenging times.

Janice Jackson, Senior Consultant
JustPartners, Inc.

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A Quick Glance: Turning Challenges into Opportunities and Results

How does one state's largest public housing site transform into a modern, sustainable, and award-winning neighborhood? The folks from New Columbia in Portland, Oregon, can tell you how.

This case study tells the story of how a group of community-based organizations and governmental agencies used the *Viable Futures Toolkit* in a planning process to create and implement strategies that played a key role in transforming a collection of residents into a community. Across 82 acres housing over 2,500 people from 22 countries, including 1,300+ children, we now see enhanced interaction across generations, racial/ethnic groups, and community-serving agencies. As a result of the planning process, a North Portland neighborhood is now a better place for **everyone** to live.

Faced with the decision to continuously repair or replace the ailing World War II Columbia Villa, the Housing Authority of Portland (HAP) applied for U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development HOPE VI funding to redevelop and reinvigorate the deteriorating community. In 2001, HAP was awarded a \$35 million grant, which it used to begin to transform Columbia Villa into the mixed-income, mixed-use New Columbia. In the midst of New Columbia – a mix of public housing, workforce and senior rentals, and homes for sale at market rates – HAP envisioned a Community Campus with neighborhood amenities for young and old.

New Columbia provided a prime opportunity as a “living laboratory” to test the components of the *Viable Futures Toolkit*. This was the conclusion reached by the Community Services Manager with Multnomah County's Aging and Disability Services Division (ADSD, the Area Aging on Aging) after attending a workshop focused on the *Toolkit* at a national conference. The *Toolkit* developers at that time were also seeking community sites to pilot the *Toolkit*. So, in 2007, stakeholders from housing, aging, youth, transportation and multipurpose organizations met in a planning process coordinated by ADSD in partnership with HAP. AARP provided start-up funding for the planning process in Portland, and the blue moon fund contributed support for technical assistance. The *Toolkit* supported discussions to find common ground, identify the best ways to develop opportunities for engagement in the neighborhood, and build the capacity of HAP and organizations with a mission to serve that area of Portland to adapt to the evolving needs of the community.

HAP understood that the success of New Columbia rested on the success of partnerships with residents, neighbors and community organizations. The planning process coincided with the

New Columbia is an innovative mixed-use development with housing units serving some of Portland's poorest and most ethnically diverse citizens, interspersed with privately owned homes of higher-income families. It is a bold, nationally-acclaimed demonstration that from its inception, sought to balance multiple goals – making it a perfect pilot site for the *Viable Futures Toolkit*.



need by HAP staff at New Columbia to build community among the 2,500 diverse residents – children, seniors, single adults and parents – who had moved there over the past two years. ASDS wanted to improve services provided to the New Columbia population and needed a road map for how best to accomplish this. The challenges at New Columbia were viewed as a two-fold opportunity – to build community among residents and also engage new partners in community development. The aspiration was a win-win for HAP, ASDS, agencies serving North Portland, New Columbia residents, and the surrounding neighborhood.

The *Viable Futures Toolkit* had a profound impact on planning and the implementation of programming at New Columbia – and was influential in developing new ways of thinking across agencies, disciplines and service areas. We'll describe in this case study how that unfolded – with implications for how you, too, can use the *Toolkit* as a resource in your community.

Fast forward to today, and we can see the following **dramatic changes** in New Columbia:

- **Culture change** in terms of intergenerational and multi-racial sensitivity and involvement.
- **Children with improved attitudes** toward older people.
- **Older adults with improved attitudes** about youth.
- Increased comfort level with **community safety**.
- Enhanced awareness of **environmental stewardship**.
- Partners meeting their **organizational goals**.

The strength of this ongoing initiative is its inclusive focus that involves residents and partner organizations. Residents are involved in program development and experience a direct benefit from their contributions. Partners see that working together on a shared project can produce results for a number of organizations that no single organization could have accomplished alone.

Partners remain engaged because the work at New Columbia helps them further their own organizational goals; collaboration reduces duplication of efforts, maximizes resources, and promotes increased visibility in the community for everyone in the coalition. Partners also recognize the potential to raise new funds to support the work at New Columbia from sources they had never tapped before.

That's New Columbia's story in a nutshell. Now let us tell you some of the details about how the *Viable Futures Toolkit* gave shape and sustainability to this effort.

A Closer Look at New Columbia



What decisions laid the groundwork for New Columbia? HAP was intentional in providing for household well-being during the relocation required by HOPE VI rebuilding – to the point that they are now seen as a model for responsible relocation. Although the average national household return rate is around 11%, for residents affected by HOPE VI, 33% of the original Columbia Villa families returned to live at New Columbia. About 2/3 chose not to return due to satisfaction with their new neighborhoods. Here's how HAP approached relocation:

- HAP developed a comprehensive relocation plan, with input from a 15-member task force made up of residents, housing advocates, and representatives from social services and public schools.
- Each household was offered a choice of comparable housing units, and a detailed individual plan was prepared that addressed every aspect of relocation.
- Relocation information and outreach materials were provided in the 5 primary languages spoken at Columbia Villa.
- Case management was provided to ensure family well-being during relocation.
- Multiple outreach measures were used – including written information, meetings, tours and opportunities for input – to familiarize Columbia Villa residents with New Columbia and to help them decide about returning.

Yet housing alone cannot sustain a sense of community. New Columbia is much more than a housing development. It's the Community Campus that distinguishes New Columbia from its counterparts around the country. With the award-winning Rosa Parks Elementary School and adjoining Regence Boys and Girls Club, Trenton Place Senior Housing, and a newly renovated community center and common green space, New Columbia serves as a forward-thinking nexus for education, services and community interaction. The U.S. Department of Education Richard Riley Award recognized New Columbia's Rosa Parks School as the school that best exemplifies the growing national trend of building schools as centers of community. In presenting the award, Ronald Bogle, President and CEO of the American Architectural Foundation, lauded the Rosa Parks School as "a fantastic example for other school districts, showing how multiple partners can work together and provide a strong intergenerational focus."

The Campus is a true intergenerational hub. Through carefully crafted programs, HAP and its partners have strengthened the relationships between children and their families, and children

Meet the core partners for the *Viable Futures* planning process...

The **Housing Authority of Portland (HAP)** is the largest provider of affordable housing in Oregon, serving 14,000 low-income households throughout Multnomah County. Since 1989, HAP has used its authority to issue bonds and work with public and private finance partners to build or acquire 3,800 units of affordable housing. HAP has an extensive history of successfully implementing programs that improve the lives of its residents. HAP currently manages 11 grants aimed at family self sufficiency, computer literacy, job preparation, homeownership, youth achievement and apprenticeship training as well as services for seniors and residents with disabilities.

Multnomah County, Oregon Aging and Disability Services Division (ADSD) is the first point of contact for the County's 150,000 elderly, people with disabilities and veterans. Annually, over 60,000 people receive professional consultation, in-home services, and care coordination. Major program areas include: Community Services, (Network of Care website, 24/7 Helpline, and neighborhood-based non-profit District Centers), Adult Care Home licensing (assures quality services in 600 homes), Long Term Care (Medicaid and other public benefits for 33,000), Adult Protective Services (5,000 investigations per year in the community and in licensed facilities) and Public Guardian.

As the designated Area Agency on Aging, ADSD is responsible for planning and coordinating a comprehensive system of supportive services that help older adults enhance or maintain their independence, health, and well-being. Particular attention is focused on those who have the greatest economic need, which includes low-income elders generally, and more specifically, low-income minority group seniors, older individuals with limited English proficiency, and older adults in rural areas.

and the community. These relationships have produced healthier, more self-assured youth and provided the opportunity for older adults to make valuable and lasting contributions not only to youth and their families, but also to the overall quality of life in the community through improved safety and environmental initiatives.

The New Columbia Community Campus receives funding through a wide array of public and private sources. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has strongly supported and invested in the Campus because of its unique design and purpose.



The goal of New Columbia to be a viable and vibrant community is seen, too, in its commitment to stewardship of the environment:

- Two mixed-use buildings in the community are the first HOPE VI-funded projects to earn Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) ratings from the U.S. Green Building Council.
- The Environmental Protection Agency gave New Columbia their top 2007 Award for Smart Growth Achievement. It was recognized for collaborating with public and private stakeholders to redevelop an isolated and distressed public housing site into a neighborhood that improves economic opportunity, community livability and environmental quality for both old and new residents.



Since New Columbia is so visible and such a model project on national and international levels, many eyes are on the project. The term "social experiment" was coined early on. Sometimes this term has been used in a positive way and often, in a not so positive way. Often times the development is viewed like a "fish bowl" with some critics waiting for the shoe to drop. For example, there are those in the community who want to point out that no matter how beautiful New Columbia looks, it's "still the same old villa." But then the question has to be asked, "So what does that mean – what was wrong with the old villa?"

The Stigma of Poverty

Often a response to that question relates to the low incomes of people that live there – making real the issue of the stigma of poverty and the preconceived notion of who and what a poor person is. At New Columbia, as elsewhere, longstanding poverty for adults has historically reduced a sense of possibility, which in turn can fuel young peoples' pessimism about the future. For a neighborhood previously challenged by the stigma of isolation and poverty, the "new" New Columbia provided a unique opportunity to create a nurturing environment that connects home, school and community. The many amenities at New Columbia – the school, the boys and girls club, senior housing, the community center and green spaces – enhanced the prospect for New Columbia to be better integrated with the surrounding community.

Perceptions of Racial Tension

In addition, the issue of racial tensions surfaced. The first summer New Columbia opened, one fight between African American and Latino high school youth became generalized as "Blacks and Mexicans are fighting." Old fears were stirred up among many New Columbia residents, particularly seniors, who were then hesitant to go out onto the community campus.

This incident occurred in the midst of the *Viable Futures* planning process. So New Columbia and its partner agencies sought to develop initiatives to address perceived racial tensions directly and enhance feelings of community safety. The challenge was to separate perceptions from reality, and seek to change ingrained attitudes that New Columbia is really just the "old Columbia Villa" – that the gangs and drugs are back and it isn't safe to go outside – attitudes found both within New Columbia and in the surrounding neighborhood. In response, many of the initiatives that were generated from the *Viable Futures* planning process focused on building effective communication across the races, as well as across the generations.

Building a Viable and Vibrant Future: How Did New Columbia Get There?

Who Lives in the New Columbia Neighborhood?

New Columbia is home to more than 2,500 adults and children, with 11 languages spoken among families representing 22 countries. The latest U.S. Census Bureau report shows that New Columbia and the surrounding Portsmouth neighborhood continue to experience low levels of educational attainment and high poverty levels. Ninety percent of students attending Rosa Parks School are eligible for free and reduced lunches. Census data also show a significant level of economic need among older adults.

New Columbia is home to 850 households – 232 are homeowners and 618 are renters. Here's a sketch of who they are:

Age:

- 1,300 children/youth; 80% ages 0-12.
- 1,200 adults; 109 seniors – oldest is 98.
- 25% of seniors are either raising their grand-children or have a significant role in their care.

Race:

- African American/Black – 58%.
- White – 23%.
- Latino – 12%.
- Asian/Pacific Islander – 4%.
- American Indian/Alaskan Native – 3%.

As a result of the *Viable Futures* planning process, each party in the planning process – HAP, ADSD, and their partner agencies – began to envision the larger possibilities through partnership. What evolved was a multifold purpose, to:

- create a sense of community at New Columbia,
- offer programs and services that benefit the diverse constituencies served by each partner, and
- expand the services available to children, families and seniors in the wider neighborhood and community.

One of the goals at New Columbia was to increase first time home ownership, particularly among lower income and minority families. Here's an overview of who currently lives in the units that are owned:

- 79% are first time home buyers.
- 24% have incomes at or below 60% of median income.
- 47% are people of color.
- 56% have children living in the home.

Getting Started

Staff at the two lead organizations, ADSD and HAP, provided crucial vision and leadership. They identified a key opportunity – to develop partnerships among New Columbia, Multnomah County and community agencies, which would lead to improved quality of life for residents at New Columbia and the neighborhood – while enabling partner organizations to be more responsive to their service areas. They saw the value to both of their organizations, and were willing to commit their time and organizational resources to the *Viable Futures*

planning process. Their agreement on the division of responsibilities built upon the strengths of the two lead organizations. ADSD offered lead planning and facilitation, and HAP played a lead implementation role.

Lead partners were able to articulate and “make the case” for collaborative planning which initially helped to bring in partners, and their consistent leadership throughout the process helped keep everyone engaged. The partners who were identified came from organizations that had a stake in New Columbia and the surrounding neighborhood, and who represented aging and youth and ethnically diverse populations (see inset box for list of partner organizations).

Partner Organizations in New Columbia, 2008

Youth-serving:

Portland Public Schools
Boys and Girls Club
New Columbia Youth Council

Senior-serving:

Loaves and Fishes
AARP
Elders in Action (ADSD advisory council)

All generations:

Metropolitan Family Services
Ride Connection, Inc.
YWCA
Urban League
Office of Neighborhood Involvement
Portland Parks and Recreation

Some other ingredients were valuable in moving New Columbia's community building process ahead:

- Portland was able to capitalize on and benefit from the national momentum on livable communities and intergenerational approaches.
- New Columbia's selection as a pilot site to test the *Viable Futures Toolkit* played a large role in people's interest in the project.
- AARP provided start-up funding – and, along with that, credibility.
- Additional funding from the blue moon fund in Charlottesville, Virginia, the prime funder of the *Viable Futures Toolkit*, allowed continuation of the planning process through support for a facilitator (essential to create an open atmosphere, focus on common ground, keep the group's focus, and sustain communication between meetings); the opportunity for technical assistance with the *Toolkit* (to appreciate all of its possible uses and applications); and that ever-appealing feature of meals at the meetings!

Creating the Environment for New Perspectives

The *Toolkit* created room to revisit the realization that problems are usually – but should not be – tackled within silos (e.g., senior serving organizations thinking about problems of older adults and youth serving organizations focusing on kids). To providers of social services in Portland, this is certainly not a new concept. But the *Toolkit* presented and reinforced the idea in concrete ways. Planning group members were energized by the opportunity to come together with like-minded colleagues and think beyond their day to day activities to brainstorm outside the box, which is often a “luxury” today.

A particular strength of the *Toolkit* is that its exercises are designed to promote thinking from the perspective of individual organizations as well as from the perspective of a collaborative

process. This is one of the major reasons the stakeholders valued the process. They were able to think creatively about their own organizations as well as address the collective task at hand.



HAP's Community Building staff at New Columbia were active planning group participants and integrated project recommendations into their work. Like the partners, they too saw that working collaboratively with partner organizations could make it easier for them to accomplish their goals. And – they saw direct benefits to New Columbia residents, such as enhanced interaction among the generations and healthier eating habits. This contributed to a “culture change” for New Columbia staff, where they now routinely ask how an activity or project can be intergenerational.

Community residents were engaged in the planning process through the use of informal discussion groups (which mixed seniors and youth), interviews, and surveys to solicit input about how their needs could be met and the types of activities they would like to see at New Columbia. These inquiries asked residents what was needed to improve community livability and the quality of life at New Columbia in the areas of: health care; nutrition; transportation; and keeping New Columbia clean and green. Many of the residents' ideas were incorporated into the projects eventually developed – such as the multi-cultural cooking classes and intergenerational environmental clean-up and re-cycling teams.

Perhaps the most valuable outcome of the discussion groups was that they produced freestyle conversations about perceptions – and misperceptions – that seniors and youth had towards each other. Here are a few:

- From youth – when they think of seniors, they think there are too many differences between them.
- From seniors – youth think that seniors forget what it is like to be young.
- From youth – seniors and youth would get along if it were a “good match” such as a WWII or Vietnam Vet and a youth who was interested in history.
- From youth – bringing parents into activities gets youth excited and shows the parents that the kids are responsible.

The pocket parks that became a core feature at New Columbia were instituted, in part, to address these perceptions. They provided a welcoming atmosphere for residents of all ages and races to interact informally, and to participate jointly in activities and educational events.

Using the *Toolkit* Components

Over the course of a year, *Toolkit* components were instrumental in focusing the dialogue on common ground across groups, identifying ways that different generations could work together, identifying key issues and areas of cross-fertilization among partner agencies and shaping specific community initiatives. Here's how each tool was used in the planning process and how it contributed to the eventual outcomes:

Core Values Agreed Upon by the Planning Group

These were continually re-visited and guided the planning process throughout:

- Single interventions should solve multiple problems.
- Synergy should result from various outcomes: 1+1 = much more than 2.
- Interventions are considered with an eye to the future not just the present.
- Older adults, youth and families support and are supported by the plans.
- Plans complement the green and clean standard.

→ **Executive Summary and DVD** – The DVD was shown at the first meeting and the Executive Summary was used to start discussion on the *Toolkit*, to engage community partners, and to raise awareness of intergenerational approaches to problem solving.

→ **Community Checklist** – This tool guided assessment of current strengths and needs in New Columbia and partner agencies; helped to articulate core values of the planning group; and identified immediate ideas for implementation and possible areas for future development.

→ **Issue Briefs** – They focused more deeply on the areas prioritized through the checklist; stirred creative thinking about potential interventions at New Columbia; articulated core values; and provided a framework to discuss potential approaches.

→ **Organizational Assessment** – This tool raised awareness about agencies' cross-generational focus (or lack thereof); prompted partners to assess their own strategic plans to review how well these support and further intergenerational approaches; bolstered discussion on common areas of interest and provided clearer understanding of partner strengths.

→ **Tips for Coalition-Building and Collaboration** – This tool identified which agencies are key stakeholders in the New Columbia neighborhood; find common ground to coalesce around those rallying points; and promoted engagement of elder and youth residents.

→ **Communication Guide** – It identified main audiences; and shaped messages for residents of New Columbia and partner organizations, which were tested and then fine-tuned for specific audiences.

→ **Resource Development** – This tool reinforced that collaborative funding can address multiple concerns, such as meeting needs of New Columbia residents, providing employment opportunities to New Columbia youth and helping partner agencies accomplish their goals; and encouraged the planning group to consider space and data as commodities to share and to collaborate on shared funding proposals.

→ **Planning Worksheet** – It guided the planning effort and helped shape the overall process.

Finding Common Ground

The following priority areas for taking action were agreed upon by all partners, and these became the focus of each meeting's discussion:

- Intergenerational and multi-cultural interaction.
- Environmental awareness.
- Healthy food preparation and purchasing.
- Community safety.

Within the priority areas, specific projects were identified and implemented that addressed the interests of the partners and met resident needs at New Columbia.

Here's a glimpse at the work:

- **Hosting of Reach and Teach Pocket Park Events** – Local agencies came to New Columbia to share resources and support the community.
- **The YWCA promoted Hands Are Not for Hurting** – Events to foster healthy relationships based upon respect and equality. Residents young and old took the pledge, "I will not use my hands or my words for hurting myself or others."
- **The Loaves and Fishes/Nutrition program and Portland Parks and Recreation** – Collaborated on a bingo pocket park event.
- **Intergenerational environmental patrols** – A crew of 7 youth outreach workers and a senior who lives on-site worked together to clean up parks and report biohazards.
- **Youth recycling assistance to elders** – Through a Summer Youth Employment Program, youth assisted elder residents with recycling and running errands.
- **Big City Produce cooking classes** – Families met at *Big City Produce*, a market located on the New Columbia campus, for a free cooking class offered once a month and to learn about healthy eating on a budget.
- **Community Garden** – A 4,000 square foot community garden, *Seeds of Harmony*, serves as an intergenerational food growing garden for New Columbia residents and surrounding neighbors.
- **Smart Reading Program** – Students from Rosa Parks School were linked up with seniors from Trenton Terrace for tutoring.

What Kept Partners at the Table...

- All partners were given meaningful roles, and their contributions were valued and recognized.
- As community ideas were identified, the group designated actions needed and the persons responsible for each objective.
- A reporting period was built into each meeting to update partners on results and reinforce accountability.
- Partners were willing to re-visit their assumptions about different populations and adapt messages and strategies based on what they learned.
- Partner meetings served as a forum to celebrate success.
- Successful projects based on sustainable community values were and continue to be highlighted in the New Columbia Community Newsletter.

→ **Youth summer employment** – The Urban League of Portland placed New Columbia youth in senior nutrition program sites where their 10 hours a week service was rewarded with a \$50 gift card each week. Both the organizers and the recipients of youth service praised the program. The Urban League's Education Director, Howard Moriah, noted that, "*For many of the youth interns, this was their first employment experience. The Youth Employment Program provides youth of New Columbia with invaluable work experience and important lessons about themselves, along with transferable skills and strategies for life.*" Ruth Jensen, the manager of Two Rivers Loaves and Fishes nutrition site, offered these insights: "*Pablo Picasso was quoted as having said that action is the foundational key to success. The students who went through the training sessions at Two Rivers Loaves and Fishes demonstrated to our senior clients that they were courteous, motivated and ready to spring into action in all areas where they were needed.*"

Value of the Collaboration to Sponsoring Agencies and Partners

The agencies and partners may have become part of the *Viable Futures* planning process in support of New Columbia's residents, but they, too, gained a lot in the process. Across participants, stronger partnerships were created in the following ways:

- Less duplication of effort among/between partner organizations.
- Recognition that these collaborative efforts support and enhance individual organizations' missions.
- Cost effectiveness by combining efforts to meet community needs.
- New funding allies.
- New advocacy partners.
- Greater understanding of one another's services and strengths.
- Greater visibility for individual organizations in the community by being part of a coalition.
- Culture change around intergenerational and multi-cultural awareness and involvement.

Here's an example of how Portland agencies experienced some interesting shifts in perspective from using the *Toolkit* with others. The YWCA Senior Services Department, a subcontractor of ADSD, was invited to the table because of its involvement with older adults. The parent YWCA organization, of course, serves many age groups. As the Senior Services Department became engaged in promoting the generation-spanning "Reach and Teach" project to encourage





appropriate responses to violence, that experience helped inform the YWCA more broadly about the value of improved linkage of its own services to families, seniors and youth.

Abby Kennedy, former Program Director of YWCA Senior Services, described her change of perspective this way: “The *Toolkit* planning process was very instrumental in broadening my horizon of populations we wanted to serve. It stretched me to look beyond my comfort zone of an age-based lens to a community-based perspective that would

benefit all ages. As outcomes of using the *Toolkit*, our organization was strengthened internally and we developed new partnerships that enhanced our work in the community.”

The value of the planning process extends well beyond this specific phase for New Columbia and its Community Partners. It is further seen in:

- **The extension of community** to the surrounding neighborhood – as evidenced by attendance at many New Columbia events by community agencies and neighbors from surrounding areas.
- **Increased visibility** and a positive image of New Columbia to voters and the media – articles in neighborhood newspapers are now more positive and feature pocket park events sponsored by the partners.
- **Win-win funding collaborations** – HAP provides technical assistance in grant-writing, partners receive funding, and New Columbia benefits from support for ongoing initiatives.
- **Co-location on-site** – The YWCA recently moved its Senior Services Department on-site to New Columbia. Two case managers work with seniors 60+ to enable them to live independently and be active contributors to their community.
- **Economic opportunity** – New Columbia programs are providing employment opportunities for residents of all ages and enhancing the job skills of youth.
- **Model for other initiatives** – the *Viable Futures Toolkit* planning process is being considered by HAP as a model for other housing projects in Portland.

Lee Girard, Community Services Manager for ADSD, describes how the planning process has broadened that network’s horizons: “The New Columbia *Viable Futures* project has provided invaluable experience to the aging network in Portland in partnering together with other community networks at the neighborhood level to plan and implement community livability initiatives that directly impact the lives of seniors, children and youth and their families.”

Lessons Learned from This Investment Approach

Growing a Commitment – What did it Take for Success?

- **Leadership:** having lead organizations step up with vision, the ability to persuade others of the benefits of a collaborative process, and the willingness to commit staff and other resources.
- **Partners:** identifying potential partners that had a stake in the community and who represented diverse interests; identifying each organization’s strengths and developing initiatives that utilized these assets.
- **Facilitation:** finding a good facilitator who could create a “safe and fun” environment and keep people focused.
- **Common ground:** identifying issues early on which then became the focus for group discussions and the selection and implementation of projects.
- **Incentives:** finding ways that the project could help partner organizations meet their own organizational missions and give them visibility in the community while keeping them at the table for collective action.
- **Funding:** locating start-up funding to support the initial planning process.
- **Building on success:** celebrating and marketing early successes, and using these to generate support for further initiatives.
- **Cultivating new leadership:** finding leaders who emerged among the partners and the community who could carry the project and vision forward.

What Might Have Been Done Differently?

- **Inclusion:** Earlier involvement of residents in the planning process might have brought certain issues to light earlier – such as the need for more relevant messaging and communication strategies to the neighborhood itself.
- **Message:** The messages that were initially developed were more relevant to agency perspectives, and did not test well with many residents. After input, it was determined that communications need to be more applicable to real life experiences and presented in a “story-telling” mode.
- **Long term agency buy-in:** The planning group was comprised of a wide range of representatives from agencies, including directors, program managers, case managers and volunteers. Providing more assistance to community partner representatives on how to present the benefits of the project to agency leadership and boards would contribute to more agency buy-in over the long-term.

- **Staff transitions:** Toward the end of the planning process and in the midst of program implementation, representatives of some key partners moved on to other positions. These included the lead partner at ADSD, the primary community builder at HAP, and one of the YWCA representatives who had been among the most active planning group members. Their departures contributed to some loss of continuity and drove home the need for new champions. However, since the *Toolkit* had already helped to establish a blueprint for programs at New Columbia, program implementation continued. And – one of the workgroup members ended up being hired as a community builder at New Columbia!

Building upon Success—Work in Process

Although the formal *Viable Futures* planning process ended in December, 2007, and in spite of transitions at some of the key partner agencies, the guiding values and priority areas that the group developed are still a driving force at New Columbia. Most of the original partners are still very invested in New Columbia, and some new community organizations have since become involved. The core activities that were generated from the planning group have been expanded into impressive new initiatives.

Senior and youth resident community builders

New Columbia now has six new resident community builders. These individuals all live at New Columbia, and include youth and older adults. They are working to build a strong community through projects such as youth programs, helping out at the Trenton Place senior residence and the Boys and Girls Club, leading the Saturday litter patrol, assisting with newsletter distribution, and participating on event committees.

Terry McLain, 66, currently serves as one of six resident community builders for New Columbia. A longtime active member of the former Columbia Villa Resident Association and a Vietnam veteran, he is known as New Columbia’s “Great Ambassador.”

Terry is in charge of the Youth Employment Program and logs 20-30 volunteer hours weekly. Under his guidance, young men and women between the ages of 12 and 18 work at the University Park Community Center, the Boys and Girls Club and Trenton Terrace, where many New Columbia seniors live. In addition, they pick up trash, keep the parks litter free, deliver flyers, and help out with weekly food giveaways.

With nearly 1,300 young people living at New Columbia, there is an ever-present need to help them find purpose through healthy and productive activities. The youth, who come from a range of ethnic backgrounds and have seen their share of challenges, need guidance on the path to becoming self-sufficient adults. McLain is the perfect person to lead them on this path:



responsible and stable, playful and empathetic – a role model and also a friend. *“My biggest reward for working with the kids is if I see them later, and they’re doing well – they’ve got a job and are helping to support their family,”* says McLain. Among his blessings, he says, is the opportunity to be of service to his community: *“It keeps me going.”*

Continuation/expansion of pocket parks

Over 20 Pocket Park events occurred in the summer of 2008, more than doubling from the previous year. Here is a sampling of community partners and the educational and social events they sponsored for people of all ages:

- o **Bureau of Environmental Services:** Sponsored a Rain Garden Party for kids to learn about the benefits of bioswales to the environment. (see more about bioswales on the next page).
- o **Metropolitan Family Services:** Created an intergenerational event by providing all sorts of games – puzzles, board games, even indoor bowling.
- o **YWCA of Greater Portland, Senior Services:** Held a sidewalk chalk art contest with awards for “most colorful, funniest, prettiest, most wonderful, etc.” The judge of the contest was an 85 year old resident whose life revolves around art and whose husband was an artist featured in the Smithsonian.
- o **Trenton Senior Housing Residents:** Showed children how to make crafts and bracelets.
- o **Loaves and Fishes:** Seniors invited youth to attend a show by Penny’s Puppets, a professional puppeteer, and had nutritional snacks.
- o **Center for Family Success:** Provided information on obtaining a GED, and awareness around positive parenting techniques. Brought books to give away to youth and supplies to make bookmarks.
- o **Rock n Roll Camp for Girls:** Three high school girls came to the park to play rock music and let kids take turns playing drums, bass, guitar and vocals. The goal was to boost self esteem in girls and make them feel confident and empowered.
- o **Local branch of the Multnomah County Library:** Brought brand new books to give away and read books in English and Spanish. Children could read to the therapy reading dog “Sita,” a real dog who is a non-judgmental listener. Children also made dog puppets out of construction paper and brown lunch sacks.
- o **Fit Right Northwest and Foot Traffic:** Hosted a Fun Run, where kids split up into groups with an expert runner and ran around the neighborhood. Kids also received an athletic bag, water bottle, and Olympic Trials poster with famous athletes.
- o **Red Cross:** Talked about being prepared for an earth quake and natural disasters with their “Disaster Dog” – a volunteer in a huge dog suit.

Highlights of other recent initiatives at New Columbia:

- o New Columbia has kicked off an **Adopt a Raingarden Campaign**, where residents and families can sign up to help their bioswale “survive and thrive.” New Columbia has 101 bioswales, which consist of landscaping filled with vegetation that filters runoff water so that it seeps into the ground and keeps silt and pollution from going into the Columbia River. Residents agree to watch for debris and litter, bicycle or foot traffic in/through the bioswale, and damage to plants. To date, 30 households have taken ownership of a bioswale.
- o New Columbia residents and staff worked with community partners to organize a large **National Night Out** event. The event promoted the ideals of a safe and strong community by fostering solidarity to prevent crime. Community Builders, apartment complex managers, residents, Portland Parks and Recreation Staff and the Office of Neighborhood Involvement jointly put this event together.
- o **K-Ching! (Kids Creating Harmony in Neighborhood Growth)** – is a Youth Employment Program – one for 12-15 year olds and one for 16-18 year olds, which has Urban League involvement. Youth attend orientations and interviews, and are placed at locations around New Columbia – the Boys and Girls Club, Trenton Terrace (the senior housing complex), Loaves and Fishes Senior Nutrition Program, and the University Park Community Center.
- o **CREW (Children Respecting Each Other Worldwide)** conducts the **New Columbia Youth Academy**, an 8 week program that teaches young people ages 12-17 leadership skills, how to make positive choices, goal setting, and communicating with respect and honesty. The main tenets of the academy are respect of self and others, and personal accountability and responsibility in school, at home and at work. In order to effectively teach these life principles, the CREW curriculum – developed around evidence-based psychology practices – addresses topics like conflict resolution, problem solving, anger management, effective speaking and listening, gang prevention, social etiquette, assertiveness, negative thinking, and substance abuse versus healthy living.

An evaluation is in process to gain a better understanding of how residents feel about their home and how the neighboring community views New Columbia. Surveys and focus groups will glean perspectives about the current livability of New Columbia and solicit ideas about what else can be done to build even stronger engagement among residents, neighbors and partner organizations.

Further, ADSD continues its strong commitment to initiatives that will improve community livability in the New Columbia neighborhood. With leadership from ADSD, the Healthy Aging Coalition of Multnomah County is collaborating with the Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) project – a community organizing effort in North Portland, spearheaded by the Multnomah County Health Department, to promote good nutrition and physical activity among schoolchildren and their families. In conjunction with HEAL, the Coalition seeks to identify areas of common interest (e.g., access to healthy food is an issue for both young and old), capitalize on

opportunities for collaboration (e.g., improving neighborhood safety to encourage more physical activity that benefits people of all ages), and promote intergenerational understanding and cooperation (e.g., exploring ways for youth and older adults to work together). This approach is based on many of the principles outlined in the *Viable Futures Toolkit*. In addition, ADSD is surveying other communities to identify ways that new partnerships like those formed in New Columbia can enhance its work elsewhere.

You, Too, Can Benefit from This Approach

This Portland neighborhood can say today that it is a better place for having utilized the *Toolkit* tools and point of view in its community. The tremendous strides that have been made in the New Columbia neighborhood clearly demonstrate the rewards that can come from using the *Viable Futures Toolkit* in a collaborative planning effort.

If a housing component is not part of your work, this case study still has applicability to you. In fact, a strong undercurrent throughout the discussion in Portland was that housing alone cannot sustain a sense of community. The partners in this initiative learned that successful community-building rests on the success of partnerships with residents, neighbors and community organizations who reach beyond their traditional points of view to a community-based perspective that benefits all ages. Many doors open onto the prospects of building a viable future characterized by more wholistic thinking and the maximization of existing resources.

And – for those who may be under the impression that this could only happen in Portland or another area of the Pacific Northwest, where some say “nirvana” rules, keep in mind the significant obstacles that were (and still are) present in New Columbia. Similar challenges may exist in your community. Portland’s experience is a testament that the *Viable Futures Toolkit* can be an invaluable resource for addressing challenges and obtaining results that work for everyone. You don’t have to use every component of the *Toolkit* like Portland did in order to get results. But we think you’ll find something in it that speaks to the pressing needs of today – and tomorrow. We invite you to join with your own community partners, benefit from the economies that partnership offers, and experience the greater success that can be achieved when we look out for one another and work toward a viable future together.

“There are so many sayings that people use like ‘what we do together is so much more than what we can do alone.’ But using the *Viable Futures Toolkit* really gave that old saying a whole new meaning. It was amazing how quickly people saw a place where their organization could get involved, even if at first it didn’t seem to be directly related to their individual mission. They came to believe that what we were trying to achieve was very similar to the beliefs and values of their organizations. Without the use of the *Toolkit*, what would have taken 2-3 years to get organized came together in less than a year.”

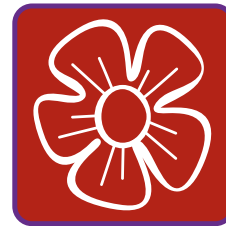
John Keating
Assistant Director for
Community Building, Housing
Authority of Portland



Case Studies in the *Viable Futures Toolkit Series*:

1. Jefferson Area Board for Aging, Charlottesville, VA: Chapter 1
2. Jefferson Area Board for Aging, Charlottesville, VA: Chapter 2
3. Arizona Community Foundation
4. New Columbia Community, Portland, Oregon

All are available at www.viablefuturestoolkit.org.





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