

Building Strong, Diverse & Sustainable Communities

# Social Capital *and* Equitable Neighborhood Revitalization *on Columbus' Southside*

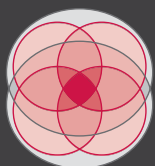
By Jason Reece, Jillian Olinger, and Kip Holley



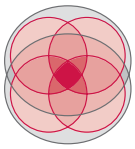
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## Table of Contents

- 4** An Opportunity-rich Southside
- 8** Section I: Defining Social Capital
- 12** Section II: What are the Barriers to Building Social Capital in a Diverse Setting?
- 15** Section III: Third Places
- 18** Section IV: Moving Forward

# An Opportunity-rich Southside



**T**he energy building on the Southside is palpable. There is not one corner of the community that is not seeing some form of investment—from the Reeb redevelopment at the south end, to the Nationwide Children’s housing initiative at the north end, change is happening. It’s an exciting time to be a member of this community. But the Southside residents have always known there was something unique about the Southside—from its origins, it has been a community marked by diversity. In its industrial heyday Eastern Europeans, and Black and white Appalachians not only worked together—they were neighbors. And though industry has changed, the diversity of the community is as vibrant as ever.

Yet the Southside has its share of challenges. Until recently, investment on the Southside has been small in comparison to the growing need, especially in the wake of the housing crisis and recession. The Southside has high rates of infant mortality, incarceration, and unemployment. Many streets are pock-marked with vacant housing and lots. We know that neighborhoods matter for life outcomes, especially for children. Moreover, we understand that no single negative factor leads

to the creation of a marginalized community. Rather, a range of factors—including high rates of incarceration, neighborhood disinvestment, housing barriers, educational and early childhood challenges, and labor market discrimination—act in combination, restricting marginalized groups from access to opportunities and severely limiting the individual and collective ability to build assets.

More than ever before we understand how neighborhoods can impact us, especially children, physically, mentally, and emotionally. For example, studies have found that when children are exposed to high levels of stress—both within the home (for example, overcrowding, mental illness) and within the neighborhood (violence, crime, substandard housing)—these stressors thwart the development of their brain—impairing cognitive, emotional, and physical development—and lead to worse adult health outcomes compared to adults who did not experience such childhood stress.<sup>1</sup> Quite simply, stressed neighborhoods are bad for children.

We know what neighborhoods of opportunity look like. They are home to high-performing schools, recreation space

for children to play safely, accessible and affordable health care, stable and affordable housing, fresh food, and an environment free from chaos and disorder. Perhaps what is most exciting about the investments on the Southside is that so many elements of opportunity are being addressed. There are health care investments, including attention to infant mortality and prenatal care. Improved educational outcomes, especially early childhood, has become a central focus for stakeholders across the community. New-build and revitalized affordable housing has been created throughout. And a new economic redevelopment corporation has been created to focus on revitalizing Parsons Avenue.

We are at a unique moment of time—the opportunity to create a unifying vision for these myriad investments is upon us. But this window is fleeting. Too often in community redevelopment initiatives, the investment and development—the brick and mortar and market pieces—tend to overwhelm the process, to the neglect of reinvigorating community engagement and developing social capital. On the Southside, there are commit-

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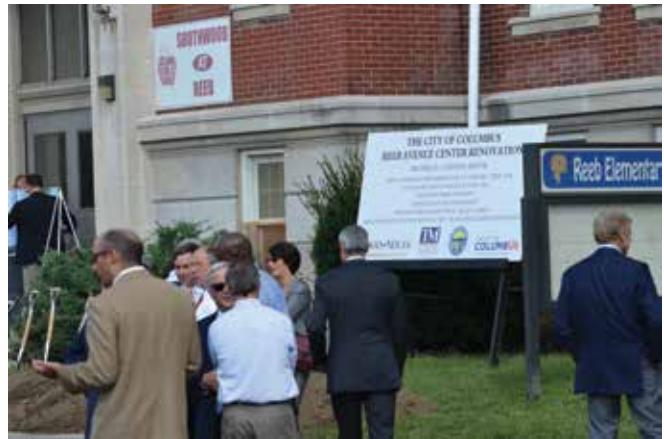
## WHEN CHILDREN ARE EXPOSED TO HIGH LEVELS OF STRESS— BOTH WITHIN THE HOME AND WITHIN THE NEIGHBORHOOD— THESE STRESSORS THWART THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR BRAIN

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ted champions who recognize the value and necessity of this engagement for any investment to yield its full potential. We have the opportunity to serve as a model of a new kind of community revitalization, one that truly puts people first. We can leverage what research tells us about neighborhoods, opportunity, and cognitive development to form creative collaborations, for example, connecting with social service agencies. We can develop activities (such as painting murals) and programs (such as community gardening) focused on engaging residents—and especially young children—to keep the momentum going, especially as much of redevelopment occurs over a long time horizon and many aspects are invisible. The goal for all of this redevelopment activity should be nothing less than the creation of a sustainable, diverse, and opportunity-rich community, one that supports its residents, even the youngest among us, at every level—physically, socially, and emotionally.

### Southside by the Numbers

The Southside of Columbus encompasses a large area with a considerable number of civic associations within its borders. Running from High Street on the West, Livingston Avenue to the North and Route 104 in the South, the neighborhood encompasses ten different sub neighborhoods as it stretches east to Alum Creek. The demographics of the community indicate that it is comprised of low-income and working class people—43% of households earn less than \$25,000 a year.<sup>2</sup>



Forty-two percent of the population is white, and about 50% of the population is Black.<sup>3</sup> Twenty-five percent of the population is under 18; another 25% is between the ages of 18 and 34; and about 40% is between the ages of 35 and 64.<sup>4</sup>

Approximately 25% of the housing is vacant in the Southside.<sup>5</sup> The housing stock is suitable for redevelopment, consisting of mainly single family homes and duplexes. Significant revitalization is already underway that is increasing the availability of safe, decent affordable homes. Despite these initial investments, the Southside is not at immediate risk of displacement given the deflated housing prices in the area. However, commercial-property speculation has increased recently, complicating the already complex redevelopment landscape.

Crime and safety have been cited as key concerns in the community. Zip codes 43206 and 43207, when compared with other zip codes in Franklin County, maintain a disproportionately high proportion of individuals returning from prison (11 and 7 percent, respectively), as well as those going to prison (9 and 7 percent, respectively).<sup>6</sup> Unemployment, about 16%, has also been a concern on the Southside.<sup>7</sup>

The current real-estate investment activity occurring in the Southside is very exciting. Already, more than \$20 million in housing investment has begun, including senior apartments, tax credit housing, and building improvements. This particular investment has the potential to transform 25% of the community's housing stock. The \$8 million dollar John Maloney Health Center has just opened, and a \$12 million redevelopment of the Reeb Elementary School into a community service center is underway. New construction is moving south down the Parsons Avenue corridor. The Columbus Metropolitan Library is relocating and expanding its branch on the Southside. The one thing missing is a unified vision for how these myriad investments can transform the Southside into a sustainable, diverse, and opportunity-rich neighborhood.

Efforts at community engagement in the redevelopment process have been initiated, with varying success. For example, the City of Columbus funded a seven month planning process with residents to guide community focus areas as part of the Southern Gateway Collaborative. This process has resulted in the collection of 500 surveys, with 300 participants attending community meetings. There were ten different committees focused on issues the community identified as pressing (housing, health, and so on), collectively delivering over 190 total recommendations. The process of querying residents about

their individual needs, or challenges facing the community is a valuable diagnostic tool.

One of the key challenges cited by the Southern Gateway Collaborative engagement process was the issue of engagement. In particular, it has proven difficult to get more families involved in the civic associations; service providers are struggling to get people to take services (for example, an early childhood center has vacant spots); and engagement with hard-to-reach residents, such as re-entering citizens, has proven difficult.

### **Maximizing Existing Assets to Build on New Ones: Opportunities Abound**

Important goals for redevelopment efforts in distressed neighborhoods include the promotion of a healthy, culturally and economically diverse community; provision of safe recreational opportunities for children; increased economic and educational opportunities for the community; and enhanced engagement of residents, especially parents. The Southside has tremendous potential to build upon its assets and recent investments to foster the “virtuous cycle” of neighborhood revitalization; more importantly, the community has the potential to become a truly diverse and revitalized community, a community rich in social capital.

The realization of these goals, however, will be frustrated without a well-rounded understanding of the community’s existing assets. While engagement processes focus on what the community needs and wants, a similar exercise should be reproduced which focuses on how to creatively capitalize on the many existing assets. Conducting an **asset mapping** project (which relies heavily on community participation) and surveying the community on social capital, and the extents of their various social networks, can enhance engagement and support asset-based development.

One of the critical assets on the Southside is the community’s diversity. The Southside has 10 civic associations located within its boundaries, communities that differ widely in regards to their demographics, housing and assets. When considering how to build stronger social capital within the community, **establishing more ‘bridging’ social capital** is an important component. Though each civic association has its own individual history and character, it is important to note that their perceived differences should not serve as “boundaries” which interfere with the capacity of all residents on the Southside to see each other as neighbors. The goal is to hold multiple micro-identities in balance with a larger unified identity.

Several community groups are located on the city’s Southside. Southside STAY, one of these community groups, has the potential to significantly assist in the development of ‘bridging’ social capital among families in the area. Many of the Southside’s wealthier families moved away when their children reached school-age, given the underperformance of Columbus Public Schools. STAY is committed to supporting Southside schools by engaging with the families of the community to maintain its diversity and increase educational opportunities for students through partnerships with educators. Education is a natural organizing issue. To date, however, STAY has been largely focused on the neighborhoods of German Village, Merion Village, Schumacher Place, and the Brewery Dis-

trict, creating a missed opportunity to building greater social capital throughout the community—there is no parent-teacher group on the Southside.

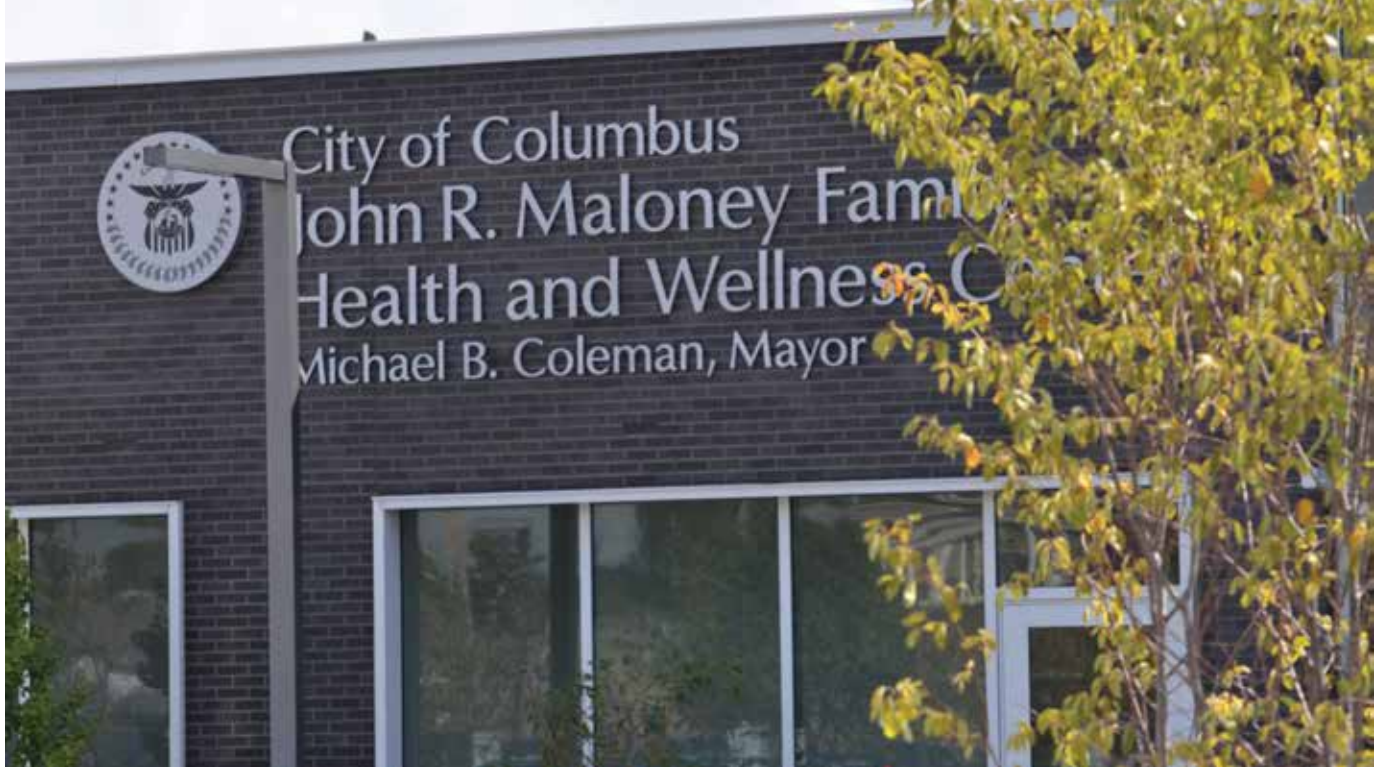
The opening of the **Reeb Community Center** presents a great organic opportunity for families on both sides of Parsons to socialize and intermingle. However, targeted efforts at facilitating engagements of these families should be done in advance of the Center’s opening, and additional programming developed once the center opens. Engaging parents and families east of Parsons may be more challenging than engaging the cohort group to the west. Households east of Parsons are likely to spend a greater portion of each day meeting the day’s necessities, leaving little free time to attend meetings, etc.

We do know that face-to-face, door-to-door engagement works, and can be effective on the Southside. One strategy is to set aside a small seed grant from the investment in the Reeb Community Center to **develop a Neighborhood Leadership Academy**, similar to what the United Way organizes. This program is designed to provide training to current and emerging community leaders in the areas of advocacy, consensus-building, and effective collaboration and communication skills.<sup>8</sup> While this program is open to anyone from any Columbus neighborhood, a site located within the Southside and focused solely on the community and the youth who live there would be beneficial, and could be done in partnership with the existing Academy. Such a program could train community volunteers on effectively communicating with Southside residents, leading to increased interaction with the Academy and the area’s residents, increased interaction among residents, as well as a number of other potentially positive outcomes. We would recommend that the Academy commit resources to engage families when the time is appropriate, and partner with the neighborhood to build new connections, and help strengthen existing services.

The **new library** also presents a great opportunity to encourage more interaction among area residents. The new space will have ample room for homework and job-help centers, and other amenities. As with the Reeb Community Center, the new library can act as a connector.

The coalescence of several investments on the Southside present the opportunity for the **creation of a “Children’s Health Zone.”** Such a zone would be modeled after the Children’s Harlem Zone, which has offered educational, social service, and community-building programs to children and families since 1970. Nationwide Children’s Hospital already has a similar program underway, the Healthy Neighborhoods, Healthy Families program (HNHF), which targets programming in zip codes 43205, 43206, and 43207. This initiative focuses on affordable housing, health and wellness, education, safe and accessible neighborhoods, and workforce and economic development.

The presence of such an anchor institution, committed to being a good neighbor, is a huge asset for the community. The re-opening of the John Maloney Health Center on south Parsons, an \$8 million investment, includes Columbus Public Health’s Women-Infants-and-Children (WIC) Program, which offers nutrition education, nutritious foods and breastfeeding education and support to women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, and infants and children under 5 years of age. The Moms2Be program is also expected to provide support ser-



vices out of the center. Together, these two institutions present a great opportunity to form partnerships around the issues of health and wellness. This is a natural avenue for increasing community engagement opportunities on the Southside. The Nationwide Children’s Hospital holistic approach to health through its HNHF initiative can serve as a model for similar programs at the new health center. Particularly relevant to these health initiatives is research that unpacks the **nuances between income inequality, social capital, and public health**: “the growing gap between the rich and the poor affects the social organization of communities and the resulting damage to the social fabric may have profound implications for the public’s health.”<sup>9</sup>

The redevelopment of the Reeb Elementary School also provides an opportunity to **integrate education and recreational opportunities into a Health Zone**. The Reeb Community Center is a multi-use, public-private community center with emphasis on education. Likely tenants of the new space include Boys & Girls Club of Columbus, Southside Learning and Development Center, a workforce development center, the Columbus Southside Pride Center, and Community Development for All People programs. Research supports the importance of shared spaces for developing bridging social capital.<sup>10</sup>

However, physical investments will be a key part of the success in encouraging families to the north and from the west of Parsons to utilize these services. For example, creating “visual safe-ways” into the Reeb Community Center will be a critical factor to the Center’s success—abandoned buildings and vacant lots do not engender confidence in parents wanting their children to take advantage of services and amenities the facility will offer.

**Moving Forward on the Southside**

A lot of great work has already been done to shore up existing opportunities on the Southside and to create new ones. We propose the following actions, described more fully in **SECTION IV**, as a blueprint for the next phase of investment on the Southside:

- **Asset Mapping:** For many communities seeking solutions to local challenges, determining community needs is a good first step. However, an assessment of community assets is also vital. An asset mapping exercise can uncover resources in the community that may not be available from more formalized sources.
- **Building more Bridging Social Capital:** Building meaningful and authentic bridges between diverse community members must be intentional. Create a purposeful vision about how community residents, officials, schools, housing, and other community factors can be used to foster social capital between different groups on the Southside.
- **Convening Connectors:** Neighborhood connectors are vital for creating and sustaining social capital, especially on the Southside where person-to-person connections are of such importance. Since different connectors work on different levels within the community, creating a dedicated place for community connectors to gather with each other, learn, and develop strategy is paramount.
- **Finding New Third Places, Maximizing Existing Places:** The Parsons Avenue area is naturally situated to house several third places. A third places questionnaire, described in **SECTION III**, is an important tool in uncovering and supporting new third places. However, equally important is making maximum use of existing third places such as the John Maloney Health Center and the future Reeb Community Center.
- **Promoting Social Empathy and Emotional Intelligence:** Social capital is primarily a function of both social empathy and emotional intelligence. Promoting both of these traits, particularly in the youth on the Southside, is vital not only for increased social capital now, but increased social capital and opportunity access for the next generation. Talk to youth organizations about activities that promote deep listening, openness to change, and an acceptance of different perspectives. These concepts are described more fully in **SECTION I**.

# Defining Social Capital



**R**elationships based in trust, reciprocity, and understanding are commonly referred to as social capital. Building social capital is an important activity, and is in itself a legitimate end, though it is not usually the primary goal of a meeting, gathering, or community organization. More often, social capital is the byproduct of activities that draw people together in pursuit of a common goal.<sup>11</sup>

Social capital can be understood in two ways, bonding, and bridging. Bonding social capital is formed by relationships within a community or between people with a shared identity; bridging social capital is formed by relationships between communities or between people without a shared identity.

**Bonding social capital** could be created by a neighborhood block watch, a community gardening club, or neighbors just coming together to share a meal. Anytime community members get together they have a chance to make connections with other people in their neighborhood. Once neighbors are more connected, they tend to work together on issues of mutual import.

**Bridging social capital** can happen at a church with diverse membership, or in a civic group that rallies residents from different neighborhoods together under a common banner. When people make connections with others that are different (racially, socioeconomically, culturally), each party will benefit from the exchange of perspectives and from the introduction into new social networks.

At the beginning of a development process it is not always clear how to maximize the existing assets of a disinvested neighborhood, especially those assets considered “soft,” such as the relationships among neighbors.

Although social capital can be a great asset to a community, simply having more social capital is not always beneficial. For instance, strong ethnic ties can sometimes be a source of social capital, as well as a way to exclude others from a community.<sup>12</sup> Bonding social capital in the form of familial obligations may hold individuals back from being able to pursue a career outside of their home town. In the sections that follow, we document the importance of understanding social capital and



of what it consists; what the barriers are to building diverse social capital; how it impacts the success and sustainability of revitalization efforts; and what this implies for the myriad investments on the Southside.

### **The Connections among Social Empathy, Emotional Intelligence, and Social Capital**

New research in fields as varied as psychology, evolutionary biology, neuroscience, and social work is demonstrating the importance of developing social empathy, emotional intelligence, and positive social capital in order to live a healthy and happy life. The benefits of increased social and emotional awareness and connection accrue not only to the individual, but also help drive professional and organizational success and productivity (a “private” good). In addition, strong social relations can be beneficial at the community level (a “public” good).

*“Humankind would not have endured and cannot continue without the capacity to form rewarding, nurturing, and enduring relationships. We survive because we can love. And we love because we can empathize....”*

*“By understanding and increasing just this one capacity of the human brain, an enormous amount of social change can be fostered. Failure to understand and cultivate empathy, however, could lead to a society in which no one would want to live....”*  
—Bruce Perry and Maia Szalavitz. *Born for Love: why empathy is essential—and endangered*. William Morrow 2010.

Empathy is more than a “feel good” emotion; it is hardwired into our brains.<sup>13</sup> **Social empathy** is “the ability to understand people by perceiving or experiencing their life situations and as a result gain insight into structural inequalities and disparities.”<sup>14</sup> Research has shown that individuals who express empathy are more likely to be civic-minded, and become responsible citizens.<sup>15</sup> In thinking about our communities, the social supports we provide each other (formal and informal), and the structural changes required to bring opportunity to more people, it is not enough to hope for empathetic individuals. Instead, we should focus on developing a “culture of empathy”—that is, social empathy—the direct aim of which is “to use insights about the circumstances of peoples’ lives to develop public policies and programs that are appropriate and responsive to those in need.”<sup>16</sup>

Social empathy consists of individual empathy, contextual understanding of disparities and inequality, and social responsibility.<sup>17</sup> Social empathy also emphasizes the idea of “perspective-taking”—that is, the ability to understand, accept, and value the perspectives of those in different life situations.<sup>18</sup> This ability to understand and value perspectives of people different from us is important in the context of social empathy, emotional intelligence and social capital because diverse community members can have different histories, norms, and practices from those of their neighbors. These histories, norms and cultural practices can result in diverse understandings of what social capital is, what it can and should accomplish, and how best to relate to others.

Research in neuroscience has found that we are physiologically inclined towards empathy and other desires to act



## **SOCIAL CAPITAL CAN BE UNDERSTOOD IN TWO WAYS, BONDING, AND BRIDGING**

virtuously, or in a socially positive and responsible way.<sup>19</sup> In other words, the motivation to act empathically and virtuously is driven in part by our non-conscious systems—the biological processes that keep us alive.<sup>20</sup> Although we are naturally prone to empathy, power differentials, along with the ability to frame what society perceives as normative—heterosexuality vs. homosexuality for example—can mediate this physiological urge. Thus we might desire to act in a virtuous or empathic way, but may participate in marginalizing or scape-goating people seen as outliers. Stereotypes or fears of difference or change can be powerful mediators of our natural empathy, leading to behaviors that are not socially beneficial.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, engaging to build social capital requires the creation of social values such that stereotypes and anti-social behaviors are challenged so we can follow through on our desire to be empathetic and help each other.

**Emotional intelligence** refers to the ability to perceive, control, and evaluate emotions. A growing body of evidence shows that emotional intelligence is positively connected to social empathy. Key measures of emotional intelligence include the ability to find similarities between situations despite differences that may separate them,<sup>22</sup> the ability to make sense out of ambiguous or contradictory messages, and the ability to recognize the many moving parts of a given situation, all of which require a great deal of attention and concentration.<sup>23</sup> It is no wonder that corporate America has embraced the concept of emotional intelligence. Those of us working in the public sphere should do the same. Research shows that people who are more socially empathic—those who are best able to identify others’ emotions—are more successful both in work and in life.<sup>24</sup>

A wealth of scholarship documenting the importance of emotional intelligence exists, highlighting the role of emotional intelligence in building **social capital**.<sup>25</sup> Social capital is about *relationships*.<sup>26</sup> Recent research is showing that emotions are just as important in cognitive processes as other perceptions.<sup>27</sup> In fact, research in evolutionary biology and neu-

rosience shows that emotional intelligence, more so than IQ, is responsible for building social capital.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, “emotionally intelligent behavior is a prerequisite for building bridges of mutual understanding and trust in the space between people.”<sup>29</sup> In a very real sense, emotions are a form of thinking as well as a form of feeling. Emotion cannot be divorced from efforts to engage social capital. Although we like to think ‘rational’ planning processes that leave little room for emotion are the ideal, in fact, “research shows that reduction in emotion may constitute an equally important source of irrational behavior.”<sup>30</sup>

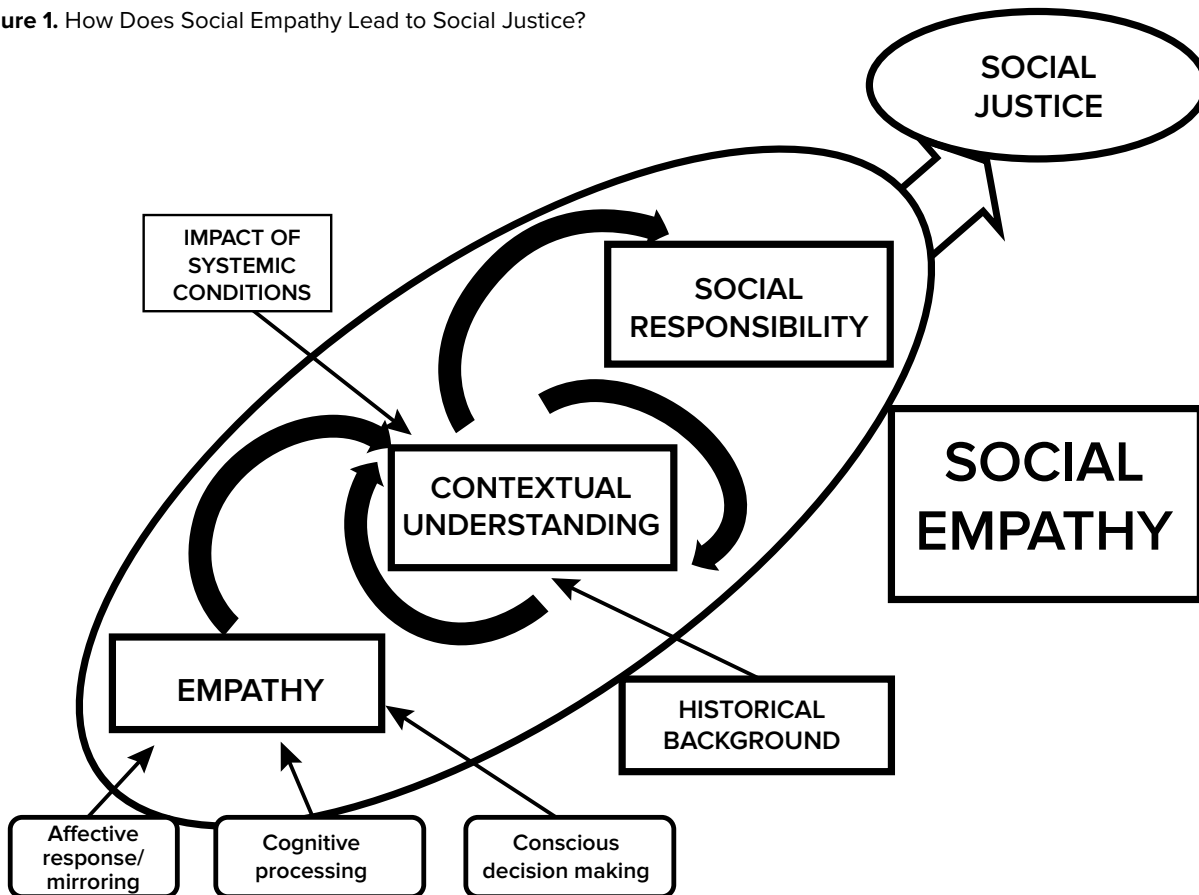
**Figure 1** describes a model of how social empathy can lead to more social justice. The model describes how increased empathy—which itself is a product of mirroring (i.e. perspective-taking), cognitive processes, and conscious decision-making—in combination with contextual understanding of what other groups or individuals are experiencing (including both systemic conditions, or access to opportunity, as well as historical background, such as explicit discriminatory practices) can lead to a greater sense of social responsibility and thus social justice.

### How Can We Improve our Emotional Intelligence, Social Empathy, and Social Capital?

Emotional intelligence is registered through **deep listening** both to others and to internal messages.<sup>31</sup> Research suggests that “engaging in social empathy requires people to see themselves in relation to the outside world,”<sup>32</sup> and that key components of emotional intelligence include **self-other awareness**.<sup>33</sup>

Demonstration of **flexibility and openness to change** are important features of social empathy and emotional intelligence.<sup>34</sup> Developing emotional intelligence involves flexibility and the willingness to develop novel ideas.<sup>35</sup> The social empathy concept of “perspective-taking” requires a person to regulate their emotions and shift their own cultural understanding around in order to consider different cultural norms without cultural bias.<sup>36</sup> An open attitude towards exploring long-held personal beliefs and customs is vital to creating the space for the development of social capital in diverse communities. As our neighborhoods, cities, and nation rapidly diversify, encounters with a wide variety of cultural cues can be expected, and we can work to make them welcome and valued, rather than feared and/or ignored.

**Figure 1.** How Does Social Empathy Lead to Social Justice?



**Source:** Elizabeth A. Segal (2011) Social Empathy: A Model Built on Empathy, Contextual Understanding, and Social Responsibility That Promotes Social Justice, *Journal of Social Service Research*, 37:3, 266–277



### **The Benefits of Diverse Social Capital in an Increasingly Diverse Nation**

Communities in South Columbus—and across the country—are becoming more diverse. According to current census figures, America will become a majority-minority population by 2042.<sup>37</sup> These demographic changes have the potential for increased understanding, productivity, and opportunity for our communities. Broadly speaking, building social capital may provide a mechanism for harnessing the power of our various cultures and experiences, fueling the vehicle in which we will meet the emerging issues of this century.

Too often, our civic engagement efforts in community plans are not as effective as the community, investors, or public officials would like. The intentional development of social capital in a community can prove to be a powerful tool that can encourage positive involvement in community initiatives. Social capital ensures that community-led or partnered programs will have access to the support that can arise from already existing bonds. Social capital is so important to successful community initiatives that when public administrators fail to invest in social capital, “they lose legitimacy and reduce the willingness of community members to bear the costs of [change].”<sup>38</sup> In this way, strong social capital in a community is key to community growth.

Building social capital is also important for the health, welfare, and safety of our neighborhoods. Diverse neighborhoods with high levels of cultural engagement have been linked to economic revitalization in urban neighborhoods.<sup>39</sup> Over 30 years of economic research has shown not only increased ‘earnings’ from social capital (i.e., increased financial gains), but also increased trust in community governance and legitimate market activity.<sup>40</sup> A high degree of social capital in communities has also been correlated with increased support for local businesses, and decreases in crime.<sup>41</sup>

Social capital also has the capacity to mediate the harmful

effects of social inequality and the lack of cohesive social trust associated with ethnic diversity.<sup>42</sup> Bonding and bridging social capital activities have the potential to bring diverse groups within a community together,<sup>43</sup> giving people an opportunity to demonstrate their skills, knowledge, and culture in a positive and supportive environment, strengthening community bonds.

The most meaningful benefits of diverse social capital may ultimately be for the next generation. The challenges and opportunities in our neighborhoods are increasingly being felt by young people. The majority of three-year olds (Pre-K) and children entering kindergarten in America are children of color,<sup>45</sup> and many are at risk for lower educational and economic attainment, if patterns of disinvestment and low school performance in communities of color and low-income neighborhoods continue.<sup>46</sup>

For children, diverse schools and neighborhoods are a natural environment for teaching appreciation of diversity and respect for differences among individuals and communities. Research has shown that early exposure to diverse cultures can help children develop more empathy for others and navigate interpersonal relationships later in life. Schools in diverse neighborhoods have also been shown to bring about higher academic achievement for all students.<sup>47</sup> Socializing with someone of a different racial group or discussing racial issues can contribute to student academic development, satisfaction with college, level of cultural awareness, and commitment to promoting racial understanding.<sup>48</sup>

An increased understanding and cultural awareness for those situated differently in terms of income and race has been shown to foster more support for social programs aimed at increasing access to opportunity for these community members.<sup>49</sup> In sum, the long-term benefits from building strong social relationships in diverse neighborhoods may provide our children the tools and skills that they need to thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy.

# What are the Barriers to Building Social Capital in a Diverse Setting?



**D**iverse neighborhoods offer many unique challenges to building social capital. Some current research indicates that the more diverse a neighborhood is the less social capital it tends to have.<sup>50</sup> Other research shows that racial/ethnic diversity “exerts negative and short-term effects on trust in other people, as well as many other civic attitudes and behaviors.”<sup>51</sup> Studies confirm that racial heterogeneity is associated with decreasing levels of interpersonal trust.<sup>52</sup> Many neighborhoods with diverse populations tend to be characterized by division and strife, instead of cooperation and cohesiveness.<sup>53</sup> This is especially salient when we consider community revitalization and the risk of displacement. When the composition

of the neighborhood is changing such that original residents are not able to enjoy the benefits of reinvestments, increasing social distance and isolation are usually created during this transition phase.

### **Implicit Biases**

Attempts to address challenges related to diversity are complicated by the fact that conscious, normative expressions of racism are lessening. Indeed, few Americans identify with traditionally racially negative views of minorities and, increasingly, white Americans embrace a wide variety of cultures.<sup>54</sup> However, many of the narratives, ideologies, biases and structures

that underlie the expression of racism have changed little over time.<sup>55</sup> The problem of racism in our communities now deals less with an individual's conscious biases, but rather with the unconscious biases that are held within our society and the structural barriers that are created because of them.<sup>56</sup>

Research on implicit bias and cultural stereotyping suggests that many white Americans hold persistent beliefs linking minorities to crime, violence, and disorder, therefore viewing them as less desirable neighbors.<sup>57</sup> Minorities have been traditionally perceived by whites as threatening, marauding "others" hostile to established social norms in a community.<sup>58</sup> These beliefs are reinforced by the association of racial integration with increased poverty, disinvestment and community decline.<sup>59</sup> Research in social psychology has shown that automatic racial stereotypes can persist, regardless of conscious or personal rejection of prejudice toward blacks. This "laissez-faire racism" is expressed through unconscious responses to conscious observations.<sup>60</sup>

These unconscious responses often lead to actions that impair the efficacy of "bridging" social capital activities. For instance, during Hurricane Katrina, implicit biases of aid workers towards African-Americans in the central city of New Orleans were seen as a factor in the inability to build bridging relationships in the wake of the disaster.<sup>61</sup> In cases such as these, the individual, unconscious biases held by one group of people about another present significant barriers to increasing the breadth and penetration of social capital within diverse communities.

### **Economic and Social Class**

Income and social positioning are often overlooked barriers to building social capital as well. Social capital is often class-specific, meaning that how people build social capital can differ based on their access to resources. The result is incongruence in levels of community participation among differently situated residents, which in this case is defined as income or class.<sup>62</sup> Studies have shown that those with fewer resources often have more difficulty building social capital relationships or gaining the benefit of these relationships in more formalized settings.<sup>63</sup> These barriers are largely related to the lack of time and resources.<sup>64</sup>

Of the difficulties faced by those with fewer resources, time is chief among them. Poverty not only robs a person of money, it robs them of time, through challenges such as extra work hours and multiple jobs, and time-consuming interactions with institutions.<sup>65</sup> Poverty also robs one of the ability to focus on multiple things at once. Studies have shown that the cognitive patterns of those facing pervasive financial insecurity shift away from a number of aspects of daily life, and towards gaining and protecting their scarce resources, usually at the expense of the former.<sup>66</sup> In communities that have been subject to capital disinvestment and societal neglect, daily challenges are magnified, making it extremely difficult to build and sustain social capital through building relationships between neighbors.<sup>67</sup>

Additionally, developing social empathy between people across income lines can be difficult due to relative deficits or advantages in community power. Those from social groups with less money (i.e. less power) "learn that direct, honest reactions with those with more wealth and power are potentially

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## **THE PROBLEM OF RACISM IN OUR COMMUNITIES NOW DEALS LESS WITH AN INDIVIDUAL'S CONSCIOUS BIASES, BUT RATHER WITH THE UNCONSCIOUS BIASES**

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dangerous, and that open communication is possible only with each other."<sup>68</sup> This is because those with more economic and social power often react negatively towards expressions of anger or disappointment, and are also more likely to have some degree of control and/or influence over the resources and opportunities being pursued by those suffering the effects of structural disinvestment. Gentrifying neighborhoods, where wealthy newcomers control the community association, provides an instructive example. Those with fewer resources, namely money and power, often report having anxiety about expressing their honest opinions regarding their legitimate feelings about the neighborhood's changing character for fear of being labeled a 'troublemaker.'<sup>69</sup> The ability to frame others in this way is in itself an example of disparate power dynamics, and may also dissuade or disenfranchise individuals from civic engagement.

Barriers to building social capital in diverse neighborhoods can be daunting because they often involve issues of race, class, and power dynamics that are difficult to discuss.<sup>70</sup> However, it is critical to note that social ties can mediate these negative effects.<sup>71</sup> In short, "**diversity is a challenge to trust only when it is not accompanied by social interactions.**"<sup>72</sup>

### **Heterogeneity and Homogeneity**

Community activities aimed at increasing social cohesion, unfortunately, do not often account for the lived experiences and diversity of many neighborhood residents.<sup>73</sup> As a result, efforts to build social capital in diverse communities can be a demanding process. If subtle racial (and class-based) narratives and biases underlie community conversations, building social capital can actually be a negative experience for minorities.<sup>74</sup> In communities where minorities move into neighborhoods that are already home to an established demographic base, existing traditions and activities aimed at building social capital may wind up alienating new residents.<sup>75</sup> Bonding social capital may be highly useful in achieving certain outcomes in more homogeneous communities, but it can also be antithetical to the achievement of community cohesion in diverse areas.<sup>76</sup>

Exclusion is an important negative side effect of bonding social capital when practiced by those in dominant community positions. Negative reactions to aspects of diverse and often marginalized cultures may undermine the bridging relationships that are important for building a cohesive society. This is because these negative reactions do not facilitate open communication or trust-building, both of which are vital to bridging



ing relationships.<sup>77</sup> Conversely, socially bonding activities that are natural and positive in minority communities may be misunderstood by community members from the dominant community group, leading to further distrust and lack of cohesion in the community.<sup>78</sup> Additionally, minority community members often have to negotiate both their own cultures and the dominant culture, whereas the same is not true for those of the dominant culture. This phenomenon has been termed “double vision,” and it can be a powerful barrier to creating lasting relationships in diverse communities.<sup>79</sup>

A predominant idea that community cohesion can be built by imposing a ‘majority’ agenda on ‘minority’ communities also presents barriers to the formation of community cohesion.<sup>80</sup> A common response to the challenges presented by the exclusion that comes with bonding social capital is to attempt to build bridging social capital by way of a singular community vision. While well-intentioned, the result is that ideas, values, and motivations from a ‘majority’ point of view often end up being imposed on ‘minority’ community members, presenting significant barriers to the formation of community cohesion in diverse communities.<sup>81</sup> Diverse neighborhoods are by definition not uniform and often are unsuitable candidates for unitary community visions. Diverse communities tend to be “marked by multiple and hybrid affiliations of varying social and geographical reach, and each intersecting momentarily (or not) with another one for common local resources and amenities.”<sup>82</sup> Diverse communities in particular tend to have multiple sources of power, places of gathering and worship, retail services, etc., many of which are designed to serve select populations.<sup>83</sup> Ethnic groceries or restaurants often also serve as cultural meeting points for individuals with similar backgrounds. Churches tend to find their core membership among people who have similar religious values.

These sub-communities may provide important opportunities for community members to create relationships that can bolster their ability to affect change.<sup>84</sup> Participating in a more uniform community environment may lead to relationships

that could lessen their individual power. Historically, much of the power wielded by minorities has come from heterogeneous bonding social capital.<sup>85</sup> For instance, the Civil Rights movement gained its strongest and most consistent support from the African-American church in the South. The bonds between African-American parishioners, many of whom shared a similar upbringing, experiences, and beliefs were a source of economic and political power within a larger environment where they had far less power.<sup>86</sup> The persistence of racial and economic marginalization may continue to make the prospect of foregoing these insular bonds for a wider community identity potentially dangerous for minorities, who may find themselves with less power over their community circumstances.

Dominant community cohesion can be achieved, but often at the expense of the social alienation of minorities who have not adopted the language and culture of the dominant mainstream.<sup>87</sup> Emphasis on forming a singular, majority vision for a community in order to build social capital fails to address the realities of an increasingly multicultural society. Under these conditions, social capital can become yet another source of socioeconomic stratification, rather than its antidote.<sup>88</sup>

While diverse communities offer a great deal of complexity, those complexities do not have to become barriers to building social capital. On the contrary, understanding and acceptance of the barriers to building social capital in diverse communities can provide a basis for building strong community connections. In order to reap the benefits of social capital, diverse neighborhoods need to be accepted as paradoxical: open, culturally heterogeneous, and socially varied spaces, as well as a central place that is shared by many people.<sup>89</sup> We now know from the research that the development of positive social capital relies on the cultivation of social empathy and emotional intelligence. This new research shows us that valuing difference, listening intentionally, and openness to change can create a framework for building strong social capital within diverse neighborhoods.

# Third Places



“Third places” are places in the community that are neither home nor workplaces.<sup>90</sup> These natural gathering places in the community are open to everyone, but generally, are held with a particular fondness or affinity by local neighborhood residents. Third places can be traditional public places like parks, schools, churches, or small business—those places where neighbors come together.<sup>91</sup> Irrespective of physical geography or location, third places have some general characteristics in common. They are often informal places whose use generally does not require prior authorization, and where interaction is usually spontaneous and unscripted.<sup>92</sup> They are often places where conversation is the primary activity, and where residents communicate openly and honestly with their neighbors.<sup>93</sup> They provide a ‘home away from home’ for community members by providing a sense of warmth and community.<sup>94</sup>

In diverse communities such as the Southside, a notable characteristic of third places is that they act as a ‘leveler’

amongst community members—they level the playing field between residents in terms of money, race, and power.<sup>95</sup> To be a true third place, the social position of community members must be left at the door. In diverse communities, third places accomplish this by being open and accommodating to everyone, and also providing a strong reason for various community members to frequent the space.<sup>96</sup>

Third places are most effective when they are created by the local community because when community members become the prime movers in creating a shared space, it is more likely to be relevant to them.<sup>97</sup> A community-created space reflects the needs, backgrounds, and aspirations of community members and allows them to express themselves authentically and to create a shared community on their own terms.<sup>98</sup> In other words, the act of creation by the community makes third places real for the community.

In many neighborhoods, including the Southside, the precursors for these third places already exist. Residents of dis-

invested communities sometimes create a third space out of a heavily trafficked street, a local business, a park, or a playground. Third places sharing this general characteristic of disinvestment, however, often lack wider community support and attention.<sup>99</sup> Therefore, a good first step in creating relevant third places where diverse communities gather is to identify those areas where diverse communities already gather.<sup>100</sup> A local grocery store, a major thoroughfare, or community schools are all places where diverse community members may meet for practical reasons.

Examples across the country show that the best way for a community to invest in existing third places are with unassuming, informal investments such as adding children’s activities to an empty park or holding a community festival on a major community thoroughfare.<sup>101</sup> The most successful investments in existing third places are those that allow community members to share their skills and resources and create tangible positive changes for the neighborhood.<sup>102</sup> Investments such as these can be the first step in creating places that can help bring together a wide range of neighbors in a community.

### Small Businesses

Increasingly, small businesses such as small ethnic markets and food-related businesses are becoming important third places.<sup>103</sup> This is particularly true in communities where public investment and large scale private investment have been scarce.<sup>104</sup> The primary reason that these small businesses have become important third places in communities is that they tend to be vital to community members. In communities with few options for fresh, affordable food, these small businesses offer necessary nutrition to local families.<sup>105</sup> They are also often the only source of credit to struggling community members.<sup>106</sup> These businesses may have long-time ties to the community and often offer a sense of history to new and old members alike.<sup>107</sup>

In many ways, small businesses can bring together diverse groups of people in a way that a community meeting or neighborhood group cannot. The drive of necessity brings many people into the same local shops when they otherwise may not have met.<sup>108</sup> However, small businesses require community support in order to become places where diverse individuals

### Uncovering Third Places

Neighborhoods that have multiple ‘third places’ are neighborhoods strong in social capital. While the creation of new third places can be an important goal of community revitalization efforts, stakeholders should also understand what places already exist, and maximize their potential. To that end, we propose asking the following questions of residents:

- Where do neighbors tend to gather?
- What motivates you to come to these places?
- What factors/values/issues are important to you? (Name top 3 or 4)
- What type of environment makes you feel comfortable? (Describe type of setting, items, activities, types of people, etc.)
- What type of environment tends to make you feel like opening up and talking to others?
- What are some circumstances under which you would feel comfortable trying something new?
- Are there any places in the neighborhood where it is easier to just ‘be yourself?’ Are there places where it is more difficult? Why or why not?
- Think about Parsons Avenue and the Southside over the years. Were there good gathering places in the neighborhood in the past? What do you think made them good gathering places?

are comfortable relating to each other on matters tangential to the business’s primary purpose.<sup>109</sup> Identifying these community businesses and working with them to create places where positive community interactions can occur is an important key to developing these unique places.

### Third Places and Community Connectors

Building communities where a diverse group of people feel a sense of belonging and ownership does not happen accidentally. Inclusion needs to be intentional, particularly in the case of the most vulnerable members of our communities.<sup>110</sup> The invitation must reflect the needs and concerns of the community member. Reaching out to community members means meeting them where their concerns are.<sup>111</sup> Community hospitality is best when it is tailored to those whom you wish to reach.

Easy to Reach	Middle Tier	Most Difficult to Reach
Civic Associations	Small business	Single parents
Area Commissions	Anchor institutions or larger employers	Re-entering citizens
Block Watch Groups, Neighborhood Groups	Renters	Senior residents
Churches	Landlords	Disabled residents
Schools	Lower Income Homeowners	Troubled Youth (school discipline or legal trouble)
Social Service Organizations	City/Community Officials	Limited English households
Middle Income Households	Philanthropic Partners	Chronically unemployed
		Low income households

**Table 1:** An example of different community members and levels of engagement based on our previous work with community stakeholders



Real hospitality requires a determined dedication to creating inclusive places and conversations where people can feel comfortable sharing their ideas, thoughts, and gifts.<sup>112</sup>

Local community members that act as *community connectors* can be very useful in building relationships in diverse communities like the Southside. A community connector is a person who is often found in the center of the community. They play a central role in promoting and maintaining social capital by creating new relationships and maintaining existing relationships between neighbors.<sup>113</sup> Connectors also provide communities with opportunities to build relationships across diverse communities. These community members tend to be naturally oriented towards making new relationships with other community members and have a good grasp of the assets and challenges possessed by themselves and their neighbors.<sup>114</sup>

In diverse communities, connectors may already exist within the myriad of social levels present in the community.<sup>115</sup> Neighbors, clergy, teachers, and business owners may be familiar with many community members with whom they share much in common. Additionally, connectors may unite people within different ethnic or geographic circles. **Table 1** provides some examples of different community members and their engagement accessibility based on our previous experiences. People who are easy to reach are often involved in formal organizations or have resources that make community partici-

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## THIRD PLACES PROVIDE A ‘HOME AWAY FROM HOME’ FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS BY PROVIDING A SENSE OF WARMTH AND COMMUNITY

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pation easier. Those in the middle tier are comprised of stakeholders that tend to get involved according to their interests or concerns. Then there are those that are the most difficult to reach, usually due to a lack of resources or negatively held biases by the larger community. The table illustrates the multi-layered nature of diverse communities, and how the work of connecting people across those boundaries requires a multi-layered strategy.

This is particularly important on the Southside, which is comprised of 10 distinct civic associations and housing patterns that reflect a general racial divide on either side of Parsons Avenue. Southside residents can make the connection between third places and community connectors by making those places a key resource for uncovering and supporting people who are adept at connecting people from various ‘bandwidths.’ Some third places can also be connection points for connectors. Creating a dedicated, intentional space for natural connectors from different community spheres to gather and share authentically can bind the community together in a stronger way and uncover a wealth of hidden community potential.<sup>116</sup>



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**Third places can be very helpful to community connectors** as they reach out to diverse members of the community. Third places are relevant, welcoming places where social divisions can be relaxed, creating a safe space for the exchange of ideas, and for formation of new relationships between people from different backgrounds.<sup>117</sup> In one neighborhood, a “Community Living Room” (a community space built to mimic the comfort of a family living room) provided the space for a local community group to hold conversations about neighborhood improvement with various community members.<sup>118</sup> The open and accessible third place creates a comfort zone that allows community members to have difficult conversations in a way that would be unlikely elsewhere. This combination can also help heal tensions within a community. A candy store owner in Memphis was known to many of the neighborhood children because he regularly gave out extra candy for children who did well in school. Later, when gang-related violence spilled over in the neighborhood, the store owner invited members from the rival gangs to end the violence and create a healing event with local religious leaders. The gang members accepted because most of them had frequented the candy store as children.<sup>120</sup> In this way, third places offer a neutral ground for tense community conversations while community connectors offer trust built from years of close relationship-building within the community. When third places and connectors are brought together and deliberately supported, these two resources can be powerful assets in mitigating endogenous and exogenous tensions.

# Moving Forward



**Types of Assets:**

- **Associational:** these include associations residents know about and those they don't know much about. What do they currently do? What have they talked about doing and not done yet? What might they do if they were asked?
- **Physical space:** what is in the neighborhood: parks, schools, libraries, community centers, hospitals, small or large businesses, etc. Also, what happens where: block club activities, re/sports, crime, senior activities, youth activities, clean ups, code problems, etc.
- **Institutions:** gifts of employees & volunteers; physical space & equipment; how money is spent—supplies, servicing, hiring etc.; current relationship with the community
- **Individuals:** gifts, talents, dreams, hopes, fears
- **Local economy:** how money flows in (and out) of the community; neighborhood business development.

Figure 2. Asset Mapping Exercise

**S**ocial capital helps communities leverage their natural assets in a way that promotes growth in opportunity and a growth in *access* to that opportunity. Assets such as shared places and resources, strong community bonds, and an intentional focus on using those assets to benefit everyone can transform a struggling community into a beacon of success and opportunity for other communities to follow. The power of community relationships is incalculable.

In diverse communities such as the Southside, building social capital can be more challenging, but can also offer a wealth of rewards that can only be found by building strong bonds between people from different backgrounds. Creating bridges through relationships and shared places can help build trust and mitigate the effects of larger social inequities related to income and race. Bridging social capital can also help to heal difficult relationships in the community and be the catalyst for connecting a wealth of ideas, values, and customs together to create a more rich and vibrant community.

While there are many strategies that can help build this type of social capital, there are some steps that can be taken in the Southside that could prove valuable:

**Asset Mapping:** For many communities seeking solutions to local challenges, determining community needs is a good first step. However, an assessment of community assets is also vital. An asset mapping exercise can uncover resources in the community that may not be available from more formalized sources. Asset mapping can also be used to encourage diverse community members to identify assets that they share in common, thereby increasing community spirit. When community members identify resources together, they tend to use them together. **Figure 2** above is one example of asset mapping.

**Building More Bridging Social Capital:** Building meaningful and authentic bridges between diverse community members must be intentional. Create a purposeful vision about how community residents, officials, schools, housing, and other community factors can be used to help foster social capital between different groups on the Southside. How can assets such as Nationwide Children’s Hospital or the Reeb School be useful? Who may provide important leadership and capacity to help promote social capital? What are some of the pitfalls? Make use of existing organizations and groups to help develop

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## BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL CAN BE MORE CHALLENGING, BUT CAN ALSO OFFER A WEALTH OF REWARDS THAT CAN ONLY BE FOUND BY BUILDING STRONG BONDS BETWEEN PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS

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a cohesive plan that will benefit everyone.

**Convening Connectors:** Neighborhood connectors are vital for creating and sustaining social capital, especially on the Southside where person-to-person connections are of such importance. Since different connectors work on different levels within the community, creating a dedicated place for community connectors to connect with each other, learn, and develop strategy is paramount. Using United Way’s Neighborhood Leadership Academy as a possible model, the creation of a ‘Connector’s Academy’ can be the lifeblood of a new, vibrant Southside. Be sure that this initiative balances intentionality with authenticity so that the strategies of connectors can be fully realized.

**Finding New Third Places, Maximizing Existing Places:** The Parsons Avenue area is naturally situated to house several third places. The third places questionnaire is an important tool in uncovering and supporting new third places. However, equally important is making maximum use of existing third places such as the John Maloney Health Center and the future Reeb Community Center. Because of their utility to a wide and diverse audience, these places already act as third places. Ask residents about how they interact with these places now, and what could be done to make them more useful, accessible, and vibrant. By working together with building officials and tenants, different events, programming, and uses can be created to ensure that these natural assets are used to increase access to opportunity by increasing social capital.

**Promoting Social Empathy and Emotional Intelligence:** Social capital is primarily a function of both social empathy and emotional intelligence. Promoting both of these traits, particularly in the youth on the Southside, is vital not only for increased social capital now, but increased social capital and opportunity access for the next generation. Talk to youth organizations about activities that promote deep listening, openness to change, and an acceptance of different perspectives. The more intentional the strategies and programs to promote these building blocks of social capital, the more effective the Southside youth will be at these skills in the future. An example of building social empathy is provided in **Figure 3**.



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These suggestions provide a good starting point on a journey to a closer and more prosperous Southside. The results of these strategies will invariably provide even more ideas about bridging diverse neighborhoods and expanding opportunity. The people of the Southside represent its most vital community asset. The compassion, pride, and community spirit that are already present in the people on the Southside, when intentionally leveraged, can provide the foundation for a new future marked by prosperity and opportunity for all.

**Building Social Empathy**  
 Each level builds on the prior level and culminates with the strongest empathic experience:

**Level 1 | Exposure:** Visit new places and people who are different from you.

- Who is different from me?
- How are they different?
- How do we describe those differences?

**Level 2 | Explanation:** Strive to understand why we are different.

- What history, life events, culture, geography, ancestry contributed to our differences?
- What is the impact of those differences today?

**Level 3 | Experience:** Put yourself into the life of a person of a different class, sex, ability, age, sexual identity, race, or national origin.

- What would your life be like if you were different?
- What opportunities would you have or would you miss?
- How would you be treated?

**Figure 3.** Based on Segal (2007b). Social empathy: a tool to address the contradiction of working but still poor. *Families in Society, The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 88, 333–337

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[119] *Id.*

[120] *Id.*



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