



## WHITE PAPER SERIES

Volume 5, Number 1

# A fuller response to vulnerability

Brenda Krause Eheart

David Hopping

Deborah Finck

July 2015

GENERATIONS OF HOPE

201 W. Springfield Avenue., Suite 208, Champaign, Illinois 61820

voice/message: 217.363.3080 • [generationsofhope.org](http://generationsofhope.org)

WHITE PAPER



201 W. Springfield Ave, Ste. 208 • Champaign, Illinois 61820 • [generationsofhope.org](http://generationsofhope.org)

COVER IMAGE: *Design by Shoesmith Cox Architects. Rendering by Stephanie Bower.*

Copyright © 2016 by GENERATIONS OF HOPE

All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction in whole or in part in any form.

*This document is the proprietary work of Generations of Hope.*

*Many terms in this document, including the title, are trademarks of Generations of Hope.*

*Any unauthorized use of this copyrighted material or use of any of these terms in relation to goods and/or services (including seminars, workshops, training programs, classes, etc.) is prohibited without the express written permission of the owner.*

# A fuller response to vulnerability

*New initiatives are strengthening our country's safety net by building communities of kindness and possibility.*

**T**here is growing recognition that too many people in this country are facing serious challenges – challenges that threaten their well-being, including their happiness and ability to contribute to society.

On almost a daily basis the media remind us of the serious problems people are experiencing today—poverty, racial bias, the growing income gap, gun violence, the high cost of health care, and lack of compassionate end-of-life care to name just a few.

What can be done to reverse this rising tide of vulnerability, to restore hope and optimism that change is possible? What's needed is a fuller response to vulnerability.

## Conventional solutions

Far too often solutions that are offered to address social problems are complicated, expensive, inflexible, and beyond the ability of everyday people to make a significant contribution—to make a real difference.

We read about the need to make affordable housing more available or the need to

expand child care credits. We know there is a need for access to more jobs. Rarely, however, are solutions presented that make us feel empowered, able to personally become part of the solution; we are left feeling helpless and hopeless.

As a result, we leave the answers to these questions to government, business, and the social service sector—sectors which traditionally have been responsible for designing and implementing answers to these seemingly never-ending problems. Their work in recent times has seldom been enough to significantly reduce rates of poverty, especially among children, or decrease the need for more and more services. The child care burdens many working mothers face have not changed nor have this country's incarceration rates decreased; and there has not been a reduction in the number of Americans who routinely go to bed hungry.

Clearly our social safety net that is designed to provide a margin of protection or security for people facing serious social challenges needs to be strengthened. Key characteristics of this safety net include:

- vulnerability being defined by needs
- services being designed to meet these needs, generally by providing assistance with acquisition of food, housing, income, and health care
- services being provided by agencies and often relying on professional guidance
- most services being time-limited and geared toward eliminating poverty.

## Intentional Neighboring

Through the work of Generations of Hope Development Corporation, we have come to believe that *a new dimension* must be added to this mix of assistance, one so obvious that it is almost always overlooked, a dimension we call *intentional neighboring*. This paradigm leverages the power and natural dynamics of small-scale, intimate, fully-engaged community.

It has certain distinctive characteristics:

- the primary focus is on the universal need for *caring relationships* and neighboring;
- people who are facing serious social challenges become *assets to the community*;
- it relies on *ordinary people* and their capacity to care about one another;

- it addresses the needs of *people of all ages* and incomes; and
- assistance is *community-driven* and open ended.

Rarely, when we think of providing a safety net, do we think about the value and essential importance of caring relationships and neighboring to well-being. Yet there is a substantial body of research showing that this aspect of daily living, where people are surrounded by a culture of friendliness, kindness, helpfulness, and consideration, is

---

*Intentional neighboring offers a way for ordinary people to provide daily support as family and friends to those facing serious social challenges.*

---

essential to emotional and physical well-being, to everyone's health and happiness. This missing dimension consists very simply of ordinary people doing what we always do in times of need.

What do we do when we personally face a difficult situation, perhaps a serious health issue or financial concern, or the loss of someone dear to us; who do we first turn to? It is not government, business, or a social service. Almost always we first turn to trusted family members, friends, and neighbors—a community of people we care about and who care about us. Imagine if the *only* people who could help us were paid professionals; imagine having no trusted

family member or friend to turn to when we are feeling most vulnerable.

For too many people of all ages, the lack of a stable, supportive, caring network of friends and neighbors is a growing reality, contributing to a sense of vulnerability.

Intentional neighboring “systematically” offers a way for ordinary people to provide this daily support to those facing serious social challenges. It helps to fill a gap in the way we as a nation address social challenges by doing what government, business, and social services were not designed to do—to focus on caring relationships, utilizing what psychologist Ann Masten (2001) refers to as the “ordinary magic” of family, friends, and neighbors.

## Collaborative efforts

Over the past two decades we have been working with a growing group of people to establish and study communities where people come together “intentionally” to be good neighbors to each other and to help make a difference in the lives of some of those we have come to perceive as most vulnerable—people whose well-being is or has been compromised due to, for example, poverty, incarceration, poor health, inadequate housing, or abuse and neglect.

We’ve seen repeatedly just how powerful the simplest acts of neighboring can be, giving meaning and fulfillment to the lives of everyone involved while simultaneously healing the invisible wounds carried by those who are most vulnerable.

Intentional neighboring, as a key intervention strategy, will develop and spread only with the assistance of the public, private, and social service sectors. Collaborative efforts are showing that this can be done. Recently for example, agencies of the Washington D.C. city government, nonprofit developers, and businesses came together to finance, build, and furnish an apartment building designed to facilitate intentional neighboring in a community wrapped purposefully around mothers aging out of foster care.

In Portland, Oregon the city government, a developer, social services, and private businesses have been helping the community of *Bridge Meadows* to support, through intentional neighboring, kinship families.

And in Rantoul, Illinois, *Hope Meadows* repurposed eighty-three housing units on a decommissioned Air Force Base. For over twenty years it has demonstrated that when government, business, and social services collaborate to bring people together to live a life of intentional neighboring—in this case to support families adopting children from foster care, and more recently to also support frail elders—everyone benefits in ways that may have seemed impossible only a few years ago.

## Core components

Intentional neighboring in communities does not just happen when people live next door to each other. To effect social change,

it must be rediscovered and intentionally designed. Years of practical experience and research have led us to identify eight core components that serve as the key underpinnings of the intentional neighboring paradigm. These components include three foundational values and five design patterns.

Following is an introduction to each component, including a brief description of

- what each component means in the context of intentional neighboring;
- specific ways to facilitate implementation of these components in actual communities; and
- how perception and implementation of these core components often differ significantly from conventional perspectives and common practice.

These critical differences or “deltas” are not always intuitively obvious, so applying the foundational values and design patterns can be challenging.

## Foundational values

We believe that three foundational values are essential to intentional neighboring; these are:

1. a profound belief in the importance of caring relationships to well-being;
2. looking at an individual’s abilities, strengths, goodness, and contributions even while recognizing needs and deficits; and
3. Engagement of older adults.

These core values are the essence of intentional neighboring. Implementation of them must be woven into the fabric of neighborhood life on a daily basis.

### Foundational Values

1. Power of relationships
2. Reframing “vulnerability”
3. Engagement of older adults

### Essential Design Patterns

1. Key focus on vulnerability
2. Three or more generations
3. Embracing diversity
4. Architectural design facilitates relationships
5. Transformational leadership

Core components of the intentional neighboring paradigm.

## 1. The power of relationships

*A core belief underlying intentional neighboring is that everyone has the capacity to form caring relationships. Through these relationships, well-being is fostered for people of all ages, with or without significant special needs, even in times of change, crisis, or suffering.*

### Introduction

What gives life its deepest significance, and what gives our own lives meaning, are the caring relationships we make. From these relationships can come social trust,

community engagement, norms of reciprocity (if I do something for you, you will do something for me), and coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit (Eheart and Power 2001; Putnam 2000). These relationships (or lack of them) also shape our sense of self.

Everyone has the capacity to form these relationships, but not everyone has the opportunity or encouragement to use this innate ability.

Especially vulnerable, because of the perceived lack of caring relationships, are people who are marginalized, such as older adults or children from the child welfare system who feel abandoned and lonely, who feel that no one really cares about them in ways that could give them hope.

### *Caring relationships*

**Intentional Neighboring:** In this paradigm, the desire to be a part of a network of intergenerational caring relationships is the catalyst that draws people together. These relationships develop and evolve because people of all ages and experiences are supported as they work to come together and quickly begin the process of forming trusting and caring relationships.

The presence of three or more generations enables all residents to benefit from the wide range of possible meaningful relationships and richness of diversity due to different generational needs and generational experiences; it is out of these relationships that strategies for action grow.

**Conventional perspective:** For children and adults in need of meaningful, caring relationships, the conventional perspective is for social services to become involved.

They conduct evaluations and design interventions, establish and monitor relationships, impose limitations on the formation and fostering of relationships, and expect decisions about relationships to be made “from the top” down.

In addition, many believe that meaningful, caring relationships can only be provided by members of one’s extended family or by

---

*We must expand our understandings, perceptions, and expectations of people we consider “different” or “vulnerable.”*

---

professional care-givers, formed with people who have shared interests, histories, social status, race, or religion. It is also assumed that to be relevant, caring, meaningful relationships can only be established over long periods of time.

### *Facilitating the development of caring relationships*

Key to embracing the power of caring relationships is the expectation by everyone that all generations will be active members of the community. Under the intentional neighboring paradigm, older residents, the young, and all those in between, including the most vulnerable, *routinely come together* to form meaningful connections

with one another, often without relying on past histories or usual commonalities.

They come together to celebrate birthdays, holidays, new or transitioning residents, and all of life's major passages; to rally to assist neighbors in need; to attend potlucks and special neighborhood events; to create or support on-going activities, opportunities, or interactions that further relationships; and to make important decisions collaboratively (though sometimes with guidance from transformational leaders; see below).

Ultimately it is the daily coming together of neighbors, the spending time—a little each day kind of time—that facilitates the development of caring relationships.

## 2. Reframing “vulnerability”

*Where there is intentional neighboring, residents with challenges that make them vulnerable are viewed as friends, neighbors, and family—as caring and contributing community members.*

### *Introduction*

For too long it has been common practice to address complex social, emotional, and behavioral challenges related to issues such as abuse and neglect, poverty, and even aging, by offering services that mainly focus on shortcomings, vulnerabilities, and limitations.

Individuals facing these challenges are viewed through a very narrow lens where the focus is on what needs to be “fixed,” and where people are viewed as “the

problem”—as individuals who are receiving from, not contributing to, society.

If our child, parent, or someone else we loved were viewed through this narrow lens, how would we feel? And how would this focus affect the way our loved ones would feel about us or about themselves?

The answers to these questions force us to begin to think about “business as usual” in a different way. Clearly policies and practices are needed to address deficits and disabilities. But what about first addressing abilities, strengths, and goodness? To do this we must expand our understandings, perceptions, and expectations of people we consider “different” or “vulnerable.”

### *Experiencing vulnerability*

**Intentional Neighboring:** In this paradigm, everyone is seen to be a part of something, and made to feel they are making a contribution. No one is segregated by housing, policies, or programs. For example, at *Hope Meadows*, if parents have both children from foster care and birth children at home and want respite time, they would request that it apply to all of their children, not just the children in the foster care system as is the usual practice and policy. They also would take the initiative to find the help they needed within their network of *Hope Meadows* friends and neighbors.

In addition, using language in which no one is labeled is critically important in shaping perceptions of vulnerability (Power, Mitchell, Eheart and Hopping 2011). Words that denote difference such as *ward*, *client*, *patient*, and *case* are abandoned.



Language related to place is normalized. For example traditional social service terms such as *placement, beds, slots, and campus*, like the labels *foster* or *client*, impose hierarchy and reinforce existing power inequities.

Perhaps most importantly in reframing vulnerability, intentional neighboring requires that policies and program decisions be made by first asking, “Would we be comfortable with the decision we are making if it were impacting our own loved ones or ourselves?” If not, why not?

### **Conventional perspective:**

Implementing the above practices may seem easy and obvious, but it is not. This is due in part to the common definition of *vulnerable* (being weak, helpless, defenseless, at-risk), which reflects only deficits.

A child or adult, who has been traumatized or is vulnerable in some other way, is often viewed through this prism of deficits. As a result they are often segregated from others and always assumed to need professionals to help them.

Policies, programs, and practices reflect these views, but we have learned some ways to slowly change these perceptions.

### *Developing a new view of vulnerability*

Reframing vulnerability, seeing it through a different lens, happens when people of all degrees of ability and vulnerability get to really know each other; and this happens

when we live side-by-side and get together on a daily basis both formally and informally. By getting to know each other, people begin to share hugs and laughter, triumphs and disappointments. Perceptions also change when the uniqueness of each individual is celebrated (e.g. individual birthdays, random acts of care, or the accomplishments of a child are noted in a weekly neighborhood newsletter) and by using language that is inclusive and normalizing.

---

*It is this focus on vulnerability that unites a community, and can make it “come alive.”*

---

## 3. Engagement of older adults

*Older residents are obligated to engage regularly in a variety of supportive activities (mentoring, tutoring, gardening, etc.) while also being a caring friend, neighbor, and surrogate grandparent. Engagement, viewed this way, becomes a way of life and enables older people to have significance in large part as a function of age.*

### *Introduction*

Our society is not physically capable of providing a professional care environment for every future elder, nor would every elder want one. Nevertheless, as a society we have become increasingly reliant upon professional care and services to support us through all aspects of life and death.

The result is that as we age many of us become physically, socially, and psychologically isolated. And the irony is that we want and even *need* to be engaged, to stay connected, to have our lives still have purpose from one day to the next. Social connectedness and community involvement are two of the most powerful determinants of health and well-being, while loneliness hastens the declines that come with age. Nonetheless, the idea of promoting connectedness is rarely discussed as an intervention strategy necessary to support aging well.

### *Engaging older adults*

**Intentional neighboring:** In the intentional neighboring paradigm, the engagement of older adults strengthens their commitment to the neighborhood. It also strengthens the formation of meaningful relationships and through this, enhances their status as older adults. On a daily basis they find themselves “giving back” and “making a difference.” This becomes simply the way life is lived, giving these, the last decades, years, and months of their life, real meaning, purpose, and joy.

**Conventional practice:** In typical life-style retirement communities, engagement is optional. When retirees find themselves doing things for their community such as volunteering in schools (in large measure because they have the time), it is the activity itself which has significance.

In contrast, intentional neighboring enables older people to have significance in large

part as a function of their age. They occupy roles and engage in activities that amplify their standing as elders (*David Racine, personal communication*).

For older adults who do not live in life-style communities, the opportunity for regular engagement may not even be available. There may be the once-a-week volunteer job or church activity, but the opportunity for daily involvement in helping to enhance the lives of others is rarely if ever an option. Ultimately, many, especially in the last years of their lives, end up feeling lonely and isolated. Many also end up having to leave their communities—their friends and neighbors—and moving into age-segregated assisted living.

It does not have to be this way.

### *Facilitating the engagement of older adults*

Intentional neighboring involves obligatory engagement by older adults in regular activities, both formal (*e.g.* tutoring, mentoring) and informal (*e.g.* inviting children in for cookies and milk).

This obligation is underscored by offering physical and material support (*e.g.* reduced rent, specially-modified housing) in exchange, but it is also important to decouple the amount of benefit received (*e.g.* \$100 discount from market-rate rent per month) from the amount of engagement provided.

While the engagement requirement may be, for example, six hours per week (as it is at *Hope Meadows*), residents will routinely

put in many more hours because they want to, and because there is so much to do. No dollar amount is attached to each hour of service.

Engagement is also facilitated by clarifying policies and formally documenting requirements for engagement; by recognizing, valuing, and encouraging the use of special talents and interests each older adult brings to the community; and by actively listening to and responding to the ideas and opinions of residents regarding their engagement, especially those of the older adults themselves.

## Essential Design Patterns

While shared foundational values are critical to the success of an intentional neighboring initiative, other key characteristics also contribute by creating an organizational “scaffold” upon which a network of relationships can emerge and proliferate.

We call these distinctive program features **design patterns**, following the lead of architect Christopher Alexander (1979). Design patterns are broad guidelines that can be implemented in various and often innovative ways.

Together they form an intuitive template for creating opportunities and supports for successful interaction and long-term flourishing, and when implemented flexibly and creatively, can resolve the natural tensions entailed in forming community out of diversity.

There are at least five design patterns which appear to be integral to intentional neighboring.

### 1. A key focus on vulnerability

*Families and individuals facing specific chronic challenges that make them vulnerable provide the organizing focus of the community. They are its reason for being.*

#### *Introduction*

Reframing our understanding of vulnerabilities is a core value, and underpins the design pattern of focusing the community’s purpose on mitigating or overcoming challenges that create vulnerability. This focus becomes a means for galvanizing a thriving, inclusive community.

---

*What gives life its deepest significance and what gives our lives meaning are the caring relationships we make.*

---

#### *A focus on vulnerability*

**Intentional Neighboring:** Vulnerability is something we all experience, some of us more chronically than others. A primary focus on the challenges of people who are experiencing persistent vulnerability is central to the development of a culture of

intentional neighboring. It is this focus that unites a community, and can make it “come alive.”

Communities now in operation have mainly focused on supporting parents adopting children from foster care or on supporting kinship foster families. Other communities are being designed to fully integrate and support young adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities, or to support wounded warriors and survivor families.

Having a common focus provides a source of identity and community cohesion and unites people regardless of their differences. All residents, including the most vulnerable, become problem-solvers rather than recipients of services.

As Christopher Alexander notes, the contributions, interests, and abilities of *everyone* must be identified and encouraged.

This vision may seem extraordinary, but when the goal is to develop a culture of intentional neighboring, it can become an ordinary part of daily living, something one easily takes for granted.

**Conventional practice:** In most neighborhoods there is no unifying social purpose. Neighboring is often viewed as being limited to acts such as lending the proverbial “cup of sugar” or “keeping an eye on a neighbor's house.” People facing significant challenges including disabilities tend to be isolated and can often feel invisible.

The idea of a “normal” community deliberately uniting around the challenges of managing and overcoming vulnerability is extremely rare. And the idea that community members might be enriched by one another’s abilities and vulnerabilities is almost nonexistent.

### *Implementing a focus on vulnerability*

Intentional neighboring communities are first conceived with the identification of a particular set of challenges or obstacles that create significant and long-term vulnerability in individuals.

Addressing these issues becomes the central purpose of the community, as the particular people they most impact become a key focus, and the “heart” of the community. For example, the purpose of *Ohana Village*, now being developed in Spokane, Washington is to

identify barriers affecting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, barriers often visible from one’s own porch, and address them within the context of a diverse, intergenerational, intentional community of support, by harnessing the organic power of home and neighborhood to enhance the lives of every resident.

To accomplish this purpose, *Ohana Village* will reframe what it means to be vulnerable. It will integrate adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities into the normal rhythms of daily life, where all residents, including older adults, embrace one another as friends, neighbors, and family members.

## 2. Three or more generations

*Neighborhoods are designed to include residents spanning at least three generations. Complex interactions and relationships developing among three or more generations give rise to a more robust culture of neighboring and a deeper understanding and appreciation of the unique perspectives of each generation.*

### *Introduction*

The energy, care, and resilience brought to people's lives by three or more generations are necessary for a community to thrive. Children bring joy, meaning, and purpose to the daily lives of older adults; parents delight in older adults becoming "grandparents" to their children; and older adults become friends and mentors to parents while always being available to provide care and support to them, to their children, and to one another.

### *Multiple generations*

**Intentional Neighboring:** *Hope Meadows* in Rantoul, Illinois is the community where the intentional neighboring paradigm was first conceived and implemented. The importance of not just two, but at least three generations is clearly reflected in the words of one of the first residents of this pilot neighborhood, a resident who still lives there two decades later:

I think the reason people become close here is because of the love for the children and the caring for each other and what each other is

trying to do—the seniors caring for the families and what they are trying to do with the children, and the families caring for the seniors because they know we are trying to help them in any and every way we can. They know the seniors are here for them, and the seniors know that if we need help there is a family here for us too.  
[quoted in Power & Eheart 2001 p.731]

**Conventional practice:** Rarely do programs that focus on uniting generations or on "intergenerational programming" emphasize the importance of three or more generations. Much more typical are two-generation program models with the

---

*Intentional neighboring enables older people to occupy roles and engage in activities that amplify their standing as elders.*

---

generations being children and older adults. A typical agency or social service goal might be "to improve the lives of children and older adults through intergenerational programs and policies."

### *Engaging three or more generations*

There are many design and program features that help bring three or more generations together. These include designing all physical spaces, (e.g., community center, housing, playground) to accommodate the physical, social, and psychological needs of residents of all ages; integrating rather than segregating housing according to age; designating space (inside

and outside) for use by all residents, regardless of age; and designing space for aging in place.

Ultimately the children will become teenagers, parents will become older adults, and older adults who may have arrived in their 60s may well live into their 80s or 90s and become less active.

Architect John Shoemith recognized this when he wrote to us about designing new spaces for *Hope Meadows*:

As a community design effort... when we build a special place for those seniors requiring a little extra care, we must build places for the grandchildren and families to come, to meet with their grandparents—to share, to talk and to continue the relationships that make them both stronger.

*[Personal communication, May 2009]*

In addition to designing physical space for engagement of generations, policies and programs also must be designed to encourage the interaction and development of neighboring among residents of all ages, for example, by involving all generations in the majority of community activities or by making policies inclusive rather than exclusive.

### 3. Embracing Diversity

*Diversity is deliberately cultivated to generate creative solutions to complex problems while reducing stigmas, stereotypes, and intolerance.*

### *Introduction*

Diversity in relation to community can be defined as people coming together to form community who are of different races, gender, ages, and from different geographical locations, class, religions, economic status, etc.. People coming together who represent these differences can help enrich community life by utilizing each other's wide range of experiences, ideas, and customs.

### *Fostering diversity*

**Intentional Neighboring:** In a community based on intentional neighboring, the inherent diversity of age is complemented and enhanced by cultivating diversity of race, ethnicity, education, income, and life experience and perspective. Living in a community intentionally designed to incorporate differences among its residents is not always easy, but the rewards can be powerful.

When people live beside each other, when they see each other every day, and when they share a common purpose, they get to know each other as individuals, and they come to rely on each other for support and for friendship.

Stereotypes that individuals bring with them when they come to a community based on the intentional neighboring paradigm begin to disappear as open and honest communication, reciprocal everyday acts of care (*e.g.* picking up a neighbor's mail when they are out of town, or a spontaneous hug from a child), and growing

understandings become routine, a part of everyday life. Ignorance is replaced with knowledge, fear with comfort, abnormality with normality, and apathy with care and concern.

**Conventional practice:** Unfortunately, most conventional practices and policies often work to limit diversity in neighborhoods. People are segregated by age, race, and household income. Think about assisted living facilities or senior housing developments which require residents to be 55 or older. Or think about federal affordable housing policies which make it difficult to mix market-rate housing with subsidized housing for people with lower incomes.

### *Cultivating diversity*

To cultivate diversity, communities based on intentional neighboring have implemented several key practices. Every effort is made to bring people from differing backgrounds, incomes, and races together; everyone is expected to contribute to the betterment of the community; and everyone is expected to be engaged as a neighbor and as a community member. The ideas and knowledge that people bring to the community because of their diverse backgrounds and experiences are embraced and often celebrated. Also helpful can be a policy that all meeting rooms must be for use by all generations, and a practice of bringing all residents together frequently, often on a daily basis, through planned activities.

## 4. Physical design facilitates relationships

*The physical design dimensions of a community based on intentional neighboring are vital as a context for the formation and development of caring relationships across and within generations, and among a diverse population.*

### *Introduction*

Christopher Alexander's seminal work on architectural design has greatly influenced our thinking. *In The Timeless Way of Building* Alexander writes,

There is one timeless way of building. It is thousands of years old, and the same today as it has always been. The great traditional buildings of the past, the villages, tents, and temples in which man feels at home, have always been made by people who were very close to the center of this way....

It is a process through which the order of a building or a town grows out directly from the inner nature of the people which are in it. It is a process which allows the life inside a person, or a family, or a town, to flourish, openly, in freedom, so vividly that it gives birth, of its own accord, to the natural order which is needed to sustain this life. [p. 7]

### *Physical design*

**Intentional Neighboring:** The social dynamics at the heart of intentional neighboring emerge naturally within the course of daily life and interaction. Architecture and site design can facilitate and enhance such living and interaction, or

it can frustrate and even prevent it altogether.

Alexander's work on identifying patterns that lead to successful spaces offers a wealth of suggestive and practical insights, but perhaps more importantly it indicates an approach that puts the life of the community at the heart of the design process. In our experience, once the goals and values of intentional neighboring are made explicit and imagined in concrete terms, architects and planners have no trouble working out innovative designs for structures and spaces and affordances that can realize them.



A child stops to chat with Bill Biederman in the carport of his apartment at *Hope Meadows*. (Photo credit: Alex Harris)

**Conventional practice:** New housing projects are typically designed as ends in themselves. Cost-to-build and marketability of individual units are dominant considerations, while effects of the physical design on the social and psychological

dimensions of the neighborhoods thus created are subordinate, if considered at all.

---

*Physical design should facilitate the formation of relationships and the active engagement of all community members.*

---

The physical arrangement and design of buildings and outdoor spaces rarely if ever address the specific social, psychological and physical needs of *multiple* generations simultaneously. Designing space for common areas is not normally a high priority.

As *Hope Meadows* resident Clarissa Moramarco recently observed, the result is that individuals and families who do want to gather must resort to using spaces, resources and facilities outside of their own immediate neighborhoods.

### *Facilitating intentional neighboring through physical design*

To optimize socialization and a sense of neighborliness and well-being, the physical design includes a community center which becomes the hub of community events; it also includes vehicular traffic being minimized and office and intergenerational spaces being optimally situated. In addition, with few exceptions, all space (outside and inside) is made available for use by all generations.



All buildings are designed with significant visual connection to the outdoors. There also should be easy access for all residents regardless of age or physical needs to all community spaces including open space for gatherings such as playgrounds or a memorial garden, and built community space (e.g. the community center).

Finally, the housing units need to be designed with sufficient privacy, while also inviting community participation. The driveways ending with a carport at *Hope Meadows*, for example, are often used by children to easily ride their bicycles right up to where “Grandpa” is sitting. Conversations ensue or “Grandpa” might be asked to fix the children’s bikes.

## 5. Transformational leadership

*Intentional neighboring requires leaders—people who empower residents, including those who often are stigmatized because of their challenges, to become active partners in working to accomplish the neighborhood’s mission.*

### *Introduction*

Words used to describe leadership include *management, control, guidance, and direction*. These words can be interpreted to mean having power over and being in command of constituents—to be in charge. But this interpretation of leadership has been changing, slowly but steadily, since the mid-eighties.

In 1987 Tom DeMarco and Timothy Lister wrote a book casting new light on

management. They argued that the best success is the one in which there is no evidence of management, where the team is not even aware they are being “managed.”

---

*The best success is the one in which there is no evidence of management, where the team is not even aware they are being “managed.”*

---

They weren’t suggesting that managers don’t manage, “that they don’t give direction and make judgments of their own.

They have to do this all the time” (p. 142). But good managers or leaders also continually utilize the strengths and expertise of each of their team by providing frequent opportunities for the team to succeed together.

Ultimately, DeMarco and Lister write,

The great manager knows that people can’t be controlled in any meaningful sense anyway; the essence of successful management is to get everyone pulling in the same direction and then somehow get them fired up to the point that nothing, not even their manager, could stop their progress. [p. 154]

### *Leadership*

**Intentional Neighboring:** In this paradigm, the key job of a community leader is to transform an intergenerational neighborhood or community into a place

where a culture of kindness, helpfulness, consideration, and generosity is pervasive.

Leadership skills include personally building and maintaining trusting and caring relationships with all community residents, and through these trusting relationships, continually encouraging and empowering community members to take responsibility for the creation of a culture of neighborliness.

In addition, transformative leadership requires having passion for the community's purpose, being a risk taker who is not afraid to bring temporary chaos to business-as-usual, and bringing creativity and innovation to all leadership tasks.

**Conventional practice:** In typical intervention work, a highly respected leader is one whose primary skills include taking control and being a key decision maker; having excellent administrative skills such as managing a budget; and being emotionally detached from his or her "clients" or "constituents."

Such leaders are not expected to work within an empowered community, nor to rely on the strengths of that community to help address social issues. Rather, their education and prior work experience usually prepare them to take charge in situations where their skills and knowledge apply and where other participants are not similarly equipped. They define, with some precision, the problem they hope to solve and carefully design the means through which the problem is to be solved.

## *Implementing transformational leadership*

Transformational leadership has at least five key components:

- recognizing that a leader's most important job is to build relationships that are collaborative, reciprocal, trusting, and friendly
- remaining open and flexible to the needs of the community as it evolves
- providing leadership *with* the community not *to* the community
- continually encouraging diverse opinions and suggestions from all residents of the community
- tapping the abundance of special talents of all community members.

In essence, one leads by listening to and genuinely respecting and caring about all community members.

## Conclusion

As a nation, we need to craft a fuller response to vulnerability. The key characteristics of our safety net, in many ways, stand in stark contrast to the characteristics of intentional neighboring (*e.g.* one is largely agency-driven and guided by professionals, while the other is driven by community and relies on ordinary individuals; one focuses on deficits first and the other attempts to focus first on strengths.)

Yet these differences do not have to be incompatible. If we were to continue to

implement the current safety net while also leveraging intentional neighboring, the result would be a *strengthening of both institutions*.

The effective implementation of both has the potential to:

- broaden our perception of “vulnerability” to include *the whole person*, not just the circumstances or factors that make someone vulnerable,
- provide a fuller, more complete response to basic human needs (*i.e.*, adding caring relationships and neighboring to the categories of food, shelter, *etc.*),
- utilize the talents and experiences of, not only professionals, but of *all of us*, including those most vulnerable,
- be more encompassing, providing both targeted services *and* the daily care and support of family, friends, and neighbors.

### *Looking ahead*

If we are to address more fully the challenges so many of us are facing which make us vulnerable, and the challenges that cause us to feel a sense of sad helplessness, we must begin to recognize two things:

- that our nation’s safety net, based on the best efforts of businesses, government, and social services, still needs to be strengthened; and
- that in these modern times, when many of us barely know our neighbors, the recovery of neighboring is critical to the well-being of everyone, including the most vulnerable among us, and ultimately to the health of the nation.

We need a new vision of how we address current and long-standing social challenges—a vision that strengthens both our country’s safety net and the recovery of neighboring.

By building communities of intentional neighboring we will be helping to fill the gap between what is and what can be.

## References

- Alexander, C. (1979). *The Timeless Way of Building*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- DeMarco, T. & Lister, T. (1987). *Peopeware: Productive Projects and Teams*. New York: Dorset House Publishing Co., Inc.
- Eheart, B. K. (2014). *Transformational leadership*. Available at:  
<http://ghdc.generationsofhope.org/publications/transformational-leadership>.
- Eheart, B. K. & Power, M. B. (2001). From despair to care: A journey of the old and the young at Hope Meadows. *Children and Youth Services Review, 23*(9/10), 619-718.
- Masten, A. S. (2001). Ordinary magic. Resilience processes in development. *American Psychologist, 56*(3), 227-238.
- Power, M. B., & Eheart, B. K. (2001). Crisis in a foster home: The need for a caring community. *Children and Youth Services Review, 23*(9/10), 719-742. [An earlier version of this paper was published in *The Sociological Quarterly*, (2000) 41(1)].
- Power, M. B., Mitchell, E. T., Eheart, B. K., & Hopping, D. (2011). The power of language: Practice in a shared site. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships, 9*(3), 281-292.
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon and Schuster.