

# Community as Intervention

Modeling a complex intergenerational  
neighborhood initiative

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## Abstract

The Generations of Hope Community (GHC) concept represents a new approach to providing support and service to vulnerable populations – an approach that cultivates the largely untapped potential of intentional community living to address social problems. As a place, a GHC is an intentional, intergenerational neighborhood where older adults provide indispensable support to parents, children, and youth who, in turn, become instrumental in promoting the well-being of the elders as they age. As a program, a GHC is designed to tackle challenges that are often resistant to intervention from conventional social service systems, by utilizing the contributions of all members of the neighborhood, who are supported by a small staff.

A central claim of the GHC approach is that by cultivating a network of caring intergenerational relationships, problem-solving can shift from intervention *in* community to community *as* intervention – neighbors will provide extraordinary levels of neighboring (care and support) within the normal course of daily living. Several local initiatives have been launched to implement this model in full or in part, lending some urgency to the task of devising a common framework for basic evaluation of process, outcome, and impact.

The original exemplar of this approach is Hope Meadows, a neighborhood established in 1994 utilizing housing on the decommissioned Chanute Air Force Base in east-central Illinois.

Hope Meadows is both a place and a program: twelve families agree to adopt three or four children from the foster care system, and approximately 50 older adults agree to provide six hours per week of volunteer service to the community in exchange for below-market-rate rent in the neighborhood. Adoptive families and older adults remain in the neighborhood for as long as they want; youth leave the neighborhood and transition to adulthood in the same ways other young adults do. Traditional programs and services (therapy, case management, tutoring, after-school programs) as well as nontraditional programs and services (camps, picnics, special neighborhood events, caring “grandparents”) are provided within and by the neighborhood.

The Hope Meadows program is multi-layered and produces effects in multiple domains which unfold on multiple timelines. The challenge of devising a complete logic model is daunting, and following through with appropriate process, outcome, and impact measures even more so.

In this session I will present a high-level overview of the GHC approach, followed by a more detailed examination of the “multilevel” logic model currently being developed to address multiple programming domains (foster-adoption casework, therapy, aging-in-place, etc.) as well as multiple layers of programming and meta-programming involved in cultivating and supporting the collective efficacy of the emergent community itself (“community as intervention”). I will discuss the role of conventional “multilevel” methods in the evaluation of specific program domains, as well as the extension of the concept of multilevel analysis to address multiple levels of emergent social structure – the web of kin and kin-like relationships that weaves across generations and entwines residents in a network of reciprocal support and commitment. Such methods may range, for example, from Principal Components Analysis of multilevel constructs like Sense of Community (encompassing sub-components of membership, influence, needs fulfillment, etc.), to visualizations of complex interlocking network structures at individual, extended family, and neighborhood levels – all conditioning (and recursively conditioned by) outcome domains such as lifecourse transitions, transformative gains, wellbeing, etc.

By its nature such inquiry demands a multi-method approach that bridges ethnographic detail with more stylized measures (family functioning scales, depression indices, etc.) and/or mathematical modeling (e.g. correspondence analysis of social network structures). A number of research and evaluation efforts have been undertaken in various ways over the sixteen years of Hope Meadows’ existence, but are only now being assembled into a more synoptic picture and organized under a comprehensive logic model.

My hope is that by exploring and explicitly modeling the programmatic cultivation of deeply collaborative living, new avenues for providing more effective services to vulnerable populations – not exclusively foster-adoptive children and families – will become viable and widespread.



## A new program concept

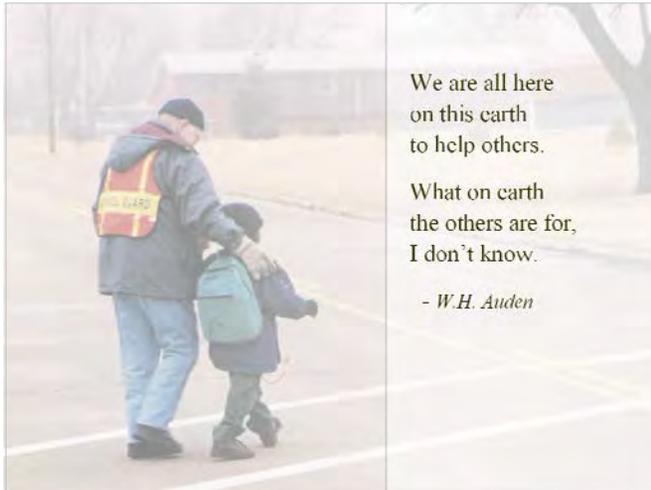
My entrée into the realm of child welfare evaluation came not via programming nor evaluation *per se*, but as a social theorist. I learned about the Hope Meadows project through a segment on **ABC's Nightline** in 1996 that aired when the initiative was just two years old – this piece is still one of the best introductions to the concept, and it also poses some important theoretical questions.

The founder of the program (Brenda Krause Eheart) was teaching at the University of Illinois; I was a sociology graduate student looking for a dissertation project. Eheart had already started receiving inquiries regarding program replication. We discussed the program and its origins in her research into foster-adoption, but pretty quickly it became clear that a great deal more had been accomplished – perhaps inadvertently – than the creation of a successful new approach to adoption. And I became hooked on the challenge of identifying and articulating just what this larger achievement was.

Just to help visualize this, here is the Google Maps view of the neighborhood in Rantoul, Illinois.

And to illustrate how senior households are mingled with family households, I've added an overlay image that shows senior apartments in red and family units in blue.





After some initial interviews and background research, and considerable puzzling, the notion suddenly occurred to me – that at Hope Meadows **community itself had become an intervention.**

Initially I was being somewhat facetious with the term **community as intervention...** W.H. Auden is also being facetious in this slide – he's referring to social workers and their "peculiar kind of arrogance"...

I think he's actually onto something, but being the child of a social worker, I have a slightly different take on it. What he's pointing to – maybe inadvertently – is something like a barrier, or maybe a veil, between service interventions and life as we normally live it.

The question for me, and the question for "community as intervention", is just how permeable is, or should, this veil or barrier be?

Which leads to a cascade of further questions...

- What are the optimal roles of professional staff vs. organic community processes?
- How can deliberations be conducted and decisions made that appropriately respect this boundary?
- How should information be shared to inform those deliberations and decisions? Obviously process evaluation is deeply implicated here.

Let's begin with how Hope Meadows arose in the first place... which was as a **challenge** both to the service industry and to society generally... Then we'll pick up where Ted Koppel (Nightline) left off, and step through the program **structure** more systematically.

Next we'll step back and see if we can't construct a **logic model** that does at least some justice to the full complexity of things, and I'll offer some illustrations of modeling techniques that can help.





One of Brenda’s favorite quotes early on was this one from John Dewey, which can be read in a couple of ways, the most obvious being a variation on “leave no child behind”.

But another way to interpret it is to propose a (somewhat disturbing) thought experiment – imagine your own children becoming subject to the child welfare system.

What are the goals of this system, and how do they measure up with respect to your aspirations for your own children?

safety → permanency → wellbeing

My impression is that, in most research literature, the construct of “wellbeing” is represented in terms of **managing negative indicators** – anxiety, stress, poor health, delayed physical or socio-emotional or cognitive development, behavior disorders, etc.

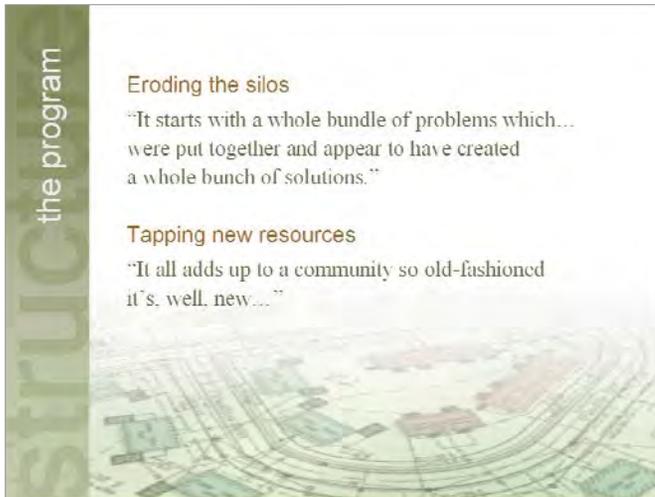
When I think about my own children, other goals and aspirations come to mind – especially that of being securely embedded in a web of close family and community ties.

I recognize that in more recent work the wellbeing construct has begun to evolve towards recognizing and encompassing a richer set of concepts, including for example “care for others”, “joining groups”, etc.

But the question remains: to what extent can we – or should we – delegate the work of achieving even a well-rounded wellbeing to professional services and public institutions?

By definition this richer kind of wellbeing is a function of processes that occur behind the veil of intervention.





In retrospect I’ve come to think of **Ted Koppel** as the **first social theorist** of the Hope Meadows initiative – here are a couple of his insights from the clip. In the case of the first quote we now would probably recognize an instance of the famous “silo problem” – chronically separate funding streams for services.

The second echoes Mark Freedman’s observation about retirees being an **untapped national resource**, but it goes further – in this case the retirees are bringing another dimension (“old-fashioned” community) of this resource to bear... even if they’re actually inventing it as they go along.

Of course you can’t just concentrate multiple problems and expect to see new solutions. But you can look for how problems are inter-related and how people who have become identified *as problems* may actually be untapped resources. Everyone in fact – families, neighbors, and even kids themselves – who have been cut out of **circuits of care**.

**Social networks as circuits of care** – not always necessarily, but always potentially. So the question is, under what conditions?

The newness of this old-fashioned concept consists in the fact that it is deliberate and diverse; a ‘normal’ neighborhood, yet also multi-generational, integrated with respect to class and race, and characterized by a high level of professional competence that is diffused throughout the neighborhood, and thus effective in an understated way.

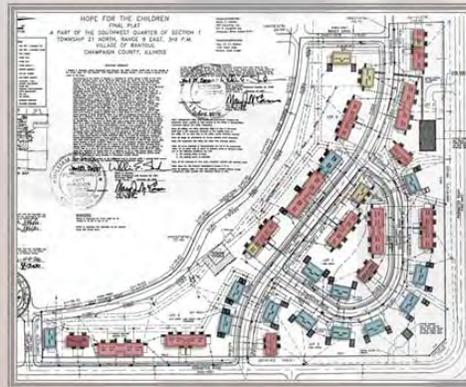
The entire process is managed so as to evoke a sense of an ‘old fashioned’ village, but without recourse to the usual exclusions and coercions that made such traditional spaces possible. The ‘normality’ that is sought and achieved in this way is both natural and artificial.

Again the question is, what conditions make this possible?

## Structure

Relationships develop naturally, but not automatically. Hope Meadows builds and supports an “old-fashioned” network of relationships in several ways...

## Architecture and site design



## Structure

This leads to a discussion of structure – architectural, programmatic, socio-cultural, etc. – that contains and makes possible the kind of dynamics we intuitively recognize as an “old-fashioned” solution to new social problems.

As mentioned above, new solutions will not emerge automatically. The devil is in the details of **structure**, which in this case encompasses several layers that normally don’t get addressed together in such a comprehensive manner. The next few slides present a heuristic set of categories through which program coordinators and designers can introduce structure, beginning with the physical built environment.

At Hope Meadows everyone’s most basic role is simply that of geographic neighbor, but being a neighbor is also a programmatic role.

Normally when architecture and programming do get addressed together it’s usually in the context of something like “service-enriched low-income housing” or of “continuing care retirement communities” – neither of which incorporate the residents themselves as integral elements of the “programming”.

## Structure

Relationships develop naturally, but not automatically. Hope Meadows builds and supports an “old-fashioned” network of relationships in several ways...

## Architecture and site design

## Routine and special events



Community events are scheduled as either routine, such as daily after-school tutoring and other activities at the Intergenerational Center (IGC), annual Easter Egg Hunt, 4th of July barbecue (pictured) etc., or special – a good example of a special event becoming part of the community’s routine identity is the Formal Tea pictured here, which began as a spontaneous project of a few “Red Hat Society” ladies (“when I am old I shall wear purple...”) in the neighborhood and now is an annual event.

## Structure

Relationships develop naturally, but not automatically. Hope Meadows builds and supports an “old-fashioned” network of relationships in several ways...

Architecture and site design

Routine and special events

Volunteer engagement



The roster of volunteer activities adds a crucial element of “compulsory engagement” that – among other things – helps to overcome the “viscosity” of developing social networks – people have to engage with one another on tasks that really do need to be done (no make-work envelope stuffing...), and this provides a natural way to get acquainted and connected. Of course it also adds instrumental value to the program as well, the equivalent of tens of thousands of dollars of labor each year.

## Structure

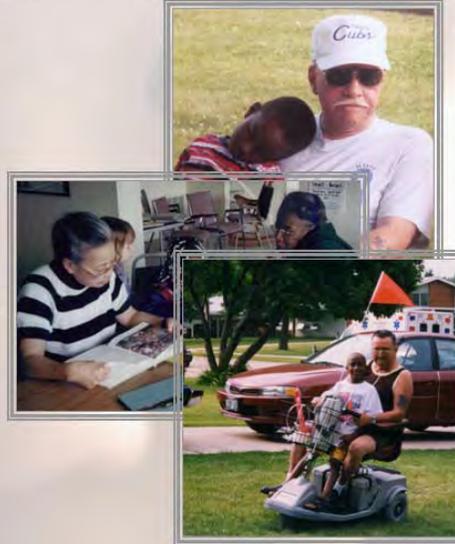
Relationships develop naturally, but not automatically. Hope Meadows builds and supports an “old-fashioned” network of relationships in several ways...

Architecture and site design

Routine and special events

Volunteer engagement

Roles and expectations



From the outset of the program the very definition of roles such as “Hope Senior” help to structure expectations and behaviors, laying down a foundation for cultural evolution within the community.

New children pick up very quickly on the interactions and relationships that are possible, and suddenly find themselves with a wealth of opportunities for (re)building a personal network of care and support.

This is particularly remarkable given that foster children normally are offered almost no opportunities for exercising this kind of proactive agency in their lives, and too often reach adulthood without basic social skills.

## Structure

Relationships develop naturally, but not automatically.  
 Hope Meadows builds and supports an “old-fashioned”  
 network of relationships in several ways...

## Architecture and site design

## Routine and special events

## Volunteer engagement

## Roles and expectations

## Communications



Formal channels of reliable communications are critical – not only in the practical sense of coordination and announcements and calendars etc. but also as a venue for recognition and acknowledgement of achievements. At Hope Meadows the weekly “Seedlings” newsletter pictured here has been a fixture since the inception of the program in 1994.

## Structure

Relationships develop naturally, but not automatically. Hope Meadows builds and supports an “old-fashioned” network of relationships in several ways...

## Architecture and site design

## Routine and special events

## Volunteer engagement

## Roles and expectations

## Communications

## Professional services and material supports



Finally there are the professional services themselves, delivered unobtrusively from an office that is indistinguishable from any of the homes. The play therapy room in the basement could be virtually interchangeable with a dozen other basement playrooms in the neighborhood – seniors sometimes set up their own basements as playrooms.

Caseworkers can visit their entire caseload by walking around the neighborhood.

There is a pastoral flavor to the professional service roles that is necessarily absent from the conventional service industry with its “field visits” (as if clients lived out in the wilderness) and 50-minute hours.

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*So with this heuristic model in mind, we can begin to abstract from the concrete example of Hope Meadows, so that its design can be made useful to other programs and initiatives that might want to adapt or otherwise build on it.*

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## **The Generations of Hope Community (GHC) Model**

This takes us into the next topic, the essential model and the theory supporting it. The next two slides are just text of simple statements:

### **The GHC Model**

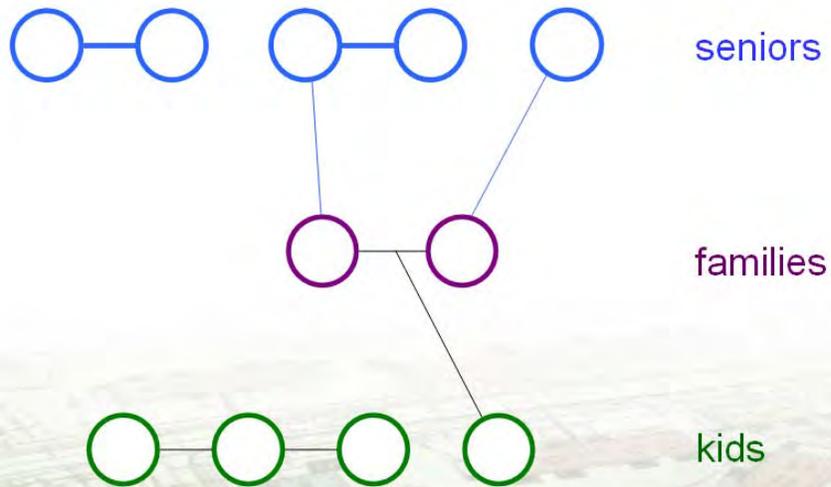
A Generations of Hope Community is an intentionally created, geographically contiguous intergenerational neighborhood, where some of the residents are facing a specific challenge around which the entire community organizes.

### **Theory**

Purposeful engagement and intergenerational relationships, developing over decades within a contiguous neighborhood, can sustain transformative gains and support life-course transitions, producing new kinds of organizational capacity.

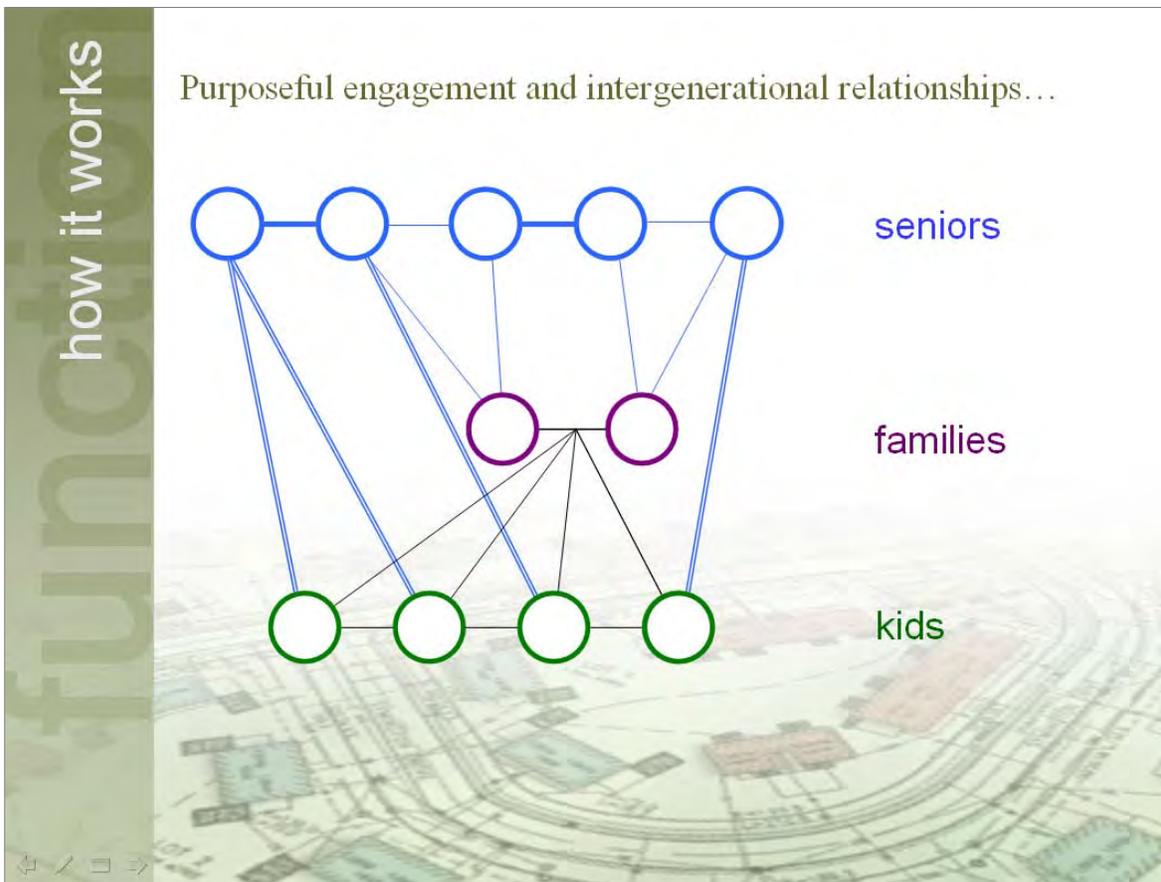
The slides that follow then **explore this theory statement**, phrase by phrase.

Purposeful engagement and intergenerational relationships...



Echoing one of the first slides of the presentation (extended social network), this animated slide focuses on the basic unit of analysis from an intergenerational perspective: the system of linked households that emerges around the foster-adoptive family.

In this illustration, three households of seniors (two couples and a single) connect as neighbors with a new family that brings one birth child with them and adopts a sibling group of three. New family relationships and attachments need time to form, and the process can be challenging.



The active presence of multiple seniors, available to assume multiple roles as friends, mentors, tutors, neighbors, etc. (signified by the double lines connecting seniors with kids) – can mitigate the risks and difficulties entailed in this melding of family systems.

This is one of the ways a GHC approach can multiply or leverage resources beyond what is typically possible in more conventionally structured program models that might pair senior volunteers with children around specifically-targeted needs.

The animation also illustrates why it can take three senior households to adequately connect up with all the members of an adoptive family, hence our strong guidance regarding a 3:1 ratio of households for a community with a foster-adoptive program focus.

This **extended network** dimension is augmented by an **extended time** dimension, the subject of the next slide...

how it works

... developing over decades  
within a contiguous neighborhood ...



Miss Irene and Brandon – the first picture from the 1996 Nightline segment, the middle one probably about 2000, and the last 2007.

... can sustain transformative gains



Picking up on the theme of what becomes possible “within a contiguous neighborhood...” this slide looks takes a closer look at a pair of connected households.

A family built by adoption – spanning four races/ethnicities (the child on the left is Hispanic) – accomplishes the transformative work of adding a succession of new members. Among the seniors who became close to this family are Margie and Elmer Davis – some of the very first to move into the neighborhood in 1994.

For Elmer the transformative gain was especially dramatic. Marge once explained that before moving to Hope Meadows, Elmer had largely lost any sense of initiative and purpose in life. “Down in Florida he just laid, didn’t what to do nothing...” she said. “Up here it’s entirely different.” Elmer struck up a particularly close relationship with one child, driving her to school occasionally when she was late and then eventually as a routine every day.

... can sustain transformative gains  
and support life-course transitions ...



The encouragement and support (emotional and material) that she received from neighbors like Elmer and Margie were probably critical in seeing her through to high school graduation, a major life-course transition.

Conversely, when Elmer died, the children and other neighbors were a vital resource for Margie. In effect Elmer's passing represented a major transition not only for Margie but for the entire community – a shared process of grief and of celebration and remembrance.

how it works

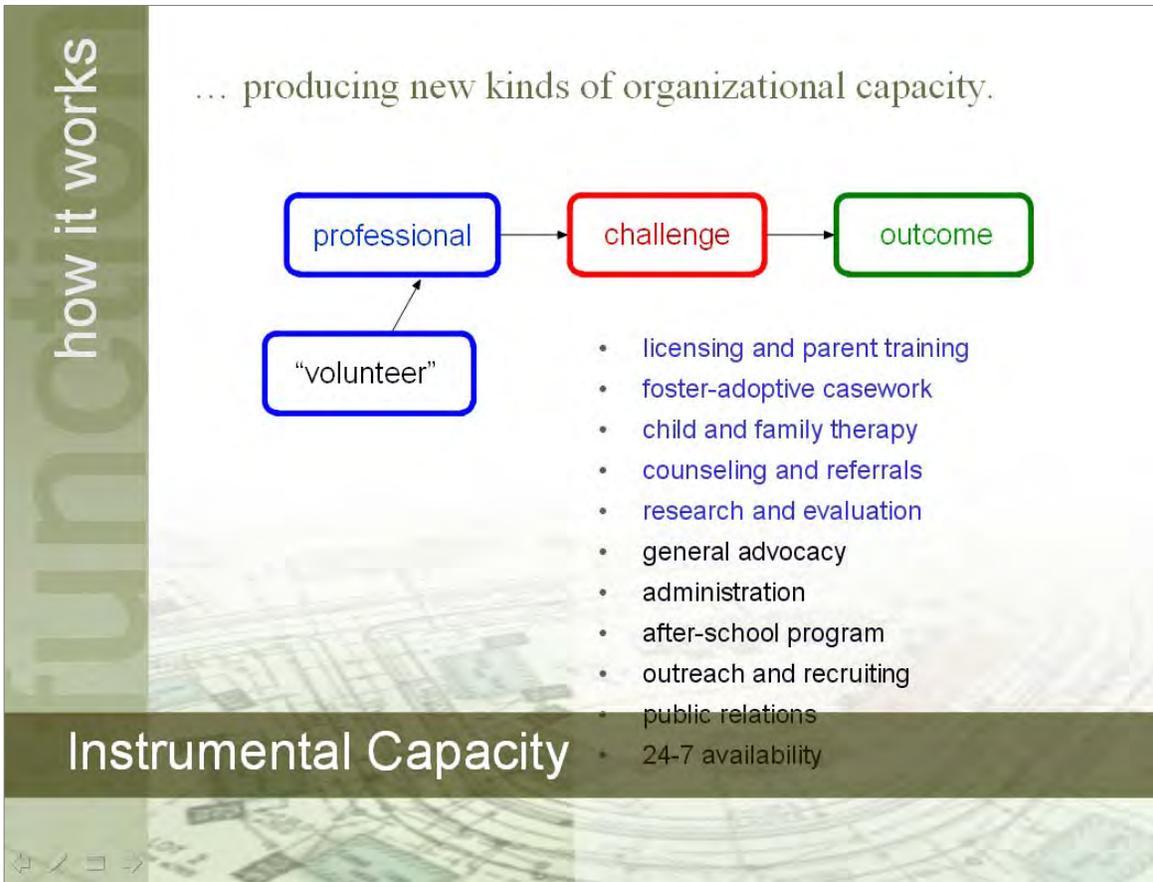
... producing new kinds of organizational capacity.



And so it goes... replicated and extended over and over, creating a complex network of interwoven lives.

From the perspective of organizational development, I think we're really looking at a new kind of capacity here.

To be just a little more analytical... let's look at the notion of "capacity" a bit more closely...



The conventional paradigm for professional services and intervention is to meet a challenge and produce a well-defined outcome. When volunteers are added to the mix it's usually in a way that's designed to take some of the burden off the professionals – to extend their reach so to speak.

So what's new is not really the presence and contribution of volunteers – and in terms of delivering reliable and knowledgeable assistance the approach pictured here has a lot to recommend it.

I call this **Instrumental Capacity** – and you can see in this list some of the specific ways this works at Hope Meadows.

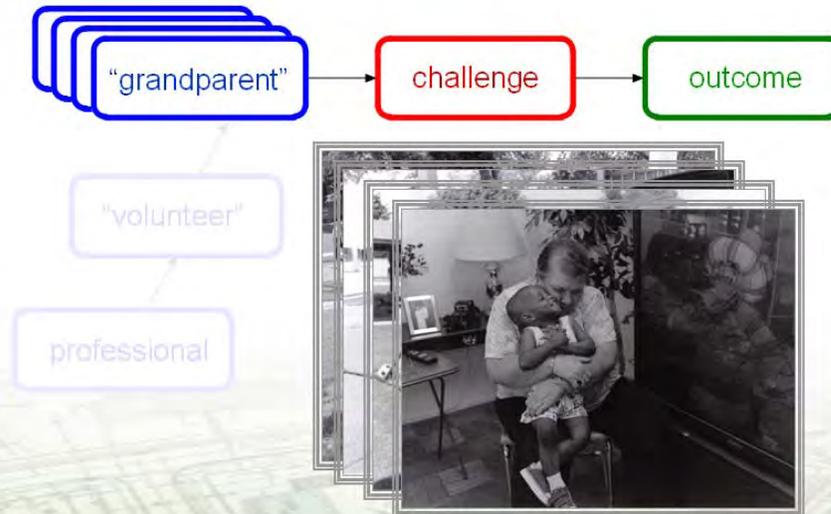
... producing new kinds of organizational capacity.



It's also possible however for GHC professionals to take a back seat to the efforts and activities of residents, and support them from behind the scenes or in more understated ways.

One effect then is that even the role of volunteer begins to recede into the background, after jump-starting relationships that continue to mature and develop on their own.

... producing new kinds of organizational capacity.

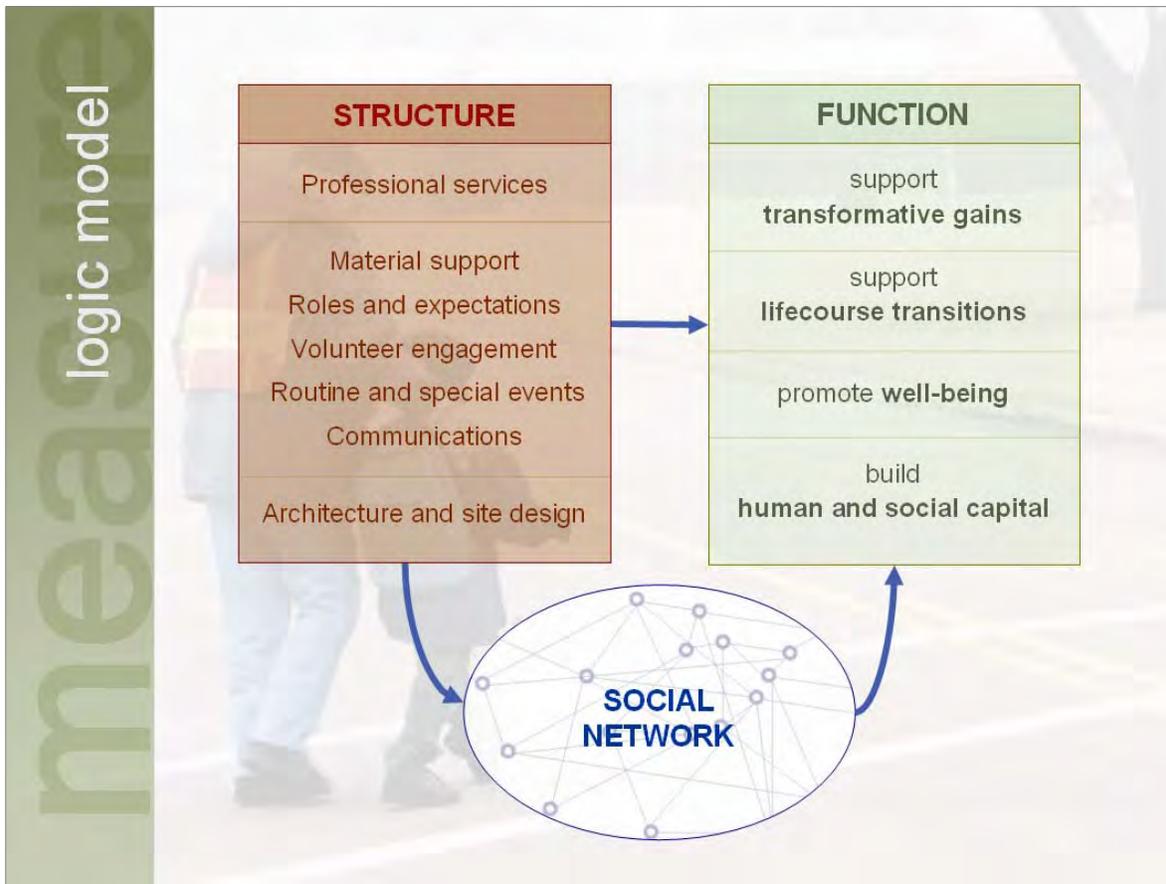


## Core Capacity

Neighbors may become friends, and friends may become mentors, and mentors may even become grandparents. Another angle on multistranding, and another visual series to hang the concept on.

I call the resulting organizational resource **“Core Capacity”**.

From a staff perspective it’s a challenge to cultivate and work with this kind of capacity, because it’s so indirect – sort of like trying to back double semi trailers into a parking spot. Not everyone is up to it.



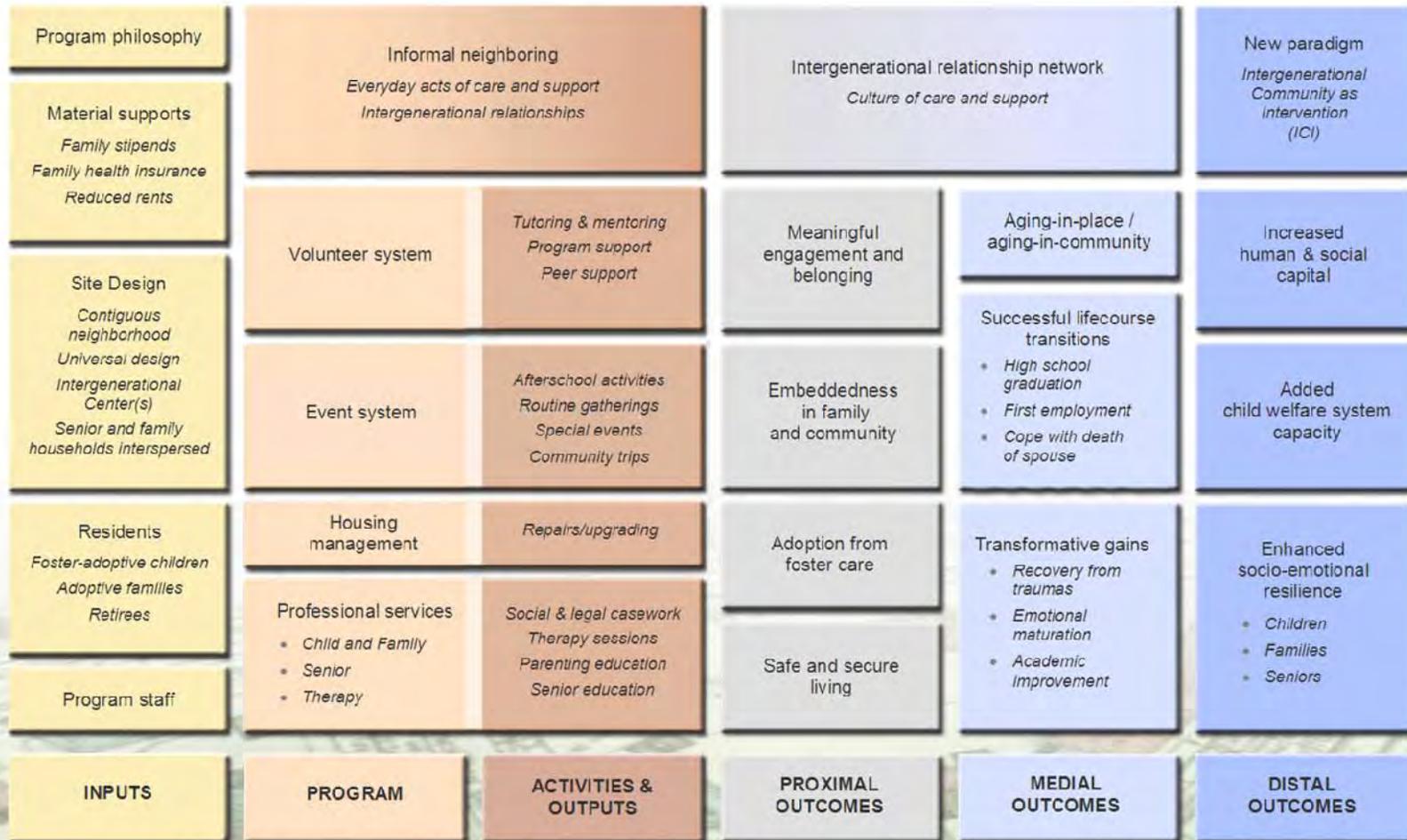
## Logic model

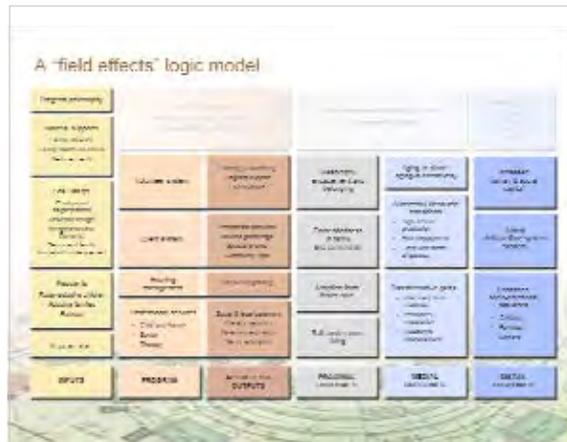
Recapping, and formalizing this whole process as a logic model, we can begin to look for ways to operationalize and measure the various elements and intended outcomes, and recognize interdependencies and emergent structures.

This diagram is helpful but doesn't really capture the full complexity of what's (ideally) going on.

The next evolution of our thinking brought us to what we now describe as a "field effects" logic model, which tries to assemble all the "working parts" in a single gestalt (*next slide*).

# A "field effects" logic model





The idea of a “field effects” model is that, in a complex undertaking such as community-as-intervention, the consequences of changes occurring in one domain may ripple throughout the entire system in planned and unplanned ways, with effects that may be more-or-less traceable but whose pathways can remain stubbornly inscrutable.

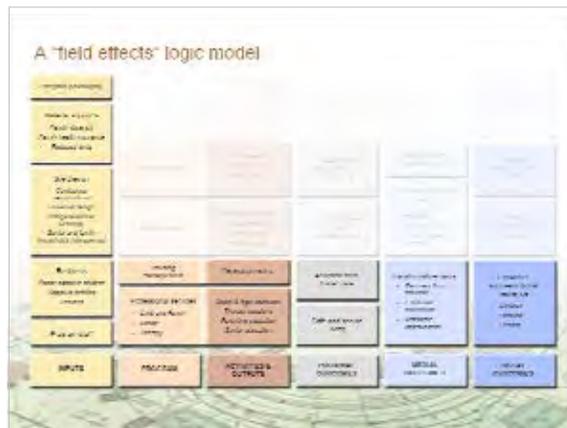
The challenge then is to bring appropriate tools to bear to illuminate what we can, while keeping an eye out for these “field effects”.

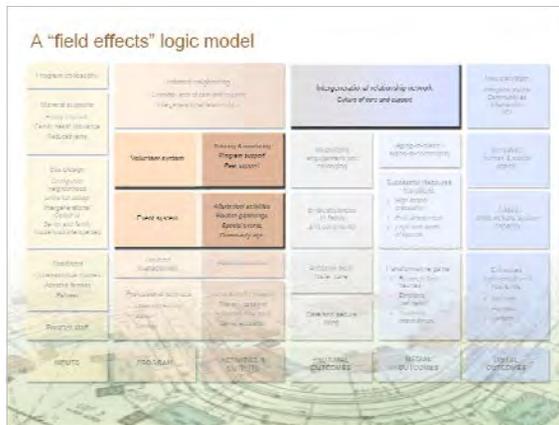
Ethnography for example is intrinsically a field-effects approach – you consider everything in the context of everything else, at first intuitively and then as explicitly as you can manage. Ethnographic observation would also be an appropriate approach to the top-level phenomena in the model – such as the emergence of a “culture of care” through routine neighboring activities.

Such activities (*top level tan-colored cell, previous page*) feed forward into the proximal/medial “outcome” of a network of relationships (*top level bluish cell*), but this network also emerges in part as an effect of mid-level program structures (*the tan-colored event system and volunteer system*). Those mid-level programmatic components lend themselves to more formal data-analytic methods (e.g. correspondence analysis) and can be expected to affect network development both directly and indirectly, by connecting neighbors in formal ways that trigger further informal interaction.

The bottom-level program components (*housing management, professional services, etc.*) are even more directly traceable with conventional process and outcome measures, but of course they too will trigger cascading field effects.

Note however that mid-level and especially upper level cells designate areas that are largely “behind the veil” of intervention – beyond the direct reach of service professionals and program designers.



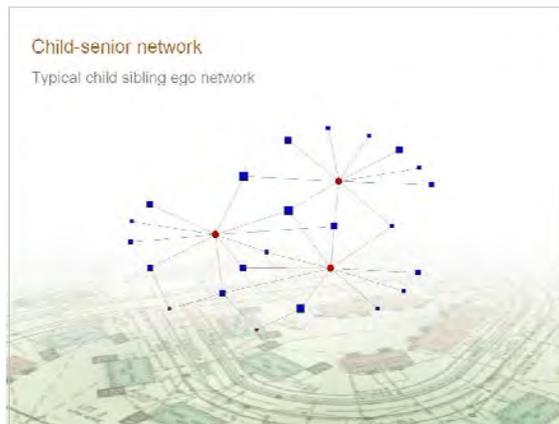


To illustrate some of the ways this complexity can be modeled, I'll show you (very briefly) a few tools we've been exploring that are particularly suited to "field" type phenomena – a more detailed discussion will have to wait for another time.

Here I've highlighted three cells at two levels of the model: the volunteer and event systems (*tan-colored cells*) and the relationship network (*blue cell*).

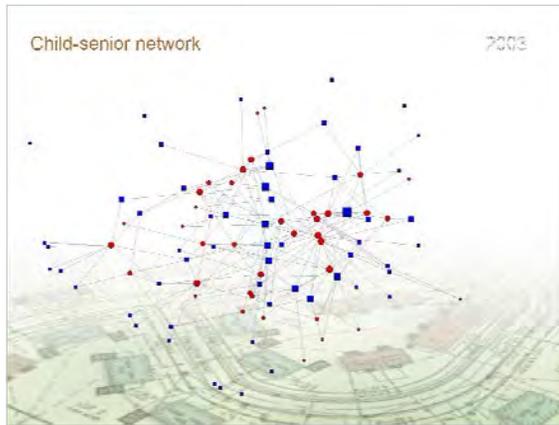
*(The slide images that follow are still versions of the animated and time-lapse slides of the presentation, and very abbreviated.)*

In theory then, one of the intended programmatic effects of residents' engagement as volunteers and as participants in scheduled events is the development of enduring interpersonal connections. Logs of volunteer hours and event participation and other routine administrative data provide the basis for a rudimentary picture of all three domains.



A typical child sibling ego network is illustrated to the left – close connections with seniors (*blue squares*) are mapped for a sibling group (same mother) of three adoptive children (*red dots*), aggregated over a ten-year period. At any one point in time some subset of these links would be current, averaging between 3 and 4 per child (in this sample case as well as generally for all adoptive children). Obviously there is considerable, but not complete, overlap.

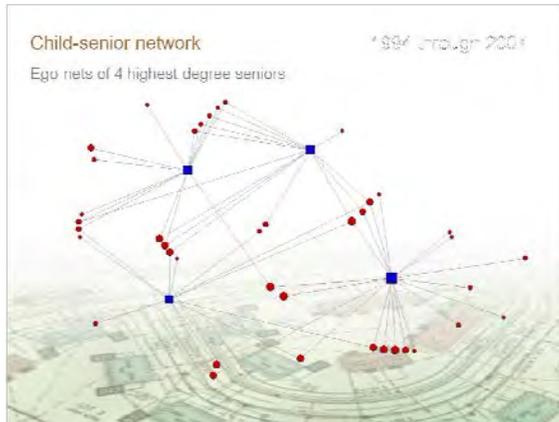
Children in the neighborhood who were not adopted from foster care tend to have lower degree (fewer such relationships), possibly in part because they are already embedded in an extended family from birth comprising grandparents and close cousins. Adopted kids nearly always tend to accumulate more seniors, bringing their personal extended families up into the 12 to 15 range.



By 2002, and more completely by 2003, the overall web of links and cross-links between kids and close seniors had become highly interconnected, and has remained pretty much at this density ever since (*left*).

Even if we restrict our view to just the four “highest degree” or most kid-connected seniors – the “centers of gravity” so to speak – we find systematic *inter*-connectivity, especially through the sharing of connections with whole sibling groups (*below left*).

This reflects one of the primary programming challenges – which must be achieved from “behind the veil” of intervention – to not only provide an optimal environment with sufficient opportunities for establishing intergenerational relationships, but also to encourage re-mixing and cross-linking – embracing and sustaining diversity against the natural human tendency to retreat into flocks of “birds of a feather”.



As I mentioned above, the challenge facing program designers in this regard is somewhat like that facing a truck driver trying to back double semi-trailers into a loading dock – control is indirect and effects are often counter-intuitive.

But there are some areas where variables can be adjusted, including (1) the system of routine and special events in the community and (2) the micro-economy of mandated volunteer effort.

And each, in its way, constitutes a domain of “field effects” in its own right.



## Event system

Here is a sample list of events that were scheduled for a single month. Some were more heavily attended than others, but a simple list (*left*) cannot reveal patterns of attendance.

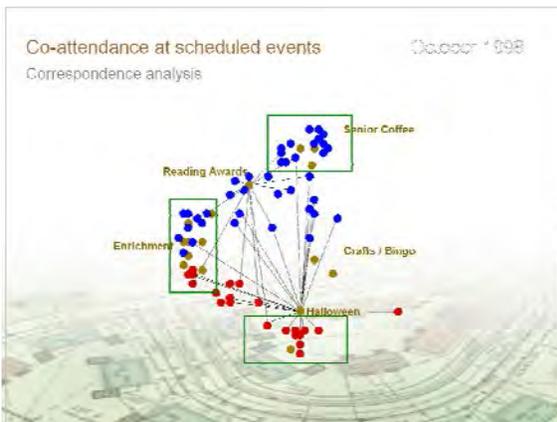
Rendered through correspondence analysis, however, the events sort themselves out graphically (*middle slide*). Attendees can also be situated in the same diagram, according to which events they attended – the blue dot represents a senior who attended the events shown with connecting lines, and is situated where it is because this is its “center of gravity” in the system of brown event dots.



In the bottom diagram all the seniors (blue dots) and children (red dots) appear in their respective places, and attendance at two key events is shown with connecting lines – these particular events served to cross-link groups (*green squares*) that otherwise might not have encountered one another routinely.

Cross-linking events obviously bring together the people who attend, but they also connect the people who don't, indirectly, via the “field effects” of subsequent conversations and serendipitous meeting.

Day trips and overnight trips are particularly good venues for jump-starting relationships that don't originate in formal tutoring or other routine contact, but again mainly as field effects, *i.e.* only because both child and senior will inevitably encounter one another again as neighbors and/or via programming, telling and retelling stories, building memories, and interweaving life histories.



As kids got older, some of these early routine events (e.g. pre-school Enrichment) were replaced by others (Brownies, fishing outings, etc.). There is a constant challenge to programming (and to seniors) to adapt to the evolving developmental needs of the children. Research suggests however that this very challenge can contribute to resiliency – a question we are hoping to investigate further via an NIH R21 grant.



## Volunteer system

The volunteer system can be approached with very similar tools – here the list for the same month shows senior volunteer tasks – those involving kids are in green and those not involving kids in red.

As with the events in the previous diagram, correspondence analysis sorts these tasks out in a revealing way. Tasks are situated close together if they are taken on by mostly the same seniors, and those tasks situated at the center of the diagram are most highly shared. (Seniors themselves are not represented in this diagram, to keep it simple).

There is not enough time right now to get deeply into the nuances of this analysis – but note what would happen (hypothetically) if two key volunteer tasks were to be eliminated. Taking out the highly shared “Office Clerical” and “Senior Coffee” dots, the system essentially bifurcates into largely separate sub-networks of volunteers (*bottom left*).







**Initiatives inspired by Hope Meadows.**  
Operational projects are indicated in red; those still under development are shown in blue.

## Extending the concept

A number of initiatives have been inspired by the example of Hope Meadows. Initially most focused on adoption of children from foster care, but over the years several variants have emerged, including communities dedicated to kinship care, long-term foster care, and residential secondary education for at-risk youth.

Generations of Hope Development Corporation (GHDC) was established in 2006 with a major funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, to facilitate both the replication of the model and its extension to an even wider range of application.

Projects currently under development include communities dedicated to supporting wounded military veterans and survivor families, developmentally disabled adults and their families, and homeless LGBT youth.

From a research perspective all this variation creates a unique opportunity to explore the potential of purposeful intergenerational community living to address longstanding social challenges in new ways.

GHDC is organizing a larger collaborative research network, to link sites and researchers across distances and variations in approach, leveraging web-based tools and resources, with the goal of serving as a knowledge and communications hub.

