

Implementing the Community Café Approach in Nebraska Communities

A Summary of Six
Community Café Sites

July 1, 2017 - June 30, 2018



Community Cafés are supported by

**The Nebraska
Child Abuse Prevention
Fund Board**

Welcome

Welcome to this summary report on the results of Community Cafés hosted in six neighborhoods in Nebraska during the 2017-2018 school year. The parents and staff who are leading the work share their experience in it.

“A Café is an outlet where people can come together to unify towards a common theme or goal; an unofficial opportunity where people can make a connection—the start of something bigger.” – Parent Host

Each Café is a space where parents and community partners explore what is most important to them, express their concerns, and share heartfelt dreams. Overall, the result is new partnerships and other means for parents to strengthen themselves, their families, and their neighborhoods.

This report highlights the change the host teams wanted to make in their communities and what resulted when they used guided conversations with building protective factors for children and families in mind. The information in this document is gleaned from their Café conversation notes, end of the year reports turned in by their organizational partner, ten phone interviews with café hosting team members, and written surveys from participants. Common results from all sites include an increase in social support networks for families, new partnerships developing between families and community organizations or schools, and leadership growth from hosts and Café participants.



“Our Café participants became very energized when they were discussing how to connect by doing things together to help others, or just for fun. Numerous ideas emerged from this café, which materialized into: a Summer Events Calendar (picnics at Prescott Park, Monday playdates, and other events offered by the community within walking distance in the neighborhood,) a September World Fair event (an international potluck event, welcoming and celebrating our diverse community.)” – Staff Partner

The Approach

The Community Café approach sparks leadership to build the relationships needed to strengthen families. It can be used as a community-building strategy for growing social capital (relationships) and bridging social capital (partnerships with families).

It is in the building of these relationships and spotlighting group wisdom that programs, policy, and behaviors change to strengthen families. There are three important components to the approach:

1. The World Café Principles for Hosting (www.theworldcafé.org),
2. Appreciative Inquiry as a conversation design and evaluative process, and
3. Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework™ (www.cssp.org.)

Actualizing the approach most frequently looks like family members hosting relevant conversations in their own neighborhood, in partnership with a local organization or school. Hosts are oriented to the three important components the approach and use these components to design their conversations. Community Café host teams in Nebraska comprised at least two parent hosts and a staff member from a local agency.

“Every time we were planning the Cafés the hosts were looking at the protective factors and wondering how to create stronger bonds. It was great to see parents sharing phone numbers and contact information, making connections with each other.” – CLC Staff

How do Community Cafés relate to the dream you have for your community?

When we asked this question to the host teams, every response related to growing a stronger sense of community or social support network for families. They frequently described challenges families face raising a family and said that parents often felt alone in their struggles. Several teams expressed an interest in building a group of people in their neighborhood that could work together either to create a safer neighborhood or appreciate the different cultures that were a part of their communities. One site shared that because of the diversity in their neighborhood, there were groups that didn't interact with each other and creating a space where all cultures would be welcomed was the first step to building a better community. Two teams mentioned safety as a high concern for families, having recently experienced gun violence in their neighborhoods.

“There were two shootings, right before school started and it put a damper on our neighborhood. There’s a lot of good people in our neighborhood; we want to build a sense of community...Cafés are another opportunity for folks to get together and talk here where three in five go hungry. It’s a place for people to feel comfortable.” – School Community Coordinator

Design

A total of 29 Cafés were hosted in Lincoln and Norfolk. In Lincoln, parent hosts partnered with Lincoln Community Learning Centers staff to host Cafés at five locations: Belmont Elementary/Goodrich Middle, Calvert Elementary, Everett Elementary, Huntington Elementary/Dawes Middle and Prescott Elementary schools. In Norfolk, Cafés were hosted at The Zone, an after-school program location. These 29 Cafés were led by 17 volunteer parent hosts, and attended by 231 parents and their children, and 104 community members. Four sites planned for six Cafés, (one Café was cancelled due to weather), and another site hosted four Cafés and a community event. One neighborhood began later in the year and hosted two well-attended Cafés and will continue hosting in the next school year. In addition to schools, community partners who contributed their time or resources included small businesses, churches, agencies, parks and recreation, law enforcement and a neighborhood association.

“The principal comes to every meeting and he really engages the parents and wants to get to know the parents and he comes to every Café.” – Parent Host



According to participant satisfaction surveys, the responses to feeling welcomed to the Cafés - whether it was their first or their sixth Café - was remarkable. This reflects the comments made by hosts in their interviews regarding the attention they placed on setting up the environment to be culturally relevant as well as creating a safe place for people to gather and talk. Written survey results:

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree

Survey Questions	1	2	3	4	5
99% - I felt welcome during the café - 153 responses	1 ¹	0	1	6	145
98% - Participation in the Cafés was helpful to me - 153 responses	0	0	3	36	114
92% - These Cafés will lead to improvements in my family or in my community. - 153 responses	0	2	11*	49	91

¹This survey was marked 1-3 in every response despite the written comments being positive. One could easily assume they read the ranking wrong and meant to select 3-5 as a response.

*All 11 of these responders indicated this was their first or second café

What was Learned About Strengthening Families?

With a larger goal in mind, host teams were encouraged to design conversations related to the Protective Factors all children and families need to thrive. Conversations topics are often built on previous conversations. Café topics are listed below in descending order of frequency:

- Building positive Social Connections to include sharing family culture and building an inclusive community
- Parental Resilience/Self Care
- Neighborhood safety/Community Engagement
- Social and Emotional Development of Children

“Parents wanted to continue with the support group. They wanted to build more social support for the community and bring in more people.” – Parent Host

Participants were invited to fill out a written survey at most of the Cafés. Although most who turned in a survey attended fewer than three Cafés, there are obvious trends. Of the 153 participant surveys collected, all who attended more than one Café found them helpful and indicated they met parents or staff who were positive supports.

In their interviews, every host team talked about the need to build positive social connections for families in their community. When asked about high points, a common theme was a sense of accomplishment teams felt when they saw people getting to know each other, observed leadership

changes in another person, or seeing people exchange contact information or stop to talk to each other in the neighborhood. Another common theme was a growth in personal leadership by the hosts themselves or a parent who attended. Other frequently mentioned outcomes related to protective factors that strengthen families were:

- Parents are taking more leadership roles and getting involved in their community
- More parents are supporting other parents and feeling more comfortable offering help
- More community events are allowing families to gather together

“I think promoting social connections is the biggest way that Cafés built protective factors for families. Oftentimes the knowledge and resources were already present in the community, but the connection of people to other people who could meet those needs was what made the difference...connecting people who normally wouldn’t cross paths was significant in all of the Cafés. A desire to have connection within the community was present, but often the Café was the first place to meet that need by providing an avenue for conversation.” – CLC Staff

In the written survey questions, 89% of the surveys were received by respondents who participated in three or fewer Cafés. Despite only attending a few Cafés, 97% found Cafés helpful to them and 90% of respondents agreed that Cafés will create positive change in their family or community. The majority of those who had neutral responses had participated in only one or two Cafés or were not parents.



Survey results:

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree

Survey Question	1	2	3	4	5
71% - I am more confident as a parent, youth or community member as a result of this café	0	2	42	52	57
88% - I have met other parents/adults who are positive supports.	0	0	18	46	86
84% - I have increased my involvement in my community.	0	2	20	52	66
77% - I am more comfortable asking for help.	0	2	33	63	53
77% - I have more information or resources to help meet my or other family's needs.	0	2	32	64	53
78% - I have increased my capacity to be a leader.	3	3	27	54	62
89% - The work that we did in the Cafés will make a difference in our community.	0	1	15	44	91

“I personally developed two significant relationships and I don’t seek relationships. A couple of individuals came to all the Cafés and I ended up inviting them over after the Cafés for a playdate. We built trust, getting to know each other than friendships developed.” – Parent Host

How Was the Community Impacted?

Since every team had community building or safety as an intention, it is important to notice the changes that happened in the neighborhoods as a direct result of their Community Café work.

Community change could be observed on three levels:

- How Cafés change neighborhood day-to-day interactions—as indicated by the surveys and host observations of participants and their own behaviors;
- The neighborhood’s capacity to engage parents and community members—indicated by participant numbers, the commitment of parent volunteers as Café hosts and increased

community involvement by Café participants;

- And community activities and program changes that happened as a direct result of Café conversations.

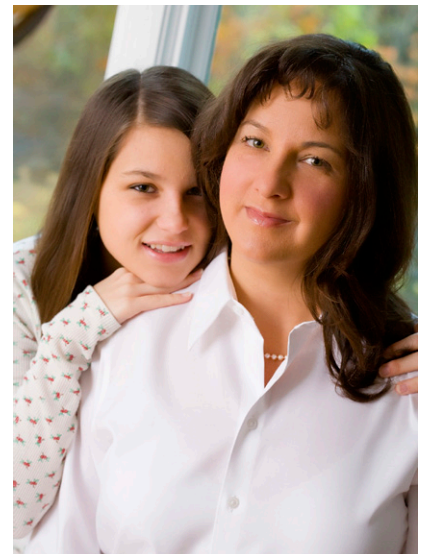
The survey data and written comments made on the participant surveys strongly indicate that the Café conversations influenced participant thinking regarding the importance day to day interactions and increasing their social connections. Hosts themselves shared how they were more intentional about interacting with other parents in the community because of their Café experience.

“Our Café participants became very energized when they were discussing how to connect by doing things together to help others, or just for fun. Numerous ideas emerged from this Café, which materialized into: a Summer Events Calendar (picnics at Prescott Park, Monday playdates, and other events offered by the community within walking distance in the neighborhood), a September World Fair event, an international potluck event, welcoming and celebrating our diverse community.” – CLC Staff

Café hosts and participants expressed the desire to invite more people to come. One site that struggled with outreach last year grew significantly in participation this year and increased the diversity of people coming to their Cafés. Another location noticed that there were 18 languages represented at their cafés and they needed up to six interpreters per evening to act as table hosts to ensure language was not a barrier to having conversations together. Interpreters were invited to stay and participate as members of the community if they arrived and their services were not needed.

Café hosts were coached in using Appreciative Inquiry as a tool to design their conversations, so group wisdom is what is leading change and an emphasis is placed on building on strengths. Examples of positive community change as a direct result of Café conversations include:

- Increased partnerships between families and a local recreation center happened in two locations. One agency got valuable ideas for engaging families from diverse cultures. Another culminated in families being more involved a summer event.
- Families at several locations got involved in community event



planning.

- The start of a “Multicultural Night” where hosts and Café participants helped to plan the event and share their family culture.
- All the participants at one Café location helped a local church with fundraising to improve their playground.
- Hosts reported going to more community events such as a farmers’ market to promote their Cafés.
- A new partnership between families and the local police department resulted in law enforcement sending a representative to attend their Cafés and to work with the students there to build positive relationships.
- Group efforts in sharing Café harvests and networking are emerging such as creating an online newsletter and creating a Facebook group.
- An agency is helping parents to start a support group.
- One school that does not have a PTO or any formal family partnership programming has made it a priority to give people who speak English as a second language a voice in their community and their quick success has been reflected by the diversity of the people attending, as well as their commitment to growing their parent host team from two people to four or five people next year.
- A state senator, the principal, teachers, a representative from Parks and Recreation and the head of a neighborhood association have all contributed time to attend local Cafés.
- A neighborhood family swim event was planned with 78 in attendance and led by Café participants. It was so well received they are going to repeat the event.
- A school was going to cut a family fitness program due to low participation. A parent spoke well of it at a Café resulting in the school continuing the program and more parents are now attending.
- At one site where Café participants wanted to foster an inclusive community, a World Fair was organized due to a new partnership between the families attending the Cafés and the school PTO. Other projects emerging from this partnership are “Adopt a Family” and an intercultural Family Game Night.
- Café participants are partnering with their neighborhood church to sustain Café activities.

“I love hearing from all the parents regardless of language. The bigger goal is that all parents are heard. I had a perception that as a parent I didn’t really know where I fit in this system. I found a spot where my voice is valued and important and by doing this I’m giving other parents that opportunity and just seeing where that leads.” – Parent Host

Written Comments from Participant Surveys:

- This is seriously great. We can't wait to be a part.
- It has been a great group and as a stay at home mom one of my only chances to get adult conversation and time away from the kids.
- Continue building relationships. (More than 5 similar comments)
- Listen, stay involved. Great work!
- This will make a big impact on the community.
- Thank you Ruth and Nicole!
- I love this group! (More than 5 similar comments)
- Look for more parents to connect;
- Try to keep the group going.
- I had a good time and feel a bit more confident in who I am as a parent.
- Commit to attending more and being a part of a sustainable plan.
- How to support one another, be yourself.
- I liked the small group activities.
- I like talking about how our community can grow.
- Look for more opportunities to be in the community.
- Bring a friend. (More than 5 similar comments)
- Great people and conversations.
- I will try to build connections with others.
- I visited from E.E. and looking forward to starting our own Café!
- I will be more involved. (More than five similar comments)
- Thank you!!! (More than 5 similar comments)
- Talk to more parents. (More than 5 similar comment)
- I will bring more people in. (More than 5 similar comments)
- Try to speak to more neighbors.
- I will organize more open play dates.
- I liked talking about the practical tools of making connections.
- Be more intentional about connecting with other families
- Come again.
- Slow down. Say hi.
- I want a story-telling festival.
- Take more actions to be involved in our childrens' improvement.
- Talk to other people about cafés.
- Segir participando.
- Keep coming and getting involved.
- Get to know the other parents in the room.
- We will work through the church to make this a sustainable group.
- Angi was great!
- Can't wait to make this a sustainable group.
- Look into other community based events, it was a good time.
- I feel more comfortable getting involved in community improvements.
- Breathe deeply, relax, and be more involved with my children and the community.
- This evening seemed to go faster. Perhaps only having the tables hosts more helped with the overall flow.
- Make sure it's a conversation and not just questioning those who don't speak English.
- I'm really glad that a parent mentioned that Calvert CLC is part of the community.
- I enjoyed getting to know each other.
- This was great. (More than 5 similar comments)
- Commit to attending more and being part of a sustainable plan.
- Thank you it was fun. (More than 5 like this)

This report is a collaborative effort between the Nebraska Community Café Team, Nebraska Child Abuse Prevention Fund Board, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, the National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds, and the Community Café Collaborative. To learn more about Community Café work in Nebraska, contact Kathy Stokes at Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, kstokes@nebraskachildren.org.