

# Creating a Safer, More Connected Asylum Hill

## How to Accelerate and Deepen Meaningful Conversations and Collaborative Efforts

### Strategic Questions for Further Conversation from the Harwood Report

October 2013

Beyond reflecting the key insights learned from engaging people who live and work in Asylum Hill, our hope is that the report will help to accelerate and deepen meaningful conversations and collaborative efforts to strengthen the neighborhood.

Toward that end, we offer here a series of strategic questions that can help to focus such conversations and perhaps lead to new collaborative efforts or strengthen existing ones. The questions reflect various key insights outlined in the report. They also reflect the experience of The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation and its work, which has now spread to thousands of U.S. communities and numerous other countries.

#### ❖ Safe Gathering Places

Throughout the report, those who live and work in Asylum Hill express their desire for safe gathering places where they can meet, get to know each other, and find ways together to strengthen the neighborhood.

1. How could safe gathering places be created in the neighborhood? What places already exist, and where can new ones be developed?
2. When residents say that it is important for these gathering places to be publicly visible, to be safe and to help build trust, in what ways might these goals be achieved?
3. How can safe gathering places bring together people who may not otherwise interact, so that a deeper understanding of one another, stronger bonds of trust, and a greater investment in the neighborhood can come about?

#### ❖ Existing Pockets of Change

Many residents say they cannot identify positive actions being taken in the neighborhood. But such positive actions do exist, and new ones are being created.

1. How can existing efforts be more prominently featured so that residents can see positive signs of progress?
2. What would it mean to focus on those efforts that genuinely address people's

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### Core Messages from the Harwood Report

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The people who live and work in Asylum Hill want change. But not just any change. We know this because of what we heard from people who live in Asylum Hill and others connected to the neighborhood. The full report lays out the directions that people believe are important to take to bring about positive change, and the conditions they hope can be created to foster that change.

Over the past six months, The Hartford and United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut partnered with The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation to engage a cross-section of neighborhood residents, community leaders and other stakeholders in a series of community conversations and in-depth interviews to uncover people's aspirations for the neighborhood; issues, concerns, and desires for change; and the best starting places to make progress. It is important to recognize that many individuals and groups are already hard at work in Asylum Hill. For some people and groups, their commitment to Asylum Hill goes back many years. Our hope is that this report will help to build on their good efforts.

### Three Core Messages

Throughout our engagement, three main themes emerged:

1. **People who live and work in Asylum Hill want a safer, more connected community.** They want to be able to go out from their homes and workplaces to meet, socialize and work with others in the neighborhood. This all has to do with getting crime off the streets, creating safe places for interaction, and building trust – key ingredients for nurturing the kind of community they want.
2. **Crime – or the threat of it – drives people's concerns about the neighborhood.** It undermines people's ability to come out from their homes, and it can make those who work in the neighborhood fearful of engaging. All this serves to block people's ability to come together and create the kind of neighborhood they want.
3. **Trust in "change efforts" is key to residents.** Residents want to know that activities that seek to strengthen the neighborhood reflect their everyday challenges, and that the efforts are long-lasting and not sporadic (here today, gone tomorrow).

aspirations and daily concerns – and not end up in a public relations effort that glosses over challenges or hypes results?

3. How can the talents of both those who live and work in the neighborhood be leveraged to strengthen existing or new pockets of change?
4. How can different groups come together to work more collaboratively?

### ❖ **Small, local actions**

Asylum Hill residents seek ways to engage with each other and get things done to improve their own lives and the neighborhood.

1. What are small actions that people who live and work in Asylum Hill could do *together* that would make a visible difference?
2. How can space be made, in all of these efforts, for people to make decisions about what to focus on, set goals, and figure out how to move ahead together – all so they can take greater ownership and pride in the neighborhood?
3. What could be done to provide ways for people to stay engaged once they become engaged?

### ❖ **Strong Police-Neighbor Connections**

Crime, and the threat of it, has at least three important effects on Asylum Hill. It undermines the daily life of neighborhood residents, especially at night. It can lead to people being driven off the streets in an attempt to make the streets feel safer. And it inspires fear that keeps others away from the neighborhood.

1. What would it take to develop stronger connections and relationships between the police and Asylum Hill residents?
2. How might the police and neighbors work together to fight crime, especially at night?
3. How can the police help to ensure that gathering places are safe and that people aren't driven away from them?

### ❖ **The Asylum Hill Story**

The stories people tell to themselves and to one another shape how we see ourselves, our community and what is possible. Neighborhoods that seek to strengthen themselves inevitably face a competition between an ingrained negative narrative and a new emerging narrative of possibility.

1. What actions – or "proof points" – in the neighborhood are moving people closer to their shaped aspirations, and how can those actions be highlighted?
2. Who are the individuals and groups that people trust, who can spread stories of new possibilities to those who live and work in Asylum Hill?
3. How can the individual stories be connected into a larger narrative so that people have a coherent sense of the new path the neighborhood is on?
4. How can you tell stories and a new narrative without over-selling progress or any single individual's or group's contribution – so that trust is built and not undermined?