

My Thoughts Before Visiting the Harlem Children's Zone

By Aviva Scully, Champion for Zone 4

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On the eve of our Family Success Alliance trip to the Harlem Children's Zone Conference I find myself reflecting on the connections I have made with other people in my personal and work life and the synchronistic events that seem to describe my life. One such synchronistic event occurred a few weeks ago as Meredith McMonigle and I were chatting on the phone, which we usually do daily. I often share with Meredith the latest research I have read highlighting strategies and programs designed to help lift parents and children out of poverty or the budding excitement I am feeling about a new [Family Success Alliance](#) (FSA) that we have formed with parents and community members. It was in just one of these conversations that I mentioned to Meredith how uncanny it was that we were able to go the [Harlem Children's Zone Conference](#). What made this set of events even more spectacular, I was telling her, was that I could still remember being at home reading the NY Times Sunday magazine more than a decade before and being completely taken and moved by the [article](#) written about the work that Geoffrey Canada was doing with the Harlem Children's Zone. I had just finished my dual masters in Social Work and Public Health (in Maternal and Child Health) and I was impressed with the philosophy that Canada was utilizing in his work in Harlem. He understood and was able to get buy in from his community; parents, service providers and community partners, in working in a comprehensive model that provided wrap around services and employed the Cradle to College Career model. He recognized how important it is to have your feet on the ground – making meaningful connections with the families in the specific geographic area that you were serving and how relationships need to be cultivated and sustained through the life cycle of the child and parent/s; guardian/s. I told Meredith that the article made such a vivid impression upon me that I saved the copy of the NY Times magazine section and still have the copy.

How auspicious that I am now partnering in FSA with Rosemary Deane, the Orange County Health Department and our parents, community members and service providers to learn more how to tailor the wonderful work of the Harlem Children's Zone to the work that we are doing in Zone 4 in Hillsborough and northern Orange County. How delightful that our lives may present people and opportunities that, if you look at it hindsight, you feel an intrinsic connection with and to. Events may unfold in such a way that, when you trace the original germ of an idea, you can see a path stretching ahead of you and behind you and you are being carried forward by the strength of your passion and purpose.