

Washington D.C.'s 'Promise Neighborhood' Makes School Reform A Community Concern

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This time last year, the Parkside-Kenilworth area in Washington D.C. mirrored struggling communities across the United States -- low-performing schools went hand-in-hand with **high levels of crime and unemployment**.

Disappointed by the hardships that prevented her students from learning, Irasema Salcido, an educator from the District area, decided to work with members from the community to turn things around, by applying for one of the 21 federal grants offered by a new education program called Promise Neighborhoods, reports [Philanthropy.com](#).

Inspired by the success of the "[Harlem Children's Zone](#)," the federal program **Promise Neighborhoods** is a government initiative that attempts to break the generational poverty cycle by improving educational and overall life prospects in low-income communities. Nonprofits, including faith-based organizations, and institutions of higher education are eligible for grants to make a difference in their surrounding communities.

Gregory Rhett, a local activist who now directs the project's effort to get area residents involved in the program, said to [Philanthropy.com](#):

"The fabric of the community was torn, that was the problem. And the only way you could improve academic outcomes was you had to repair the fabric of the community."

Ms. Salcido used the grant to head up a program to work with other community members to improve students' lives holistically.

Part of the D.C. Promise Neighborhood Initiative's vision is to improve the educational and developmental outcomes of children in distressed communities by working to fix other areas that might affect children's learning, such as health or economic factors.

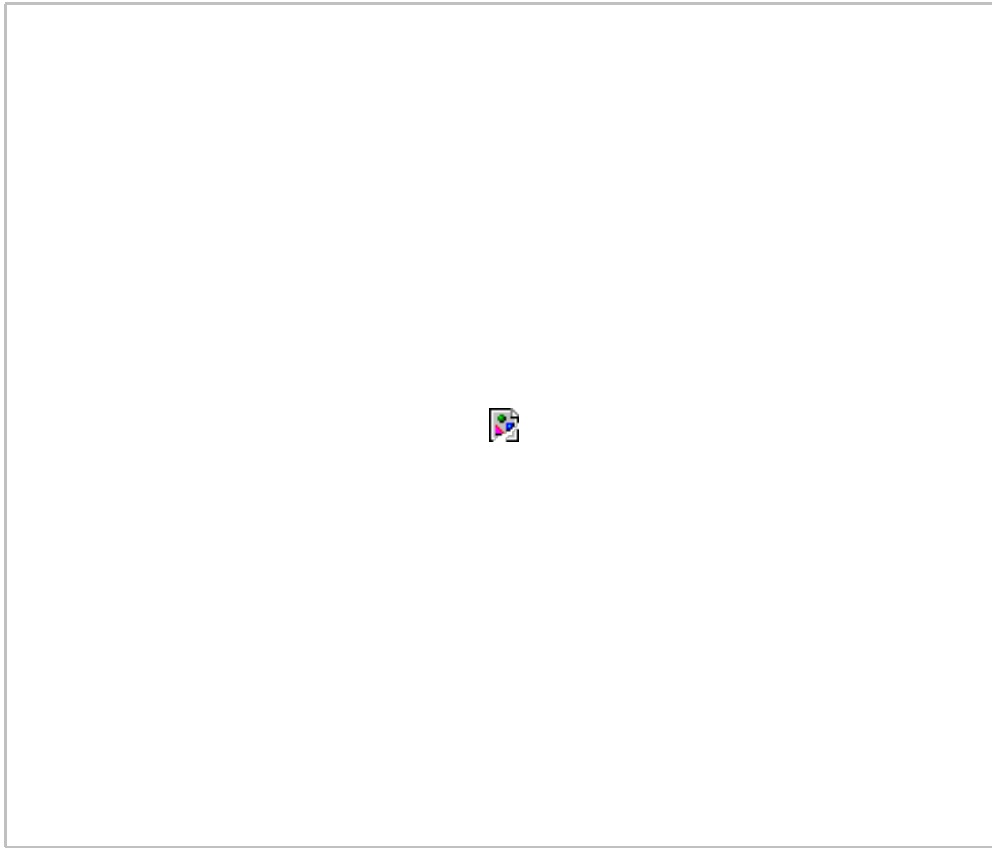
While it's too early to tell yet whether the effort has made a measurable difference, the surrounding community is already committed, fundraising double the required \$500,000 matching sum the Department of Education required and already vowing to build complementary programs that aid in the full-scope education process.

Ms. Salcido, head of the César Chávez Public Charter Schools for Public Policy, told [Philanthropy.com](#):

"We made a commitment to the families in that community to have high expectations for their children, expectations that they would go to college."

An essential part of the Promise Neighborhood Initiative in that area is to provide children with access to health care with mobile medical facilities.

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Other programs are emulating the Harlem Children's Zone example across the nation. [The Piñon Project](#), a Colorado initiative that aids low-income residents, is like a small-town version of the New York program; It offers services like parenting classes and high school advocates that keep children from dropping out, reported [NPR](#).

The federal program [Promise Neighborhood](#) has awarded 21 communities in the U.S. with one-year planning grants that range between \$400,000 and \$500,000. But for now, the future of the program remains uncertain – Congress, whose members are under pressure to reduce the deficit, still has not approved the 2011 budget and \$10 million in grants from 2010 remain frozen.

Learn more about the Promise Neighborhood Initiative at [the Department of Education](#) and visit the [website](#) from the D.C. Initiative to help and read about its project proposal.

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