

COMMUNITY BUILDING

Building Relationships at the Speed of Trust

Situated between the old mills and the Presumpscot river is the Westbrook neighborhood known as Frenchtown. Historically, the neighborhood has struggled with a bad reputation driven by high poverty rates, criminal activity, and severe social isolation.

Jim, a long-time resident and neighborhood leader has served an integral role in what is now a better connected, well-resourced, and safer community.

In 2016, The Opportunity Alliance began implementing a Resident-Led Community Building program (RLCB) in Frenchtown, which works to create communities where individuals and families know each other, care about each other, and take care of each other. The program uses an asset-based philosophy that sets high expectations for community members and sees them as having gifts to contribute even while they are experiencing other types of challenges in their lives. The goal? Help transform the Frenchtown neighborhood into a community where individuals and families are thriving.

Integral to the success of the RLCB model is the outreach performed by Community Builders like Brittney, who hosts the Neighborhood Resource Hub in Frenchtown. Brittney's primary role is to build direct relationships with residents and facilitate neighbor to neighbor connections to create a network of support. Brittney, with the help of many community partners including the Westbrook Police Department, has spent the greater part of two years knocking on doors and holding community gatherings to break down barriers and foster a true sense of belonging. It's vital that residents both trust Brittney and recognize her as a resource.

A reality of working with individuals and families living in poverty is that, to get their needs met, they often lead with the challenges they're facing rather than the assets they possess. RLCB strives to have neighbors see themselves as more than these struggles. Community Builders like Brittney work to ensure neighbors have the things they need but aren't identified by those needs. Neighbors like Jim.

Jim lives up the street from the Neighborhood Resource Hub. He is a daily visitor who gives Brittney updates on what is going on in the neighborhood and with neighbors. Jim has multiple stressors like all of us – but always has a smile on his face and a story to share. He is famous and beloved in the neighborhood because he walks everywhere and talks to everyone. Jim says the neighborhood is “less rowdy” now that they have the hub as well as community policing. The hub gives him a place to check-in, get out of his apartment and give back. As a neighborhood leader, Jim takes great pride in ensuring everyone knows about Brittney, the Hub, community meals, events, and resources.

Positive momentum continues to build in Frenchtown as members of the community regain their sense of pride, understanding they bring value and can be of service to each other. Brittney has witnessed residents' generosity firsthand along with how much they want to help themselves and each other have better lives.



Jim, a neighborhood leader stands outside the Community Resource Hub located in the Frenchtown neighborhood of Westbrook.