



Cultivating Synergies for Systems Change: Examining Hub Models as a Pathway to Building Resilient Communities

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Aknowledgements



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Introduction

This report examines the community hub model and how it might support community building and systems change efforts. This project aims to highlight common themes for best practices by exploring how other models have utilized this approach.

The strategies listed here are not exhaustive and do not represent the vastness of modalities but are meant to provide insights and learnings for groups interested in engaging in root cause work.

This report begins by providing a case for community hubs and how organizations might incorporate its use of strategic collaboration to address root causes and improve outcomes. Next, there is an introduction to the hub concept. Then, various approaches are explored by highlighting three community hub models. Finally, the report concludes with opportunities, challenges, and best practices for hubs.

Sandusky Food Justice Landscape & Community Hub Project Opportunity

The Second Harvest Food Bank of North Central Ohio is a regional nonprofit committed to fighting hunger. For forty years, it has connected NorthEast Ohio community members to fresh, nutritious food through its work with local farmers and retailers, mobile pantries, and a network of over 100 partner charities and 150 programs. While food assistance is at the core of Second Harvest's mission, the organization also commits to addressing the root causes of hunger.

The opportunity for this project was born from community efforts to address the Kreimes Cardinal grocery store closure in December 2017, creating an even bigger void for downtown Sandusky residents to access fresh, healthy foods. According to Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap research, about 12% of Erie County residents overall and 18% of children live in food-insecure households, meaning they do not have access to sufficient quality, affordable, nutritious foods. Recognizing the loss of the grocery store and its direct impact on food security in the region, conversations began taking place about placing a grocery store in this area but shifted to developing a community hub. As part of its mission to help families achieve long-term stability, Second Harvest has embarked on a process to determine how best to bring a community hub to the region.

After an exploratory process to determine the best location for a hub in Erie County, the City of Sandusky was chosen for the pilot. To move the project along and determine the viability of the hub, Second Harvest conducted significant localized outreach through stakeholder and community member interviews and a community-wide survey. My project as a National Bill Emerson Hunger fellow was to research hub model best practices to inform the next steps of the Sandusky Community Hub. As part of this process, I conducted background research into the community hub model and spoke with several representatives from hubs across the nation.



Overview of the Hub Model

The following section introduces the hub model. It begins by outlining the hub's approach to social impact, the types of activities and services it might encompass, guiding principles, and common development stages.



Overview of the Hub Model

Why do we need hubs?

In 2021, 12.8 percent of the total U.S. population had income below their poverty thresholds, and more than 34 million people, including 9 million children, are food insecure. The cycle of poverty and hunger is sustained by systemic and structural racism that creates barriers for people to thrive. Historical and present-day injustices fuel poverty, power imbalances and inequitable decision-making, neighborhood disinvestment, and disproportionate access to basic goods, services, employment, and ownership opportunities that systemically harm BIPOC, immigrants, working-class families, and other minoritized groups. Thus, meaningful, sustained change is tied to systemic solutions that address root issues. Any policy or programmatic intervention must understand and address that the impacts of race, sexual orientation, age, religion, creed, family status, disability, and gender do not exist separately from each other — and must be addressed together.

During stakeholder interviews for the Sandusky Community Hub, participants were presented with an overview of the Sandusky hub project, and their reactions were recorded. A consistent theme among these responses was that stakeholders identified a greater need for more coordination among organizations to increase impact, and many

partners had challenges connecting community members with all the resources available to them. Stakeholders shared that a hub-type model would make for warmer hand-offs between agencies and a more holistic and seamless experience for guests.

A major element of this project was examining how other groups have moved from recognizing issue linkages to effecting systems change. The hub model is uniquely positioned to improve access and achieve better outcomes for people through its ability to coordinate efforts, establish synergy among social ecosystems, foster long-term stability for individuals, and build more resilient communities.



Overview of the Hub Model

Why do we need hubs? (cont.)

One of the core principles of a hub is its emphasis on a strengths-based approach rather than duplicating efforts; this model recognizes the work and impact that is already being done and is strengthened by building on existing networks and capacities. In addition to providing a space for organizations to join efforts, community hubs also integrate an alternative framework of service provision. This approach allows organizations to expand on their core services and traditional notions of support to include elements of culture, play, and connection. In addition, it allows groups to establish collective ownership by building with the community.

Establishing synergy between partners is what distinguishes a community hub from simple co-location; however, synergy is a pursuit and not inherent by organizations simply collaborating within the same space. The Strathcona County Hub Study outlines how a community hub often marks a shift in how partner organizations think, behave, and convene (See Table 1). Partner organizations must be aligned in their approach to social impact and develop the capacities necessary to support a new way of operating.

Table 1: Social Impact Framework Shift, Strathcona County Hub

Shifts FROM:	Study	Shifts TO:
Programmatic responses		Systemic thinking
Do <i>for</i> people		Do <i>with</i> people
Incremental, organization-level outcomes		High aspiration and community-wide outcomes
Working in silos		Collective ownership
Focus on symptoms		Focus on root causes

“

Meaningful, sustained change is tied to systemic solutions that address root issues.

”

What is a community hub?

A community hub, by its simplest definition, is a welcoming and inclusive place for people to find connections, pursue common interests, and access support when needed. Community hubs offer a central access point for comprehensive supportive services but can also integrate cultural and recreational spaces to enhance community life. Each hub is unique, some may be mobile, and others might occupy rural or urban spaces, but they are all defined by local needs, services, and resources.

There is no single way to create a hub; hubs take on various forms, from communal gardens to a group of artists who gather to offer free classes to community members. They might begin as a space for people to meet and connect and eventually add more services and resources (See Table 2 for a list of hub model types). The value of community-informed models of care has gained renewed interest among community-based organizations, policymakers, and community leaders as an approach to improve access to support and livelihood opportunities, establish collective ownership and contribute to overall community economic development.

Table 2: Hub Model Types

Hub Model Type	Description
Drop-in Centers	Spaces where people can access services without an advance appointment, these centers typically have a specific service type/target demographic, i.e., people experiencing homelessness, youth, and mental health
Learning Hubs	Community-driven efforts to support students' learning and well-being, providing safe places to connect to school, caring adults, and additional services
Community Centers	A place where people from a particular community can meet for social, educational, or recreational activities
Mobile/Pop-up Infrastructure	Some hubs operate pop-up infrastructures that incorporate many of the services available at the central location, this allows them to expand access to a wider range of community members
Loose Structures	Loose or informal networks of individuals that gather to connect and provide resources/services to improve their community

Community Hub Guiding Principles

While hubs manifest in many modalities, the research emphasizes that hub models share core principles that inform their design, organizational structure, and processes. Those principles include being people-centered, utilizing collaborative community governance, emphasizing comprehensive partnerships, and ensuring sustainability.



01. Hubs are People-Centered

Hubs are spaces designed for the community with the community, and they aim to create a safe and welcoming environment for all by centering inclusivity, accessibility, and transparency. They embody this principle by applying a racial equity lens and a trauma-informed approach.



02. Hubs utilize Collaborative Community Governance

Hubs develop mechanisms to meaningfully engage community members, centering those with lived experiences. Services and resources rooted in the goals, visions, and needs of community members



03. Hubs employ Strategic Partnerships

Hubs create a central access point for users through the colocation and integration of support services. There is a strategic and intentional collaboration among partners with a shared commitment to community-informed models of support.



04. Hubs are Sustainable

Hubs utilize approaches that sustain long-term value and ensure that their systems and processes are responsive and flexible.

Hub Development Stages

The following are some common stages in developing a community hub. Some steps may occur concurrently, while others will occur in succession. These stages are meant to help build a framework rather than being prescriptive.






Stage ONE

UNDERSTANDING LOCAL NEEDS AND
DEMAND

The first stage consists of understanding a community's strengths, resources, and needs. Interviews, surveys, and landscape assessments are all helpful tools for understanding the local context and how the hub may impact that context.





Stage TWO

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Building a community engagement plan for your community hub is about establishing culture. While a work plan or business plan will outline what will take place, a community engagement plan outlines how you will do it. This part is twofold: establishing structures to ensure ongoing and quality community participation and identifying mechanisms to maintain communication for the community to ensure the hub is accountable and responsive to local needs.

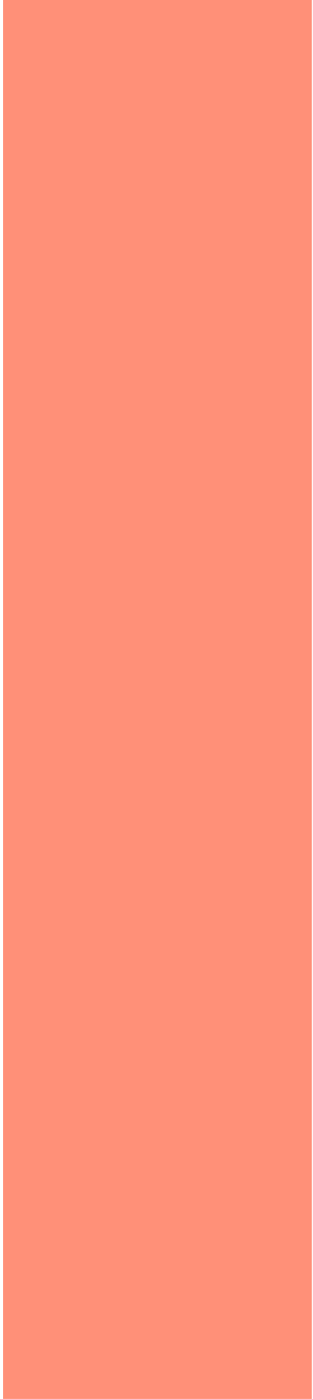


Stage THREE



PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

The partner engagement phase is an exploratory process to begin to distinguish which organizations are willing and able to commit the funding, staff, and resources necessary to sustain the hub versus who is supportive of the concept and can offer expertise, connections, and warm-handoffs.



Business planning often includes identifying and outlining operating costs and funding sources. The integrated nature of organizations also provides added administrative complexities (i.e., property management, liabilities, etc.). This phase can also include plans to implement project prototypes to test the hub concept.

Stage FOUR

BUSINESS PLANNING





Stage FIVE

ACQUIRING THE HUB




Acquiring the hub involves determining locational criteria. Some groups inherit or modify an existing building, while others require a new building structure. Regardless, some hub location review process often outlines space considerations to inform the subsequent design process.



Stage SIX

OPERATING AND SUSTAINING THE HUB



The sixth stage includes establishing an effective structure to sustain the hub. Some considerations include how policies and procedures will be determined and created, staffing volume, staff, and volunteer training. Another critical element of this step is developing a monitoring and evaluation framework to effectively review, measure and communicate hub impact.



Hubs in Action: Case Studies

Community hubs can be conceptualized as a place for communities to gather, live, build, and grow together. Hubs reflect and strengthen the communities that create them. The programs, services, and activities are rooted in the context of each place. This diversity of activity allows community hubs to help foster economic and social cohesion in the community. Research has found that hubs offer improved program coordination through service collaboration, cross-referrals, and resource-sharing. While there is a general lack of literature on the community hub model, especially as it relates to its impact on community outcomes (i.e., social determinants of health, social returns on investment, etc.), the following case studies begin to paint a picture of how hubs are being received and impacting individuals in their respective communities.

Corvallis Daytime Drop-in Center

Corvallis, Oregon

Where needs are met



History

The Corvallis Daytime Drop-In Center (CDDC) has served the tri-county community for 20 years. What began as a peer-run center to provide socialization for people with psychiatric disabilities evolved to support those chronically marginalized due to poverty, homelessness, mental health disabilities, and substance use disorders. Today, it is a daytime resource and navigation hub that serves individuals experiencing homelessness and poverty with a mission to “provide basic needs and provide dignified assistance and advocacy, offer opportunities for building community and social networks, and support individuals’ welfare and rehabilitation across emergency, transitional, and ongoing life circumstances.” Vital to its success and long-standing reputation as a trusted resource is CDDC’s approach to care. The organization utilizes a community-first model, a holistic approach that recognizes building communities of support and opportunities as key to ending homelessness.

Corvallis Daytime Drop-in Center views advocacy as critical to its organization and is on the frontlines of social justice work. Beyond providing basic needs, they also engage in systems change processes to create sustainable solutions. They strive to foster a just and equitable space by integrating trauma-informed and healing-centered care and centering individuals who are the most marginalized. They have also collaborated with guests to elevate their voices and connect them to opportunities to increase their self-advocacy, from preparing guests to present before the city council or conducting focus groups to obtain feedback and input. Recently, CDDC community members were highlighted in the [A Peace of My Mind](#) multimedia art project, created by peace activist and award-winning photographer John Noltner, that uses portraits and personal stories to bridge divides and encourage dialogue around important issues.



About CDDC

CDDC utilizes a drop-in model, with the lowest barrier point of entry in the tri-county area. Allison Hobgood, Executive Director, describes their work as "providing folks with dignified care and a space to feel loved and cared for." The hub provides a combination of basic needs and social services and serves 40-70 people daily on-site; their street outreach team helps an additional 60-80 people in tents and vehicles each week. Appreciating that poverty is a multifaceted phenomenon that requires a multifaceted approach, CDDC pursues its goals in many different ways. On-site activities and services include:

- CDDC provides resources for guests to access Basic needs and project action. Guests can charge their phones, retrieve mail, and get help with basic hygiene items, clothing, shoes, and more. CDDC also offers coffee, fruit, snacks, and sandwiches. They can also connect with Needs Navigators for additional help to receive more information and assistance with services like (SNAP application, obtaining/replacing official documents, access to health providers, completing official paperwork, and getting on housing assistance wait lists)
- CDDC counseling provides low-barrier, trauma-informed, highly-skilled care to address life challenges that can impact safety, well-being, and ability to thrive
- The Homeless Employment Launching Project (HELP) helps individuals with job training, develop a work history, earn paychecks and Social Security credit, and make an impact by helping others
- The Street Outreach Response Team (SORT) engages with individuals and families experiencing homelessness who are on the street or camping (meaning both rough camping and car/RV camping) to provide proactive support, resources, and service connections.
- The Prescription Assistance Program supports guests with prescription co-pay coverage.
- CDDC provides Transportation Assistance via financial assistance for bus or train tickets when travel can help guests connect with support systems and loved ones.
- The Pet Assistance program includes financial support for veterinary care and also helps advocate for guests who have pets.

What Next?

Looking forward, CDDC is in the process of expanding into a navigation center that will provide 24-7 shelter and crucial services to Tri-County residents experiencing homelessness. The Center will be a low-barrier, non-congregate emergency shelter that is open 7 days per week and connects individuals living there with health services, permanent housing, and public benefits. Residents will have one-stop-shop access to service providers and case management, community spaces, basic needs navigation, healthcare, behavioral healthcare, employment resources, and affordable housing services.

Learn more about the Corvallis Daytime Drop-In Center by visiting [their website](#) or contacting Executive Director Allison Hobgood at allison.hobgood@gmail.com (541)-224-7578.

ArtPark Community Hub

Denver, Colorado

Sparking innovation and bringing people together

History

Located in Denver, Colorado, the River North Art District, also known as RiNo, is an area in North Denver that includes the historical neighborhoods of Globeville, Elyria- Swansea, Five Points, and Cole. Formerly known as an industrial hub, the area was left with vacant buildings as industry moved out in the late 80s and 90s. The area's affordability at the time drew many artists and local creatives to the space. A grassroots movement began to connect the arts organizations in the area. Today RiNo art district consists of four organizations with the mission of funding and supporting the neighborhood through advocacy, infrastructure improvements, artist support, community programming, business support, and events.





About ArtPark

When a historical building connected to the industrial history of the RiNo neighborhood was set for demolition, community members organized themselves to push the city to make use of the space. RiNo ArtPark, along with its partners, submitted a proposal to the City of Denver, outlining a vision of the building to create a hub dedicated to creative expression for all with a focus on access, education, collaboration, culture, community, and nature. The first phase of the project was completed in 2021 and currently houses five main partner tenants with the following features:

- The [Bob Ragland Branch of Denver Public Library](#) is housed at the ArtPark hub, has a community arts focus, and is the home of the Denver Zine library, which is home to over 20,000 magazines.
- [RedLine Contemporary Art Center](#), a Denver arts-based nonprofit, has eight affordable studios on-site for local emerging artists.
- The [Alto Gallery](#) is a nonprofit-run art gallery that provides art exhibitions and hosts innovative and educational program partners.
- The [Community Culinary Accelerator \(CoCuA\)](#) is a forthcoming project of Focus Points Family Resource Center, another local nonprofit, designing a curriculum and a commercial kitchen to support entrepreneurs in the next stages of their food careers.
- The project's second phase will be a mixed-use space that lends itself to performance but can also be used for gatherings such as public meetings



About ArtPark (cont)

Emphasizing its role as a creative hub, art is a core feature throughout ArtPark and is an integral part of the design considerations. For example, the RiNo Mural Program supports a diverse group of local artists to facilitate monthly installations around the district; many are featured throughout the park.

Since its opening in 2021, RiNo Art District has hosted several events and full-blown programmatic series, including Al Fresco Family Art Nights as a part of summer programming and The River Series in partnership with environmental, youth, and arts organizations across Colorado to explore the region's relationship to the South Platte River. ArtPark partners run their full calendars of events and programs—from gallery openings and workshops in the RedLine and Alto Gallery space to story time in the Denver Public Library space.

Community engagement was at the forefront of the ArtPark hub's planning process and remained a critical component in its processes. During the RFP process, a community survey was provided to build a case of why the buildings should be repurposed for community benefit instead of being demolished. During the planning stages, they invited various art organizations and community groups throughout the Colorado region for walkthroughs to gain input on how the space could best be designed for their use. ArtPark hub sees synergistic and aligned partnerships as key to its success. The partner organizations are community-minded and have existing relationships and history within the district. Furthermore, each partner brings their own connections to the space, thereby expanding offerings for community members.

Learn more about the River North Art District and the ArtPark Community Hub by visiting [their website](#) or contacting RiNo Programs Director Molly Paillet at molly@rinoartdistrict.org.



UJIMA Resiliency Hub

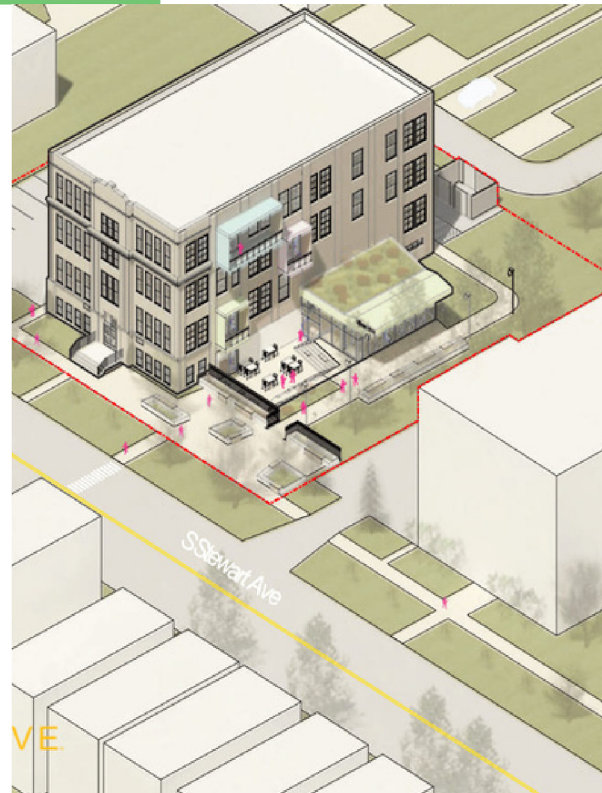
Chicago, Illinois

A place to learn, grow and build together together

History

Grow Greater Englewood, and Teamwork Englewood are two nonprofits serving the Englewood community of Chicago for over twenty-seven years combined. In recent years, the two organizations have collaborated more closely and worked with community stakeholders to develop local food economies, land sovereignty, and create conditions for residents to thrive. Community leaders have worked for years to expand the neighborhood's access to fresh food amid grocery closures and other cycles of disinvestment. Furthermore, during the pandemic, the Englewood neighborhood food insecurity was exacerbated by food pantry closures and unemployment. GrowGreater and Teamwork Englewood worked alongside several local community organizations to facilitate weekly mobile food distributions.

Concurrently, Greater Chicago Food Bank experienced $\frac{1}{3}$ of their network pantries closing due to the challenges presented during the pandemic. The Partner Engagement team collaborated with network partners to develop a more resilient emergency food response model, which developed into a longer-term solution. Grow Greater Englewood (G.G.E.) executive director Anton Seals and Teamwork Englewood executive director Cecile DeMello created the UJIMA hub concept and vision.



About UJIMA Hub

UJIMA is the third principle of Kwanzaa and means collective work and responsibility. The UJIMA Resiliency Hub seeks to embody these values and will support the Englewood, Washington Park, Greater Grand Crossing communities, and surrounding areas. The hub will house a choice-based fresh food market and provide wrap-around support from workforce development, youth programming, parent leadership, and nutritional education through cooking demonstrations and classes in nutritional health.

UJIMA perceives the hub model as “an opportunity to effectively work at the nexus of community resilience, emergency management, climate change mitigation, and social equity while providing opportunities for communities to become more self-determining, socially connected, and successful before, during, and after disruptions.” It will be an extension of the work already offered by its partner organizations but will include myriad other offerings to support community resilience. Once complete, the hub will include the following:

- UJIMA Fresh Hive (Choice-Based Market)
- Lorraine Cafe (hot food program)
- A business launchpad for multiple competencies (Agriculture, Conservation, Technology)
- A Barber and Nail Academy
- Office Spaces
- Community Gathering Spaces
- Learning Center
- Outdoor Forum / Green Spaces
- Community Garden
- Media & Recording Studios
- Benefits Enrollment

Guest experience is central to the UJIMA hub’s structure. From the moment community members arrive, the space and staff will be arranged to be welcoming and inclusive. Concierges will greet visitors as they walk into the space to welcome them, connect them with the resources they need, and provide them with a keycard to facilitate more efficient access on their subsequent visits. The UJIMA Fresh Hive Market will be a client-choice model, centering on healthy fresh produce and eventually include a hot meal program. In addition, green space, art, and aesthetically pleasing design are integral to the space and foster a welcoming atmosphere that people want to return to.

To learn more about the UJIMA Hub, contact GrowGreater Englewood Executive Director Anton Seals at anton@growgreater.org or Teamwork Englewood Executive Director Cecile DeMello at cdemello@teamworkenglewood.org.



Conclusion

This report concludes by highlighting the opportunities, challenges, and best practices for the community hub model.



Opportunities and Challenges

The hub model presents opportunities for community economic development, social service integration, building on local assets, and community-led structures and processes. However, experiences from existing hub models emphasize that the hub structure requires a paradigm shift for most institutions. Thus, there are challenges for hubs to startup and sustain themselves.

Some groups, especially those occupying government-owned spaces, cite administrative barriers as a challenge when working within the bureaucracy of government. This presents several logistical challenges for the hub itself and the partners that make up the hub. There are also barriers to acquiring and adapting the property to fit the hub's needs. Additionally, a sustainable financial plan was essential to the long-term success of the community hubs in the research. While grant funding may be critical at the beginning stages of hub development, integrating diversified income sources improves hub resilience. Lastly, a hub is a substantial financial, human, and social resource undertaking. Some hub models described being able to communicate the feasibility of a hub model to their respective stakeholders, community members, etc., as a challenge in the beginning due to a lack of literature, prior hub model impact research, and funding limitations.

My hope for this report is that by showcasing hub models from across the country and consolidating the findings I've collected over the course of this project, I can outline that the hub model has been successful and begin to outline under what conditions.



Community Hub Best Practices

1. There is no conclusive "formula" for the creation of a community hub

- Hubs materialize as a response to local conditions and differ for each community. The programs, services, and activities are rooted in the context of each place.

2. The importance of synergy and collaboration among partners is found across all successful hubs

- Establishing synergy between partners is what distinguishes a community hub from simple co-location.
- The partner engagement phase was a critical step identified by all the hubs. It's essential to develop a more clearly defined understanding of the needs and commitments expected of organizations participating in a community hub. This stage will begin to distinguish between those that are able and willing to commit to the concept and those that are supportive of the concept.

3. Guest experience should be at the forefront of the community hub model

- Hubs are spaces designed for the community with the community, and they aim to create a safe and welcoming environment for all by centering inclusivity, accessibility, transparency, and utilizing a trauma-informed approach.
- A significant strength of the hub is eliminating the need for guests to re-explain their situation at every stage of accessing support. The social service hubs highlighted have some form of needs navigator to greet individuals upon arrival at the hub and assist them in accessing the available services.

4. Hubs present an opportunity for authentic community engagement

- They can do this by developing mechanisms to meaningfully engage community members, centering those with lived experiences. This ensures that services and resources are rooted in community members' goals, visions, and needs.

5. Successful hubs provide holistic service offerings

- Expanding notions of care outside of service provision to include considerations for connection and community
- While social services might be the primary focus of a hub, complimentary services help a wider range of residents feel connected to the hub and provide reasons for residents to visit the hub beyond simply accessing social services.



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