

Real Stories

Meet the people who live in *Making Connections* neighborhoods

Carl Wesley

Jobs/Public policy

Jobs are hard to come by in Milwaukee and harder still if you don't have a valid driver's license. More than 100,000 residents of Milwaukee County are driving with a revoked or suspended license, and Carl Wesley was among them. Then, when Milwaukeeans advocated for an amnesty program for errant drivers, Carl's prospects started to look up. *This is his story.*



Making Connections Milwaukee

Seven neighborhoods—Sherman Park, Washington Park, Metcalfe Park, Walnut Hill, Midtown, Cold Spring Park, and Martin Drive—comprise the *Making Connections Milwaukee* community, just west of downtown Milwaukee. Residents express their vision this way: “*Making Connections Milwaukee* connects residents to economic,

spiritual, and educational resources that allow them to take control over their destiny, gain a prosperous quality of life, and demonstrate personal and community pride.” Partnerships with a broad array of public, private, and community-based organizations enable residents and their allies to carry out the mission.



Carl Wesley had proven himself to be an ideal recruiter of middle- and high-school kids for a pre-college program in his job at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, where he is an undergraduate in criminal justice. A serious 27-year-old man, Carl was largely responsible for increasing the number of program participants from 25 to 150 during his first year on the job. Ninety-seven percent of the students he brought into the program were African-American kids from some of Milwaukee’s toughest neighborhoods. “We wanted them to think about college as a viable option,” he says. “What they experienced on campus was totally new for them.”



On the weekends Carl often drove two-and-a-half hours from Platteville to Milwaukee to talk to kids back in his old neighborhood. His boss recognized his initiative and wanted to promote him, but there was a hitch. Carl was driving without a valid driver’s license. His boss insisted he needed one if he wanted to keep doing his job.

At 18, Carl had gotten a speeding ticket, and he couldn’t pay it. Over the next few years he got pulled over a few more times, and he began to rack up significant fines. When he got a job on an assembly line in a steel factory, he continued to drive. “Can’t drive, can’t make it to work,” he

says. Eventually, he got one too many tickets, and his license was suspended.



The factory work was grueling, and he made \$9 an hour. He worked there for four years. “I got tired of training people with college degrees, and watching them make way more than me. It wasn’t something I wanted to do for the rest of my

life. I knew I wanted to work with my mind.” He enrolled in a technical college; then a paralegal program. Soon he set his sights on becoming a lawyer. With “lots of support from my mother and my wife” (he is married with three children), he eventually headed for college at UW-Platteville.



Carl grew up in Milwaukee, in a *Making Connections* neighborhood, and is among an estimated 107,000 residents of Milwaukee County who have lost their licenses.

Drivers who are young and poor make up 75 percent of all unlicensed drivers. Eighty-five percent of circuit court misdemeanor cases entail violations by drivers whose licenses have been revoked.

At a *Making Connections* neighborhood forum, residents suggested that some kind of amnesty for drivers would go a long way toward helping people who were looking for work or trying to keep their jobs. Between 1970 and 2000, when the city was losing manufacturing jobs at an unprecedented rate, suburban counties registered a 200 percent job growth. But residential racial segregation remains the unwritten rule in Milwaukee County—the suburbs are largely white, while close to 94 percent of African Americans in the four-county metropolitan region live in the central city. And since bus service linking the city and the suburbs is extremely limited, a car and valid driver’s license are necessities of life.

For the next two years *Making Connections* and residents worked with partners at the city, the courts, and community organizations to formulate a viable plan. When a new mayor stepped to the helm, he made the plan, called the Driver’s License Recovery Program, the centerpiece of his new tenure. When the pilot program was launched, suddenly the door swung open for Carl and others in the same predicament.

The pilot program reinstated Carl’s license and gave him four months to pay half his fines. When he did so, the other half was forgiven. Carl was driving legally for the first time in years. He is among more than 600 program participants now carrying new legal licenses.

The small pilot program succeeded in showing what works—and what could work better—in an amnesty program for drivers. Some participants felt they needed a payment plan with more time to pay off fines. Others found the legal process daunting, especially when it involved several

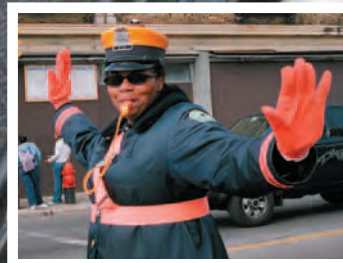
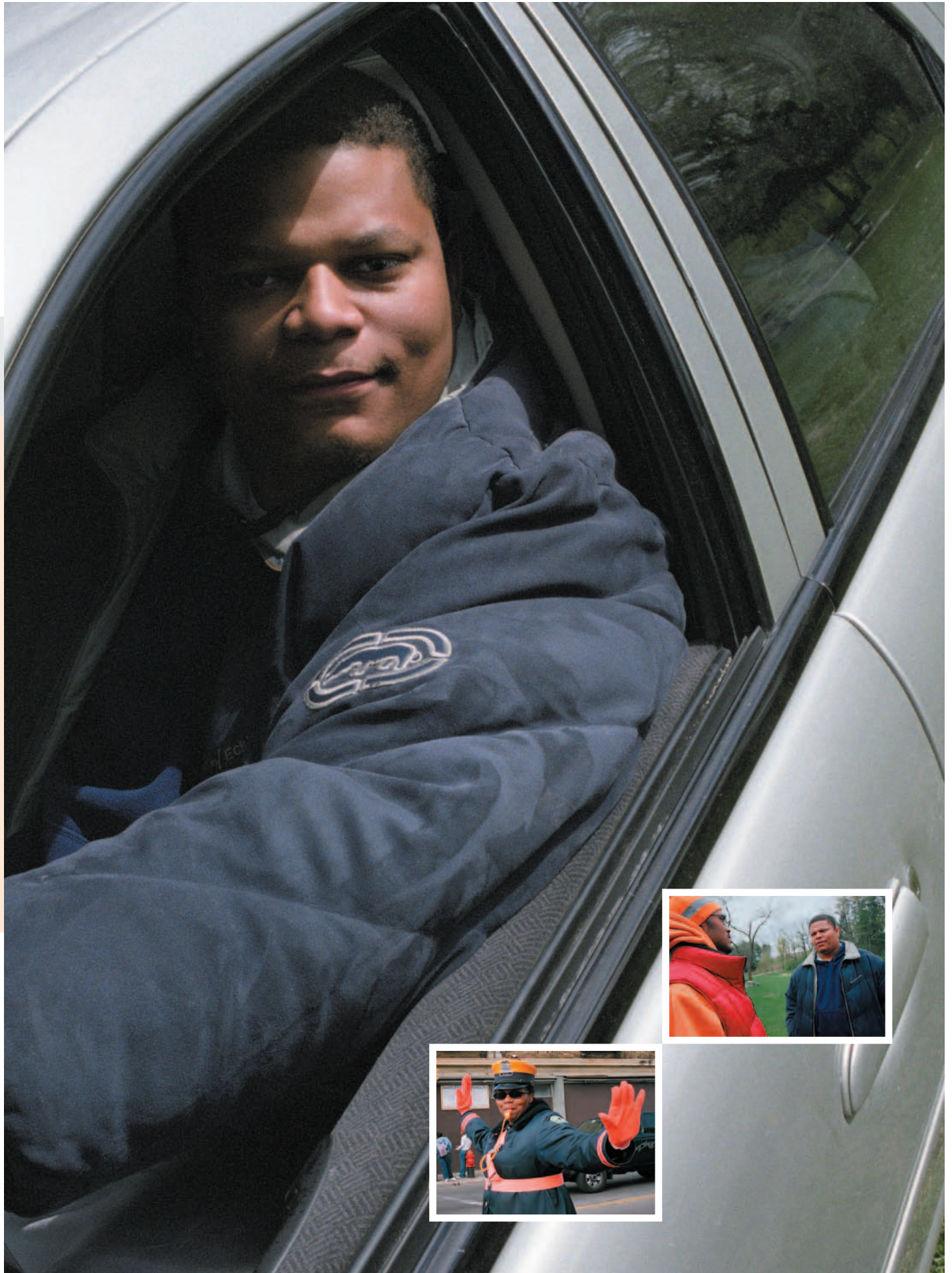


jurisdictions. Others, who never had a driver’s license in the first place, suggested that universal driver’s education be reinstated in the schools. The results of the pilot were impressive enough for the Milwaukee Bar Association to propose a range of legislative remedies to address these

and other issues, as well as an expansion of the program.

After law school, Carl plans to return to the Milwaukee neighborhood where he grew up. “Coming from an urban area, it is hard to learn to be successful if you don’t see other people who are successful. I want kids to look at me and say, ‘He grew up in my neighborhood—I can make it too.’”







Snapshot: *Making Connections Milwaukee*

- 30,449 people live in *Making Connections Milwaukee* neighborhoods. [*U.S. Census*]
- 56.6 percent of children under 5 live in poverty. [*U.S. Census*]
- African Americans make up 74.4 percent of the population, Caucasians 9.4 percent, Southeast Asians (Hmong and Laotian) 9 percent, Hispanics 4 percent. [*U.S. Census*]
- Since 1967, Milwaukee has lost nearly 83,000 factory jobs, a 69 percent decline. [*U.S. Census*]
- Milwaukee had the highest black poverty rate among the nation's 20 largest cities in 2000. [*U.S. Census*]
- 75 percent of all African Americans in Wisconsin live in Milwaukee; the state has the nation's highest rates for black teenage births and black incarceration. [*Kaiser Family Foundation and U.S. Department of Justice*]

Source: John Schmid and the Milwaukee *Journal Sentinel* for analysis of economic and job trends among black residents of Milwaukee.

Just the Facts

- ⊙ About one third of African-American adults in Milwaukee are without a high school diploma.
- ⊙ In 2000, 39 percent of black men in the U.S. without a high school diploma had a job; 79 percent with a college degree had a job. Only 8.4 percent of black men in Milwaukee hold a four-year college degree, the lowest rate among major U.S. cities.
- ⊙ In 1970, the median annual family income among black families in Milwaukee was 19 percent *higher* than the U.S. figure. A bigger share of Milwaukee's African Americans found blue-collar jobs during the post-World War II era than blacks did in any other American city. [U.S. Census]
- ⊙ By 2000, Milwaukee had the second-highest African-American unemployment rate in the nation, trailing only Chicago. Milwaukee black family income had dropped to 23 percent *less* than the national figure. [U.S. Census]
- ⊙ The unemployment rate in *Making Connections* Milwaukee neighborhoods is 23.7 percent for African Americans, 10 percent for whites, and 6.4 percent among Asians.

Source: John Schmid and the Milwaukee *Journal Sentinel* for analysis of economic trends among black residents of Milwaukee.

Get Connected

Making Connections Milwaukee

2819 West Highland Boulevard

414-344-3933

Eloisa Gomez, Site Director

Bob Clark, Director of Resident Leadership

Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership (WRTP)

414-906-4204

www.wrtp.org

Dedicated to preparing low-income, unemployed, and young people for family-wage jobs.

Hmong American Friendship Association

414-344-6575

www.hmongamer.org

Working on behalf of Hmong and Laotian refugees to bridge culture and language barriers.

Hmong Educational Advancements

414-931-8834

Connect for referrals and information about jobs and educational opportunities.

Partners

Partners include: Urban Economic Development Association, Milwaukee Asset Building Coalition, Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, Milwaukee Public Schools, City of Milwaukee Municipal Court, Next Door Foundation, Community Coordinated Childcare, Local Initiatives Support Corporation, and the Nonprofit Center of Milwaukee.



Making Connections

Making Connections, an initiative of The Annie E. Casey Foundation, works to improve the lives and prospects of families and children living in some of America's toughest neighborhoods. Common sense tells us that children do better when their families are strong, and families do better when they live in communities that help them to succeed. *Making Connections* works for real change in three areas:

- increasing opportunities for people to earn a decent living, save, and invest
- fostering close ties among family, neighbors, faith communities, and civic groups
- creating connections to reliable, respectful services close to home



The Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. Its mission is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that meet the needs of vulnerable children and families.

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The Annie E. Casey Foundation