



**ALL SHOULD HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO LIVE IN
FAMILY FRIENDLY NEIGHBORHOODS**

Environments affect families' well being and functioning

Safe, stable, and viable neighborhoods engender better social interactions among residents and are healthier places for children to grow and develop. Family-friendly neighborhoods provide opportunities to play outside and interact with other children and adults in a clean and healthy environment. Neighborhoods associated with poverty, residential turnover, violence, significant unemployment, lack of accessibility, and lack of social relationships and trust between neighbors are high-risk environments for families.¹

Community well-being provides numerous protections for families. Access to social support is a strong mediating factor to crisis and risk for individuals and families. Social support, both informal family and friend networks and formal supports, offers families the resources that often prevent difficult financial, personal, or relationship situations from resulting in bankruptcy, homelessness, mental health relapses, child neglect or abuse, and other forms of crisis.² In socially rich environments, needs and resources tend to balance as individuals can afford to give and share with neighbors. In socially impoverished environments, however, individuals tend to operate in a "scarcity" economy. Interactions are more likely to be developmentally destructive with negative effects on cognitive function, physical health, and/or emotional well-being. Strong connections with others are more likely to exist in family-friendly neighborhoods.

The availability and accessibility of community services also impacts risks for families. Family-friendly neighborhoods have a network of formal supports, including services to assist with education and training, good health, employment and economic security, recreation, and housing. When neighborhood services are difficult to find or are uncoordinated, families suffer. Different organizational philosophies and priorities often create barriers to effective service provision to families.³

Research demonstrates that families benefit from:

- **Neighborhood planning and code enforcement policies.** Communities can ensure that new home developments incorporate elements that promote neighborhood interactions and pride as well as provide access to schools, health care, and other family supports.
- **Integrated comprehensive community services.** Coordination and integration of service agencies ensures families have access to the supports they need to support family well-being.
- **Neighborhood safety provisions.** Families need to know that the places they live are free of violence.
- **Identification of and intervention for high risk neighborhoods.** Studies suggest that neighborhoods should be screened to identify high and low-risk areas. Parents in high risk areas are less self-sufficient, participate in less reciprocal exchange, and do not view their neighborhoods as good places to raise their children. Strong support systems are most needed but are less available in high risk areas.⁴
- **Community meeting spaces.** Families need opportunities for their children to play and for adults to meet and develop social relationships with their neighbors

¹ Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina

² Loman, 2005

³ Ghazvini & Foster, 2003

⁴ Garbarino & Sherman, 1980