

STUDIO C

CASE STUDY:

Taking Head Start to the Hill





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Case Study Background

What is Studio C?

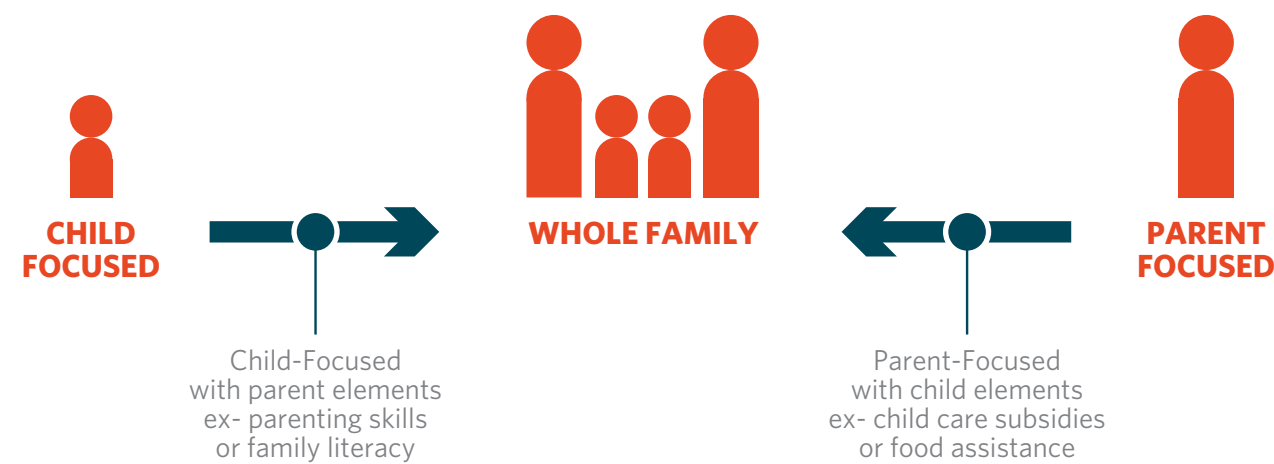
A collaborative project between the United Way of Greater Cincinnati and Design Impact, Studio C is a social innovation program that combines design thinking and leadership development principles with other sources of discourse to create a space for creative community change.

The six month program brought eight project teams, representing more than 15 organizations, through a full design process aimed at reducing poverty in our region. Design Impact was tasked with guiding this work towards creating services, products, and programs to achieve the United Way of Greater Cincinnati's Bold Goals.

The Bold Goals target the achievement of outcomes by the year 2020 in the areas of education, income, and health. In education the goals include that 85% of children will be kindergarten ready, 85% of young people will graduate high school, and 45% of adults will obtain an associate's degree or better. In the area of income the goal is that the "Labor Force Participation Rate" will reach 90%. Finally, in health the goals are that 95% of the community would self report regular and adequate healthcare, and 70% should self-report as having excellent or very good health.

Through Studio C, Design Impact explored how Design Thinking, and more specifically, how building empathy with various organization's community members would shape the outcomes for organizations seeking to implement Two Generation Approaches.

THE TWO-GENERATION CONTINUUM



**Adapted from Ascend at The Aspen Institute*

What is a Two-Generation Approach?

Ascend at The Aspen Institute, a national hub for Two-Generation research and practice, defines the work as programs, policies, systems, or research with a “focus on creating opportunities and addressing needs of both vulnerable parents and children together.”

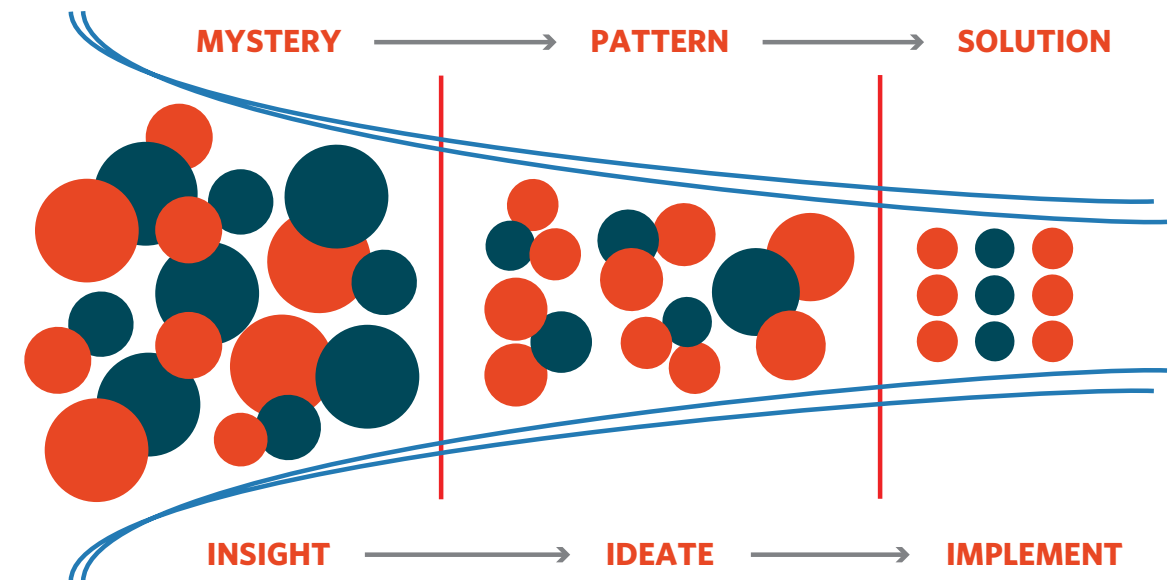
What is Design Thinking?

Design Thinking is a process that employs both rational and creative methods to define, explore and solve problems. The Design Thinking process focuses on building empathy with users, considering divergent possibilities, and learning through action.

Studio C Partners

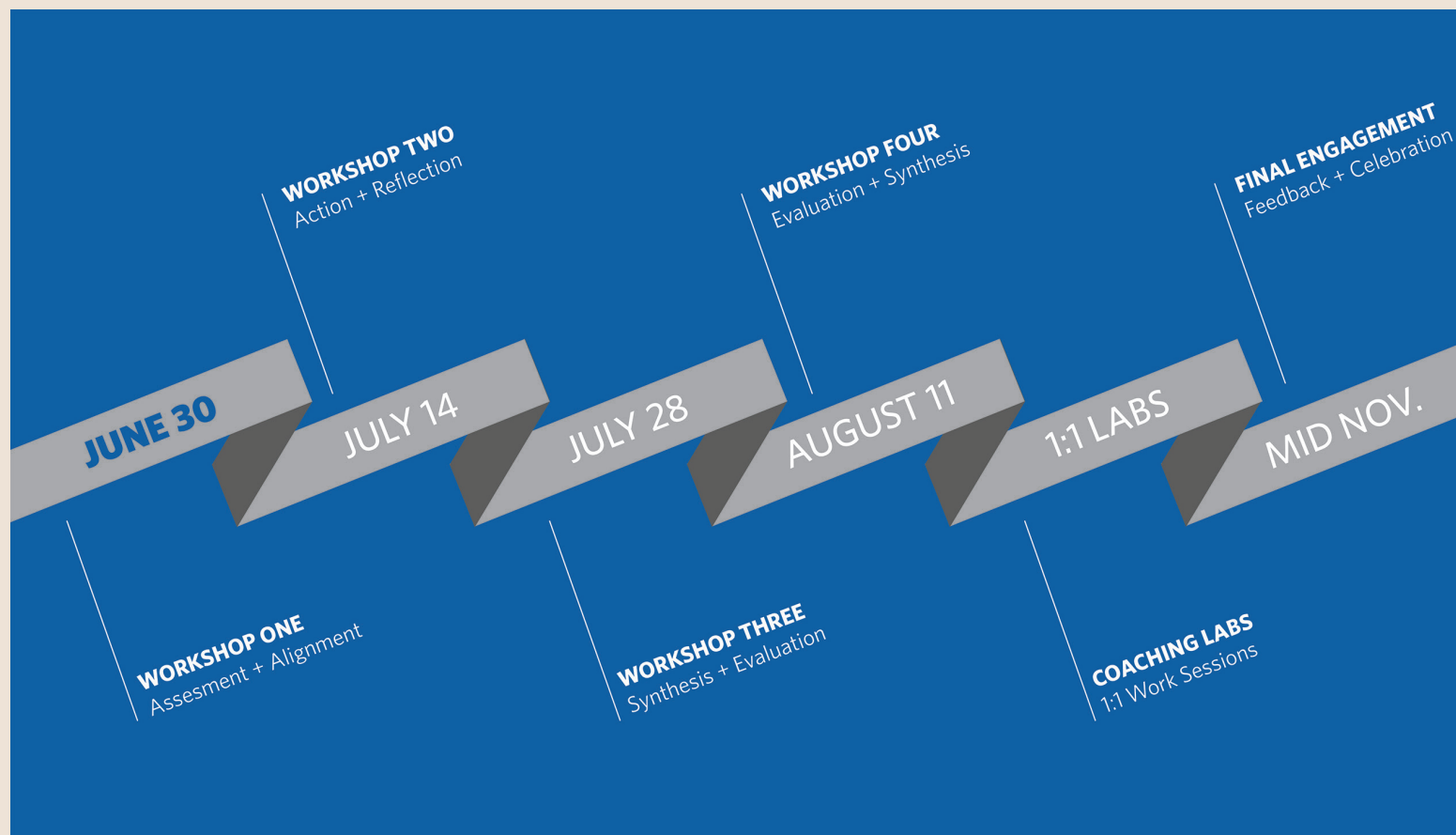


DESIGN THINKING



**Adapted from Roger Martin, The Design of Business*



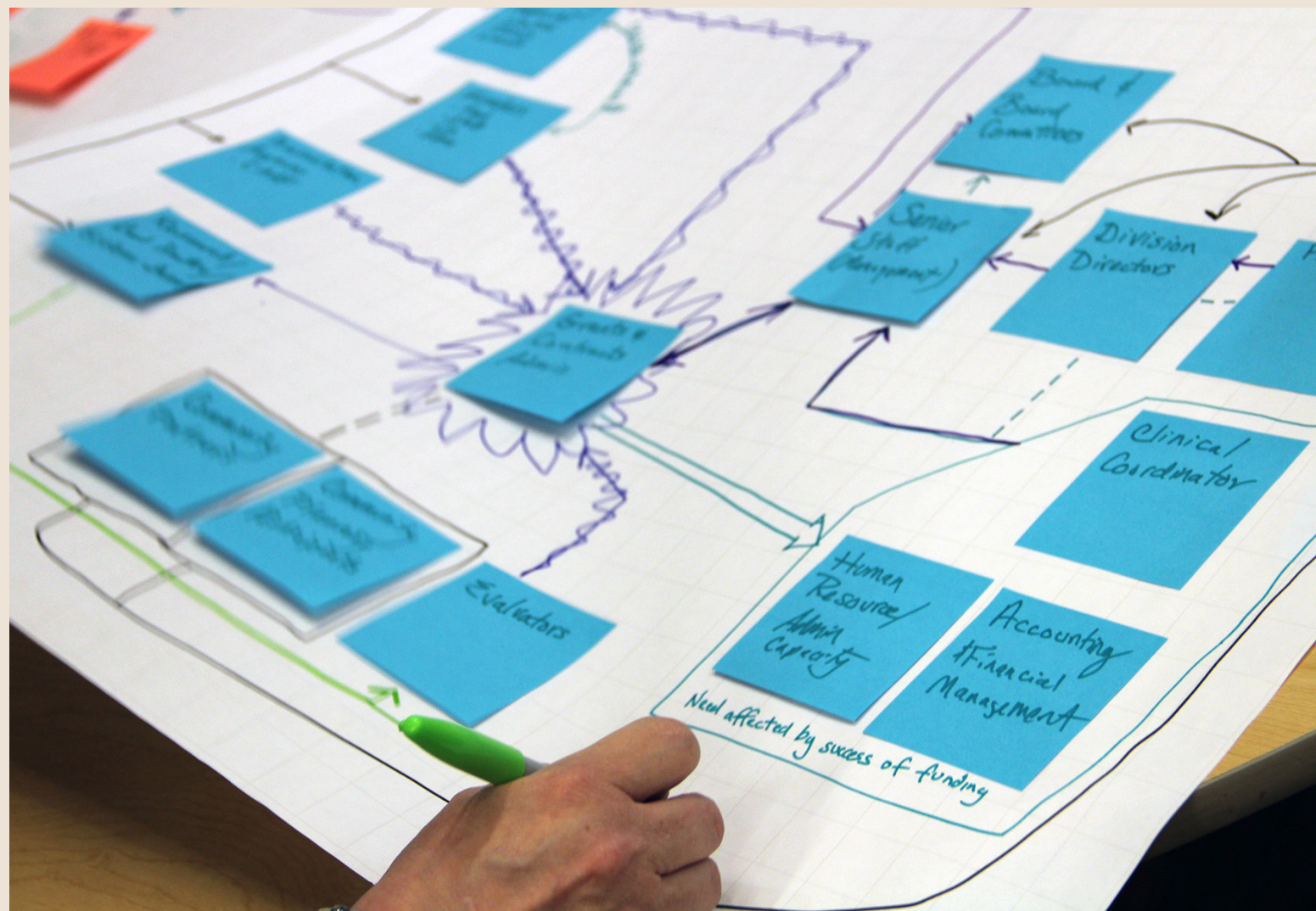


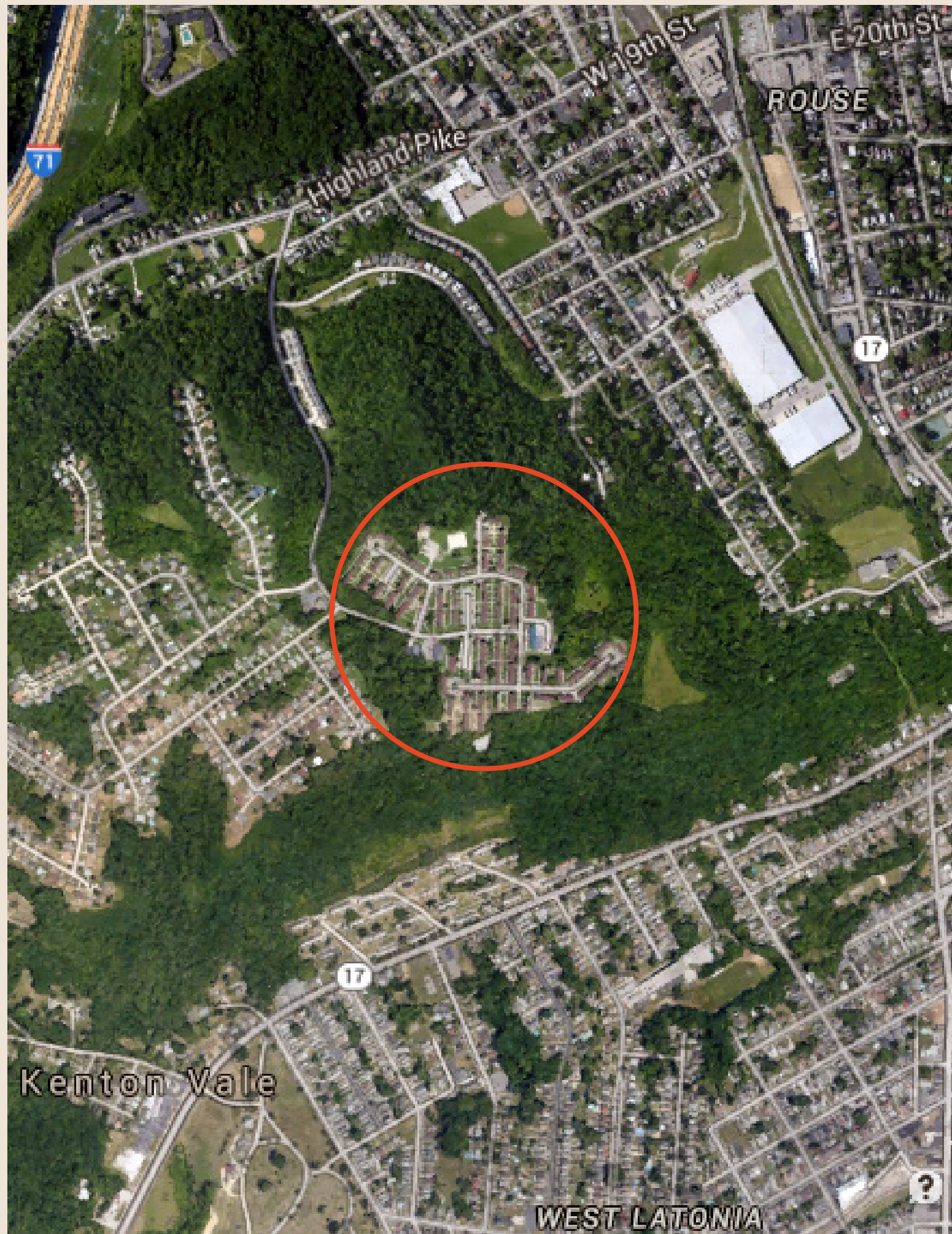
Studio C Timeline

Studio C participants used Design Thinking to explore Two-Generation strategies to reduce poverty in the Cincinnati region. Studio C began with a series of four workshops to introduce Design Thinking and Social Innovation concepts and tools to participants. In workshop one, teams assessed their strengths and weaknesses and aligned their expectations with the Studio C program. Workshop two equipped teams to think about engaging clients and community members in increasingly involved and meaningful ways. In workshop three teams learned the process of teasing opportunities out of their research. And, in workshop four, groups presented what they'd discovered and identified three questions to prototype around.

Following the workshops, Design Impact engaged in 1:1 Labs to support teams through prototyping their ideas, after which, all teams presented their process and findings in a closing circle event.

The following pages tell the story of one group's journey through the process of exploring themselves, their work, and their impact using a Design Thinking lens to explore possibilities of Two-Generation approaches.





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Taking Head Start to the Hill

The Team

The Housing Authority of Covington (HAC) is committed to creating better neighborhoods through processes of inclusion. The HAC focuses on generating opportunities for residents of public housing to achieve and maintain self-sufficiency.

Northern Kentucky Community Action Commission (NKCAC) assists families in developing knowledge, opportunities, and resources. NKCAC values empathy, dignity, independence, and accountability. They provide the Head Start program for families in Northern Kentucky to ensure kindergarten readiness for their communities.

The Problem

City Heights, one of HAC's key neighborhoods, is a secluded housing project in Northern Kentucky with 220 young people under the age of six residing there. Only 1 in 10 attend pre-school, which has resulted in previous years in 90% of the students from this geographic location not being ready for kindergarten (as measured in 2013).

Before beginning the Studio C program, the team believed that the secluded nature of the housing development was the main contributing factor to low levels of pre-K (Head Start) enrollment. The initial question they had was:

How might we increase access to transportation so that Head Start enrollment increases?



The Journey

When the group began this process they were almost certain that the barrier that they were confronting was transportation. They were encouraged to get out and talk with people to test this assumption.

“Using the Studio C techniques for engagement --- forced rankings, heavy use of artifacts, and quick, fun, multi-sensory/multi-generational experiences to demonstrate the fun of learning --- was a game changer! It definitely helped open the conversation with our families and sparked a greater interest in pre-school programming!”

Through engaging the community, they uncovered that there were more fundamental barriers to pre-K enrollment than they initially thought. It emerged that the primary barrier was that parents thought that pre-K would involve their children sitting at desks all day, and that parents believed that their children were too young to be away from their parents during the day.



Because of the methods Design Impact introduced, the team was able to gain new understanding about their users. Speaking with families, the team learned that lack of transportation wasn't their main barrier, and that a lack of understanding of what Head Start was kept parents that they spoke with from enrolling. With these new insights the team stepped back and asked, "How might we shift parents' attitudes about pre-school in order to increase enrollment in Head Start and better prepare students for educational success?"

"The biggest surprise during our Studio C experience came when our preliminary research findings "debunked" our long-held belief that transportation was the key reason why our City Heights' families were not enrolling in pre-school. Lack of transportation, in fact, really only plays a minor role. We learned the biggest barrier to pre-school enrollment was that our families just don't believe pre-school is important. They also don't tend to trust outsiders and they fear for their child's safety when away from home."



The team developed several ideas to answer this question, and eventually selected a few two-generational approaches to test with parents and children. Their first idea, a mobile Head Start experience, drew on the teams' inspiration to create an event that is exciting yet familiar - like the neighborhood ice cream truck - and using this event to provide exposure to the benefits of pre-kindergarten education. The "Bubble Mobile" prototype brought community members into the streets to engage with Head Start staff and receive their contact information. It was a great first success and inspired the team to try other ideas, specifically, ideas that included disruptive stimuli that would generate different levels of interest in the City Heights community.

Next, the team applied this reasoning to bring parents into an in-class simulation, which was less of a success. But they learned from the experience and adjusted to bring the simulation back into the neighborhood. Through this simulation, parents were engaged in thinking about how everyday activities can be instances of learning for young people. Additionally, parents had the opportunity to engage with Head Start staff to ask questions about what the experience would be like for their children in the Head Start program and receive enrollment materials.

Finally, the team created a "Head Start Day" experience with a petting zoo, pumpkin patch, and jump house to generate an interactive afternoon with Head Start staff. This went over very well, and proved to be another possible model for future community engagement.



The Result

The HAC and NKCAC were able to use their prototypes to double the number of youth enrolled in Head Start from the City Heights neighborhood. They will continue to apply what they learned during Studio C and are planning multiple Head Start recruitment events during 2015. Additionally, they plan to use these techniques in other areas of resident programming. For example, they are exploring how they might “use a comedy act as a way to open the dialogue with families on some very tough issues, including addiction, chronic unemployment, and strained family dynamics.” Finally, because of this positive experience, they have committed to implementing a Head Start “Play and Learn Mobile Classroom” and are currently working with Design Impact to make this a reality.

“By employing the Studio C techniques, we literally doubled enrollment in the Head Start program among City Heights’ families in three short months. Thanks to the Studio C experience, more young children from impoverished families will be ready for Kindergarten!”



3 Closing

“Studio C was a great learning experience for both the Housing Authority of Covington (HAC) and the NKY Community Action Commission/Head Start (NKCAC/HS) program. We learned to think “outside the box” and take more risks with our pre-school recruitment efforts. We learned “WOW” factors and low-cost, quick, recruitment methods are not only possible but more effective than traditional methods!”

Contact

This is just one story from the Studio C journey.
If you are interested in learning more, please get in touch!

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