Playgrounds That Build Communities:

An Evaluation of KaBOOM! in Eight Cities

An Independent Evaluation Conducted by Public/Private Ventures

August 29, 2011

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- ACCESS in Dearborn, MI;
- Blue Lakes Elementary School in Miami, FL;
- The Debbie Institute in Miami, FL;
- Focus HOPE in Detroit, MI;
- Gulfstream Elementary School in Miami, FL;
- Hyde Leadership Charter School in Washington, DC;
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- Talk Inc., in Newtown Square, PA; and
- Woodfield Academy in Macon, GA.

The KaBOOM! dual-purpose Theory of Change was of particular interest to the Knight Foundation's National Program. While helping a Community Partner realize its vision for a playground, KaBOOM! promotes a twofold legacy in its communities: a safe new place for children to play and increased skills and confidence among project participants that can be applied to other problems in their communities.

In the spring of 2010, the Knight Foundation supported Public/Private Ventures (P/PV), a national nonprofit research organization that works to improve the lives of children, youth and families in high-poverty communities by making social programs more effective, to work with KaBOOM! to improve its data collection instruments and processes and to assess KaBOOM! outcomes in the Knight-funded builds.

This report summarizes the major findings from the Knight Foundation-funded sites based on our pilot test of new data collection tools. While there are a wide range of outcomes that might stem from a KaBOOM! build—including improved child health and physical activity, physical improvements to the surrounding community area, and enhanced interpersonal relationships among community members—this study and the tools developed for piloting focus on those outcomes related to the joint interest of the Knight Foundation and KaBOOM! in increasing community engagement through community building and developing community leadership. Consequently, this study is not an evaluation of the whole of KaBOOM!, whose work extends far beyond the Knight Foundation supported projects.

Findings

At the crux of many community change initiatives lies the goal of fostering resident involvement in positive social change so families and individuals living in high poverty neighborhoods can feel safe and supported. Many community change initiatives are long term, comprehensive efforts to address a broad array of social problems. At the other end of the spectrum are those efforts that offer very short term engagement experiences—that alone yield little enduring benefit to individuals or communities. KaBOOM! offers an alternative view on how community members can become more able, confident and willing to address issues in their communities—through building skills, leadership and self-efficacy.

The KaBOOM! Theory of Change guides the organization's efforts and has three main parts: (1) KaBOOM! convenes people around a common cause—the playground; (2) KaBOOM! helps communities achieve a "win" by completing the playground; and (3) KaBOOM! volunteers engage in further efforts to benefit others through "cascading steps of courage." Indeed, the KaBOOM! Theory of Change centers on those who undertake building a playground and how they become sufficiently skilled and empowered through their experiences with KaBOOM! to become and stay an active and involved member of a community. Our read of the research tells us that KaBOOM! is on the right track in many ways, by attending to all of the major elements of self-efficacy (i.e., building skills, bolstering confidence and introducing

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success into the repertoire of participating individuals). Further, KaBOOM! may also foster what is known as "collective efficacy," in its work with Community Partners.

The evidence from our assessment leads us to believe that involvement in this effort resulted in skills and efficacy benefits for individuals involved in KaBOOM! planning committees and the Community Partners three to six months after the build. This suggests that a short term, intensive, structured effort, like the KaBOOM! community-build model can yield effects that can result in increased community change efforts and positive outcomes for these communities.

We learned that:

➤ The majority of planning committee members believe they have developed or improved in a variety of skills related to organizing, leading and executing large scale change efforts.

➤ Most of the respondents to our survey reported positive changes across a variety of skills, abilities and attitudes related to their community. In particular, staff of the Community Partners showed the highest levels of positive change.

➤ All of the Community Partners showed increases their organizing and leadership skills and many have applied these skills to other efforts post-playground build. Further, they attribute their increased involvement to their experience with KaBOOM!.

➤ Much of this effort is mutually reinforcing: Planning committee members and Community Partners become more skilled and confident through this effort. Armed with these newly acquired strengths, the organization can further employ participants' skills in other and eventually more ambitious tasks. With growing experience, both Community Partners and individual participants can support each other in determining and executing a future agenda.

➤ After participating in a KaBOOM! project, planning committee members expressed a greater sense of hopefulness that by working with others, they can improve their communities. Moreover, individuals on the planning committee have increased confidence that the Community Partner they worked with can carry out other projects at the same scale as the playground

effort. In fact, after participating in a KaBOOM! project, survey respondents reported levels of trust in the community and confidence in one's ability to change the community that were very high compared to individuals residing in many other cities and low income areas in the US.[1]

The consistent and strong findings from this study focused on the Knight-funded builds give us reason to believe the Knight Foundation support to KaBOOM! is likely of lasting value in helping KaBOOM! realize its Theory of Change. While this study did not examine whether KaBOOM! created sustainable change in the lives of these individuals, organizations or communities, *it does suggest that an enduring impact of KaBOOM! in their communities, one which extends beyond the playground itself, is possible.* Only a more rigorous test of KaBOOM! can determine if it does result in long term change.

Having evaluated many community engagement efforts— of both comprehensive and more limited nature, we leave this review deeply impressed by KaBOOM! in its evidence based approach, execution, commitment to learning and now what looks to be substantial outcomes. There is much that other community change efforts can learn from the KaBOOM! approach to community change. We hope that the Knight Foundation continues to support KaBOOM! in its work to learn more from its future endeavors.

1 Alesina, Alberto and Eliana La Ferrara. 2002. "Who Trusts Others?" *Journal of Public Economics,* 85 (2), 207–234.

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In the spring of 2010, the Knight Foundation began a conversation with Public/Private Ventures[2] (P/PV) about evaluating its investment in KaBOOM!. P/PV discovered in its early encounters with KaBOOM! that the organization was already an avid consumer of information. KaBOOM! currently maintains a comprehensive "BOOMbase" with information on each site, collects information at several points in time, reaches back out to Community Partners one week, one month and six months following the build and assesses the condition of a subset of playgrounds two years after they are built. KaBOOM! also previously

2 P/PV is a national nonprofit research organization that works to improve the lives of children, youth and families in high-poverty communities by making social programs more effective.

contracted with the two organizations: the Institute for the Study of Knowledge Management in Education (ISKME) and Asset-Based Community Development Institute (ABCD) at Northwestern University to conduct evaluations in 2004 and 2007 respectively. Both studies were used to better understand and improve the implementation of its model.

During early discussions between P/PV and KaBOOM!, it surfaced that the KaBOOM! data collection instruments and processes could be improved, as (1) they did not capture key outcomes related to community engagement and mobilization and (2) they were not structured to provide aggregate information across their builds. The Knight Foundation agreed to revise P/PV's scope of work from evaluating KaBOOM! to providing assistance to build the organization's internal data collection capacity and to assess KaBOOM! short-term outcomes in the Knight-funded builds.

As such, P/PV used the Knight Foundation-funded KaBOOM! sites as the test grounds for new data collection instruments (to be developed as part of this project). The Knight Foundation also requested that P/PV use this data and its knowledge of KaBOOM! to provide a summary of lessons learned about the Knight-funded projects. This report summarizes the major findings from this work.

While there are a wide range of outcomes that might stem from a KaBOOM! build—including improved child health and physical activity, physical improvements to the surrounding community area, and enhanced interpersonal relationships among community members— this study and the tools developed for this pilot focus on how well KaBOOM! advances community engagement, a focus of interest for both the Knight Foundation and KaBOOM!. It should be noted that this study does not cover the whole of KaBOOM!, whose work extends far beyond the Knight Foundation–supported projects.

Understanding KaBOOM!

KaBOOM! is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to saving play for America's children. The organization envisions a place to play within walking distance of every child in America, and works toward this goal by enlisting and supporting the participation and leadership of community members.

> **KaBOOM! is a national nonprofit organization with a mission to save play for America's children.**

An original and central strategy of KaBOOM! is its "community-build" model. In a "build," as it is called, KaBOOM! aids a community-based nonprofit organization ("Community Partner"), usually selected to build a playground after a competitive application process.

The Community Partner is responsible for working with a Funding Partner, organizing and overseeing the process, generating additional resources, and ultimately for building and maintaining the playground.

KaBOOM! assigns a Project Manager to each Community Partner to help them form a planning committee that will: work with the children and KaBOOM! to design the playground, recruit volunteers, solicit donations and raise funds, gather necessary tools, find first aid/emergency personnel for the Build Day, organize children's activities for the Build Day, work with local media to bring attention to the projects and lead logistics for planning and the build itself.

The planning committee[3] forms the nucleus of individuals receiving the greatest "touch" from the KaBOOM! intervention. As their role is pivotal in the KaBOOM! Theory of Change, KaBOOM! invests heavily in coaching and training them to the tasks involved.

KaBOOM! engages each Community Partner throughout an 8- to 12-week planning process. The process kicks off with a Design Day, at which local children help the planning committee and other volunteers design the new playground. After Design Day, the KaBOOM! Project Manager and planning committee hold weekly meetings to organize and plan the Build Day, at which approximately two hundred community and corporate volunteers complete the playground construction.

The KaBOOM! Project Manager is responsible for managing the overall budget and guiding the planning committee through the entire planning process. The KaBOOM! Project Manager coaches the planning committee members through weekly planning calls and also makes calls to the individual planning committee members to provide more intensive coaching or direction when needed. The Project Manager works to ensure that the project planning stays on track and on budget, and that the Build Day will occur as planned, with optimal community building.

3 The committee typically forms at Design Day or shortly thereafter and consists of about 8 to 12 people responsible for the planning of the project. One or two planning committee members serve as the overall chairs of the planning committee and most other planning committee members lead a subcommittee such as construction, recruitment, safety, or children's activities. Typically in a KaBOOM! project there are two co-chairs, one from the Funding Partner and one from the Community Partner. However, in the Knight Foundation builds, there were no funder co-chairs.

On Build Day, volunteers from the community and the planning committee may serve as Build Captains or Build Day volunteers. Build Captains are individuals who take leadership on Build Day and were not necessarily involved in the planning of the project as a planning committee member.

Captains receive training prior to Build Day and they manage a group of 10 to 20 volunteers on a specific project on Build Day. Build Day volunteers are members of the community and the Funding Partner who volunteer on Build Day. The KaBOOM! Theory of Change suggests that this group will be least impacted because they simply commit to one day of service and may or may not have a more lasting connection to the playground.

KaBOOM! Participants and Roles		
STAKEHOLDER	AFFILIATION	MAJOR TASKS
Project Manager	1 KaBOOM! staff member	Manage budget Coach, guide and direct the planning committee
Planning Committee Chair(s)	1 Funding Partner representative 1 Community Partner representative	Oversee planning committee Assume the greatest level of responsibility within the community
Planning Committee Members	8 to 12 individuals	Attend planning committee meetings Lead subcommittee activities
Build Captains	10 to 15 individuals	Attend training prior to Build Day Lead group of 15 to 20 Build Day volunteers
Build Day Volunteers	Approximately 200 individuals	Complete the playground build on Build Day

KaBOOM! Theory of Change

KaBOOM! has an impressive, research-based and well-articulated Theory of Change that links its interest in promoting play and the availability of safe play spaces to its aims to build and activate community leadership. The organization describes its Theory of Change as follows:

The KaBOOM! Theory of Change has a dual mission that balances the product and the process. The KaBOOM! community-build process achieves important individual, institutional and community outcomes that increase civic engagement among communities and corporations alike, build social capital, and improve the lives of children and young people.

The KaBOOM! Theory of Change is built upon the belief that the *process* of organizing a community-build playspace is as important as the *product:* the playspace itself. There are three pillars that support KaBOOM! Theory of Change:

COLLECTIVE CAUSE Like teammates on a sports team striving to win a game, a diverse group of volunteers use their different skills to collaborate and achieve the straight-forward and simple goal of building a playspace in one day for the universal cause of children's well-being.

ACHIEVABLE WINS Community development research has shown that an important step in community empowerment is to achieve a small, probable "win." A community group that has successfully built a new playground is more likely to believe they can individually and collectively make a difference. And they are more likely to act on future community needs.

CASCADING STEPS OF COURAGE Small steps of courage lead to greater acts of courage. Researchers have explored what has caused people to take significant courageous actions to benefit others and one of the leading factors for such acts was the presence of small, civically minded steps early on in life, which helped shape personal values and, over time, progressed to greater, civically minded acts.

Collectively, these pillars help KaBOOM! activate powerful citizenship.

KaBOOM! believes that, together, we can achieve active, powerful citizenship by pursuing smaller common goals—a playground, skatepark or field complex—toward collective causes (the well-being of children). A one-day build can result in "achievable wins," all through the small yet courageous act of volunteering. This is how KaBOOM! activates powerful citizenship.

KaBOOM! takes the Theory of Change to scale by leading builds, providing resources to support communities that build playspaces on their own, and advocating for better public policy, funding and public awareness for increased play opportunities nationwide.

This Theory of Change links participation in the community-build process and the skills that it imparts along the way to ongoing community engagement. The skills and confidence that community members develop through "achievable wins" of the build (e.g., planning, organizing, seeking funding) should later be available to them to apply to other issues of meaning to themselves and to their communities.

The KaBOOM! Theory of Change further suggests that participating in the build planning process and the Build Day activates a chain of events that ultimately leads to increased community leadership, vision and action (see the KaBOOM! figure below). By participating in the Build Day planning process, community members become involved in a universally desirable cause that requires them to work together with diverse individuals from their community. By successfully completing the one-day build, participants and communities experience an "achievable win" and create a shared purpose and vision for children and their community. This shared purpose and vision along with skills accrued along the way, lead individuals and Community Partners to take on additional community engagement projects and activities.

KaBOOM! believes that planning committee members, who are deeply involved in the planning process over 8 to 12 weeks, should be most affected by their participation and therefore experience greater benefits from their involvement with KaBOOM!.

You & Your Community **Build**

1. Collective Cause
- Universality
- Simplicity
- Teamwork
- Diversity

2. Achievable Win = Powerful Citizenship
- Proven model
- Support
- Community & corporate collaboration

3. Cascading Steps of Leadership
- Catalytic experience
- Shared purpose
- Vision for children, play and community

In sum, KaBOOM! expects the experience to offer:

- A simple and universally desirable cause...
- that brings together people from diverse backgrounds...
- to work together in teams...
- that are supported extensively...
- to teach skills and build capacity that are sufficient...
- to allow them to achieve a "win"...
- that in combination (skills + motivation/support + confidence from success and skills)...
- leads to future action.

Translating the Theory Into Evidence

KaBOOM! presents an interesting opportunity to examine how a structured intervention of relatively short duration affects community engagement, both in building the capacity of Community Partners and in promoting the abilities of individuals to continue to engage in their communities.

- In order to bolster the KaBOOM! data collection effort, P/PV's task has been to work with the organization to identify *who* or *what* should change and in *what ways.* Our knowledge of community change and engagement, combined with our conversations with KaBOOM!, suggests that planning committee members and chairs, Build Day volunteers, and Community Partners should all experience benefits from participating in KaBOOM! (A matrix of stakeholders and benefits is presented in Table 1). Because their exposure to the project and planning is presumably of greatest depth and duration, **planning committee members** are likely to reap the greatest benefits from participation. Compared to the planning committee members and chairs, **Build Day volunteers** who are not members of the planning committee spend significantly less time working on KaBOOM!, so this group is expected to have smaller effects from participation.

- If the individuals involved in the planning committee and Build Day volunteers go on to engage in further **community** activism and volunteerism, the communities in which they live should experience benefits on a larger scale—such as additional beautification projects near the playground and greater community cohesion. In the current project, we did not have the

opportunity or resources to investigate these types of changes, though such changes should be addressed in future research.

- While **Community Partners** figure centrally in the work of KaBOOM!, they are not addressed explicitly in the Theory of Change; therefore, P/PV has used this opportunity to explore changes in Community Partner outcomes. Because many of the planning committee members and Build Day volunteers are involved continually in the Community Partner organizations, it stands to reason that their increased individual skills and abilities may translate into increased capacity for the organization.

In what ways will change evidence itself? Following the KaBOOM! Theory of Change and the literature, we surveyed participants and Community Partners to assess the extent to which the planning committee members, Build Day volunteers, and Community Partners may have experienced increases in skills, abilities, confidence in the efficacy of community action, and community engagement after participating in a KaBOOM! project.

- *Skills and abilities:* Did participants perceive that their organizing, outreach and leadership skills improved?

- *Increased community involvement:* Has this experience motivated participants to take other action in their communities?

- *Confidence in community activism:* Are participants more likely to believe that they and others can change their communities? Do they trust others in their community more than before they participated?

In addition to assessing the extent to which participants and Community Partners felt they benefited from the experience, we were also interested in other outcomes, such as:

- *Quality of and satisfaction with experience:* Was the experience satisfying enough to support volunteers to stay involved for four months of intensive work? Did they feel satisfied with the support they received from KaBOOM!?

- *Recruitment of others:* As a proxy for impact we looked at whether participants would recommend this experience to others and would they do it again, if an opportunity presented itself.

- *Playground use and condition:* Was the playground completed? How is it being used? And by whom? What is its current condition (three to six months later)?

Approach to Data Collection

In order to address the dual goals of the project—to pilot new data collection instruments for KaBOOM! and to learn about the success of the Knight-funded builds—we collected qualitative data from interviews and site visits and quantitative data from surveys of stakeholders.[4]

Site visits: As part of our data collection efforts, we conducted three site visits—to Woodfield Academy in Macon, GA; Starlight Community Development Corporation in Detroit; and Jude Childcare Center, also in Detroit. During these sites visits, *which occurred just after Build Day,* P/PV staff interviewed 17 planning committee members, five Community Partner agency

4 A more detailed explanation of our data collection methods is provided in Appendix A.

TABLE 1: **Matrix of Key KaBOOM! Stakeholders and Key Areas of Inquiry**				
Group	Planning Committee Chairs	Planning Committee Members	Community Partners	Build Day Volunteers
Inquiry areas				
Skills and abilities	X	X	X	
Community involvement	X	X	X	X
Confidence in community activism	X	X		X
Motivation for participation	X	X		X
Quality of and satisfaction with experience	X	X	X	X
Recruitment of others	X	X		X
Playground use and condition	X	X	X	X

5 Because we were most interested in testing the newly designed measurement tools, we wanted to include all the build sites regardless of the amount of time that had passed since Build Day. Given the schedule of builds, we were not able to assess participants at a standard time post-build, but we would recommend a standardized schedule for assessment in our data collection and analysis plan to KaBOOM!.

6 Given that we were conducting an online survey at varying post-build time intervals, these survey response rates are very good. We would expect that given more regular and standard collection processes, KaBOOM! may be able to increase this response rate in the future.

7 The accelerated schedule of the builds meant that we administered the survey several months after the builds, to allow enough time for survey development. We believe that one-day volunteers may have been particularly likely to be unresponsive to the survey after so many months had passed. We also found substantial inaccuracies in email addresses among our sample.

8 Blue Lakes Elementary and Hyde Leadership Charter School did not complete an organizational survey, despite numerous attempts by P/PV to contact them.

9 Kaplowitz, Michael D., Timothy D. Hadlock, and Ralph Levine. 2004. "A Comparison of Web and Mail Survey Responses." *Public Opinion Quarterly,* 68 (1), 94-101.

Sheehan, Kim. 2001. "E-mail Survey Response Rates: A Review." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication,* [On-line], 6 (2). Retrieved 5/17/11 from http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol6/issue2/sheehan.html.

Sheehan (2001) reported an average response rate of 24.0% across studies utilizing email-based surveys from 2000. Kaplowitz et al. (2004) reported a response rate of 20.7% when soliciting people solely via email.

staff (all of whom were also planning committee members) and nine Build Day volunteers to gain in-depth knowledge of their experiences with the KaBOOM! build process. We also interviewed the KaBOOM! Project Managers who worked with these three sites. Information from these interviews helps provide specific examples of experiences and impacts of a KaBOOM! project.

Survey design and administration: In close consultation with KaBOOM!, we developed surveys to be administered to several stakeholders: planning committee members, Build Day volunteers and Community Partners. KaBOOM! provided P/PV with a list of participants and email addresses from the Knight-funded build sites. Electronic surveys were the most efficient and cost-effective way to gain access to the participants, even though the approach has its limitations (e.g., incorrect or out-of-date addresses, loss of surveys to spam filters). Emails containing links to the electronic surveys were sent to the planning committee members, Build Day volunteers and representatives of the Community Partners (usually the school principal or the executive director) between three and six months after Build Day.[5]

Response rate: We received surveys from 39 percent of planning committee members (65 of 167), 85 percent[6] of planning committee chairs and co-chairs (23 of 27), 14 percent of Build Day volunteers (95 of 678) representing each of the 13 Knight-funded build sites,[7] and 85 percent Community Partner agencies (11 of 13).[8] Staff were more likely to respond to the survey than nonstaff; therefore, we break out responses by staff and nonstaff throughout this report (In our survey, 47.7 percent of respondents were nonstaff, compared to 59.2 percent nonstaff from KaBOOM! records). Background characteristics of the planning committee members who responded to our survey are described in Appendix B. The low Build Day volunteer response rate, while not far off from that reported in other studies,[9] is nonetheless too low to include in the body of this report. We have summarized our findings from the Build Day volunteers in Appendix C.

Organization of this Report

The remainder of the report is organized in the following manner:

- The Knight Foundation Community Partners— descriptions of the participating Community Partners

- Planning committee members—reasons for participating in a KaBOOM! project

- Quality of and satisfaction with the KaBOOM! planning and implementation processes

- Outcomes by participant group looking at skills acquired and changed attitudes and behaviors

- Conclusions and key takeaways and observations

Thirteen sites in five states and the District of Columbia participated in the KaBOOM! playground builds funded by the Knight Foundation (see below for descriptions of Community Partners).

It is important to note that the Knight Foundation-supported sites had additional requirements to meet that do not apply to the standard version of KaBOOM! community builds. Specifically, the Knight Foundation provided funding to incorporate Imagination Playground in a Box (IPB), allowing KaBOOM! to pilot the inclusion of IPB within their well-established community build model. IBP requires storage capacity for its movable parts and staff who can facilitate the type of play that IPB was designed to inspire.[10] As a result of the inclusion of IPB, the profile of the Community Partners presented here is not necessarily representative of all KaBOOM! builds.

10 IPB is a semi-mobile set consisting of parts suitable for a variety of sites. It gives communities an easy-to-install, cost-effective means to enhance the way their children play by promoting creativity and imagination through the use of mobile pieces. The set includes a storage unit on wheels, Imagination Playground Blocks, parts that encourage sand and water play, along with a variety of other loose parts. IPB can be used on its own or as an addition to an existing play space.

Compared to the larger portfolio of KaBOOM! builds, the Knight-funded sites were more likely to be schools (62 percent of the Knight-funded sites were schools versus 22 percent of all KaBOOM! builds in 2010). Schools present the more highly structured environment that is needed to fully utilize the IPB, which requires staff known as "Play Associates" as part of the implementation. In addition, the Community Partners for the most part serve low income people but they are not necessarily from the organization's immediate geographic community. As KaBOOM! continues to discuss how to define "community" in its work, this is an important consideration, as volunteers from schools may draw from a geographic area more broad than the playground's immediate context.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

ACCESS: The Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS) in Dearborn, MI, offers a full platform of social services. ACCESS primarily serves a low-income population, with 84 percent of clients having an annual income below $20,000. The playground is open to the community and is used by its Youth and Family Center participants and by a newly established Head Start program.

Blue Lakes Elementary School: A public elementary school in Miami, FL, serves approximately 750 children in prekindergarten through fifth grade in both general education and programs for students with special needs, specifically children with autism. The elementary school serves a primarily Hispanic community (83 percent of students), and 52 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

Debbie School: The Debbie Institute (Debbie School) is a division within the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Miami's Miller School of Medicine that provides services and education programs to children with disabilities, focusing on children with developmental, speech and hearing disabilities. Eighty-six percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. *(continued)*

Focus HOPE: Focus HOPE partnered with the Paul Robeson Academy, a Detroit public school serving approximately 675 children in prekindergarten through eighth grade. The school is 99.9 percent African American; enrollment is limited to students with a 2.5 grade point average or higher, and 78 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

Gulfstream Elementary School: A public elementary school in Miami, FL, serves 685 children in prekindergarten through fifth grade. Eighty percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Before KaBOOM!, the school's existing playground was closed because it was considered unsafe.

Hyde Leadership Charter School: A public charter school in Washington, DC, Hyde serves 750 students in prekindergarten through twelfth grade, with approximately 240 students in the elementary grades, 250 in middle school, and 270 in high school. Seventy-five percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

Imani Charter School: Located in Philadelphia, the Imani Charter School serves 450 students in kindergarten through eighth grade. Before partnering with KaBOOM!, the school did not have a playground. The school uses the new playground for both students and children in the surrounding community. Seventy percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

Jude Childcare Center: Located in Detroit, Jude Childcare Center is affiliated with the Jude Missionary Baptist Church. In 2010, the church also formed the Jude Community Development Corporation. The playground is open to the community. Eighty-six percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

Patterson Park Community Center: The Patterson Park Community Center in Akron, OH, is one of 13 community centers operated by the city's Recreation Bureau under the direction of the Department of Public Service. All children using the playground qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Eighty percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

St. Stephens Daycare: In Philadelphia, St. Stephens Daycare and after-school program are run by the Grace Neighborhood Development Corporation. Enrollment at the center is at full capacity with 70 children and a waiting list of 30 children. The center plans to grow to accommodate 110 children and views the playground as central to its strategic growth plan. The playground is not open to the public. Seventy-seven percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

Starlight CDC: The Starlight Community Revitalization Group in Detroit, which grew out of the 300-member New Starlight Baptist Church, is a community development corporation (CDC) focusing on economic development and youth programming. The average income of those served is just over $13,000. The playground is open to the community. Seventy percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

Talk Inc.: Talk Inc. is a full-day speech and language intensive school for children with autism in rural-suburban Newtown Square, PA. The school enrolls 15 children full time, but the facility also draws 150 students a day as part of a Garrett Williamson preschool and day care program. In summertime, the school attracts 250 children a day through the Camp Kids program. The playground is not open to the public, except for special events arranged in advance. Thirty-five percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

Woodfield Academy: Set in suburban Macon, GA, the Woodfield Academy serves more than 80 students with learning differences or developmental disabilities. Opened in 1997, the private school plans to grow to serve more than 100 students over the next two years. The playground is not for use by the general public. Seventy percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

The involved volunteer sits at the center of the KaBOOM! Theory of Change. KaBOOM! bases its work on the capacity to bring community members to the table to accomplish an important goal.

11 While not a precise assessment of whether planning committee members were members of the geographic community near the playground, we used respondents' indication of whether they were staff of the Community Partner to approximate their status as community members. We assumed that staff members, particularly of schools, would be less likely to live in the geographic area near the playground.

12 "Work for the organization" could refer to a staff at a community-based organization or a teacher or other staff at a school. "Member of the Community Partner" refers to a nonstaff member of the Community Partner, such as a member of a YMCA or other membership organization. Percentages do not sum to 100 because categories in which neither group (staff and nonstaff) exceeded 10 percent were excluded from the figure.

KaBOOM! works with different types of communities and, therefore, defines community in multiple ways—for a community based organization, the community may be the geographic area immediately surrounding the playground while for a school the community could consist of students and their parents and guardians regardless of geographic proximity. KaBOOM! aims to recruit about half of the planning committee members from the community to maximize the impact the project has on community building going forward. For the Knight-funded sites, KaBOOM! reports that approximately 59 percent (110 of 186) planning committee members were not staff members of the Community Partner, indicating they had met their goal.[11]

We asked survey respondents to indicate the three most important reasons for their decision to volunteer for the KaBOOM! build (from a list provided). As we received a disproportionate number of responses volunteering from the staff of the Community Partner, we report findings separately for both staff and nonstaff respondents. The results are presented in Figure 1.[12]

In their responses, planning committee members generally emphasized collective and community benefits over those that might foster individual gain. Among the most important reasons selected were "to do something positive for kids in the community" and "believ[ing] this was an important community effort." For nonstaff planning committee members, a substantial portion volunteered because their child would be using the playground.

FIGURE 1

Most Important Reasons
to Volunteer with KaBOOM!

■ staff ■ nonstaff
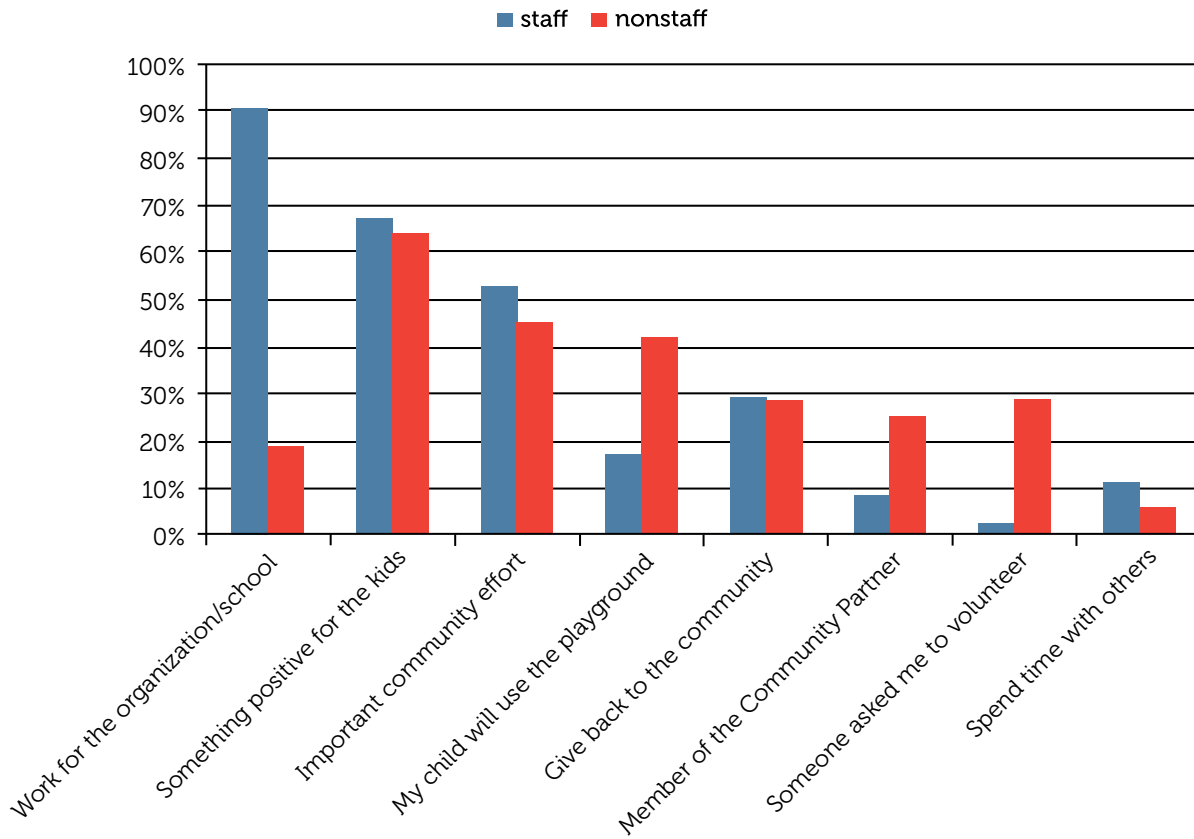
We asked planning committee members about their satisfaction with various aspects of the planning process. Because the KaBOOM! planning process extends over a number of months, satisfaction with the process including meetings and their experience with the Project Manager is crucial for retaining individuals over time.

Overall, planning committee members were extraordinarily satisfied with every dimension of their KaBOOM! experience, with staff members indicating a higher level of extreme satisfaction than that expressed by nonstaff members. (Figure 2).

Comments by planning committee members reinforce their overwhelmingly positive ratings of KaBOOM!. As one said: "I really believe KaBOOM! has made a big difference in the lives of not only the children in this community but the adults too."

FIGURE 2
Satisfaction with KaBOOM! Processes
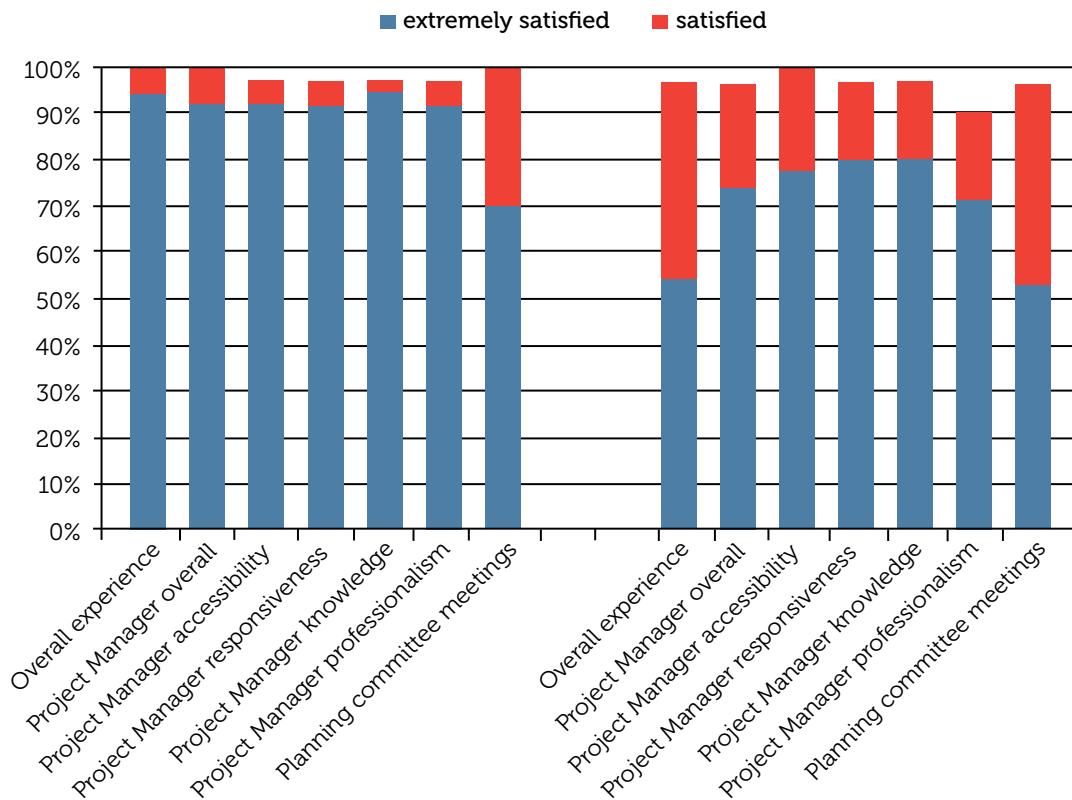
The organizational capacity of KaBOOM! was the subject of much positive commentary, with many participants noting the support, structure and precision of the effort:

- "Extremely well organized."

- "Everything ran like clockwork."

- "I had never participated in a well-organized project like this before! Months of planning culminated in a playground we are all proud of."

Having seen many meetings in schools in the context of evaluations we found it notable that planning committee meetings were also positive experiences for the vast majority of committee members. As reported:

- "Everyone was on top of what they were doing and very helpful."

- "The conference calls were very effective and accommodating to all involved."

- "I was extremely satisfied with the main project planning committee and, overall, disappointed in the [public relations] planning committee."

- "The meetings were productive and kept us on track. Our success was [in part] because of those meetings."

Project Managers received substantial acclaim as well, with individuals noting not just their organizational abilities but also their emotional support:

- "This was one of the most meaningful experiences I have had. Working with [our Project Manager] was a joy; he was very professional and knowledgeable about the project."

- "Working with KaBOOM! was an outstanding experience. Our Project Manager was extremely helpful and supportive. She was our guiding light through the experience."

- "Very informative and kept the committee on great timelines to complete their assignment."

- "Wonderfully organized and calm even under extreme circumstances—yet young personnel."

- "[Our Project Manager] was amazing!"

Of course, some participants made critical comments about the experience but they were mostly minor or in vast contradiction to everything else we heard from the site. One noted the "creeping size and demands of the project." She added: "Initially I expected a certain level of demands and expectations from our end. That level seemed to rise a little every day. It wasn't unbearable but would be nice to know it all up front."

FIGURE 3
Online Resources
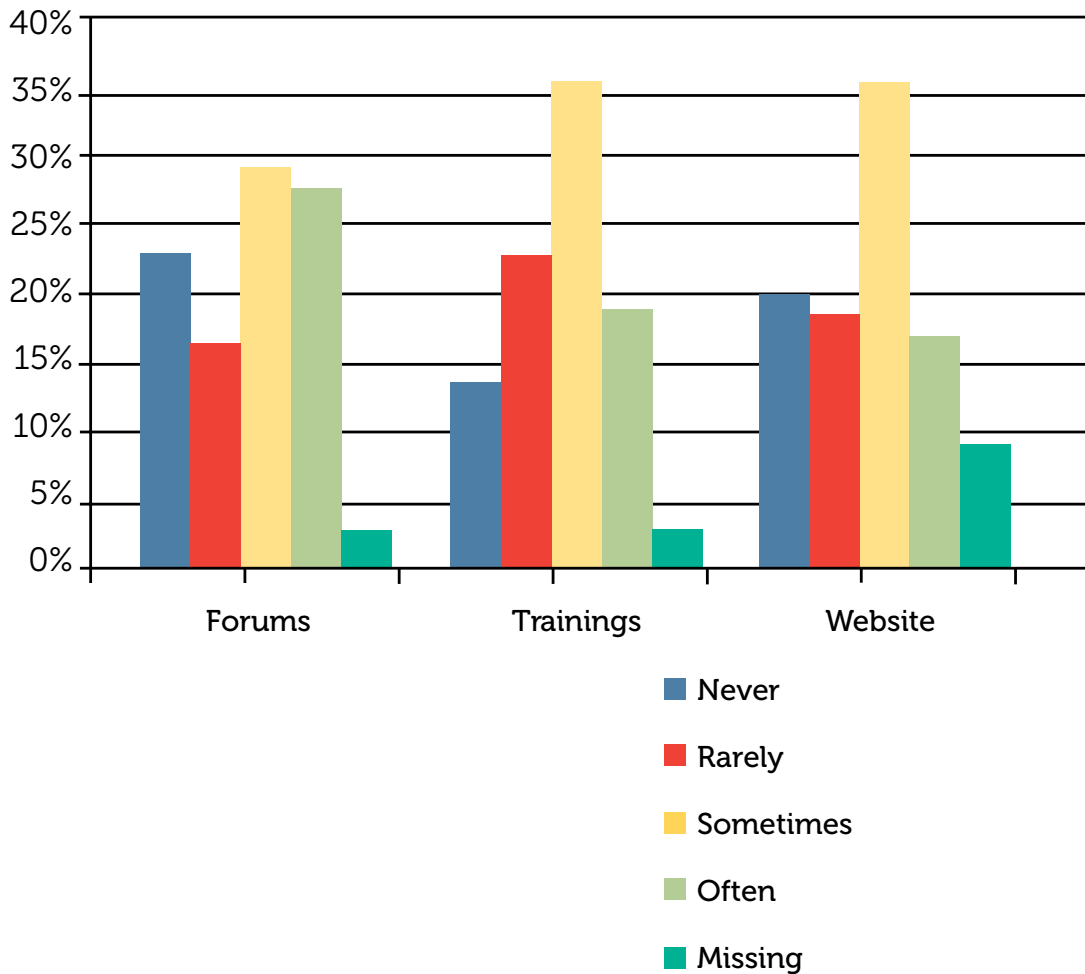
Use of Other KaBOOM! Resources

KaBOOM! promotes the use of several online tools for its build participants, including an online planning tool, webinars, trainings and forums. While many planning committee members did not rely heavily on KaBOOM! online resources, those who did use the online tools found them helpful in planning their playground build (Figures 3 and 4 below). The lower levels of online resource use might have a close relationship to the high-quality relationships with Project Managers discussed above. In essence, if participants didn't need online services, they didn't use them.

FIGURE 4
Helpfulness of Online Resources
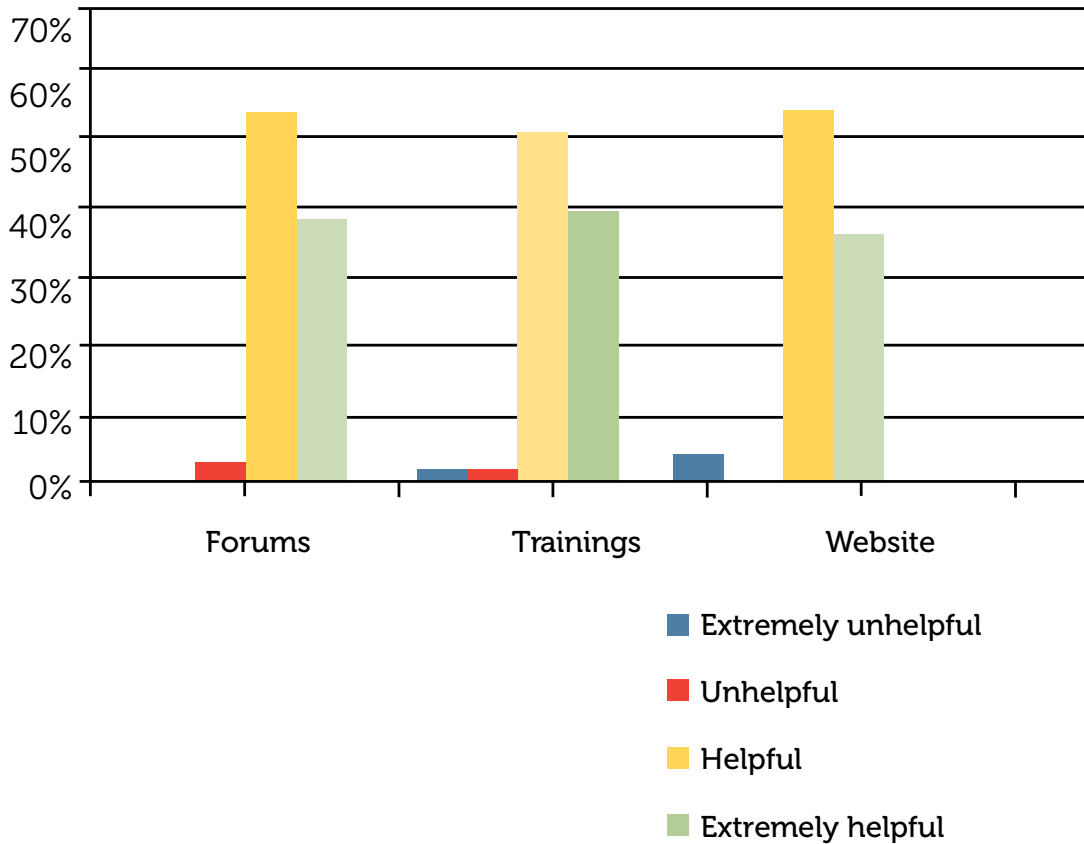
- Extremely unhelpful
- Unhelpful
- Helpful
- Extremely helpful

As the KaBOOM! Theory of Change is robust and evidence based, P/PV was able to identify appropriate outcomes within a body of research.

We know for instance, that knowledge and skills alone will not account for whether individuals accomplish a goal—they also must have motivation and a belief that they can successfully make use of their knowledge and skills. As such, KaBOOM! aims not only to impart practical skills to its participants—planning committee members and Community Partners alike—but also grounds its approach in research about how individuals (and possibly organizations) build effectiveness and confidence in their skills that can be sustained and applied to future situations.

We believe KaBOOM! strives to foster self-efficacy among its participants—a belief in one's ability to achieve a goal—through its emphasis on an achievable win: the playground. Only when skills are accompanied by self-efficacy will an individual be motivated to act toward a meaningful goal and have the capacity to act successfully.[13] Other community efforts, by contrast, languish in lengthy, drawn-out processes intended to achieve more lofty goals. The achievable win is a critically important factor, particularly in high-poverty communities, where residents experience chronic apathy from failed attempts to enact change.

As such, a centerpiece of the KaBOOM! Theory of Change is to develop not only skills but also perceptions of success and personal capacity. These perceptions are potentially bolstered by the relationships with Community Partners— at least to the degree that these partners recognize, support, and reinforce these sentiments and perceptions. In the section that follows, we report on the outcomes experienced by KaBOOM! planning committee members and Community Partners. We generated measures for these factors—skills, self-efficacy, volunteerism and organizational capacity—and tools to assess if the interim outcomes suggested by the KaBOOM! Theory of Change were attained. We also asked about the "ultimate" outcome for participants (new and increased engagement and action) and for Community Partners (ongoing community engagement).

13 Pecukonis, Edward V. and Stanley Wenocur. 1991. "Perceptions of Self and Collective Efficacy in Community Organization Theory and Practice." *Journal of Community Practice,* 1 (2), 5–21.

In our findings, planning committee volunteers—especially planning committee members who were also staff members and/or chairs—reported an increase in the development of skills critical to community change efforts, as well as a strongly heightened belief in their ability to make a difference in their community (self-efficacy). And, of note, these volunteers attributed such increases to their participation in a KaBOOM! project. Finally, in line with their theory, these volunteers reported that the KaBOOM! experience influenced them to volunteer more in future community efforts. In addition, the Community Partners themselves reported gains in organizing capacity and reputational capital. While KaBOOM! expects community benefits as a result of the build (e.g., improvements in the surrounding space and increased demonstrations of leadership over time), we did not have the resources to quantify outcomes of this nature. Such an inquiry would be important for future research efforts.

Planning Committee Outcomes

### What skills do planning committee members gain from their participation in a KaBOOM! project?

Planning committee members reported improvements across a wide range of skills relevant to future community change and organizing efforts. While the skills acquired may seem incremental, they can and do represent significant gains. For example, a relatively simple takeaway can amount to a large leap in the potential for an individual to execute a successful outreach campaign: "I also learned that you can't just do a 'mailing.' You have to have a contact person at the organization whom you can call and follow-up with. It needs to be more personalized if you want to get a response. We learned that the hard way at first."

In order to assess skills development, we surveyed planning committee members and asked whether and how much they improved along a number of dimensions relevant to community organizing and change efforts, including:

- *Community assessment abilities:* identifying individuals and groups that can help address community problems, identifying assets in their community, and identifying needs in their community.

- *Planning and logistics:* creating a plan, raising funds, organizing and running a meeting, and programming future events around the playground.

- *Leadership skills:* taking initiative, motivating others, and managing and delegating tasks.

- *Outreach activities:* gathering in-kind donations from local businesses, recruiting volunteers for a large event, and recruiting volunteers for ongoing planning.

FIGURE 5

Differences in Outcomes between Staff and Nonstaff Planning Committee Members
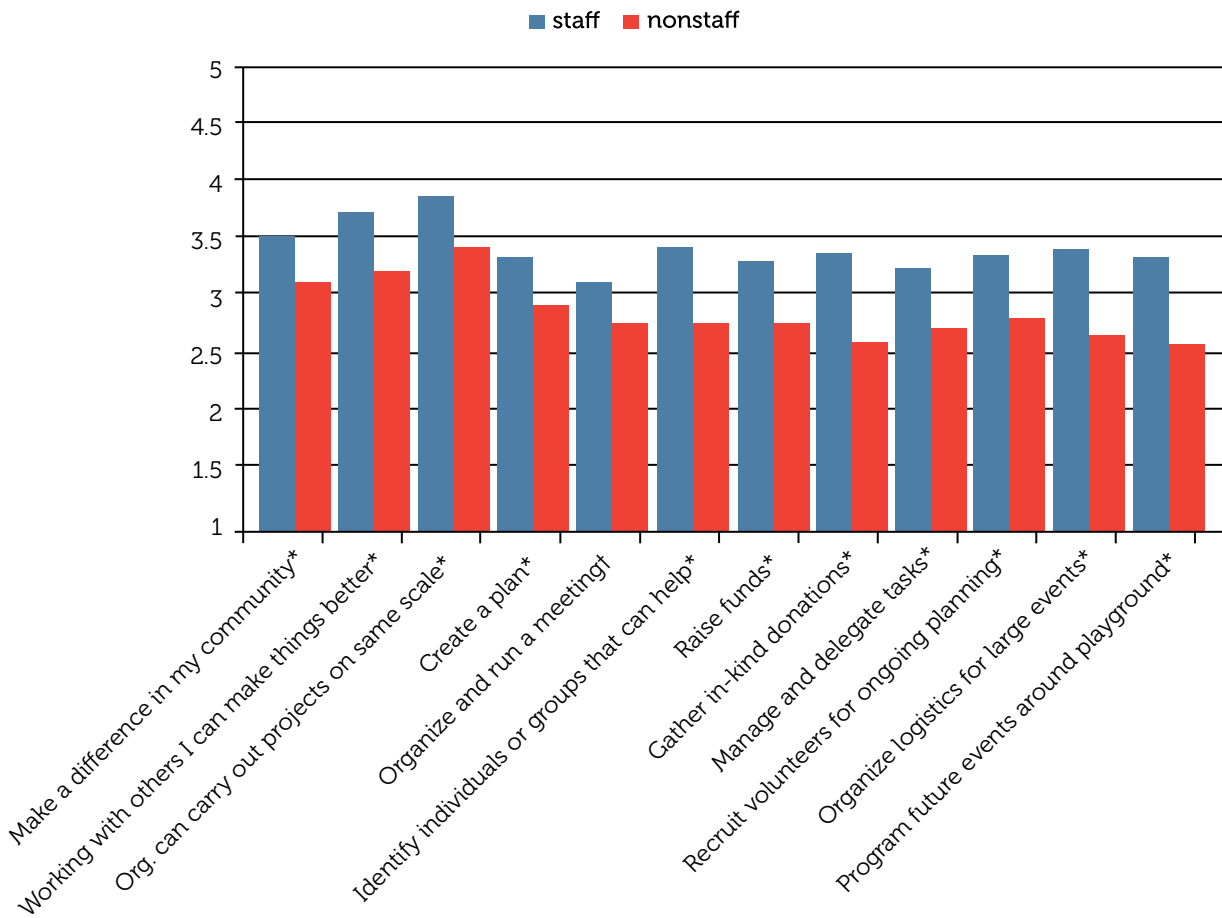
Were there any differences in outcomes among staff and nonstaff planning committee members?

As noted previously, over half of planning committee members were staff members of the Community Partner. Because of this, we wanted to explore how being a staff member influenced the outcomes reported. Somewhat surprisingly, planning committee members who were staff members reported higher levels of confidence in community activism and skill attainment than nonstaff members across all items assessed (Figure 5). Staff reported greater improvement at statistically significant levels in a number of skills and abilities:

- managing and delegating tasks
- gathering in-kind donations from local businesses
- recruiting volunteers for ongoing planning
- identifying individuals or groups that can help solve a problem
- creating a plan
- raising funds
- organizing logistics for large events
- programming future events around the playground
- organizing and running a meeting (marginal)

Were there any differences in outcomes among planning committee chairs and non-chairs?

We also wanted to investigate if planning committee chairs,[14] who theoretically would have greater involvement in the project, had better outcomes than other planning committee members. And indeed, planning committee chairs reported greater levels of skill development than other committee members (Figure 6). Significant differences surfaced in the following abilities:

- creating a plan
- identifying individuals or groups that can help solve a problem
- organizing logistics for large events
- gathering in-kind donations from local businesses (marginal)
- identifying assets in their organization and community (marginal)

14 17 of 23 planning committee chairs and co-chairs were also staff members.

Does the experience increase self-efficacy?

KaBOOM! imparts skills, but individuals have to believe they can use these skills and have an impact on their neighborhood to remain motivated to stay active in their communities. As shown in Figure 7, a majority of planning committee members reported that KaBOOM! did have a positive influence on their belief in their ability to improve the community. Specifically, around 80 percent of staff planning committee members and over 60 percent of nonstaff planning committee members reported that participating in a KaBOOM! project increased their belief that they could make a difference in their community both individually and by working with others. Almost three quarters of staff planning committee members and over a half of nonstaff planning committee members reported that participating in a KaBOOM! project increased their trust in community members. Finally, more than 80 percent of staff planning committee members and nearly 70 percent of nonstaff planning committee members felt increased confidence that the Community Partners could carry out projects on a scale similar to that of KaBOOM!.

As we know from the research, a key factor in fostering increased community engagement is enhancing residents' sense of agency that they can improve their situation. This sentiment was expressed by those involved in the KaBOOM! builds. One planning committee member summarized the situation as follows: "This project reaffirmed the good in people. You don't always know where the gift or contribution to your community will come from, but KaBOOM! really gives communities the opportunity to reinvest in themselves. I think we know that people will invest in us if we invest in ourselves."

Did the KaBOOM! experience translate into future action?

Perhaps the most important outcome for KaBOOM! and for the Knight Foundation is whether planning committee members were able to translate this experience—their skills gains and increased belief in the ability to create community change—into future action. As shown in

FIGURE 6

Differences in Outcomes Between
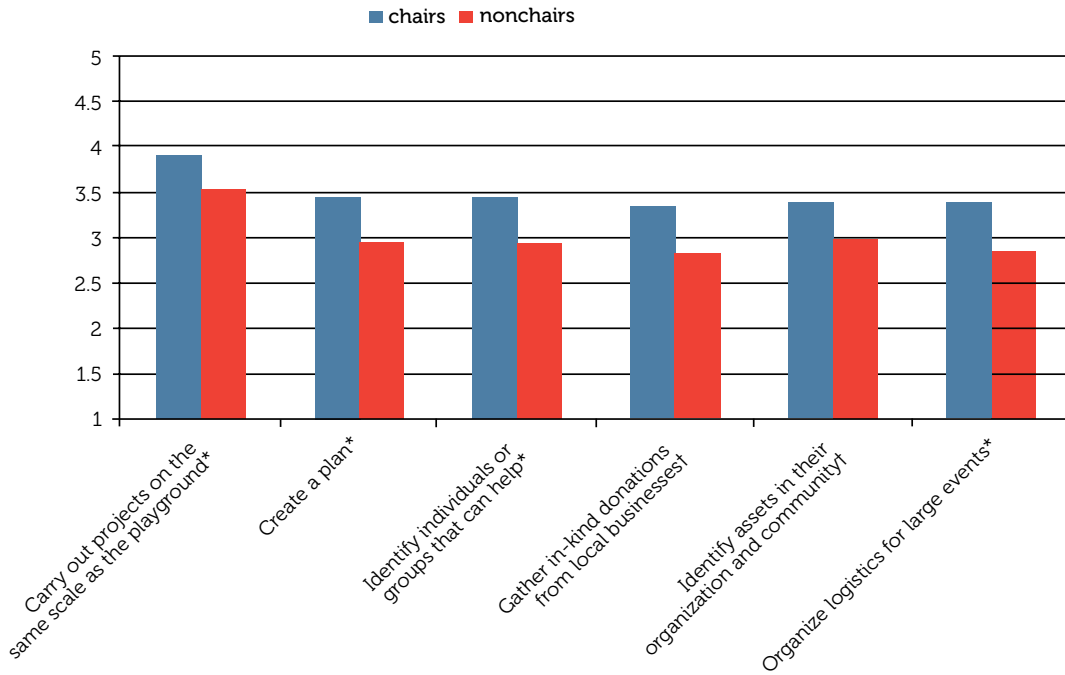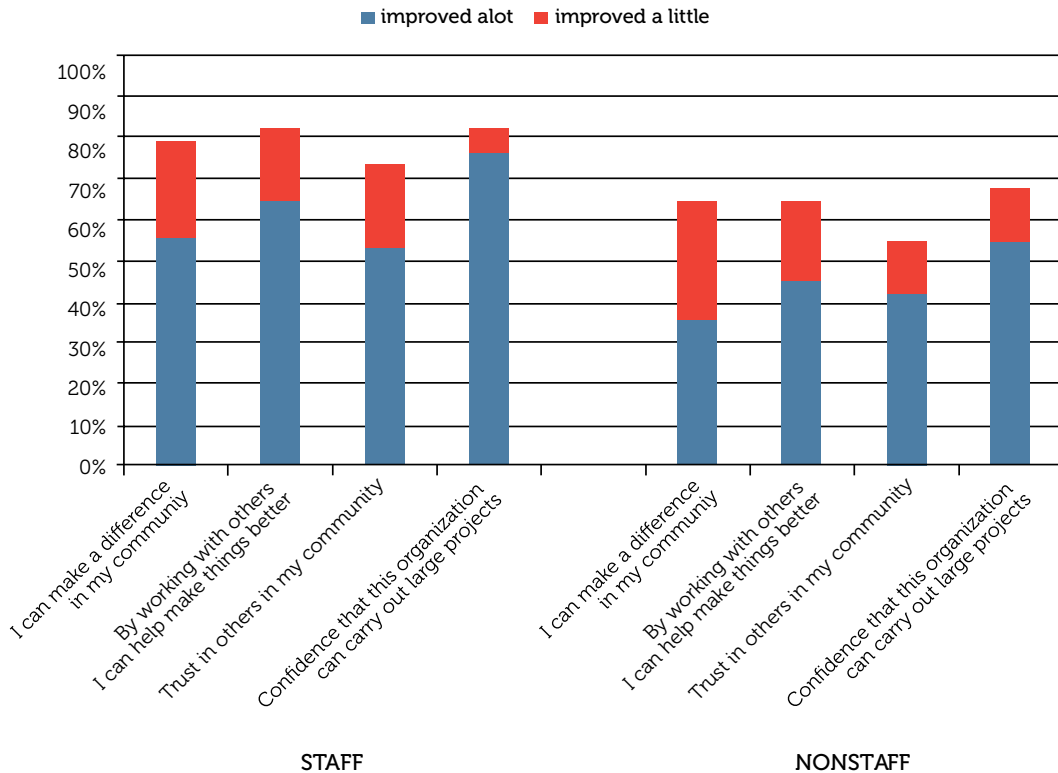## Planning Committee Chairs and Non-Chairs

■ chairs ■ nonchairs

- Carry out projects on the same scale as the playground*
- Create a plan*
- Identify individuals or groups that can help*
- Gather in-kind donations from local businesses†
- Identify assets in their organization and community†
- Organize logistics for large events*

FIGURE 7

Changes in Planning Committee
Members' Components of Self-Efficacy

■ improved alot ■ improved a little

- I can make a difference in my communiy
- By working with others I can help make things better
- Trust in others in my community
- Confidence that this organization can carry out large projects

STAFF   NONSTAFF

Figure 8, a substantial proportion of planning committee members—staff and nonstaff alike—(and at similar levels,) reported actual increased levels of community engagement as a result of their work with KaBOOM!:

- 35 percent of both staff and nonstaff have already engaged in new volunteer opportunities.

- 21 percent of staff and 23 percent of nonstaff have joined new community organizations or groups.

- 29 percent of staff and 26 percent of nonstaff have taken on new leadership roles within their volunteer activities.

- 29 percent of staff and 26 percent of nonstaff have increased the number of hours they spend volunteering.

An additional 10 to 30 percent reported that while they had not yet engaged in a new activity, they planned to do so sometime within the next six months to a year.

FIGURE 8

Planning Committee Members' Volunteer Activities Since KaBOOM!
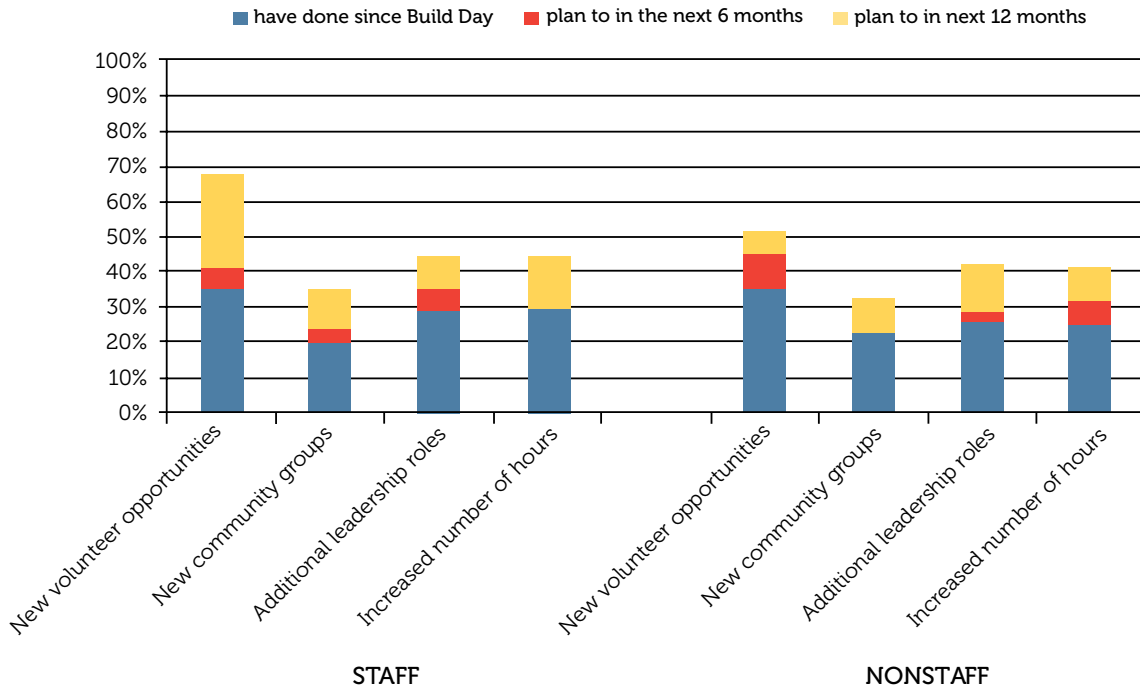
Although we did not ask planning committee members about their prior levels of community engagement, several noted that their already high levels of volunteerism limited their ability to do more. One planning committee member noted, "I'm extremely active with several nonprofit activities, so I wasn't likely to increase my involvement due to this project." But some of the most active participants also appreciate the possibility of having others joining them. As one put it:

> Helping others has always been a passion of mine. And to see others come together with the same passion is awesome. This gives us an opportunity to see that we can come together as a people, whether we are black or white, adult or child, and do something that will benefit us all. I loved this project.

Staff and nonstaff members, as well as chairs and non-chairs, reported similar levels of volunteerism after the KaBOOM! project, suggesting that the differential interim outcomes reported above (in skills and self-efficacy) did not translate into different levels of action for these groups. Said another way, KaBOOM! may have significant effects on engagement levels for all those who join the Build Day planning committees.

Community Partner Outcomes

Although the role and potential leverage of the Community Partners are not highly specified in KaBOOM! Theory of Change, the literature suggests that community organizations can be a catalyst for change and that complex problems cannot be solved by individuals or organizations alone. In effect, community organizations can help build the social capital needed to facilitate collaboration and a sense of more "collective efficacy" among community residents.[15] We wanted to explore the possible benefits to the Community Partners, both in straightforward terms— i.e., the goal of building a safe, new and well-maintained playground for children—and the extent to which the organization's "community organizing skills" were bolstered by the experience. Our survey of Community Partners confirmed that, by and large, they experienced both of these outcomes.

15 For a brief review on collaboration, see Lasker, Roz D. and Elisa S. Weiss. 2003. "Broadening Participation in Community Problem Solving: A Multidisciplinary Model to Support Collaborative Practice and Research." *Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine,* 80 (1), 14–60.

What benefits did the playground afford?

Each Knight-funded Community Partner was able to build a playground,[16] marking a significant "win" for the organization and its constituents. For instance, for many Community Partners, the new playground was a significant improvement over previous equipment, which was often hazardous—or, in some cases, Community Partners had no playground equipment at all prior to KaBOOM!. According to Community Partner leaders, the playgrounds have been well maintained since Build Day, with 100 percent of respondents indicating the playground, IPB and surrounding area were in excellent or very good condition; were clean or very clean; and were safe or very safe. The only hazard reported was broken equipment at two sites.

> The playground was the first step, and it was important [be]cause it met a community need— to combat childhood obesity. [Also], the [previous playground] space was in bad repair—it was a safety hazard, and [so] it was a good [project] to get community involvement and it was something we could wrap our arms around.

We asked the leaders at each of the 13 Community Partners to report on the use of the playground. Because eight of the 13 sites are schools, access to the playground by the broader community is often limited. More than half of all sites (54.5 percent) did not offer community access to the playground at all, restricting access to the school's students often for reasons of safety and perceived liability. Among those that did open the playground to the community, most provided unrestricted access to the playground (i.e., 24 hours a day, seven days a week). One site found a middle ground and required community members to reserve or rent the playground space for events. Additionally, some sites (54.5 percent) have hosted special events or gatherings at the playground, such as birthday parties, parent meet-ups and play dates.

As shown in Figure 9, while not all playgrounds are open for public use, they are indeed being used by a large number of children for high-quality play. On a typical day, nearly half of the playgrounds (45.5 percent) are used by 30 or more children. Children are highly active while using the playground and IPB. Respondents unanimously rated children's activity level as high or very high while

16 At the time of our survey, one site—the Debbie School—had not opened its playground due to concerns about the soil composition. However, the comments we received suggested that Build Day volunteers in particular were not well informed as to why the playground was not open and felt that the delay in opening the playground undermined the success of the project and volunteers' enthusiasm about the future. The playground at Debbie School was opened on August 19, 2011, prior to the first day of school for the 2011-2012 academic year.

FIGURE 9

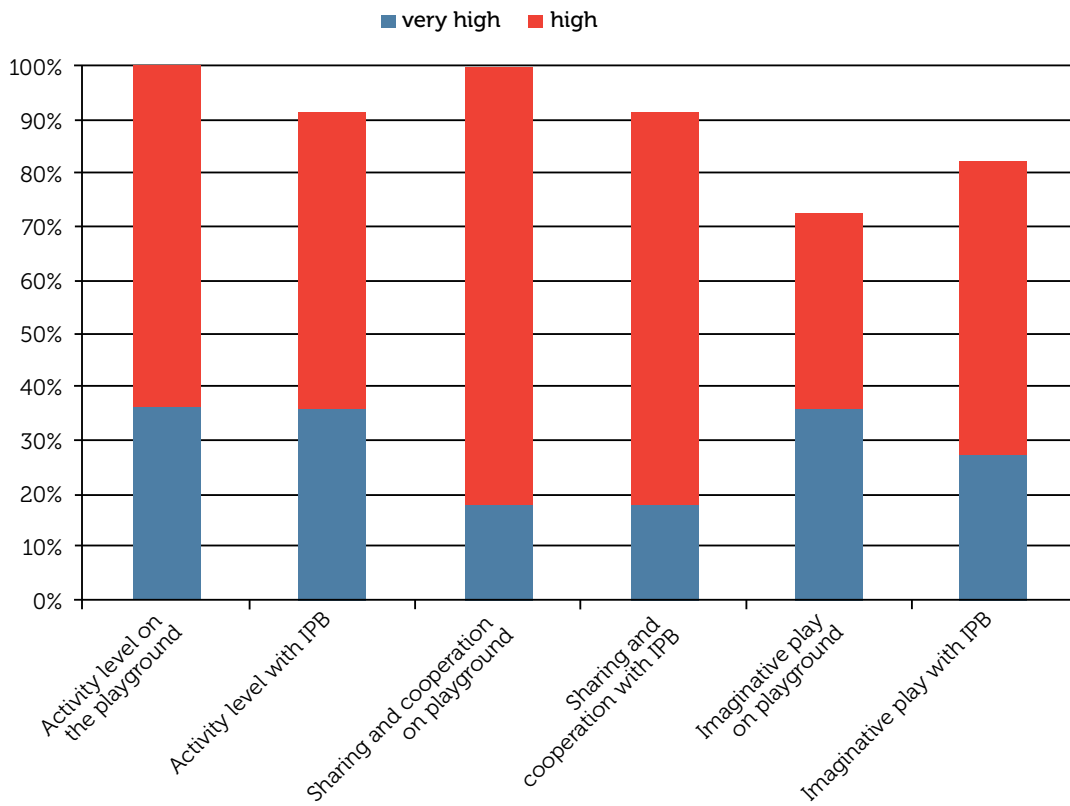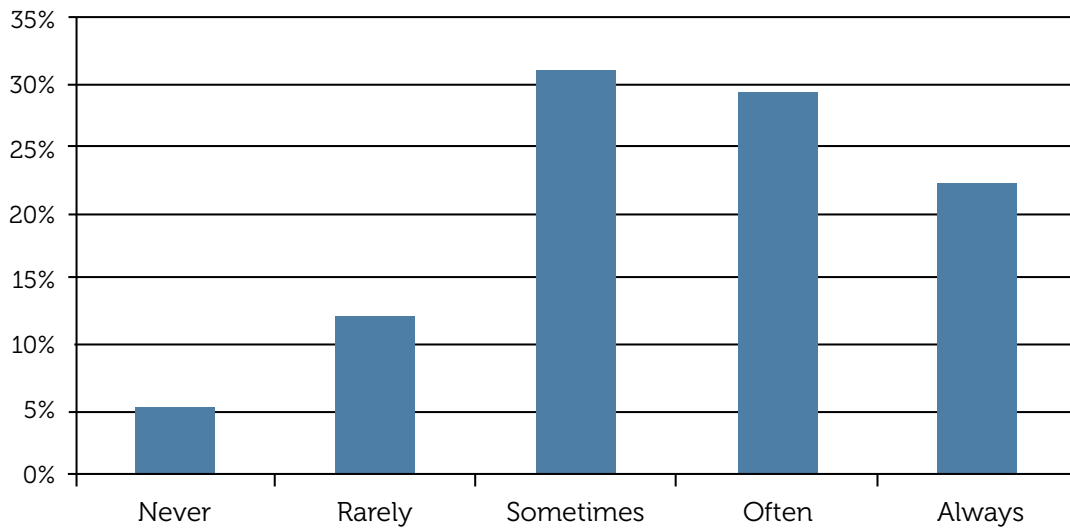## Children's Behavior and Activity on Playground

■ very high　■ high

FIGURE 10

How Often Do You Talk to Others at the Playground

using the playground, and 90.9 percent rated children's activity level as high or very high while using IPB. Similarly, 100 percent of respondents rated children's sharing and cooperation as high or very high while using the playground, and 90.9 percent rated children's sharing and cooperation as high or very high while using IPB. Finally, 72.8 percent of respondents rated children's dramatic or imaginative play as high or very high while using the playground, and 81.8 percent rated children's dramatic or imaginative play as high or very high while using IPB. Clearly, the playground and IPB have served as vital means for children to engage in active play and critical prosocial behaviors such as sharing.

For adults and children alike, the KaBOOM! playgrounds serve as places for socialization and interaction with others in the community, which the literature suggests is a key factor in a community's safety, trust and ability to rally for change.[17] More than 95 percent of planning committee members have visited the playground since Build Day—not surprising for school staff but perhaps more impressive for the individuals who do not have children who would use the playground. Almost half of the planning committee members (46.7 percent) visit the playground a few times per week. Most people who had not visited the playground had failed to do so because they lived too far away or did not have children. A large percentage of planning committee members talk to others at least "sometimes" while at the playground (82.7 percent), an important component of continued community trust (see Figure 10).

The particular impact of the playground on both children's well-being and community engagement is likely influenced by the kind of organization partnering in the build. As noted, for over half of the playgrounds built by schools, the community has little or no access. While impacts on children will still occur in terms of increased play, these effects will be limited to the schools' students. The lack of access to the general public is an important issue to consider when selecting sites for future KaBOOM! builds.

What community organizing skills were gained by the Community Partner?

17 Sampson, Robert J. (2004). "Neighborhood and Community: Collective Efficacy and Community Safety." *New Economy,* 11 (2), 106-113.

In addition to the concrete benefit of a playground, we expected the Community Partners to obtain stronger organizing skills as a result of participating in a KaBOOM! project. We did, in fact, learn that their skills in this area

FIGURE 11
Recruiting and Retaining Volunteers Since KaBOOM!

■ strongly agree   ■ agree

were bolstered. We found that Community Partners were able to more easily recruit and retain volunteers, and some experienced increases in membership, participation and donations after participating in a KaBOOM! project—critical prerequisites for strong and sustained community organizing activities. Further, we found that not only did Community Partners experience improvements in skills and abilities, they also reported being able to apply these skills and abilities to a number of new community activities since participating in a KaBOOM! project. We believe that the ability of Community Partners to transfer these newly attained or improved skills to other projects is central to the sustainability of the community engagement developed during the KaBOOM! project.

Recruiting and retaining volunteers: While most Community Partners reported that they did not have trouble recruiting and retaining volunteers for their normal program operations prior to KaBOOM!, they indeed reported that recruitment became even easier following KaBOOM!. As shown in Figure 11, more than half of all Community Partners experienced an increase in their ability to recruit and retain parent and community volunteers after KaBOOM!. Volunteers provide a valuable service to organizations in their day-to-day operations and, in turn, organizations' leadership can be utilized in other community improvement activities.

Changes in membership, activity participation and donations: The majority of Community Partner organizations (54.5 percent) maintained the same level of membership before and after KaBOOM! but experienced an increase in activity participation (see Figure 12) such as increased parent attendance at events and meetings. A sizable proportion of Community Partner organizations (36.4 percent) experienced increases in monetary or in-kind donations after KaBOOM!. No organizations reported a decrease in any of these areas.

Our interviews highlighted two potential reasons for these increases. First, Build Day increased the visibility of the organization and promoted community knowledge of its program offerings, which had a spillover effect in participation. Second, from a practical standpoint, the playground provided a safe site for children to engage in activity while their parents attended programs or services offered by the Community Partner. For families that cannot afford childcare, and therefore cannot attend community activities, a playground can be an important facilitator of engagement.

FIGURE 12
## Changes in Membership, Activity Participation and Donations
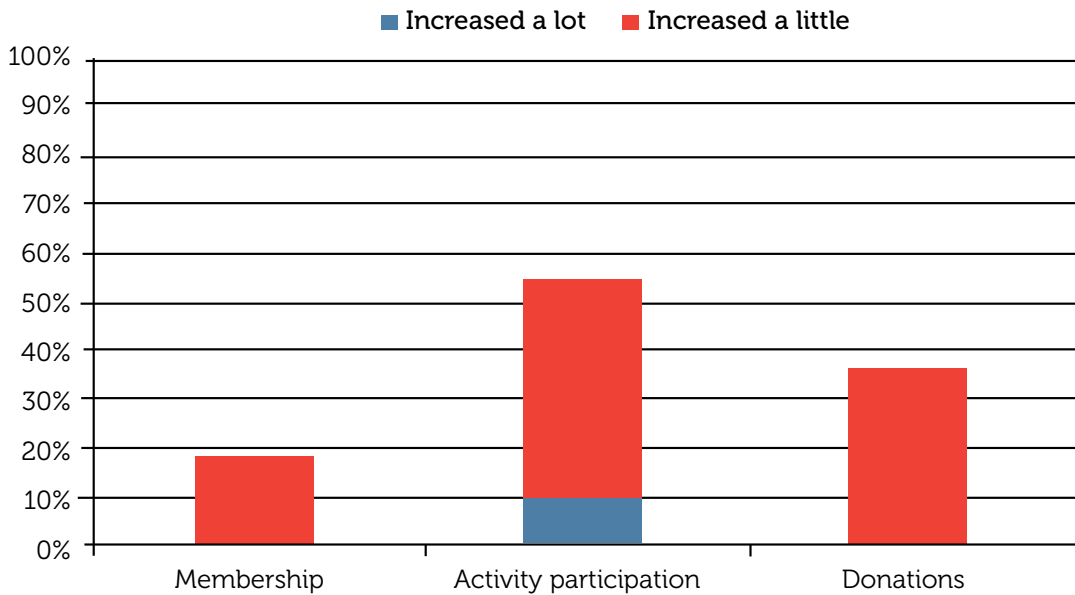
Improvements in organizations' skills and abilities:
We asked Community Partners about whether KaBOOM! motivated improvements in a wide range of skills and abilities. As shown in Figure 13, Community Partners reported improvements across all the skill areas studied, including community assessment, leadership, outreach, planning and logistics. The largest improvements were evident in the following areas: the ability to recruit volunteers for a large event (72.7 percent improved a lot); the ability to identify individuals or groups that can help solve a problem (54.5 percent improved a lot); and the ability to gather in-kind donations from local businesses (54.5 percent improved a lot).

Because of the sheer scale of the project, Community Partners needed to reach out to many different organizations, businesses and individuals to acquire all the resources needed to complete the playground. While this process

FIGURE 13
Improvements in Skills and Abilities Among Community Partners

www.knightfoundation.org | 39
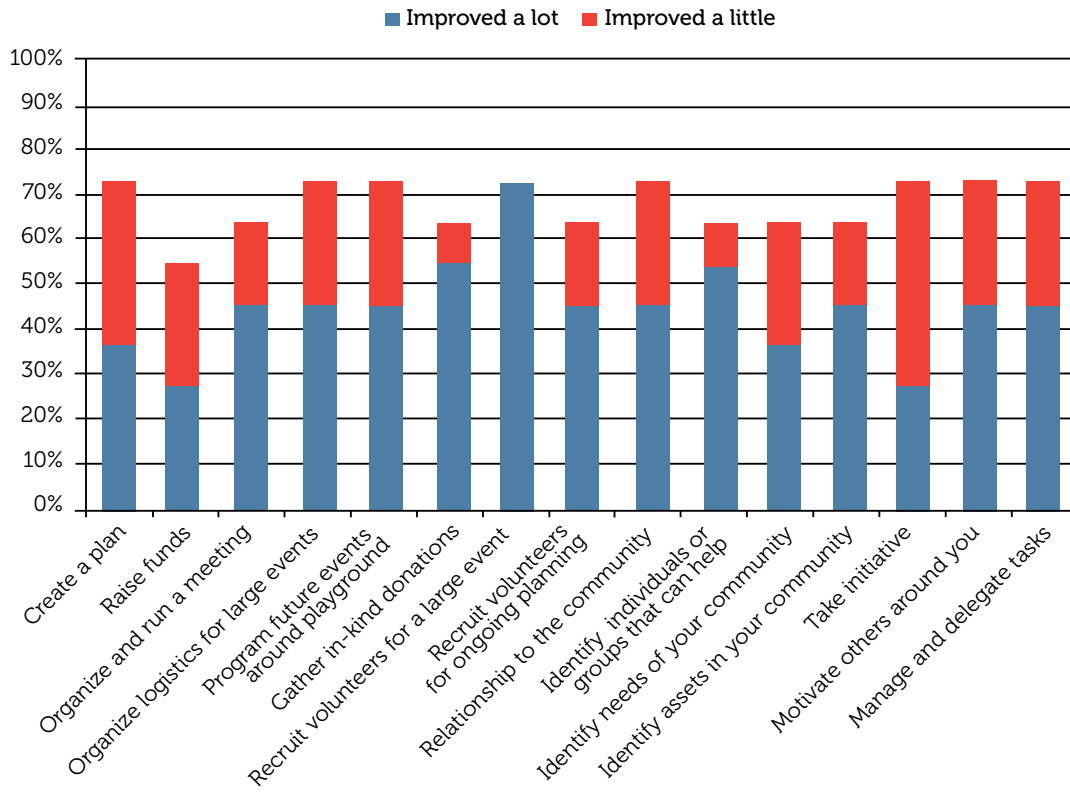
was often challenging, it afforded the Community Partners ample practice in identifying community assets and individuals who could help solve problems, two areas in which Community Partners reported substantial improvements. One participant noted:

> It was also a challenge for [our organization], [be]cause we are only one year old; it made us grow up quickly [be]cause we didn't have lots of things [other similar organizations have], like corporate backing. It made us reach out in[to] the community, meet people in industry [who] now want to work with us more. So it was good for us [because] now we have more [of a] network than before.

Many of our interviewees highlighted an improved relationship with the community as a key outcome of the KaBOOM! build as one Community Partner leader summarized:

> It creates a concrete, ongoing connection with the community, and it makes sense as a first step on a community-building project because it is an example of what can be done. It's a payoff that people can understand; it's not as complicated as a community development idea [which tends to be more abstract and long-range]. It is easier to get community buy-in and [more] likely to get people more interested in community work.

Our interviews also revealed three mechanisms that help boost recruitment of volunteers for a large event: increased exposure of the organization within the community, new network ties to organizations with established volunteer groups and increased knowledge of strategies to recruit volunteers. For instance, one Community Partner shared that the group's relationship with a local volunteer organization was critical to its success:

> Recruiting volunteers was very successful...the United Way was huge. If we didn't have them, we could have done it, it just wouldn't have been as smooth. We wouldn't have had the tools to 'go to the [local United Way] website and sign up' and that was a really critical vehicle to not only recruit people but keep them organized. You can 'join a project' on the KaBOOM! site, but it didn't really get a lot of traffic, so the United Way site was critical.

KaBOOM! creates a concrete, ongoing connection with the community.

One challenging area for Community Partners during the build process was gathering in-kind donations from local businesses—particularly in a struggling economy. Improvement, however, did occur through practice and through trial and error. Similar stories to the one that follows were shared by many Community Partner organizations:

> The biggest challenge was the waiting game for receiving our in-kind donations. As tough as the economy was, and still is, we knew that people wanted to contribute and wanted to help out, it was just a matter of actually being able to afford it. Basically, we just had to be patient and trust that everything would come through, and it did.

After completing the KaBOOM! build process, organizations felt able to successfully recreate the steps of a large planning process, using the KaBOOM! model as a template for future endeavors:

> We figured that we know how to do a playground, the fundamentals are the same [for other projects]— we have to get a city permit, and I know a guy now who can help and I know contractors now that I didn't know before, so it gave us more contacts to use for other projects.

Community Partners also describe participation in a KaBOOM! project as demonstrating their capacity to key stakeholders, which makes it easier to capture the attention of funders for future projects:

> As a new [community organization], our first event was this [the playground build]—it was a big one and we didn't have a large amount of time, and for us to have accomplished it shows a lot for us. Also [it] shows that we have a good board and we are determined. We raised the funds, got tents, food, funds, volunteers, we called them back and made sure they showed up—showed them [the powers that be] that we will go far.

Community Building Activities Since KaBOOM!

As already noted, the most significant outcome would be for Community Partners not only to have learned skills but also to have gained the confidence, resources and initiative to take on additional projects and community-building activities as a result of their experience in KaBOOM!. As shown in Table 3:

- Almost half reported developing new partnerships with other organizations in the community (45.5 percent).

- Almost half continued encouraging community-member involvement in organization-sponsored activities (45.5 percent).

- A little more than one third developed new partnerships with businesses in the community (36.4 percent).

Other instances in which newly acquired or strengthened skills have been put to use include the following: 36.4 percent wrote grant proposal(s) independently and more than a quarter used the planning committee to take on planning other projects. About the same percentage took on a range of engagements with other lead organizations—such as participating in a comprehensive community initiative or other activities to increase either community participation in their organization or to increase their members' participation in the community.

These outcomes are an important measure of the potential KaBOOM! has to influence communities because they highlight Community Partners' ability to leverage the visibility and participation gained through the build process to take on new and pressing community issues. Furthermore, the build process had ripple effects and encouraged other organizations to take on community projects: As a Detroit pastor explained:

> Knight and KaBOOM! invested in us. If they recognized us, and recognized Detroit, another pastor said to me—"I'm coming to learn how to make my people do volunteer work—not [necessarily to] build a playground. I'm impressed that you have two hundred people coming; my people have to see that!"

TABLE 3: Post-KaBOOM! Community-Building Activity	Percentage of Community Partners
Developed new partnerships with other businesses in the community	36.4%
Developed new partnerships with other organizations in the community	45.5%
Used the projecting-planning tools or other resources from KaBOOM! build to plan new activities or projects for your organization	18.2%
Met with some of the planning committee members to plan new activities or projects for your organization	27.3%
Met with all of the planning committee members to plan new activities or projects for your organization	18.2%
Held special events to fund raise	27.3%
Wrote grant proposal(s) jointly with for-profit organization	9.1%
Wrote grant proposal(s) jointly with nonprofit organization	18.2%
Wrote grant proposal(s) independently	36.4%
Partnered with another local organization in joint venture (not including grant proposals)	18.2%
Became part of a comprehensive community initiative, coalition or partnership	27.3%
Organized community events to increase community-member involvement	27.3%
Encouraged community-member involvement in organization-sponsored activities	45.5%

At the crux of many community change initiatives lies the goal of fostering resident involvement in positive social change so that families and individuals living in high poverty neighborhoods can feel safe and supported.

Many community change initiatives are long term, comprehensive efforts to address a broad array of social problems. At the other end of the spectrum are those efforts that offer very short term engagement experiences—that alone yield little enduring benefit to individuals or communities. KaBOOM! offers an alternative view on how community members can become more able, confident and willing to address issues in their communities—through building skills, leadership and self-efficacy.

Indeed, the KaBOOM! Theory of Change centers around how those who undertake building a playground can become sufficiently skilled and empowered by this "achievable win" to take on additional "acts of courage," which is how KaBOOM! describes what is required by an individual to become and stay an active and involved member of a community. Our read of the research tells us that KaBOOM! is on the right track in many ways, by attending to all of the major elements of self-efficacy (i.e., building skills, bolstering confidence and introducing success into the repertoire of participating individuals). Further, KaBOOM! may also foster what is known as "collective efficacy," in its work with Community Partners.

The evidence leads us to believe that involvement in this effort resulted in skills and efficacy benefits for BOTH the planning committee members and the Community Partners, suggesting that a short term, intensive, structured effort, like the KaBOOM! community-build model can yield increased involvement in community change efforts. We learned that:

- Many planning committee members believe they have developed or improved in a variety of skills related to organizing, leading and executing a large scale change effort.

> KaBOOM! offers an alternative view on how community members can become more able, confident and willing to address issues in their communities.

- While reporting somewhat lower levels of improvement across skills and abilities than staff planning committee members, nonstaff planning committee members nonetheless expressed high levels of satisfaction with their experience and gains, although more modest, in skills and abilities. Importantly, they engaged in new volunteer activities after KaBOOM! at nearly identical levels as those of staff planning committee members.

- Community Partners have also developed their organizing skills and have applied these skills to other efforts post-playground build.

- Both groups report that they now do more in their communities and relate these increases to their involvement in the KaBOOM! experience.

- Much of this effort is mutually reinforcing: Individual participants and Community Partners become more skilled and confident through this effort. Armed with these newly acquired strengths, the organization can further employ participants' skills to other and eventually more ambitious tasks. With growing experience, both Community Partners and individual participants can support each other in determining and executing a future agenda.

- After participating in a KaBOOM! project, individuals expressed a greater sense of hopefulness that both individually and by working with other residents they can improve their communities. Moreover, they report that they have increased confidence that the KaBOOM! Community Partner can carry out other projects on the same scale as the playground. In fact, survey respondents reported levels of trust in the community and confidence in one's ability to change the community that were very high compared to individuals residing in many other cities and low income areas in the US.[18]

KaBOOM! is very intentional about creating these positive coexisting skills and efficacy impacts. The highly structured and supported nature of the effort along with the creation of a powerful, visceral and achievable win probably leads to these increases. As such, there is much to learn from this model that others interested in community change should consider—particularly as it might bolster more traditional and long undefined community planning efforts that are inattentive to short term "wins."

18 |Alesina, Alberto and Eliana La Ferrara. 2002. "Who Trusts Others?" *Journal of Public Economics,* 85 (2), 207–234.

These findings from this study give us reason to believe the Knight Foundation support to KaBOOM! is likely of enduring value. While these findings do not prove that KaBOOM! created sustainable change in the lives of these individuals, organizations or in the communities in which they live and/or work, it does suggest that an enduring impact of KaBOOM! efforts in the community is possible, one which extends beyond the playground itself. Only a more rigorous test of KaBOOM! can determine if it does result in long term change.

Having evaluated many community engagement efforts—of both comprehensive and more limited nature, we leave this review deeply impressed by KaBOOM! in its evidence based approach, execution, commitment to learning and now what looks to be substantial impact. There is much that other community change efforts can learn from the KaBOOM! approach to community change. We hope that the Knight Foundation continues to support KaBOOM! in its work to learn more from its future endeavors.

In order to address the dual goals of the project, we collected qualitative data from interviews and site visits and quantitative data from surveys of stakeholders.

Site visits

As part of our data collection efforts, we conducted three site visits—Woodfield Academy in Macon, Georgia; Starlight CDC in Detroit, Michigan, and Jude Childcare Center in Detroit, Michigan. During these sites visits, which occurred shortly after Build Day, P/PV staff interviewed planning committee members, Community Partner agency staff, and Build Day volunteers to gain in depth knowledge of their experiences with the KaBOOM! build process. Information from these interviews, as well as phone interviews conducted with a small number of participants after Build Day, help to provide specific examples of experiences and impacts of KaBOOM!.

Survey design and administration

In close consultation with KaBOOM!, we developed surveys to be administered to several stakeholders: Project Managers, planning committee members, Build Day volunteers, and Community Partner agencies. The purpose of the Project Manager surveys was to rate the community organizing skills and abilities of the planning committees at the Knight-funded sites relative to other KaBOOM! planning committees the Project Managers have worked with. For the other three groups (planning committee members, Build Day volunteers, and Community Partner agencies), we aimed to assess background information, inputs (e.g., time spent on KaBOOM), and most importantly outcomes (improvements in skills and abilities, increases in donations, increases in volunteering and community participation, increases in playground use, etc.). These outcomes were derived largely from the KaBOOM! Theory of Change (see below for description of the Theory of Change).

KaBOOM! provided P/PV with a list of participants and email addresses from the Knight-funded build sites, and we utilized these emails lists to solicit responses to the surveys. Because the Knight-funded sites were located across the country and because of the large number of participants we were seeking to survey, electronic surveys were the most efficient and cost effective way to access

the participants. However, there are some limitations to this approach. For example, some email addresses may have been recorded inaccurately, some participants may not have provided email addresses, and some emails may have been classified as spam and thus not reached the intended recipient (see below for other limitations of our sample).

Response rate

We received surveys from 65 of 167 planning committee members—a response rate of just under 39 percent. Planning committee chairs and co-chairs responded at a rate of just over 85 percent (23 of 27). Given that we were conducting an online survey at varying post-build time intervals, these survey response rates are very good. We would expect that, moving forward and with more regular and standard collection processes, KaBOOM! may be able to increase this response rate further.

Over half of the planning committee members who responded to our survey reported that they were staff members of the partner organization (52.3 percent), and nearly a quarter were parents (23.1 percent). Almost half were white (49.2 percent), and about one quarter were Hispanic (24.6 percent) or African American (21.5 percent). Nearly three quarters were female (72.3 percent). Notably, planning committee members seemed to have a higher than expected level of education (nearly two thirds had a bachelor's or master's degree), which may be because many of the committee members were teachers where the partner organization was a school.

We received surveys from 95 of 678 Build Day volunteers, representing each of the 13 Knight-funded build sites, resulting in a response rate of 14.0 percent. The accelerated schedule of the builds meant that we administered the survey several months after the builds, to allow enough time for survey development. We believe that one-day volunteers may have been particularly likely to be unresponsive to the survey after this time lapse. We also found that there were substantial inaccuracies in email addresses among our sample. In context, however, this response rate is not far off from that reported in two sources: Sheehan (2001) reported an average response rate of 24.0 percent across two studies from 2000. Kaplowitz et al. (2004) reported a response rate of 20.7 percent when soliciting participants solely

via email. Nonetheless, because of the low overall response rate, we cannot be confident that the sample of Build Day volunteers we were able to survey is an accurate representation of *all* Build Day volunteers, so our findings related to this group should be interpreted cautiously.

We received surveys from 11 of 13 Community Partner agencies. Blue Lakes Elementary and Hyde Leadership Charter School did not complete an organizational survey, despite numerous attempts by P/PV to contact them. Finally, we received Project Manager surveys for 12 of 13 sites (the Project Manager for the North Akron site no longer works at KaBOOM! and was unable to be reached).

While we attained acceptable response rates for planning committee members, Community Partner agencies, and Project Managers, the response rate for Build Day volunteers is lower than we would like and as such, interpretations of the findings for this group are limited. One potential explanation for the low rate for Build Day volunteers is the timing of the survey deployment. In their existing data collection activities, KaBOOM! surveyed and assessed participants at regular, predetermined intervals post-build. Given the accelerated build timeline for the Knight sites and the time needed to develop and refine the new survey instruments, we deviated from these usual survey intervals, which meant that participants were being surveyed at varying times post-build (i.e., some participants were a few months post-build while other were nearly a year post-build).

We received surveys from 39 percent of planning committee members (65 of 167) and 85 percent of planning committee chairs and co-chairs (23 of 27). Given that we were conducting an online survey at varying post-build time intervals, these survey response rates are very good.

Nonetheless we wanted to compare our survey sample to the larger sample of Knight-funded planning committee members to see if there were any important differences. When we compared the demographic characteristics of the respondents to our survey (see Table 1B below) to the demographic characteristics KaBOOM! collected during planning committee meetings, we found that the respondents to our survey do not accurately reflect the characteristics of the planning committees at the Knight-funded builds overall. Respondents to our survey were more likely to be staff members than the data from KaBOOM! indicates (52.3 percent versus 40.8 percent) they were. (See Table 2B below for differences in background

Table 1B: **Background Characteristics of Planning Committee Survey Respondents**			
Build-Site Affiliation		**Ethnicity**	
Staff	52.3%	Black/African American	21.5%
Board member	10.8%	White	49.2%
Parent	23.1%	Hispanic origin	24.6%
Gender		**Primary Caregiver**	
Female	72.3%	Yes	33.8%
Male	24.6%	No	63.1%
Prefer not to answer/ missing	3.1%	Prefer not to answer/ missing	3.1%
Age Group		**Highest Level of Education Completed**	
20 or younger	1.5%	High School/GED	16.9%
21-35	27.7%	Bachelor's degree	32.3%
36-50	47.7%	Master's degree	35.4%
51-65	18.5%	Doctorate or professional degree	9.2%
65 or older	2.1%	Prefer not to answer/ missing	6.1%

Table 2B: Background Characteristics of Staff and Nonstaff Planning Committee Survey Respondents		
Gender	Staff	Nonstaff
Female	76.5%	67.7%
Male	23.5%	25.8%
Prefer not to answer/missing	0.0%	6.5%
Age Group	Staff	Nonstaff
20 or younger	0.0%	3.3%
21-35	17.6%	38.7%
36-50	50.0%	45.2%
51-65	26.5%	9.7%
65 or older	5.9%	0.0%
Ethnicity	Staff	Nonstaff
Black/African American	14.7%	29.0%
White	50.0%	48.4%
Hispanic origin	29.4%	19.4%
Primary Caregiver	Staff	Nonstaff
Yes	17.6%	51.6%
No	79.4%	45.2%
Prefer not to answer/missing	2.9%	3.2%
Highest Level of Education Completed	Staff	Nonstaff
High school/GED	5.9%	29.0%
Bachelor's degree	35.3%	29.0%
Master's degree	52.9%	16.1%
Doctorate or professional degree	5.9%	12.9%
Prefer not to answer/missing	0.0%	3.2%

characteristics between staff and nonstaff respondents to our survey). Our survey respondents were also more likely to be from schools than the data from KaBOOM! indicates (73.9 percent versus 55.4 percent). While these discrepancies do not invalidate the findings discussed in this report, they do limit the generalizability of the findings. We believe that with a more standardized assessment schedule and procedures, KaBOOM! will be able to collect more accurate data going forward.

This appendix summarizes what we learned from Build Day volunteers about why they volunteered, what they gained from the experience and how it affected their volunteer behavior and outlook on the community.

Because of the low response rate (14 percent) and its very likely bias (for the most part, responses came quickly to our request, leading us to believe that we heard from the most satisfied participants), we cannot assume that these responses reflect the opinions of the Build Day volunteer group at large.[19]

What do Build Day volunteers gain from participating in a KaBOOM! project?

Build Day volunteers offer a variety of reasons for volunteering with KaBOOM!, the most popular being as follows: to do something positive for kids, the belief that it was an important community effort and being asked by someone else to volunteer (Figure 1C).

Volunteerism

A substantial proportion of Build Day volunteers reported increased levels of community engagement as a result of their work with KaBOOM!:

- 37.9 percent have already engaged in new volunteer opportunities.

- 20.0 percent have joined new community organizations or groups.

- 23.2 percent have taken on new leadership roles within their volunteer activities.

- 26.3 percent have increased the number of hours they spend volunteering.

It should be noted that many respondents who did not report increases in their volunteer work attributed this to their already high levels of involvement in community work.

Volunteers cite their experience as motivating and leading them to seek additional volunteer opportunities. Participants describe an impressive array of volunteer activities that they have pursued since the KaBOOM! project, including but not limited to administering a Google group for adoptive parents, tutoring children,

19 As noted earlier, we received surveys from 95 of 678 Build Day volunteers (14 percent), representing each of the 13 Knight-funded Build sites. The accelerated schedule of the Builds meant that we administered the survey several months after the Builds, to allow enough time for survey development. We believe that one-day volunteers may have been particularly likely to be unresponsive to the survey after this time lapse. We also found substantial inaccuracies in email addresses among our sample. In context, however, this response rate is not far off that reported in two sources: Sheehan (2001) reported an average response rate of 24.0 percent across email-based studies from 2000. Kaplowitz et al. (2004) reported a response rate of 20.7 percent when soliciting respondents solely via email. Nonetheless, because of the low overall response rate, we cannot be confident that the sample of surveyed Build Day volunteers accurately represents all Build Day volunteers, so our findings related to this group should be interpreted cautiously.

Most Important Reasons
to Volunteer with KaBOOM!

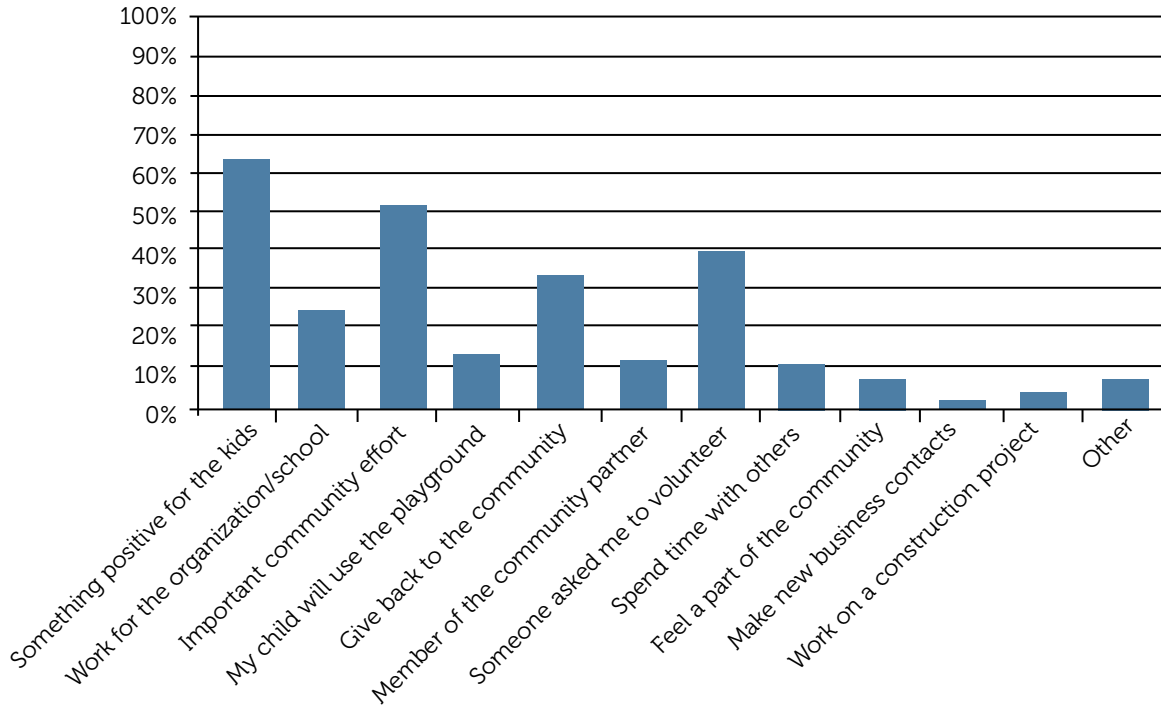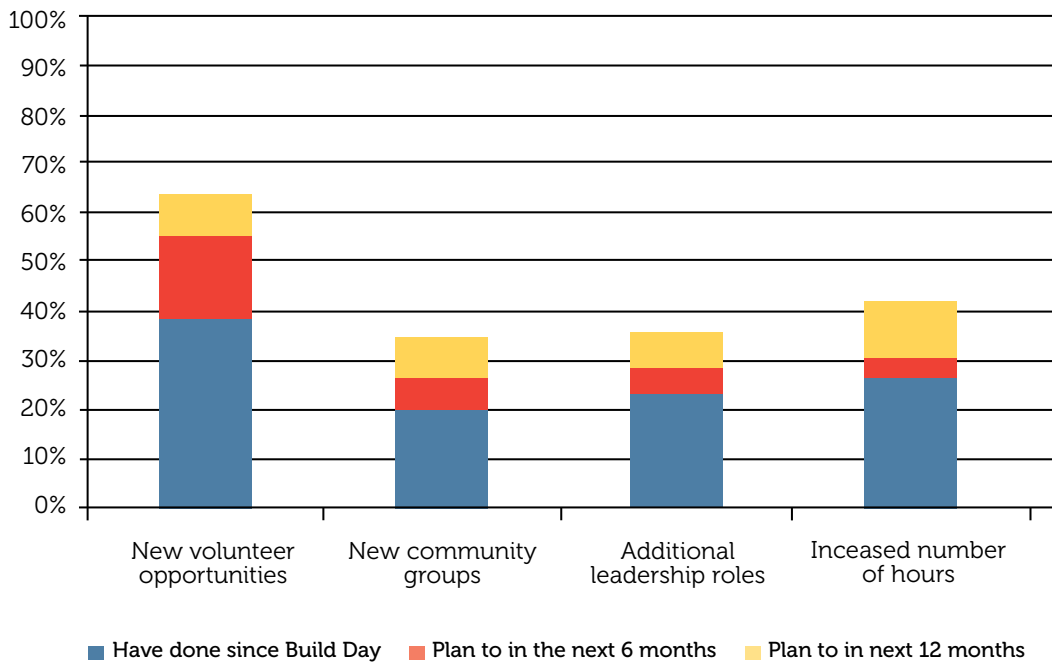## Build Day Volunteers' Activities
Since KaBOOM! Project

Legend: ■ Have done since Build Day ■ Plan to in the next 6 months ■ Plan to in next 12 months

working at a food bank, building another playground and hosting an open gym for kids in the community.

Many participants who were affiliated with the Community Partner said that the KaBOOM! experience led them to increase their time commitment and responsibilities with the organization. Volunteers also stated that through informal networking during the KaBOOM! event, they learned of opportunities to volunteer with other organizations. This is true particularly at those sites that brought together organizations to supply and recruit volunteers. Volunteers also stated that the experience reinvigorated their interest in and passion for their existing volunteer commitments, leading to an increase in the time they devoted to these endeavors.

We also heard that the volunteer experience offered participants the feeling of doing something to help others and that the Build Day event was energizing and motivational. One woman said: "I would probably say I'm more likely [to volunteer in the future]. Because once you experience that kind of feeling of what a good thing you're doing, it's addictive. Another volunteer offered: "Seeing a community of all walks of life coming together and completing such an amazing project, I went in support of my daughter's school and came out with a rejuvenated faith in [the] human spirit."

Seeing themselves as effective mattered to numerous volunteers. One volunteer said, "I learned that you can really accomplish great things by volunteering your time, so whenever anyone asks me to volunteer again, I'll be there." Volunteers expressed some surprise about the ability of a large-scale volunteer project to produce tangible results so quickly. One said: "I think I am more likely to volunteer on larger scale projects than before. I never thought that this project would come together as it was planned, but it did, so it really gave me hope that we could organize something like this in my community in the future."

The volunteer experience not only transforms individuals' perspectives on themselves and volunteer work, but it also leads to changes in how they view their community and the potential for their community to work together for positive social change.

Changes in Build Day Volunteers' Component of Self-Efficacy

■ Improved a lot   ■ Improved a little
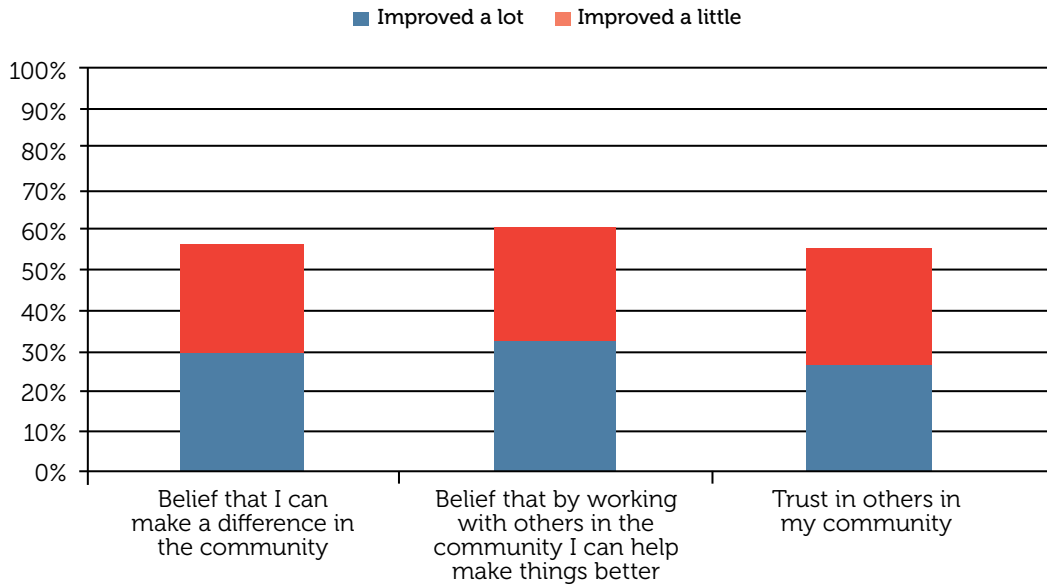
Confidence in community

A substantial proportion of Build Day volunteers reported that the KaBOOM! experience influenced their belief in the potential for change in their communities:

- 29.5 percent reported that their belief in their ability to make a difference in their community had improved a lot since the KaBOOM! project

- 32.6 percent reported that their belief in their ability to make things better by working with others in the community had improved a lot since the KaBOOM! project

- 28.4 percent reported that their belief that they can trust in others in their community had improved a lot since the KaBOOM! project

Belief in ability to make difference in community

Participants not only describe positive effects from their volunteer experience, but they also translate these positive effects and experiences into a feeling of increased ability to make a difference in their community. For example, participants state that the experience has increased their confidence. As one volunteer described, "KaBOOM! has given me the courage to ask for help to improve family life in our community. It has also given me tools [with] which to facilitate [the accomplishment of needs and goals]."

Some participants link their satisfaction to the sense of accomplishment facilitated by the "start to finish structure" of the one-day Build event. A participant said, "I have always believed in the difference I can make in my community and [that] working with others makes the community better, so [it's] hard to improve on that [idea]. However, this experience was a reminder to me that there are many to trust within and outside the community to work in partnership for improving services."

Ability to help community by working with others

Volunteers attribute their increase in desire and ability to help the community by working with others to two factors. First, participants describe the KaBOOM! experience as making visible the existing positive goals and spirit in the community. One volunteer said: "I feel that this project brought our community together and restored some faith that I had lost in community volunteerism." Another participant stated, "I would not have believed that so many people actually care like I do."

Increase in trust in community

The KaBOOM! event not only allowed people to see that others in their community held similar values with regard to creating positive change, but it also created an experience that led to new connections, changes in perceptions and stereotypes, and increases in levels of trust. On the most basic level, the event allowed participants to meet new people. One participant stated, "I got the opportunity to talk to some of the people in the community, and now we are more personable." Through engaging with diverse neighbors, participants also learned about their shared goals, a process that facilitates trust building. A volunteer described the situation thus:

"KaBOOM! has given me the courage to ask for help to improve family life in our community."

My approach was through word of mouth because I don't really have a computer or anything like that. I went around the neighborhood saying, "Hey, we need help at the childcare center. We're building a playground and you should come on out!" I talked to a really wide variety of people. It was really beautiful. Every day I walked around and my eyes were opened to new and different people who all offered to help.

Seeing community in new way

A participant commented on how participating in a KaBOOM! project changed how she saw her community: "I thought that most of the people who showed up wouldn't have because they'd be too embarrassed about their position in life, but everyone put that aside and did this for the kids. They were here faithfully, working hard, and it showed me that the community will step up when they're needed. I know that I live in a good community now." Volunteers describe seeing others as compassionate and caring. In one volunteer's words:

I felt an intense feeling of community, caring and compassion for others. We learned that one young woman came with her friends to celebrate her birthday by giving back to others. She did not know anyone at the school, but wanted to volunteer to help these children have a better play experience.

Knight Foundation