



EMPOWERING LOCAL COMMUNITIES

*Through Leadership Development
and Capacity Building*



Office of University Partnership

PD&R

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Office of Policy Development and Research

Empowering Local Communities: Through Leadership Development and Capacity Building highlights leadership-development and capacity-building initiatives provided by OUP grantees nationwide.

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October 2007



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Opinions expressed in these profiles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

FOREWORD

Ancient Chinese Philosopher Lao Tzu suggested more than 15 centuries ago that “a leader is best when people barely know he exists.” When that leader’s work is done, taught the philosopher, the people whom he leads will say, “We did it ourselves.”

This age-old perspective epitomizes the approach that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD’s) Office of University Partnerships (OUP) encourages its grantees to take as they work in local communities nationwide. Certainly, colleges and universities that participate in our diverse grant programs have the expertise and the experience to solve local problems. However, in order to receive OUP funds, these institutions of higher education must recognize that HUD’s mission is not to *do for* at-risk communities. Instead, the department’s mission, and, by extension, the mission of all its grantees, is to help local communities and their residents *do it themselves*.

Leadership-development and capacity-building initiatives, like the ones highlighted in this volume, are the keys to empowering local communities so they can make the most of their assets and meet the challenges that they face. OUP continually challenges its grantees to work hard at strengthening the ability of both individuals and community-based organizations to make a profound difference in their neighborhoods, towns, and cities. By taking this empowering mission seriously, OUP grantees ensure that community revitalization efforts will be homegrown and, more importantly, that they will be sustained over the long term.

HUD applauds the neighborhood leaders and local organizations that are highlighted in this publication. We are moved by their passion and dedication; we are gratified for the wonderful work they are doing; and we are proud that our grant funds have played such an important role in fostering their ability to serve their communities. HUD offers this volume to honor these local stakeholders and others like them throughout the country. In addition, we offer their stories as an inspiration—and a guide—to all OUP grantees that seek to empower local communities through leadership development and capacity building.



Building better communities through local leadership and neighborhood participation.

Dr. Darlene F. Williams

Assistant Secretary

Office of Policy Development and Research

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

PART ONE: EMPOWERING LOCAL COMMUNITIES THROUGH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT 7

Hawaii Community College..... 9

University of Maryland, Baltimore 14

Heritage University..... 20

Santa Ana College..... 27

Southern University at Shreveport..... 32

PART TWO: EMPOWERING LOCAL COMMUNITIES THROUGH CAPACITY BUILDING 39

Otero Junior College 41

Tennessee State University 47

University of Pittsburgh..... 54

University of California, Berkeley 62

Massachusetts Institute of Technology..... 68

INTRODUCTION

In 2006, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD's) Office of University Partnerships (OUP) set out to discover and illustrate the real impact that OUP-supported leadership-development and capacity-building initiatives were having at the local level. The department wanted to observe, firsthand, whether the public lives of individual community residents were really being changed by initiatives that were designed to provide them with concrete leadership skills. HUD wanted to know whether capacity-building efforts by OUP grantees were allowing local community-based organizations to grow and whether that growth was really helping to improve the quality of life in their communities.

A year of research and countless interviews with grantees, community residents, and leaders of community-based organizations yielded extremely positive results. The stories that unfold in the following pages are sometimes poignant, sometimes inspiring, but always instructive, as they reveal just how OUP grantees are succeeding in revitalizing communities by offering individuals and organizations the skills and resources they need to take ownership of local assets and challenges—and then to initiate their own efforts to build better communities. The publication's 10 chapters feature 5 examples of successful initiatives that teach leadership skills to individual community residents and 5 examples of successful efforts to build the capacity of community-based organizations.

It is important to note that the chapters in this book purposely do not begin with descriptions of grantees' programs. Instead, these chapters highlight the often riveting stories of individuals who put their leadership skills to work to change their communities, and organizations whose increased capacity helped them make a real difference in the lives of the people they serve. These passionate individuals and committed organizations are carrying out OUP's work in local communities. Their success is HUD's success. That is why, through this publication, we shine the spotlight on them.

These grantees can be proud of the roles they played in building the strength of local leaders and organizations, and they can be sure that, over time, they will reap benefits from this increased community capacity. That is because, as one OUP grantee observed recently, when local organizations and individuals are strong, they become stronger community partners. Strong partners mean stronger cities, and strong cities mean stronger colleges and universities.



2007 Kea'au Middle College graduates with Hawaii Community College professor Trina Nahm-Mijo (second from left).



Sharon Barber of Las Animas Helping Hands.

government agencies, community organizations, or other community stakeholders. During those conversations, OUP grantees asked important questions about whether their involvement in the local community was needed, about how their programs should be designed, and about how those programs should be delivered. The most important element of the conversation then followed: OUP grantees listened while their community partners shared their ideas, needs, and preferences.

Every grantee interviewed confirmed one basic truth: Initiatives aimed at helping people at the local level gain the skills and capacity they need for community building have no chance of succeeding if community partners are not involved in early discussions about the supports needed and how they will be provided. Without these conversations, leadership-development initiatives for individuals and capacity-building initiatives for organizations are doomed to fail.

Facilitate Relationship Building

An important goal of leadership-development and capacity-building initiatives should be to instill in local residents and organizations a sense of just how much they can accomplish by becoming actively involved in the life of their communities. However, these initiatives also need to include a reality check that helps individuals and organizations understand the limitations they face when they try to accomplish anything alone. Training local residents and organizations to seek out partners, and teaching them how to establish and foster relationships with those partners, may be the most important lessons that OUP grantees can offer their communities. Lisa Knickmeyer learned those lessons when she was a graduate student at the **University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB)**. Knickmeyer used the connections she made during an internship to establish a center for victims of domestic violence in her neighborhood, and she has come to rely on myriad partnerships for her center's ongoing success. Now, she teaches the value of partnership to UMB interns, who are required to spend time with a number of community partners before they even begin their work with Knickmeyer's organization.

Lessons about the power of partnership also need to be included in the formal leadership training classes that some OUP grantees sponsor as a way to prepare community residents for local leadership roles. In addition to teaching specific leadership skills, these classes can help plant the seeds for future community collaborations by giving their participants an opportunity to interact with a community's

Lessons Learned

In researching this book over the past year, OUP staff learned many lessons about the elements that should be part of any good leadership-development or capacity-building initiative. Many of these lessons come from individual grantees and are specific to certain types of programs. However, several lessons apply to all OUP grantees and warrant repeating here.

Start With the Community

Every example of leadership development or capacity building included in this publication started with conversations that took place between a grantee and local residents, elected officials,

established leaders. This was certainly true for residents of Washington's Yakima Valley who participated in **Heritage University's** Public Leadership and Civic Engagement Academy. Many reported that their personal interactions with local leaders and experts in the field of community development were the highlight of their 9-month leadership training program. The relationships created during the academy have already helped Yakima Valley's newest leaders form partnerships that they expect will help them accomplish great things for many years to come.

Improved networking is not the only benefit that comes from relationship building. OUP interviewers found that, especially in programs that involve children and teens, new relationships can often have a near-miraculous effect on the self-esteem and behavior of young people. Lance Garner, a high school student participating in a **Hawaii Community College** (HawCC) program for at-risk teens, firmly believes that having teachers who respected him as a person made him want to respect other adults. Garner had lifelong issues with authority figures before he joined HawCC's program, so his teachers worked hard to find ways to break through his rough exterior. By all accounts, they succeeded in doing that and, in the process, gave Garner the confidence he needed to become a leader in his own right. The same healing power of relationships was powerfully illustrated by **Tennessee State University** students who served as positive role models to inner-city children during afterschool programs at Nashville's Friendship Community Outreach Center. Being able to relate personally to successful college students enhanced the youngsters' self-esteem, improved their behavior in and out of school, and helped them begin to imagine that college could be part of their future.

Build Capacity From a Distance

Capacity building can be a long, tedious, and often painful process that involves providing resources to an organization and then standing by while that organization struggles to move forward on its own. Many grantees interviewed for this publication suggested that capacity building means taking the chance that an organization will fail to thrive even after it receives all the help a grantee can offer. Most important, it means that grantees must resist the sometimes overwhelming temptation to step in and take over when things get rocky.

Nowhere was that more evident than in the example of **Santa Ana College** in Santa Ana, California, which sponsors a Microenterprise Center for Child Care Providers with funds from its Hispanic-Serving Institutions Assisting Communities (HSIAC) grant. When Gloria Guzman, codirector of the college's HSIAC grant, was asked to serve as president of a fledgling association of Spanish-speaking childcare providers, she politely declined and then offered to help association members make it on their own. Guzman worked quietly behind the scenes for 6 years while the association's board struggled to incorporate the organization, develop its bylaws, and carve out a mission for itself. It was hard work for the group—and sometimes frustrating work for Guzman—but now the 125-member association is self-sustaining and moving forward on its own. Guzman believes that if she had not fought the temptation to get more involved, her leadership-development and capacity-building efforts would have failed.

Make Research Central

Institutions of higher education are in a perfect position to provide community-based organizations with the one resource they often need the most: information. Even the most basic research about the community's assets and challenges can go a long way toward helping that organization become self-sufficient. This type of information, provided by **University of Pittsburgh** students to a local neighborhood organization called Hazelwood Initiative, Inc., had a dramatic impact on the organization's ability

to define its mission, set its workplan and, most important, apply for grant funds to help it hire a full-time executive director and carry out a variety of community-building activities.

Other types of research can shed light on important local issues or uncover new issue areas that an organization's staff may want to explore further. OUP's Community Development Work Study Program (CDWSP) and Doctoral Dissertation Research Grant (DDRG) grantees have an impressive knack for conducting this type of research and, in the process, increasing the capacity of local organizations. Two examples of such research are included in this volume. Research by DDRG grantee Ryan Allen of the **Massachusetts Institute of Technology** has already helped the Department of Labor and Catholic Charities Maine spark a statewide discussion about the potential role that refugees can play in bolstering Maine's aging labor force. Another study by CDWSP grantee Jackie Tsou, completed while she was a graduate student at the **University of California, Berkeley**, is helping several community-based organizations in Richmond, California, promote a green economic development strategy that could improve the economic security of the city's low-income residents.

Offer Concrete Benefits

While research is at the heart of any OUP capacity-building initiative, concrete services and benefits are also most welcome by community partners and can serve to create good will and build trust between an institution of high education and its community partners. The grant resource office at **Otero Junior College (OJC)** in La Junta, Colorado, has created just this kind of good will by offering technical assistance to help nonprofit organizations apply for grants to support their work. In its first year, OJC helped local organizations obtain more than \$960,000 in grant funds, an accomplishment that has gone a long way toward building local capacity and has established an important foundation for OJC's future collaboration with a variety of partners.

Revitalize Seasoned Leaders

It is tempting to compare leadership training to riding a bike and to assume that once an individual has learned the basic skill set, he/she will always know how to be an effective leader. However, as **Southern University** in Shreveport, Louisiana, discovered, leadership skills need to be enhanced from time to time if only as a way to prevent burnout among good leaders who often do too much. The leadership training that the university provided to the Shreveport Housing Authority's Resident Advisory Board focused mainly on helping board members, many of whom had served in their leadership positions for a decade or more, to rediscover the personal missions that had initially motivated them to become leaders in the first place. Helping seasoned leaders to rediscover the roots of their community service and to recapture the passion that they once had for their jobs is an essential element of leadership development and it is critical to ensuring that a community's leadership remains stable over time.

Conclusion

Although this publication offers a good deal of inspiration, and some practical ideas about designing and carrying out leadership-development and capacity-building initiatives, it will not provide all the information needed to develop similar initiatives. However, the individuals who agreed to be interviewed for this publication have provided their contact information so readers can e-mail or call them with specific questions about particular programs. Readers are urged to take advantage of this opportunity to learn valuable lessons from those who are successfully using university and college resources—as well as HUD support—to provide leadership skills to local residents and to build the capacity of local organizations.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT



LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Every healthy community needs the active engagement of passionate individuals who care about the place they call home. Unfortunately, passion and caring alone are not always enough to guarantee that individuals will be effective in building and sustaining a community's vitality. Those who want to help a community make the most of its assets—and who are interested in bringing about change when necessary—must possess solid leadership skills or their efforts may come to naught.

Leadership skills do not come naturally even to the most passionate among us. Most committed individuals must be taught how to articulate a community's dreams for the future and how to convince others to join together in making those dreams a reality.

Colleges and universities that participate in the Office of University Partnerships Community Outreach Partnerships Centers (COPC), Hispanic-Serving Institutions Assisting Communities (HSIAC), Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian Institutions Assisting Communities (AN/NHIAC), and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) programs are playing an important role in bringing about community change by educating and empowering local residents to become community leaders. Some of those leaders tell their stories in the following pages:



Lance Garner (center) at MAPS International event flanked by Bay Clinic Nutritionist Stacey Uaumea and Brent Aqudo.

- ◆ **Lance Garner** of Volcano, Hawaii, was a high school dropout, a self-described troublemaker, and a convicted car thief when he was tapped to participate in the Middle College High School Program sponsored by Hawaii Community College (HawCC) with AN/NHIAC funds. This program, which engages at-risk students and encourages them to stay in school until graduation, worked wonders for Garner. After 9 months in the program, he graduated with honors, enrolled in college, and now serves as a mentor and guide to students who are currently participating in the program that changed his life.

- ◆ **Lisa Knickmeyer's** road to leadership in Baltimore's Fells Point neighborhood began when she was a graduate student in the School of Social Work at the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB). That is when Knickmeyer took part in a life-changing internship through the university's Social Work Community Outreach Service (SWCOS), which works deliberately to transform UMB students into community leaders. Knickmeyer's work with SWCOS offered her critical connections that would help her establish a neighborhood program for victims of domestic violence and become actively engaged in the life of the community where she now lives and works.
- ◆ **Paul Garcia and Angie Aguilar** were both seasoned leaders in Sunnyside, Washington, when they joined the HSIAC-funded Public Leadership and Civic Engagement Academy sponsored by Heritage University and the University of Washington. Despite years of experience in the public eye, both felt like newcomers to the political scene and were eager to learn the skills they needed to better represent the interests of fellow Latinos, who make up 80 percent of Sunnyside's 15,000 residents. Now, Garcia and Aguilar are using the knowledge and the contacts they acquired through the academy to steer community projects designed to encourage Latinos to vote and to serve on local governing boards.
- ◆ **Adela Castaneda** of Orange County, California, was 21 years old when she decided to start taking care of other people's children in her home. She loved the work but felt isolated because she had no one to guide or advise her as she established her own business. Twenty-five years later, Castaneda now serves on the board of an association that educates, mentors, and supports Spanish-speaking childcare providers like herself. Castaneda says that she and her fellow board members could never have established the association without the technical assistance, financial support, and leadership training they received from HSIAC grantee Santa Ana College.
- ◆ **Harold and Paula Kelly** became community leaders in the early 1990s when they organized fellow tenants in their public housing development managed by the Housing Authority of the City of Shreveport. Today, Harold Kelly is president of the housing authority's resident advisory board (RAB), and Paula Kelly manages the authority's resident services office. Both attended an HBCU-sponsored leadership training course in 2006 aimed at re-energizing RAB members, who have "been there, done that, they've seen it all," according to one observer. The seasoned board members spent their time together rediscovering and rededicating themselves to the personal and communal missions that had brought them to leadership in the first place.

PROFILES

Hawaii Community College

Innovative Curriculum Helps High School Senior Turn His Life Around

Lance Garner
Volcano, Hawaii

Lance Garner has few illusions about who he used to be. The 19-year-old resident of Volcano, Hawaii, readily admits that in fall 2005, he was a bad student and a troublemaker headed for certain disaster.

“That was my senior year, and I had already dropped out of school,” recalls Garner. “I was so far behind already that I was actually in 10th grade in my senior year. I already had a job and was making pretty good money. So I figured I would forget about school and be an electrician.”

Garner had not fallen behind in school because he was academically challenged. Instead, boredom led the Hawaii native to become a discipline problem as early as middle school when he was removed from his eighth-grade class and sent to an alternative learning center. This pattern continued when Garner reached Kea’au High School (KHS), where he “would always get in trouble and cause trouble.” His arrest for stealing a car in his junior year should have been a wakeup call, but even that did not succeed in breaking Garner’s established patterns of truancy and delinquency.

All that changed 2 weeks into what was supposed to have been Garner’s senior year. Although Garner had already informed his school counselor, Lynda Brown, that he would not be returning for the fall semester, Brown nevertheless called Garner to tell him about KHS’s new Middle College High School, a program that had been specially designed for students who were at risk of dropping out of school due to truancy, discipline issues, academic problems, or pregnancy. The Middle College curriculum, designed by HawCC and sponsored through its 2003 AN/NHIAC, was just offbeat enough to capture Garner’s attention.



Lance Garner (left) puts his talents to work.

Middle College High School

KHS students in the Middle College program would spend each morning together in a special class taught by a team of teachers led by one teacher from Kea’au High School. That year, it was English teacher William Niemeyer, a favorite of Garner’s. Also on the team would be HawCC speech teacher Jerry Nahm-Mijo, Chef Desmon Haumea, a nutritionist from a local health clinic, and an audiovisual expert. Classroom time would include speech and social studies lessons. In addition, the mornings would feature field trips; creative time for students to make their own films using state-of-the-art sound, video, and animation equipment; and weekly trips to a commercial kitchen in nearby Hilo where students would learn how to cook. Most students would spend their afternoons in KHS classrooms earning the English, math, or science credits they needed to graduate. Seniors who successfully completed the

continued on page 12

HAWAII COMMUNITY COLLEGE

PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN CLINIC AND COLLEGE TAKES BROAD APPROACH TO DRUG ABUSE PREVENTION

When the Bay Clinic in Hilo, Hawaii, received a grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration a few years back, clinic staff member Cyd Hoffeld asked local young people to identify the types of drug abuse prevention programs they would like to see inaugurated. Hoffeld, who works for the largest network of community health clinics on the island of Hawaii, expected the young people to ask for a recreation center that would help them stem the boredom that made them turn to drugs in the first place. She could not have been more wrong.

Instead of pool tables and basketball courts, local youth wanted a place where they could learn job skills that would help them build a brighter future. In particular, they asked for a recording studio where they could learn sound production skills and tap into the creative spirit that Hoffeld says is so much a part of Hawaiian culture. They also wanted a multimedia computer lab where they could learn how to make videos and animated films.

“We learned from our youth that they are doing drugs because they don’t have real goals,” says Hoffeld. “We listened to them. And we decided that if we could give them some job training to increase their employability, if we could help them develop some healthy and exciting alternatives to substance abuse, it would encourage them to develop a healthy lifestyle. In this way, the project matched the Bay Clinic’s mission, even though it is also a little bit different from what our clinics traditionally do.”

The Bay Clinic chose Kea’au as the site for its new abuse prevention program because the community of 2,000 is the neediest in the clinic’s service area. “It is a hotbed of social problems, including unemployment, drug use, crime, and juvenile delinquency,” says Hoffeld. “And it probably has the lowest income per capita on this island.”

Synergy has characterized Hoffeld’s efforts in Kea’au from the beginning. The Bay Clinic already owned a building in the town center, so site selection was never an issue. Coincidentally, HawCC had been running the Ola’a Community Center (OCC), an afterschool program for middle school students, directly across the street from the clinic’s building. Early in the planning process, Hoffeld met with HawCC professor Trina Nahm-Mijo, who had helped create OCC, to see what the



Cyd Hoffeld, Kea’au Youth Business Center comanager in front of the Bay Clinic.

Bay Clinic’s high school program could learn from Nahm-Mijo’s middle school program. To her surprise, Hoffeld found out that Nahm-Mijo was already developing a new program for high school students called Middle College High School. That program, operated in partnership with KHS, featured a special curriculum for high school seniors who were at risk of dropping out of school. By providing these seniors with an eclectic team of teachers, and by engaging them in hands-on activities such as cooking, video production, and sound recording, Nahm-Mijo hoped to encourage the students to stay in school until graduation and pursue some kind of post-graduation education or training.

“The Ola’a Community Center had become pretty successful, and we thought Trina’s idea for the Middle College was an excellent idea that would fit into our program,” says Hoffeld. “Here we were trying to train youth in state-of-the-art programs and here Trina was trying to start this first-in-the-state program. We thought we could help each other out as our programs developed.”

The construction of the Bay Clinic’s site in Kea’au might have taken longer than anyone expected, but the partnership between the clinic, Kea’au High School, and Hawaii Community College has become a model for innovation in education and community development. Today, Hoffeld serves as program director for the Kea’au Youth Business Center (KYBC), which is fully equipped with a state-of-the-art recording studio and a multimedia production lab. HawCC’s Middle College program, which is entering its third year, has just moved into

the business center and convenes classes there each school day from 8 a.m. to noon, making full use of the center's high-tech equipment. From 2 to 6 p.m., HawCC and the Bay Clinic work together to sponsor high-tech, afterschool programs for community teens and young adults. In the evenings, the center serves as an outreach location for nutrition and health-related classes for adults. The Bay Clinic's substance abuse prevention grant paid for building renovations, and the college's AN/NHIAC grant paid for the building's specialized equipment and staff.

In addition, the business center is now home base for MAPS International, a catering company specializing in Asian-Polynesian cuisine started by Middle College students with help from their culinary teacher, Desmon Haumea. Using a mobile kitchen provided through the AN/NHIAC grant, current and former students, and other youth from the community will work together to cater local events. Eventually, MAPS will become a culinary training ground and source of income for area youth as well as a means to raise funds for the Middle College and KYBC programs.

MEASURABLE SUCCESSES

Although the Kea'au Youth Business Center is still in its infancy, program statistics for Middle College High School suggest that the hands-on approach to education that both programs employ is working. KHS Principal Ann Paulino reports that Middle College students had a reduction in the number of referrals for infractions to the school rules in both 2006 and 2007. And in the program's first year, 10 of Middle College's 13 students graduated from high school, "which was a significant milestone because many of them were at risk for not graduating at all," says Nahm-Mijo.

Nine of those graduates have defied all the dire predictions about their futures and gone on to some form of higher education. Several are now attending college, one has moved to Arizona to attend the Universal Technical Institute, and two students are enrolled in a prenursing program. One student is now working as a prep chef in a well-known restaurant on the island, and two students have returned to Middle College as teaching assistants and mentors. Several continue to be involved with MAPS. Those students, says Nahm-Mijo, "have become leaders in the whole project."

Paulino says she noticed a big change in the students even before any of these statistics hit her desk. "When I visit this group of students in their classroom what is different is the fact that they acknowledge an adult's presence appropriately," she says. "Most of these students would have evaded adults or been quite confrontational in the past. Most of them had issues with authoritative figures. The other striking difference is their ability to communicate appropriately about their work. In the normal classroom setting these same students were having major difficulties just getting to class."

WORKING WITH THE BAY CLINIC

The Bay Clinic continues to be an active partner in the Middle College Program and to participate in its work. The clinic provides a van for Middle College field trips and allows the program to use its commercial kitchen in Hilo. A clinic nutritionist has been part of the Middle College teaching team, and Middle College students have taught the clinic's diabetes patients how to fix healthy snacks. Finally, says Nahm-Mijo, Hoffeld's guest appearances in Middle College classes have brought an important element to the program's curriculum. Hoffeld is a women's advocate and educator who has an extensive background in the areas of domestic violence prevention, sex education, and substance abuse prevention.

"Our island has the worst social indicators for domestic violence, teenage pregnancy, and drug abuse in the state," says Nahm-Mijo. "Three of our Middle College students are already parents at 17 years of age. So in order to build a better future for these young people, it is absolutely paramount to be doing social education as well as academic education so they become community contributors rather than community liabilities."

That is why the Middle College program has put such an important emphasis on gaining life skills, says Nahm-Mijo. That philosophy will carry over into the afterschool programs that HawCC will help the Bay Clinic establish at the Kea'au Youth Business Center.

"It's all about prevention," says Nahm-Mijo about both programs. "That way, we don't have to be doing rehabilitation."

program would receive their high school diploma—and a few college credits—in June 2006.

After hearing what was in store, Garner agreed to participate in the program. He was not thrilled about returning to school but said he figured a high school diploma “might be pretty useful.” For Garner, that estimation turned out to be an understatement.

In the 9 months it took to complete his high school education, Garner’s life changed completely. He managed to transform his grade point average from an abysmal .7 to a stellar 3.6. He excelled at cooking and is now working for MAPS International, an entrepreneurial catering business established by Middle College students with help from Haumea. In addition, Garner began attending community college in January 2007 and is now searching for a good 4-year college where he can pursue an engineering degree. All of this success still surprises the teachers who wrote Garner off long ago, but no one is more surprised than Garner himself.

“I didn’t think it was going to be that special to go up and get this piece of paper with a lot of people standing around watching me,” says Garner about his high school graduation. “But then when I actually got my diploma it changed me in so many ways. I can’t really pinpoint how I’m changed, but I just feel like a better person all together, more respectful to people. I don’t know how that actually happened, I just feel completely different.”

Building Relationships

Several aspects of the Middle College program appealed to Garner. The hands-on learning was fun, he says, as were the field trips to farms and other natural settings. And he loved the program’s cooking classes, which enabled him to “bring something into school work that I pretty much always do.” Thanks to Haumea’s cooking contests, the culinary classes engaged Garner’s imagination as well as his competitive spirit. Haumea believes that winning the class’s first cooking competition changed Garner within a matter of a few hours.

“He created his own signature dish; it was an Asian shrimp scampi,” says Haumea. “He breaded the

shrimp with Japanese bread crumbs and found some sesame oil in the kitchen. I knew then that we needed to keep an eye on this boy.”

It was not just the Middle College curriculum that helped Garner reach graduation, however. Garner says he reaped considerable benefits from the relationships he was able to form with his teachers, the kind of relationships that his “bad boy” reputation had prevented him from enjoying up to that point. Garner says he still values his interactions with Niemeyer, Haumea, and Nahm-Mijo, all of whom he describes as “real characters.”

“It really helps a lot to have relationships with the teachers,” he says. “Then you just don’t feel like you can cut class. Besides, it actually made me want to come to class. Having the teachers being really nice to me and respectful to me, it made me want to show respect to the teachers.”

The relationships that Garner describes did not happen by accident. They were the result of a deliberate effort by Middle College teachers to engage students on a personal level and to help them overcome the personal challenges that have cluttered and complicated their short lives. Each of the teachers has developed unique techniques for getting through to students whose school experience to date has certainly never included being a “teacher’s pet.”

Haumea takes his students to a natural setting outside of Kea’au for *ho’oponopono* before classes begin each year. This culturally based, problem-solving method is designed to promote the kind of healing that Haumea says his students need.

“In actuality, we are not just teaching these kids, we are healing these kids,” says Haumea. “A lot of these kids have come up through the system, and they have been so damaged; they have been so hurt. You need to instill compassion, love, and peace in their hearts. You need to let them know that they are in a good place, that they are fine, regardless of where they live or how they got to this point. That has helped to lay a foundation for our program.”

Nahm-Mijo, on the other hand, uses her own life experiences as a teaching tool to help students confront their own self-destructive behaviors.

“They always try to use the same tactics on us that they used in regular school,” says Nahm-Mijo. “I tell them, ‘Just because I’m an old turkey doesn’t mean I don’t remember what I used to do in high school.’ In high school I was probably worse than they are. But somewhere along the line I figured out that if I didn’t get it together, nobody else was going to do it for me. That’s the message I try to get across to them.”



HawCC AN/NHIAC Project Manager Trina Nahm-Mijo (center) assists students in the multimedia digital arts lab.

Becoming a Leader

Garner has gotten Nahm-Mijo’s message and is now following her example by using his own life experience to inspire other students in the Middle College program. His story has already had a powerful impact on his peers even as it shines an uncomfortable spotlight on how irresponsible Garner was before he joined the program.

“The boyfriend of one of the students in the program this year told her that she should join Middle College,” says Garner. “He graduated in the same class as me. But he was like, ‘Lance graduated? That program must be *good!*’”

Garner takes these negative characterizations in stride, using every opportunity he can to tell younger students to check out the program that did so much for him. During the 2006–2007 academic year Garner helped with Middle College cooking classes when his schedule allowed. In fall 2007, Garner began a more formal relationship with the program when he was hired as a teacher’s assistant. “I think I’ll like that,” Garner said before the fall semester began, adding that his first year of volunteering had been “pretty neat. I feel like I might be actually helping out some other student. I feel like I’m giving back to the program.”

Garner says that “giving back” is the least he can do for a program that changed the course of his young life.

“Personally, I think I would be in jail,” says Garner about what he would be doing if Brown had not called him that September. “I was doing some pretty bad things, like stealing that car for some stupid reason. I think I just got really lucky.”

“It’s not like the Middle College program was teaching us to stay out of trouble,” he continues. “I guess (the teachers) were kind of showing us that there is a lot out there and you don’t really have to be doing crimes and stuff like that to be having fun.”

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University of Maryland, Baltimore

Encouragement and Connections Help Former Graduate Student Make Local Impact

Adelante Familia
Baltimore, Maryland

During December 2006, 19 women arrived on the doorsteps of Adelante Familia, a community-based service provider in Baltimore's Fells Point neighborhood. They came at different times, but the women, all Spanish speakers, had one thing in common: each was being abused by the man in her life and was now desperately seeking help. If these women had arrived at Adelante Familia 5 years ago, they may not have found all the help they needed. However, thanks to Director Lisa Knickmeyer and the connections she made while attending the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB), appropriate help was waiting when the women needed it most.

Since 2003, the center has provided a comprehensive program that includes crisis and abuser intervention, services for victims of domestic violence and children living in abusive households, and community-based education aimed at preventing domestic violence and informing women of their rights.

"When women arrive here, it is a crisis," says Knickmeyer about those who use her outreach center's services. "They are in a serious, life-threatening situation, and they are really, really scared—mostly for their children."

Domestic violence crises are particularly poignant for Hispanic women because they live under intense cultural pressure to keep their families together, no matter what the cost. "If the family is not together, it is considered to be the woman's fault," says Knickmeyer. In addition, a woman may feel intimidated by a manipulative partner who threatens dire consequences if she calls the police: her children will be taken away, she will be deported, or something bad will happen to her family back home. Finally, a frustrating language barrier keeps Spanish-speaking



Lisa Knickmeyer, Director, Adelante Familia.

victims from approaching government agencies that could intervene to keep their families safe. At Adelante Familia, a victimized woman is quickly put in touch with an advocate who can help her face these overwhelming challenges.

"Initially, when a woman comes to us, she usually wants our help to get a protection order," says Knickmeyer. "The role of the advocate is critical for a woman who has been victimized, is scared for her safety, may not trust the police, cannot speak the language, and is faced with a daunting legal system."

After the immediate crisis has passed, Adelante Familia's advocate continues to work with a victim even if she decides to remain with her abuser. The advocate informs the victim about her rights, outlines the community resources available to her, and educates her about safety-planning strategies. The advocate also helps the client apply for immigration status, if that is an option; acquire health insurance and other benefits; and gain legal custody of her children.

"Our main focus is helping the women have a sense of greater control over their lives," says Knickmeyer. "When they come to our program, they have no control. They are completely dependent and they don't make their own decisions. Just connecting the woman to resources is a way to remove her from total isolation."

Partners and Connections

Unlike her Latina clients, Knickmeyer has little personal experience with isolation. On the contrary, the success she has enjoyed in her professional life comes directly from the connections she has been able to make over the years, first as a graduate student in UMB's School of Social Work and now as a community leader and nonprofit administrator. Knickmeyer's graduate internship has had the most profound effect on her life, not only impacting her work with victims of domestic violence but also cementing her commitment to the southeast Baltimore neighborhood that she calls home.

After a first-year social work internship at UMB that did not match her interests, Knickmeyer decided to request that her second-year field work be arranged through the university's Social Work Community Outreach Service (SWCOS), the School of Social Work's community-partnership arm and recipient of a 1998 COPC grant and a 2004 COPC New Directions grant. The prospect of a SWCOS internship appealed to Knickmeyer for several reasons. Because SWCOS employs its own faculty field instructors, the program can place graduate students in smaller grassroots agencies that have no licensed social workers on staff. In addition, the program makes a concerted effort to create a sense of community among all of its interns, enabling students to learn from one another during weekly seminars and to work together on community projects.

"I wasn't alone out there at my agency without any support at all," says Knickmeyer, who said she experienced that kind of isolation during her first internship. "Instead, I got to be part of a group of 15 other SWCOS interns who were working in different agencies and who were doing different types of work. And because of that, I got really rich exposure to all kinds of agencies citywide. As a bonus, my SWCOS

supervisor was well connected in the community. So, coming out of school, I already had a lot of contacts. That turned out to be key for me as a professional."

Cases in point are the connections that Knickmeyer made while working with Spanish-speaking immigrants as an intern at Centro de la Comunidad, a small service provider in southeast Baltimore. The agency was a good fit for Knickmeyer, who spent much of her childhood in South America and speaks fluent Spanish. Centro de la Comunidad was located within walking distance of Knickmeyer's Fells Point row house, enabling her to more easily blend her work life with her social life. The internship helped Knickmeyer make connections with people who would later help her establish the domestic violence prevention program that she now directs.

“Just connecting the woman to resources is a way to remove her from total isolation.”

—Lisa Knickmeyer
Director
Adelante Familia

"In that one year I was able to develop very strong relationships with the other staff people and to participate in the Latino Providers Network, a group of organizations serving the city's Spanish-speaking residents," she says. "That was an amazing opportunity to learn who the experts were in the field."

From St. Michael Outreach Center to Adelante Familia

Several of those experts helped Knickmeyer find a focus for what is now Adelante Familia, the bilingual program that she runs under the auspices of Baltimore's St. Vincent de Paul Society. More than 6 years ago, St. Michael Roman Catholic Church in Fells Point recognized that its Hispanic congregation had an acute need for a variety of services. The church partnered with the St. Vincent de Paul Society to establish the St. Michael Outreach Center, and the partners hired Knickmeyer to bring the center to life.

"The community said it needed services, and it was up to me to figure out what it was we were going to provide for them," says Knickmeyer.

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, BALTIMORE

UNIVERSITY PROGRAM TURNS STUDENTS INTO COMMUNITY LEADERS

Most social work professors would be thrilled to see their students land stable positions as family counselors in established social work agencies, but not Dick Cook. The SWCOS director is most happy when his graduates move into vulnerable communities and earn what he calls “sacrificial salaries.” The former Peace Corps volunteer is even more pleased when those students become community leaders.

Cook has been pretty happy over the past few years. In a development that colleagues call “amazing,” a significant number of Cook’s former students are doing exactly what he has always encouraged them to do. They have moved into the Baltimore neighborhoods where they did their graduate school internships; created organizations that are changing those communities; and, in the process, they have become committed, passionate, and extremely active community leaders.

Just look at Lisa Knickmeyer. She worked in Baltimore’s Hispanic community during her SWCOS internship. She now lives in the community and directs a domestic abuse prevention program there. Likewise, Lesley Smith, whose SWCOS internship involved building an Empowerment Zone Village Center in southwest Baltimore’s Pigtown neighborhood, just bought a house in a nearby west Baltimore neighborhood and serves as the village center’s executive director. In addition, Tisha Edwards, who received both her social work and law degrees from the university and who could have landed a high-paying job anywhere she pleased, decided instead to

establish the Baltimore Freedom Academy, an alternative school that teaches leadership skills to city high school students.

It is no fluke that SWCOS has so successfully integrated social work students into the fabric of Baltimore’s neighborhoods. Rather, that success is the result of some very deliberate efforts that began in 1992 when the program was first established. At that time, the dean of the School of Social Work became concerned that his students were coming to Baltimore from surrounding counties to attend school and then returning to those counties after graduation to open private practices. The dean wondered if some students might be missing out on an important aspect of social work.

“He wanted to create a program that would intentionally expose our students to urban issues, marginalized populations, and real problems of urban poverty,” says Cook. “His hope was that, once they were exposed to this reality, students would choose careers in that direction. In part, he created this program as a way to do that.”

All UMB social work students are required to do fieldwork as part of their coursework. Although most students still carry out that fieldwork through established social work agencies, others choose to work with SWCOS in small communities that have no social work agencies. That option is available because SWCOS hires its own field instructors, who are qualified to supervise graduate students. The arrangement helps students get a good view of the community-organizing side of social work and it also helps SWCOS carry out

After spending a few years offering general services to local Hispanic families, St. Michael Outreach Center found its niche 5 years ago when it decided to target its services to victims of domestic violence. These new services were so well received that the outreach center soon opened two additional offices on the outskirts of Baltimore and changed its name to Adelante Familia. That transition, although dramatic, began on a quiet Sunday afternoon in 2002, when Knickmeyer sat in her office listening to her

former colleagues from Centro de la Comunidad share their knowledge of the local community and its needs.

“They had been working in the community for many years,” Knickmeyer recalls about her colleagues. One of those colleagues is now Adelante Familia’s most senior advocate and the other works as a consultant providing counseling services to Adelante Familia’s women victims. “They told me that when

its mission to empower local communities. Over the years, that work has been supported by a COPC grant and a COPC New Directions grant, awarded in 1998 and 2004, respectively.

SWCOS has evolved and grown over the years, but it has remained faithful to its original vision to identify and build the capacities of individual families, communities, and community-based organizations to solve their own problems; demonstrate that the problems society faces are solvable by creating, implementing, and evaluating model solutions; demonstrate that the larger society and all of its members have something valuable to contribute to the problem-solving process; and remind people that inclusion and participation of all in problemsolving leads to more effective solutions. In addition, says Cook, SWCOS is committed to inspiring its own students to continue working in at-risk communities after they receive their degrees.

“What drives us is that we are an educational institution and our job is to educate social work students to be effective in community work,” he says. “You do that by having them *do* community work so they can learn, and make mistakes, and have mentoring relationships both with faculty and community leaders who teach them the ropes.”

During their first year of graduate school, SWCOS students spend 2 days a week in the field, a commitment that stretches to 3 days in the second year. They meet with a faculty member at least once a

week and may also work with a community leader who helps them focus on day-to-day community organizing tasks.

“We are creating an environment for students to become community leaders,” says Cook. “These internships encourage them not to think of social work as a 9-to-5 job but to see it as a calling.”

Cook says he is pleased that most SWCOS students respond to that encouragement and become intimately involved in their neighborhoods. A recent survey suggests that many former students have continued to practice the same kind of community-based social work that they learned through SWCOS. Convincing large numbers of UMB students that community organizing work is a valuable career path has been a slow process, and recruiting student interns each year is still a challenging task. Of the 700 social work students doing field work at any given time, about 50 to 60 choose SWCOS, a considerable increase over the 12 students who participated in the program when it began in 1992. Despite the relatively small numbers, Cook remains convinced that SWCOS offers university students an invaluable opportunity.

“There are a number of students who come to the university and still go to work for established social work agencies,” says Cook. “SWCOS is just one alternative. We try and encourage students to try this approach and some of them pick it. And most of those who pick it get pretty excited about it.”

you meet women in crisis, and once you dig a little deeper, you often find that they are suffering as victims. They told me that we needed a comprehensive program to help these women; that we needed to offer them specific services, including women’s support groups; that we had to have an abuser intervention program; and that we had to have an option for emergency shelter. Certainly, we have tweaked those ideas over the years, but our program is very true to what we talked about that day.”

Most of the women who seek out Adelante Familia are referred by friends or family members who have received help and support from the program in the past. Now that Adelante Familia has gained the recognition and respect of other Baltimore service providers, victims and their abusers are also being referred by a variety of community partners, including the Department of Social Services, the police, the courts, and local hospitals.

► TIPS FOR GROWING COMMUNITY LEADERS

Interested in using neighborhood-based internships to help students become leaders in the community? SWCOS Director Cook has this advice:

Do not start a program like SWCOS with a grant. “Make sure you build something that is going to be sustainable and is going to last,” says Cook. “The people who started our program had a brilliant stroke of genius. They created a small endowment to keep this program going. And, frankly, if we hadn’t had that endowment, the program would not have survived.”

Make sure whatever you do starts with the community. “If you don’t have community people at the table, go out there and talk to them and get yourself connected,” says Cook, “because a program like SWCOS won’t go anywhere without some level of community trust. You have to get an invitation before you go do anything. And you have to do a lot of preliminary work to get the invitation.”

If you cannot find community internship sites, create them. “Our first students went out and talked to local residents about whether or not they wanted to take advantage



*Richard Cook, Director
Social Work Community Outreach Service.*

of the new Empowerment Zone opportunities that were being offered to Baltimore,” says Cook. “They were involved in trying to bring factions of the community together in the same room. It took months to get them there, and finally an organization emerged out of that.”

Recognize that not all students are cut out for community work. “You need to assess whether a student can work well without having somebody telling them exactly what to do all the time,” says Cook. “There are some students for which our program is not appropriate. We are making better judgments now than we were when the program started, but we still sometimes miss.”

Still Depending on Partners and Interns

Knickmeyer continues to depend on her many Baltimore connections to run Adelante Familia’s programs. Five of the city’s service providers offer services from Adelante Familia’s center. Another partnership has provided Adelante Familia with the opportunity to meet with victims of domestic violence at four health clinics around the city. In addition, Adelante Familia is currently developing partnerships with three other domestic violence service providers to transform an English-language

hotline into a bilingual one. Knickmeyer says that her organization could have set up its own hotline, “but why do that when you have a hotline that’s working?” she asks. “All they needed was to have us at the table to help them serve Spanish speakers.”

“One of the biggest reasons that Adelante Familia is so successful is that I’m really, really keen on building partnerships,” says Knickmeyer. “You are just so much more powerful when you’re part of a team and when you can access a pool of resources that everybody brings to the table.”

A hands-on introduction to this power of partnership comes with every internship that Adelante Familia offers to social work students, many of whom come from Knickmeyer's alma mater. During their orientation, graduate students are encouraged to visit—not call—a list of community partners with whom they will interact through their work. Interns are also expected to attend meetings of the various provider networks that exist throughout the city.

Knickmeyer's willingness to supervise social work students is only partially altruistic. She certainly wants to offer future social workers the kind of community-based experiences that had such an effect on her, but she also wants her organization to benefit from the energy that graduate students typically bring to their work. Knickmeyer will not take on an intern unless he or she speaks Spanish and has had previous work experience. She is the first to admit that she expects a lot from graduate students. In return, they have helped Adelante Familia establish many of its strongest programs.

"When they come on board, I tell them about a project we want to start. And then I say, 'Research it, come up with the program development and the resources, and get it off the ground.'"

Fells Point

In addition to finding success through the connections she made during her internships, Knickmeyer believes that living in the Fells Point neighborhood has also been a key to her success at Adelante Familia. Her proximity to work—she lives a block away—made it much easier to work long hours in the early years, she says, and it has helped her become fully integrated into

her southeast Baltimore community. Knickmeyer now serves on the board of directors of the South East Community Organization, which has a long history of grassroots organizing in Fells Point. She is also treasurer of the Upper Fells Point Community Association.

"I know what is available in the community so when people need help, I can usually tell them who to call," she says. "I know the resources. I know the community. I know the schools. I know the leaders. That makes it easy to connect people, and I do a lot of connecting."

The fact that Fells Point is "a very cool place" has also helped foster Knickmeyer's commitment to her neighborhood. As an "international person" who lived in Switzerland for 10 years before coming to Baltimore, she is particularly comfortable with her neighborhood's ethnic flavor. Southeast Baltimore has been a destination for immigrants since the city's early days, and neighborhood names make it clear to any visitor that ethnic groups still flourish there. Fells Point lies between Little Italy and Greek Town, it has its own Spanish Town area, and it was once a thriving Polish-Lithuanian community.



Members of the Entre Mujeres support group.

“I like the colorfulness of it,” Knickmeyer says about the neighborhood. “I live and breathe and play in this community, and I think that makes me more passionate about it. And living in this community has made me want Adelante Familia to be more successful. It’s a pride thing. You want people to know that you are doing a good job and that you run a good program and that you are offering a great service. Because these are the people you are going to be socializing with.”

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Heritage University

Leadership Academy Helps Latino Citizens Bring Others to Community Service

Paul Garcia and Bengie Aguilar
 Sunnyside, Washington

Paul Garcia was living a quiet life in Washington State’s rural Yakima Valley about 10 years ago when he was unexpectedly called for public service. It was not something Garcia planned or something for which he felt particularly prepared. He had dropped in on an occasional city council meeting in his hometown of Sunnyside, Washington, and he had never attended a planning commission meeting. However, despite his lack of experience, Garcia suddenly found himself serving as a spokesperson before both groups.

Garcia’s time in the spotlight came in 1987 after he and a group of his neighbors became concerned about a dense housing development planned for a 20-acre plot of ground near their homes. The developer was asking for permission to build 60 single-family homes on the property, which was located on a dead-end street. Garcia says he and his friends just could not ignore the development’s potential impact on their quiet community.

“We just felt that this was not the best use of that land,” says Garcia. “So, as neighbors, we got together and talked to the planning commission and to the city council. For some reason, I became the person who did the talking.”

Their adventure in civic engagement had two outcomes. First, Garcia and his neighbors won their battle against the housing developer—the planning commission denied the developer’s high-density construction proposal. The second



PLA Graduation Reception, May 2007.

continued on page 22

HERITAGE UNIVERSITY

HSIAC-SUPPORTED LEADERSHIP ACADEMY RELIES ON UNIVERSITY EXPERTISE AND LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

Robert Ozuna and his family came to the Yakima Valley of Washington State from Texas (where Ozuna was born) to work on the fertile farms that dominate the east side of the Cascade Mountains. Like many others, Ozuna's family decided to stay in the Yakima Valley. There, Ozuna began a public-school education that would eventually lead him to the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

Ozuna is now a member of the faculty at both the University of Washington (UW) in Seattle and Heritage University in Toppenish. He uses his work as director of the UW–Yakima Valley Community Partnership (YVCP) to make sure the Yakima Valley's growing Hispanic population (as well as Native Americans and other under-represented groups) have the same opportunities he had to build a better life. The key to having those opportunities, says Ozuna, is simple: it all boils down to leadership development and civic engagement.

"The biggest impact I think we can make as we try to solve the many social and economic problems in the Yakima Valley is to create new leaders from this population who can make policymaking boards more representative," says Ozuna. "Over the years I have seen the need for the Latino population in the Yakima Valley to be more represented on school boards, city councils, and other government bodies. We're looking to them to help these bodies implement policies that are more sensitive to the needs of underrepresented populations."

Leadership development has been slow in coming to the Yakima Valley, but it has not been for lack of trying on Ozuna's part. For the past 15 years, he has been seeking support to establish a leadership training program for his Yakima Valley neighbors. Lack of funds has been only one of his challenges. In addition, Yakima Valley policymakers have only recently seen the need to incorporate settled migrant workers into the community's decisionmaking bodies.

"In the old days, people would say that farm workers are only here for a short period of time, so why do we need to include them; why do we need to change systems to address their needs?" says Ozuna, "but over time, more migrant families have settled here and changed the demographics of the community, and so over time, more

governing bodies have recognized that they need better and more diverse representation."

Ironically, newly settled Hispanic residents have also been somewhat hesitant to take the plunge into public service, says Ricardo Valdez, YVCP associate director.

"They have the heart, they have the passion, but they don't know how to get there," says Valdez. "There needs to be some education tied to this."

That education needed to come from an entity that had earned the trust of the community, says Ozuna. "We needed a neutral, credible institution to do this, and Heritage University represented that kind of institution," he says. "We also needed a quality program, and it had to be a comprehensive, long-term training program as opposed to a 1-day workshop."

A 2005 HSIAC grant to Heritage University helped UW and Heritage establish a Public Leadership and Civic Engagement Academy that would quickly gain status in the community as a trusted and a high-quality program. OUP funding gave Ozuna the ability to develop a 7-month training module that could be offered to local residents for at least 3 consecutive years. The grant also took advantage of the strong partnership between Heritage and UW, which began in 1998 when UW decided to extend its community outreach efforts (and thus the expertise of its faculty) into rural communities statewide. When the Yakima Valley was chosen as the site of a UW community outreach center, Heritage University was an obvious partner for the initiative. Since then, the partners have used a 2002 COPC grant to UW, and 2003 and 2005 HSIAC grants to Heritage to help promote tourism as a local economic development strategy, establish distance learning and other opportunities that connect Heritage students to UW's Seattle campus, and carry out a host of neighborhood revitalization efforts in the Yakima Valley.

The UW-Heritage partnership has allowed the leadership academy to tap into resources in both Seattle and Toppenish. The academy has relied heavily on UW faculty to bring training in the latest community-building and leadership skills to Toppenish. In addition,

continued on page 22

the leadership academy depends on an advisory committee made up of local leaders and educators to provide critical input into program design. This input has helped the academy create a curriculum that teaches skills that its graduates can put to practical use in local politics. It has also helped ensure that local governments and policymaking boards will look to academy graduates when seeking to fill vacant slots on their boards and commissions. Finally, strong local support has had a welcome impact on academy finances: the city of Toppenish donated \$25,000 to supplement the program's first-year budget and a local bank donated the food served during each academy session.

CHOOSING CANDIDATES

In summer 2006, Yakima Valley residents interested in honing their leadership skills were invited to complete an application for the leadership academy that collected basic information about the candidate and asked what Ozuna says was a critical question: How would participation in the leadership academy help candidates advance their personal goals?

"We wanted people who were committed and interested," says Ozuna. "We wanted people who had a goal to better themselves or their community. Maybe they wanted to run for office. Maybe they wanted to make the community a better place to live. Maybe they just wanted to be able to articulate their issues better in their current roles. We wanted to know how this would help them achieve their goals. That was the main criteria we used to judge whether folks were suited to the program."

Level of commitment was particularly important because participants were being asked to devote a significant amount of time to the program over its 7-month run, and they would not be paid for their efforts. The academy held 6-hour sessions, which included a working lunch, on one Saturday a month from October to April. It required that

students devote time during each month to homework assignments. In addition, it encouraged participants to work together on optional community projects with help from Ozuna and Valdez. Those community projects would take up at least an additional day per month.

If Ozuna and Valdez worried that time and energy demands would dissuade residents from participating in the academy, they did not need to do so. The program filled up so quickly that YVCP had to double the size of its first group from 15 to 30 students.

"We didn't want to turn any of these people away," says Ozuna. "People are hungry for this, so we decided to see how it would work with the larger group."

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Dr. Christine DiStefano, a UW political science professor, joined Ozuna and Valdez on the planning team early in 2006 as work on the academy's curriculum got underway. DiStefano had been recruited because of her extensive experience with the National Education for Women's (NEW) Leadership Project, a political and civic leadership curriculum for undergraduate students that was originally developed by the Center for American Women in Politics at Rutgers University. Grants from the Kellogg Foundation allowed the center to replicate the NEW Leadership program around the country. In her role as director of the Puget Sound NEW Leadership Project, DiStefano had coordinated annual, week-long intensive leadership immersion training institutes for young women since 2001.

DiStefano adapted parts of the NEW Leadership training program for use in the Heritage-UW leadership academy, and she also used her connections with the Puget Sound program to bring "the best trainers I had available" to the Yakima Valley. In addition, her experience told her that the leadership curriculum would have to do more than simply impart facts about how government works. Instead, she wanted the academy to be "skills-based and people-based."

outcome had even greater implications for Garcia. Impressed by his presentations, the mayor of Sunnyside asked him to serve on the city's planning commission, which he did for the next 5 years. After that term expired, Garcia was then asked to fill a vacated position on the city council, a position he has held for the past 4 years. Garcia, the only

Hispanic serving on the seven-member council, plans to seek re-election in 2008 when his current term expires.

A decade after he first appeared before the planning commission with his neighbors, Garcia says he still feels like a newcomer to local politics, so when

“There is a leadership mystique that says successful leaders are born and that leadership is a natural thing that some people have and others don’t,” she says. “We had to break down that mystique and help people understand that there are very specific, identifiable skills that leaders have and that these can be learned, and practiced, and improved upon. We also wanted to have our students meet established leaders in the flesh to see how they hold themselves, to see what leadership styles they display, and to have personal conversations with them.”

Using this model, each of the academy’s Saturday sessions followed the same basic structure. When participants arrived on the Heritage campus on Saturday morning, they attended a 3-hour skills-building session presented by guest trainers and including hands-on exercises and discussions. For example, when consultant and former media personality Lorraine Howell facilitated “How to Make a Great Presentation,” she shared tips for creating effective messages and also videotaped participants as they gave a short speech about themselves. The entire class viewed and critiqued the presentations, offering positive suggestions for improvement.

After sharing a communal lunch each month, participants typically interacted with a panel of local leaders who offered their own perspective on the morning’s topic. For example, the afternoon panel that followed Howell’s presentation featured local news reporters and other members of the media who offered their own thoughts about what makes a good public speaker and gave participants tips on what the media looks for in news stories.

In addition to Howell’s presentation, academy students also participated in sessions that explored leadership styles, parliamentary procedure, community organizing, fundraising, campaigning, and preparing a speech.

HOPES FOR FUTURE LEADERS

Ozuna and Valdez are happy to know that members of the academy’s first cohort left Heritage University in April 2007 with a host of skills that they did not have when they arrived the previous October. They are also grateful to have seen students make contacts and establish networks with each other and with the local leaders who participated in the academy’s monthly panel discussions. However, Ozuna and Valdez also hope that many of their graduates will one day hold public office. Months after the program’s first graduation, they were still working hard to make that dream a reality by spreading the word about their newly trained community leaders.

“If people call us and tell us that they are looking for someone to serve on their school board, we want to be able to respond with the names of people who just finished our training,” says Ozuna. “Part of this program’s mission is to make these connections even after our students are gone.”

Even if some students do not choose to put their new knowledge to work by running for office or serving on a local board, Ozuna says he would be satisfied to know that participants left the leadership academy with a greater awareness of the diversity that characterizes the Yakima Valley. That diversity has been evident in almost every aspect of the academy, from the makeup of the first class—it included representatives of each of the valley’s major population groups—to the makeup of the academy’s faculty and the cadre of local leaders who added their unique perspective to academy sessions.

“People who hadn’t been exposed to Native Americans before knew more about them at the end of our sessions,” says Ozuna. “And Native Americans knew more about the Latino community. It has been quite an amazing learning experience.”

he heard about a Public Leadership and Civic Engagement Academy sponsored by Heritage University and the University of Washington in nearby Toppenish, with funds from an HSIAC grant, he jumped at the chance to learn how to do a better job in the leadership positions thrust upon him.

“No one trains you for leadership,” says Garcia, who works in the quality department at Areva, a French company that produces nuclear fuel for commercial reactors. “It is kind of like here at my job. I was promoted to a supervisor based on my experience and my knowledge of my job, but I was never trained as a supervisor. The thinking is that if you’re a good

performer as an employee, you can carry those skills into being a supervisor and a leader, but it takes a different skill set to be a leader. I wanted to learn as much as possible so I can provide the citizens of my community with the best leadership possible.”

Garcia is quick to list the many lessons he learned from the 7-month academy, which ran from October 2006 through April 2007. For example, he acquired critical leadership skills, including how to conduct a meeting, how to run a campaign, and how to do community organizing. But the most important lessons he learned, says Garcia, were those that helped him come out of his shell so he could be more vocal about issues that are important to him.

“I am not an extrovert,” says Garcia. “I am a quiet and an analytical person, so I listen more than I talk. Always listening is not always a good thing when you are empowered to make policy.”

Different Needs, Similar Results

Sunnyside resident Bengie Aguilar came to the leadership academy with leadership needs almost the exact opposite of Garcia’s, but she also reports surprising success in obtaining the skills she needed to improve the effectiveness of her public service. While the academy taught Garcia how to become more vocal in his public life, it helped Aguilar realize that she needed to become more circumspect and to work on choosing her words more carefully.

Aguilar, a mother of four who has lived in Sunnyside for 30 years, arrived at Heritage University in the fall of 2006 with the distinction of being the first woman—and the first Latina—ever elected to the Sunnyside City Council. Until Aguilar’s election in 2001, all the council’s members had been white men, even though 80 percent of the Sunnyside population is Latino.

“ I wanted to learn as much as possible so I can provide the citizens of my community with the best leadership possible. ”

—Paul Garcia

“It was a pretty big deal, and people were wondering if I was going to stir the waters, which of course I did,” says Aguilar, whose city council run came after years of involvement on school-related committees. “When I ran my first campaign, it wasn’t a Latino campaign, it was a people campaign, and I was there to represent the whole community. But when the whole community is 80-percent Latino, how can you not talk about Latino issues?”

Aguilar believes that talking about Latino issues too much may be the reason she lost her second election in 2005. In retrospect, Aguilar says, she may have unnecessarily alienated some potential supporters by being too outspoken about issues that were important to her.

“I tend to be really honest and have a lot of integrity, which is a good thing,” says Aguilar, who grew up as a migrant worker and now works as a data management specialist with Washington’s Migrant Education Program, “but in politics it can be a fault. You really have to be strategic if you want to do some good for the community. You have got to choose your battles, and you have got to learn to use your words to your advantage in political situations. The leadership academy taught me a lot about strategy.”

Getting More Latinos Involved

Although Garcia and Aguilar have different leadership styles, they share similar perspectives on politics. Both hold great hope about the role that Latino citizens can play in local politics, both are working hard to encourage Latino citizens to vote, and both have similar concerns about why so many of their fellow citizens choose not to participate in local government.

“A typical election for a city council person is decided by approximately 1,800 votes, when we have a total population of 15,000,” says Garcia. “You have to think that there are more registered voters

► TIPS ON ESTABLISHING A LEADERSHIP TRAINING PROGRAM

Thinking about establishing a leadership development program? Ozuna, Valdez, and DiStefano, who formed the core planning team for the HSIAC-supported Public Leadership and Civic Engagement Academy, offer the following advice:

Do not go it alone. “Look for established curricula and programs that you can learn from,” says DiStefano. “Look for partners in the community who want to do this with you so you are not doing it all by yourself.”

Stay flexible. When the Public Leadership and Civic Engagement Academy opened its doors in September 2006, its schedule for the year had still not been finalized. That is because Ozuna, Valdez, and DiStefano wanted to survey participants during the academy’s first session to determine which topics they wanted to tackle first. “We were making the rules as we went along,” says Ozuna. “We didn’t want to schedule a session on public speaking and then find out that the participants were already great public speakers. We tried to remain flexible because we were evolving.”

Leave plenty of time for planning. Valdez estimates that you need about 6 months to plan a leadership program. That planning should include developing the curriculum, lining up guest speakers and panelists, advertising, and raising additional funds. The leadership academy was originally scheduled to begin in July 2006, but the opening was postponed for 2 months to allow more time for planning.



Left to right: Robert Ozuna, UW–Yakima Valley Community Partnerships; Ricardo Valdez, UW–Yakima Valley Community Partnerships; Dr. Christine DiStefano, UW–Seattle

Do not overdo it on the expert panels. While DiStefano believes that guest speakers are a critical element in any leadership program, she warns that this aspect of the program can be overdone. “Even though each speaker is probably fabulous and fascinating, you don’t want to overbook that kind of activity,” says DiStefano. “There is only so much that students can take in. Over the years, I have diminished the lectures significantly and increased the interactive skills-building workshops.”

Invite graduates of the program to help plan the next session. “That can be great for everybody involved,” says DiStefano. “It builds their skills, it builds community, and they have some great ideas. Plus, graduates are great role models for the new students.”

out there than 1,800 people. Where are they and why aren’t they getting involved? Is it apathy? Is it that they don’t want to get involved? Do they just not have the time?”

As a member of the city council, Garcia has been trying to figure out the answers to those questions

and to find ways to get more Sunnyside residents involved in the life of their community. Garcia now chairs a city council committee that plans to recommend that the city survey Sunnyside residents to obtain their views on voting and to gauge their satisfaction with the representation they now receive from the council. The committee will use the survey



Paul Garcia, Quality Specialist, AREVA NP, Inc.

results to identify possible strategies to increase civic engagement among Latino residents. Garcia is fairly certain that education and training—similar to the kind he received through the leadership academy—will be a big part of any strategy the city council adopts. Citizens do not understand their potential impact on local government, he says, because they do not really understand how government works.

“They understand that there are laws that they have to follow, but they don’t understand that they have the power to change those laws if they don’t like them,” he says. “They feel that if it’s a law, there’s nothing they can do about it, but that is farther from the truth than they realize.”

Aguilar agrees. “We need to get people to understand that it’s time for them to step up and be part of the change and part of the solutions,” she says. “Everybody is so busy. Everybody is working, going to school, having kids. So we need to work even harder to get that motivation going. The leadership academy is exactly what we need, because it is helping people to realize their potential and to understand that they too can be part of the solution. I hope opportunities like this happen in other communities across the nation.”

Leadership Academy

Despite their years of experience in public life, Garcia and Aguilar say the leadership academy

taught them new skills and offered them valuable opportunities that will help them provide better service to their community. In particular, the contacts they made at the academy with local leaders, experts in the field, and fellow participants are already helping to advance their shared mission to get more Latinos involved in local affairs.

“The best thing about the academy was meeting those people and getting a basic understanding of who they are and that they are interested in the same things I am,” says Garcia. At first, he was humbled by how much other students had already accomplished in their public lives. However, the more he listened to fellow students talk about their experiences, the more encouraged he became. “If they can do it, I can do it also,” he says. “It is just a matter of getting that empowerment, getting that interest, and finding the right cause, the right reason to get involved.”

For her part, Aguilar is now working with a group of her fellow students to organize a drive that will educate local residents about the importance of voting.

“We found in the last election that there were a lot of folk who were registered but never voted,” she says. “We know who they are, and we know their addresses, so we are going to put a canvassing project together and go door-to-door to let them know the importance of the vote and also to educate them about the local elections that are coming up.”

The idea for the drive came from a community-based project that Aguilar and several students had worked on during their time in the academy. All academy participants were encouraged to work on voluntary projects that focused on topic areas holding special interest for the students. Sixteen students initiated four community projects during the 7-month leadership training program. In addition to the voter education campaign, projects focused on increasing positive communication between parents and their children, reopening a local community center and establishing a local Boys and Girls Club, and developing a centralized database for housing needs and vacancies.

In addition to her formal community project, Aguilar also worked informally with other students in the academy to identify vacancies on boards and

commissions in the Yakima Valley and then to recommend individuals to fill those positions. To date, Aguilar and her colleagues have identified a potential candidate for a soon-to-be-vacant position on the city council of a neighboring municipality. They have also recommended a Latina teenager to fill a position on Sunnyside's Parks and Recreation Commission. Now the group is trying to convince Latino citizens to run for three council positions and three school board positions in Sunnyside. Aguilar says the group is depending on the 2007–2008 session of the public leadership academy to prepare those individuals for office.

"If they attend the academy, they will learn so much faster and get there so much faster than I did," she says.

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Santa Ana College

Latina Childcare Provider Shares Her Expertise With Novices

Asociación Latina para el Cuidado Infantil Orange County, California

Adela Castaneda was 23 years old when an unexpected knock came at her Orange County, California, door one day. She had just moved to the county from Los Angeles and was running a small family child-care business in her home.

When Castaneda opened the door, she came face-to-face with an inspector from the State Department of Social Services/Community Care Licensing. The woman had heard that Castaneda was providing babysitting services without a license, and she wanted to look around. Castaneda held her breath.

"I didn't know you were supposed to have a license for that," she recalls.

Fortunately, Castaneda's encounter with the daycare regulator turned out well. The inspector found no violations in Castaneda's home and even complimented the young childcare provider on her operation. At the same time, however, the inspector also issued a stern warning: Castaneda would have to attend mandatory classes for childcare providers and obtain a license. She had 2 weeks to register for the classes, and, if she failed to show up, she would be fined \$200 a day for each day she stayed away.



Current ALCI Board Members.

SANTA ANA COLLEGE

HSIAC PROGRAM PROMOTES LEADERSHIP SKILLS BY REFUSING TO “TAKE OVER”

It is not every day that someone asks you to be president. Although Gloria Guzman was flattered, she turned down the request.

Guzman is codirector of the HSIAC grant at SAC which, since 1999, has been operating an OUP-supported Microenterprise Center for Childcare Providers. The request to be president came from a small group of women interested in forming a new association that would provide ongoing educational workshops and support to Orange County’s Spanish-speaking childcare providers. Although the women knew exactly what they wanted to accomplish, they had no idea how to go about it, says Guzman. They figured that the best way to meet their goals was to have Guzman lead their efforts.

“All they lacked were leadership skills,” says Lilia Tanakeyowma, dean of student affairs at SAC. “So Gloria was wise to say, ‘No, I’m not going to do this for you, but I will help you do it for yourselves.’”

Help—and lots of it—is exactly what Guzman has offered the group over the past 6 years. With her behind-the-scenes assistance, the association has grown from 15 to 125 members, incorporated as the not-for-profit Asociación Latina para el Cuidado Infantil (ALCI), developed its own set of bylaws, and become a full-fledged SAC partner, mentoring students that SAC’s microenterprise center is training to establish their own childcare businesses.

Support for the association, although not in the original HSIAC scope of work, was a natural extension of the grant given the fact that almost half of ALCI’s members are graduates of SAC’s training program.

“It made sense to support a group that will continue to provide professional support and development for our graduates,” says Guzman. “It wasn’t in our stated purpose in the grant, but it was one of those serendipitous, wonderful things that happen when you’re just doing something good and it grows. Fortunately, we were open to the possibility. If we had decided to focus only on the objectives we wrote into our grant, we may have missed this wonderful opportunity to do something even greater.”

SETTING UP THE STRUCTURE

Helping to empower the ALCI involved work that was not very dramatic or exciting, even though it was critical to the association’s growth. Guzman spent hours filling out the necessary paperwork to obtain 501(c)(3) status and worked hand-in-hand with association members to complete the tedious process of writing the organization’s bylaws.

“To get any kind of organization going takes a lot of effort,” she says. “These women are very busy. They are all family childcare providers, they work 60 hours a week, and they have families of their own. But the association was so important to them that they really wanted to try to make it go.”

The incorporation process was an important first step in ensuring the long-term sustainability of the association, says Guzman, because foundations are not likely to give grants to organizations that do not have these basic organizational structures in place. Unfortunately, for most small organizations, the process of obtaining 501(c)(3) status is not easy, she says.

Today, Castaneda is a well-respected (and fully licensed) childcare provider with more than 25 years of experience; however, she still looks back on that day in 1981 with a faint shudder. The inspector’s visit, together with the classes Castaneda subsequently attended, represented an important turning point in her career. That experience helped Castaneda

realize how many valuable resources were available locally to help daycare providers do their jobs well and how isolated she and other Latina childcare providers really were.

“It was not easy for me because I didn’t have anybody to guide me, to tell me, ‘Okay, you do it this way,’” she says. “You need to have someone to guide

“Some of the members are bilingual, but it is a pretty sophisticated process,” says Guzman. “So I did that part. It wasn’t easy for me either. You have to educate yourself because once a group becomes 501(c)(3), there are legal requirements to file papers and you have to know what is required in your state. That is a very important thing.”

To help the group write its bylaws, Guzman collected examples of bylaws from similar groups. She then helped the association’s board review those bylaws point by point, so they could choose the provisions that made sense for them to include in their own document.

With those building blocks in place, Guzman and SAC continue to provide ongoing support to the association. Although ideas for educational programs come from ALCI members, Guzman and her colleagues often will help the group find college faculty members who can speak on a requested topic. When possible, Guzman says she will arrange for the college’s adult education division to sponsor an educational session for ALCI’s monthly meetings. This arrangement has two benefits: the association does not pay for the speaker if SAC sponsors the program, and SAC’s involvement subtly encourages ALCI members to continue their education at the community college.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

SAC has held only one formal leadership training session for ALCI’s board, which took place at the board’s first retreat in October 2006. The lack of formal training, however, does not mean that

leadership development has not been taking place during the past 6 years. Encouraging the board to make its own decisions and allowing the board to live with its own mistakes have helped individual members acquire the skills they need to lead the organization.

“It would probably have been easier if Gloria had just taken over when they asked her to,” says Tanakeyowma, “but then, there would not have been any leadership development at all. Doing it this way took a lot more effort on Gloria’s part, but at the same time she was watching something blossom that is going to live beyond her.”

Not that taking over this group would have been easy, admits Guzman. “They certainly were not a very docile little group that needed me to tell them what to do,” she says. “They had a lot of opinions.” The key in developing a strong organization, she says, “was helping them to move from personal strength to professional association strength.”

After 6 years of working with ALCI, Guzman is now confident that the association can stand on its own. The board’s 2006 retreat helped to bring the organization to a new level, she says. During the 3-day session, the women reviewed what had been accomplished to date, made plans for the future, and became closer as a working group.

“They’ve got the leadership established,” says Guzman. “I know they will be fine.”

you, even if it is to tell you what you need in the room where you are going to work with the kids.”

A Family Affair

As with many Spanish-speaking childcare providers in Orange County, Castaneda opened her

home-based business out of economic necessity and family dedication. While living in Los Angeles during the early years of her marriage, Castaneda worked outside the home to supplement her husband’s income. After her second child was born, however, Castaneda decided she wanted to stay at home. Taking care of other people’s children at the same time

seemed like a perfect way to earn extra money while spending more time with her two daughters.

“When I decided to stay home, a lot of people thought I was crazy,” recalls Castaneda. “We were very young at the time. My husband was 20, I was 21, and I didn’t want anybody else taking care of my kids, but a lot of people thought I was crazy taking care of more kids.”

Castaneda has no regrets about her decision, and she is proud to tell you about the great things that her own children have now achieved. Her 28-year-old daughter is now finishing medical school at Stanford University in Palo Alto, and her 26-year-old daughter is a teacher and a new mother. Although her own nest is now empty, Castaneda continues to operate her family childcare business. Each day she enjoys the company of six children who range in age from 2 months to 5 years. Castaneda’s newest client, her granddaughter, is definitely her most cherished. She cares for her each day while her daughter teaches school.

“It makes me feel so good because I am helping parents,” says Castaneda about her vocation. “I know it is not easy for parents to go and leave their kids with someone they don’t know. But it’s a rewarding job. You’ve got a lot of responsibility and a lot of stress, but it is not all about money.”

Need for an Association

In addition to nurturing the children in her care, Castaneda has taken on a new mission in recent years: nurturing other Spanish-speaking childcare providers so they do not make the same business mistakes she made as a young entrepreneur. Many Spanish-speaking women want to start home-based childcare businesses, says Castaneda, “but they don’t know where to go, they don’t know what to do, they don’t have anybody to guide them.”

Being a member of the Orange County Child Care Association has helped Castaneda lessen her isolation and improve her education over the years, but membership in this English-speaking organization is not always a good fit for Spanish-speaking childcare providers, she says. For this reason, a group of about 15 of Castaneda’s colleagues—other childcare providers she met at local workshops and classes—decided 6 years ago they needed an association of their own. Today, that association has 125 members and an active board of directors, holds educational sessions in Spanish each month, runs its own referral line, and recently held its first annual educational conference for 150 Spanish-speaking family childcare providers. At the beginning, however, says Castaneda, the story was much different.

“It makes me feel so good because I am helping parents... it’s a rewarding job.”

—Adela Castaneda

“At the beginning, we were a couple of ladies,” says Castaneda. “We knew we needed to have an association for Spanish speakers, but we didn’t know how to start.”

They started small, meeting once a week at each other’s homes. Each time the group met at Castaneda’s home, she cooked a meal for the attendees because she knew they would not have time to eat between the time the last child left their care and the time when their meeting began at 7 p.m. Those meals were the association’s first fundraising activity. Castaneda charged \$5 a plate and put the money in the association’s treasury. “The money went for paper and other office supplies, things that you need for an association,” she says.

As the association grew, the members began meeting at a local restaurant that offered a private room for free as long as members bought their dinners there. In addition, the women solicited donations of toys and clothes from association members and held a yard sale once a month to raise more money.

Additional and critical help came from Santa Ana College (SAC), which has sponsored an HSIAC-

supported Microenterprise Center for Childcare Providers since 1999. That center, which offers education in child development and business to Hispanics interested in starting their own childcare enterprises, has trained more than 500 providers since it opened its doors. Well aware of SAC's program and reputation, Castaneda and her friends thought the college would be a perfect place to get help in organizing their association. They were right.

Gloria Guzman, codirector of the college's HSIAC grant, helped the group's first members legally incorporate the Asociación Latina para el Cuidado Infantil (ALCI) as a nonprofit organization and guided them through the process of developing bylaws. In addition, the association now receives a \$6,000 annual grant from SAC's 2004 HSIAC grant. In return, association members mentor budding childcare providers enrolled in SAC's microenterprise center.

The funds have been a huge boost to the fledgling ALCI and have enabled it to grow in ways members never thought possible, says Castaneda. "We had our first board retreat and it cost a lot of money, but now we do have the money and it makes us feel so good."

The 3-day retreat, which took place in October 2006, was another important milestone for the association. Eleven members of the Mesa Directiva—the association's board of directors—spent one day participating in their first formal leadership training session, which featured team-building activities and an introduction to parliamentary procedure. The remaining time was spent reviewing and revising the association's bylaws based on board members' experiences running the organization for the past 6 years.

"They were exhausted," recalls Guzman, "but they were also very proud of the critical work that had been accomplished."

Castaneda is quick to credit Guzman with much of the success that she and her friends have had as



Adela Castaneda

they turned their dreams for ALCI into reality. "Gloria has been such a great help," she says. "Without her, we didn't know what to do, we didn't know how to start anything. She is always there for us. If we have questions, she is there for us all the time. It has been a really great help for us and the association. I know she is not going to be with us all the time, but we are learning a lot through her."

Effect of the Association

Latina childcare providers can belong to ALCI by paying \$30 in annual dues. In addition to attending monthly educational sessions and the annual conference, ALCI members can also attend special events aimed at helping them learn what it takes to be successful. For example, association members periodically take new providers on a tour of homes used as daycare businesses. Providers typically gather at 10 a.m. on a Saturday morning and travel together from one daycare site to the next, observing how different-sized homes have been adapted and equipped to provide quality care.

"They can look and see that even if you don't have a big room you can still have a daycare," says Castaneda about the tour participants. "Some people have big houses and they can take in more kids, but even if you live in a small place, you can get your license and do childcare. Some people don't even

know what toys to buy, what books to buy. But when they go to another daycare, they see how to do it.”

The association’s educational offerings are not just for new providers, either. Even Castaneda, with years of childcare experience under her belt, still finds that the workshops and her interactions with other providers have added to her level of expertise. In addition, the association has become a reliable source of information about changes in state regulations, information that is critical to any provider. That information comes straight from the state’s licensing office, which has assigned a representative to provide ALCI members with an annual regulatory update.

In addition to receiving practical information from ALCI, Castaneda says she has enjoyed her new role as educator and mentor for novice childcare providers. The job is a big one, she admits, because it involves not only organizing meetings and workshops, but also being available whenever providers need help or advice.

“It’s not easy to be in this business,” says Castaneda. “So it makes me feel so good when somebody comes to me and says, ‘Thank you, we are learning a lot about our job.’ Sometimes when they call with all these questions, I tell them to come to the meetings. They come, and they ask for me, and they look so happy.”

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Southern University at Shreveport

University-Sponsored Leadership Training Provides New Skills to Experienced Board

Resident Advisory Board Housing Authority of the City of Shreveport, Louisiana

In spring 2005, a public housing resident in Shreveport, Louisiana, had serious issues with the city’s housing authority. In an effort to resolve those issues, the resident made an appointment to appear before the resident advisory board (RAB), a group of 11 public housing residents that serves as a liaison between the Housing Authority of the City of Shreveport and its residents. When the irate resident arrived at the meeting, she proceeded to describe her plight to the board and to communicate, in no uncertain terms, her acute frustration over the situation.

On this particular day, two other people were also attending the RAB meeting: David Aubrey, project manager of the Community Economic Development and Housing Initiatives at Southern University at Shreveport, and Ron Anderson, a former nonprofit administrator who now conducts leadership training programs in the city. Aubrey and Anderson were on hand to introduce themselves to RAB members and to discuss the board’s upcoming leadership training program. Anderson would facilitate that training, sponsored by Southern University with funds from its HUD Historically Black College and University (HBCU) grant.

“The woman was extremely upset and very emotional,” Anderson recalls about the resident who addressed the RAB that day, “but one of the board members handled her so gracefully that the whole encounter ended on a positive note.”

Challenges on Both Sides

As it turns out, the RAB’s successful encounter with the irate resident helped determine the design of the leadership training program in which board members would participate over the next 18 months. In addition to giving Anderson a true-to-life example

that he eagerly incorporated into his curriculum, the incident made it clear to Anderson that the RAB was operating under serious pressures. He also became painfully aware of the challenges he would face as he tried to provide board members with the tools they needed to withstand those pressures.

On one level, the resident's complaint—and the level of her emotions—symbolized the new challenges the RAB faces as it helps its constituents adjust to life in the increasingly complex world of public housing. Public housing residents in Shreveport are struggling with myriad changes that are taking place in their developments—changes that include the recent demolition of one of the authority's largest and oldest apartment buildings. In addition, long-time residents are still adjusting to the authority's new scattered site structure and its reliance on housing vouchers.

“Public housing hasn't necessarily been involved in these things before, and sometimes people are very resistant to change,” says Aubrey. “Being leaders in their individual communities and having to voice the concerns of their fellow residents is a hard job for RAB members, especially in light of these pressures. More than ever, the housing authority needs its tenants to be well informed and engaged in responding to the changes that are taking place. It wanted to give RAB members new skills they could use to express themselves in their board meetings and with their fellow tenants.”

For his part, Anderson was being called on to teach new leadership skills to a group of individuals who already had years of experience serving both on the RAB and on resident councils in their individual housing communities. The board's successful encounter with the irate resident convinced Anderson that RAB members were not novices in the area of leadership. These seasoned leaders would expect—and would respond best to—a training curriculum that respected their achievements while offering them a new way of approaching their responsibilities.



RAB members participate in the ribbon cutting ceremony for a new community center.

Ahead of Their Time

“They have been there, done that, they've seen it all,” says Terri Hines in describing the members of the RAB board, with whom she works every day in her role as housing client service specialist with the housing authority.

In fact, says Hines, some RAB members began leading their communities long before HUD started encouraging residents to participate in public housing governance. Harold and Paula Kelly are a prime example of this proactive leadership model. The married couple became community leaders in the early 1990s when they organized fellow tenants who were disgruntled about the maintenance of their public housing development. Taking an approach that would serve them well for the next 15 years, the Kellys and their neighbors decided to stop complaining among themselves about problems they saw, and instead, to take collective action that would help change the situation.

“We loosely organized ourselves, and after a while, we elected a president and some officers,” says Harold Kelly, who now serves as president of the RAB. “Then, once we figured out how that worked, we started to do the same thing at other housing

continued on page 35

SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY AT SHREVEPORT

LEADERSHIP TRAINING FOR A FEW CAN CHANGE THE LIVES OF MANY

As soon as David Aubrey of Southern University at Shreveport received permission from the Housing Authority of the City of Shreveport to provide leadership training for public housing residents, he knew he would need to talk to a cross-section of those residents, including the individuals who would be trained and those who would not.

Housing Authority Executive Director Donzetta Kimble had given Aubrey the go-ahead to train members of the RAB, which serves as a liaison between the authority and residents of its nine housing developments. Aubrey, who works in the university's Division of Community and Workforce Development, knew he would need to talk to RAB members to find out what leadership topics they were most interested in discussing during the yearlong training. In addition, he wanted to ask ordinary housing authority residents to identify the areas in which they thought their resident leaders needed help.

Aubrey fulfilled both goals. He attended a RAB meeting at which he talked with board members about what they wanted to learn. He also attended meetings at several housing developments where he asked residents to complete a survey about potential training topics for their leaders. Those residents recommended four topics: stress management, conflict resolution, public speaking, and effective communication. Getting that kind of feedback from ordinary residents may have been a bit unusual, but Aubrey says it was a critical first step in designing the curriculum that would guide the RAB's leadership training.

"You have to know what the needs are before you take on something like this," he says. "And you really have to talk to the residents as well as their leaders. Many leaders don't think they need training. They think they are already leaders. We were able to get more buy-in from the RAB because we were able to say, 'This is what your clients say you need.'"

TRAINING ELEMENTS

Members of the RAB met every other month during late 2005 and throughout 2006 to discuss the leadership topics suggested by their fellow tenants. Each 2-hour session took place in addition to the board's regular monthly meeting. Sessions featured a motivating

lecture presented by former nonprofit administrator Ron Anderson and punctuated by lively discussions. During the course of those discussions, RAB members analyzed case studies presented by Anderson and worked together to develop strategies to meet challenges they faced as a board.

"By talking about incidents that they had all gone through together, we made it much more fun and much more engaging," says Aubrey.

Toward the end of the series, RAB members traveled about 100 miles to Monroe, Louisiana, for an overnight retreat that included sessions on customer service, relaxation, and parliamentary procedure, as well as important time to bond as a group. Finally, at the end of 2006, the RAB came to Southern University at Shreveport's campus for a graduation ceremony, which had been planned and publicized for months. Working toward graduation helped to motivate participants to complete the training, says Aubrey. Taking part in the ceremony helped convince RAB members that the university and the housing authority took that training seriously, he says.

"The RAB members gave a lot of their time," says Aubrey. "They volunteered. They didn't have to do it. They weren't getting paid to do it. So I think it was very important to reward those who completed it."

NEXT STEPS

Aubrey and his colleagues at Southern University at Shreveport could not be more pleased with the RAB's leadership training, which Aubrey says motivated and reenergized the board. He admits, however, that it is too soon to tell whether the training will meet his overarching goal of inspiring RAB members so they will, in turn, inspire fellow tenants to get more involved in their communities. Aubrey hopes this will happen, and he looks forward to working toward the same goal with other community groups that have requested similar training. Aubrey remains convinced that leadership training can be a valuable tool in building the capacity of any community.

"This whole experience has made us realize what a difference this kind of activity can make, and what a positive impact it can have on the community and on the lives of all of its people," he says.

developments. We recognized that all public housing residents had some of the same general concerns, so we united collectively even though it wasn't formally recognized at the time by HUD."

The Kellys' efforts, and subsequent policy changes at HUD, have brought dramatic changes to the lives of housing authority residents in Shreveport. Today, residents can have their voices heard through the resident boards in their own communities, or through the RAB. In addition, RAB President Harold Kelly is also a member of the housing authority's five-member board of commissioners (and a former chairman of that board). A decade ago, it would have been difficult for a public housing resident to even imagine holding such positions.

"I am a living example of how things have changed," says Kelly. "The board, the housing authority, and HUD became aware that you have to do more than just provide places for residents to live. You have to have programs to help them bring themselves up by their boot straps. Bricks and mortar is just one part of that."

The Resident Advisory Board

In its capacity as a liaison between public housing residents and the housing authority, the 11-member RAB provides an important forum for tenants who have complaints about their places of residence. Although the complaint process is important to the RAB and to its constituents, it is only one part of the board's activities. The RAB also works actively to provide services that will help tenants improve the quality of their lives. It administers the housing authority's resident services office; publishes a newsletter for 4,600 public housing and Section 8 residents; provides information about community resources; and sponsors various activities and programs in the areas of service, self-sufficiency, and homeownership promotion. In addition, says Kelly, the board advocates for residents by actively encouraging housing authority contractors to train

and employ residents. The RAB also serves as an ombudsman if residents are evicted from their homes.

"We want to help make residents' lives better," says Paula Kelly, who serves as coordinator of the resident services office and president of her scattered site housing development. "And we want to make sure that the housing authority gives us what is justly ours."

Despite their years of leadership experience, all RAB members agreed that they could benefit from Southern University at Shreveport's leadership training initiative. Paula Kelly said the board welcomed the opportunity "to enhance what we already knew." Hines, who attended the sessions along with

the board members, said the training helped to reinvigorate and reenergize a board that "was carrying a lot on their shoulders."

"Some members had become stagnant," says Hines. "This program was a good jolt to wake them up, get them either back to being active, or get them to continue being

active. We also wanted to reassure board members that they, and the work they do, are important to the housing authority."

Leadership Training Curriculum

Given the board's level of experience and maturity, Anderson decided not to focus the leadership sessions on specific skills such as public speaking, negotiating, or running meetings. Although these skills were quietly incorporated into the discussions that took place during individual sessions, Anderson says he tried to stay focused on the big picture. His primary goal was to inspire RAB members so they would remember why they had become leaders in the first place. To reach this goal, Anderson helped board members devise individual and group mission statements. He taught them how to praise one another and how to gain the trust of residents. He offered tips on how to work with difficult people and

"This program was a good jolt to wake them up, get them either back to being active, or get them to continue being active."

—Terri Hines

how to resolve conflict. He also tried to convince RAB members that their behavior spoke much louder about their character and integrity than their words ever would.

Training Benefits

Anderson's messages got through loud and clear to Catherine Poole, who has been an active leader in her housing community since 1996. Poole, who currently serves as president of the residents' council at Wilkinson Terrace in Shreveport, says she appreciated being reminded of things that she had learned about leadership over the years, but had forgotten.

"It brought a lot of things back," says Poole about the training. "It reminded me that not everyone will like you as president, but you have to be nice to the ones that do and the ones that don't. That means holding your tongue and giving a smile and saying, 'I'll get back to you on that comment.' That has helped me control myself better, and to remember that you can't judge another person too quickly. They may be poor in wealth; they could be poor in love. So you have to take the time to talk to each individual to decide their situation."

For Harold Kelly, the training was successful because it increased the confidence level of board members and reminded them that they can always call on one another if they need help. On a broader level, says Kelly, the training also helped to change the perceptions that people have of public housing residents.

"People who are on the outside are not sure who actually lives in public housing," he says. "They might think we are all minorities, that we are all criminals, that we have no education, that we don't pay taxes. You know and I know that that's not true, but if someone continually tells you that you're not but 50 percent of the whole, you tend to believe it. That's why it's important for us as leaders to say, 'No, that's not true,' and to set some examples that disprove those assertions."

By setting aside additional time each month to attend leadership training classes, RAB members sent a powerful message to fellow public housing

residents that all education is valuable, says Kelly. By participating fully and enthusiastically in each leadership training session, he says, board members sent an equally powerful message to Aubrey and Southern University that public housing residents are intelligent, astute, and always willing to learn.

Kelly hopes both messages will produce benefits in the years to come. He would like to see public housing residents follow the board's example and seek educational opportunities that will improve their skills. He is also hoping that some members of the RAB can collaborate with Southern University at Shreveport on future leadership training initiatives—this time as workshop leaders.

"We have been living as leaders every day for a long time," agrees Paula Kelly. "Now, we are ready to teach others."

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CAPACITY BUILDING



EMPOWERING LOCAL COMMUNITIES THROUGH CAPACITY BUILDING

While the presence of individual leaders is critical to any community revitalization effort, those leaders become even more effective when they join together to form community-based organizations. Of course, simply establishing a community organization does not ensure its success. Even the most well-intentioned organizations will experience a variety of needs: qualified staff, adequate funding, research, equipment, expertise, and influence with local policymakers, to name a few. Leadership skills do not come naturally even to the most passionate among us. Most committed individuals must be taught how to articulate a community's dreams for the future and how to convince others to join together in making those dreams a reality.

Colleges and universities who participate in the Community Development Work Study (CDWSP), Doctoral Dissertation Research Grant (DDRG), Hispanic-Serving Institutions Assisting Communities (HSIAC), Community Outreach Partnerships Centers (COPC), and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) programs play an important role in empowering local communities by strengthening the organizations that form the backbones of those communities. Some of those organizations tell their stories on the following pages:



Ribbon cutting at SCORE Center opening at Otero Junior College.

- ◆ **The Las Animas-Bent County Library and Las Animas Helping Hands** are only 2 of the more than 200 nonprofit organizations that have sprung up to meet critical needs in the economically challenged counties of southeastern Colorado. Until recently, however, local nonprofits obtained relatively few grant funds to carry out their work, mainly because the state's private foundations received few proposals good enough to fund. That has changed thanks to the HSIAC-funded grant resource office at Otero Junior College (OJC) in La Junta, Colorado. Grantwriting technical assistance from OJC has helped bring more than \$960,000 in grant funds to the region during the last year, including a \$20,000 grant to help the library upgrade its technology and a \$10,000 grant to build the capacity of Helping Hands.

- ◆ **Friendship Missionary Baptist Church** in Nashville, Tennessee, was well on its way to transforming its former church building into a community outreach center that would provide academic enrichment programs to help local youngsters do better in school. It had only one problem: it could not afford to buy new computers for its center, and it could not find anyone to donate up-to-date models. Enter HBCU grantee Tennessee State University (TSU), which donated 20 university computers to the church (and an additional 63 computers to 5 other nonprofit organizations in Nashville). With Friendship's 20 computers in place, TSU faculty and students began conducting computer-based enrichment programs at the center. These programs have helped local children learn critical academic skills, build their self-esteem, and improve their behavior.
- ◆ Residents of Pittsburgh's Hazelwood neighborhood formed a neighborhood association called **Hazelwood Initiative, Inc.**, in 1999 in an attempt to have their voices heard in discussions that investors, city officials, and state policymakers were having about economic development in the community. During the past 8 years, the organization has grown tremendously with help from 13 University of Pittsburgh interns, who worked with the university's COPC to conduct community-based research, provide administrative support and technical assistance, and grow the organization's membership from 25 to 135. Hazelwood Initiative now has a full-time executive director and plays an active role in local committees charged with designing future development.
- ◆ **Urban Habitat** had been working for years to improve the economic stability of low-income residents in the environmentally challenged city of Richmond, California. Short staffed and juggling an overwhelming workplan, the community-based organization turned to CDWSP Fellow Jackie Tsou, a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley (UC-Berkeley), to research whether green economic development would help solve Richmond's economic and environmental challenges. Tsou's research has captured the attention of city officials and has had an impact on national discussions about the potential benefits of a green economy.
- ◆ The **Maine Department of Labor** and **Catholic Charities Maine** share an interest in the employability of a growing segment of the state's population: the estimated 10,000 refugees, mostly from Somalia and the Sudan, who have moved to the state since 2001. The Department of Labor hopes that the state can count on these refugees to fill gaps in the labor market that will develop when large numbers of baby boomers retire in the next few years. Catholic Charities Maine is advocating for more aggressive strategies to provide these refugees with language and job training so they can get good jobs that promise a living wage and a chance for advancement. Now, as a result of a study completed by DDRG grantee Ryan Allen, both agencies may get their wish.

PROFILES

Otero Junior College

Colorado Nonprofits Gain Helping Hand and Operating Dollars Through College Grants Office

Las Animas-Bent County Library District
Las Animas, Colorado

Las Animas Helping Hands
Las Animas, Colorado

Librarian Sue Keefer would have been thrilled to receive any amount of money, however small, to help her begin replacing the four malfunctioning computers in the Las Animas-Bent County Library in southeastern Colorado. However, in 2006, when Keefer got a phone call from the Colorado State Library (CSL), she was overwhelmed: her cash-strapped library had received the \$15,000 Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant for which it had applied. Also, in a development that still has Keefer scratching her head, CSL decided, without even being asked, to increase the grant by another \$4,500.

“I was glad I was sitting down when I got that call,” Keefer remembers. “I spent the rest of the day just floating around on cloud nine. It was just totally unexpected.”

When Keefer hung up the telephone that day, she sat down immediately at one of the library’s aging computers and wrote two e-mails. The first e-mail informed the library’s board members that they now had \$19,500 to spend on new computers and computer furniture. The second e-mail expressed Keefer’s heartfelt thanks to Teri Erickson at Otero Junior College (OJC) in nearby La Junta. Without Erickson’s help on the CSL grant proposal, says Keefer, no one at the

library—not Keefer, her board, or her patrons—would have been doing any celebrating that day.

Erickson, who runs OJC’s grant resource office, uses funds from its HUD HSIAC grant to help nonprofit organizations in southeastern Colorado do exactly what Keefer did: apply for grants that will help them fulfill their mission and build their capacity. In addition to conducting grantwriting workshops several times a year for nonprofits in Bent, Otero, and Crowley counties, Erickson is also available (often at a moment’s notice) to help staff or volunteers of a nonprofit organization write and submit winning grant proposals.

In the process of offering help, Erickson carries out a variety of activities that range from handholding and cheerleading to collaboration and oversight. One day Erickson might find herself listening and reacting to ideas for a client’s next grant proposal. The next day she might be calling a nonprofit organization with a hot lead on a new grant. On yet another day she might be calming a client who has never written a grant application and is totally overwhelmed by the process. That might be followed by a few hours spent editing a finished proposal that a more-experienced client is ready to submit.



SCORE Grant Resource Office Director Teri Erickson (left) with Harilah Hall of Echo Canyon Ranch.

Last-Minute Help, Long-Term Benefits

Like many overworked nonprofit administrators, Keefer came to Erickson late in the CLS grantwriting process. Actually, Keefer admits sheepishly, it was about 24 hours before the LSTA application was due.

“I had been working and slugging through this thing and then a light went on in my head: ‘Why didn’t I just call Teri?’” says Keefer. “She went through this mess that I had. I think she felt I had started well, so she didn’t rip it apart, but she took bits and pieces out of it, and she polished it nicely. She really did a great job. I don’t think we would have gotten the grant otherwise. We might have been able to get a couple of computers through other sources but not what we got. Our annual budget is only \$66,000 so a \$20,000 grant had a major impact.”

In addition to its budgetary impact, the CSL grant has also had a dramatic impact on the ability of the Las Animas-Bent County Library District to fulfill its mission, according to Keefer. That mission calls for the library to provide access and encourage the use of current technology, which, says Keefer, “we really weren’t fulfilling.”

“I know there are those librarians who still think that it would be nice if the library had just books, but anyone who is forward-thinking at all realizes that it’s not going to happen that way,” she says. “You have got to have all the other things that the people want, too. We may be smaller and more rural than most libraries, but now I would say that we have as much current technology as some of the bigger libraries do.”

Before receiving the grant, the library had only four public computers, and the newest computer it owned was already 6 years old. Now, Keefer can proudly steer library patrons to 12 new computers displayed on brand-new tables with ergonomically designed chairs. Seven of the new machines are available for use by adults; one Internet-free computer is set up in

the children’s section of the library; and two computers are now permanent fixtures in the library’s teenage section, where they receive constant use. The remaining computers are used by library staff.

The new computers and their up-to-date software packages are a welcome addition to a library that has undergone staff changes and a serious budget crisis over the past few years. Unable to upgrade the building’s technology, library staff found themselves having to deal each day with the rising frustration of library patrons who typically experienced long waits for computer time and then struggled with aging computers that could not meet their needs.

“Our new capacity has been kind of important locally, and it is getting more important every day.”

—Sue Keefer
Librarian

Las Animas-Bent County Library

“Our patrons would be trying to do school work or write e-mails and the computers would constantly freeze up,” says Keefer. “And, of course, we had the kids coming in to play all the games with the graphics. Our computers just couldn’t handle those. People were always telling us that it was about time we got new computers, but we just couldn’t afford them.”

Besides making current patrons happy, the technology upgrades are also helping Keefer and her staff attract more local residents to the library, including Hispanic patrons who can now enjoy a dedicated Spanish-language computer equipped with new software. In addition, local public-school students and adults attending OJC and nearby Lamar Community College now have a comfortable and convenient place to complete school assignments that require computer access.

“We are an economically depressed area, so it is not likely that these students own their own computers or that they can go somewhere else in the community to use a computer,” says Keefer, who reports that the local high school recently eliminated its after-school library hours as a cost-cutting measure. “Our new capacity has been kind of important locally, and it is getting more important every day.”

OTERO JUNIOR COLLEGE

HSIAC-FUNDED OFFICE BUILDS CAPACITY AND CONFIDENCE AMONG COLORADO NONPROFITS

Fewer than 32,000 people live in Bent, Otero, and Crowley counties in southeastern Colorado combined. The rural region spans a little more than 3,500 square miles and was once a thriving farming region. However, as the local farming economy declined in recent decades, poverty rates in the region have increased with nearly one-fifth (19 percent) of residents living below the poverty level compared with 9 percent statewide. Median household income is \$28,000, about one-half of what residents in other regions of the state are earning.

Given that the economic need in the tricounty area is so evident, it is no surprise that a host of nonprofit organizations (200 at last count) have sprung up throughout the region to help residents. Most of those nonprofits are very small, according to Teri Erickson. Those organizations are usually run by passionate individuals who believe in their work and are anxious to help anyone in need, including young people and families with health, education, or financial needs.

“Many of these nonprofits are strictly volunteer organizations so they don’t have big budgets at all,” says Erickson. “They have no money at all for training or capacity building. So a lot of them were really floundering.” Yet, she says, these same organizations get only about one-half of one percent of all grant funds awarded by private foundations throughout Colorado.

It is not that grant makers do not want to send money to this underserved area of the state. In fact, most of the foundations Erickson has contacted would be thrilled to show that they had played a role in alleviating some of the region’s needs. The problem is that few grantmakers are receiving proposals that they feel they can fund.

“Some of the foundations said they just weren’t getting proposals from this area,” says Erickson. “The grant applications they were getting were either not written well or didn’t contain the right information. Some foundations said they were getting grant applications that really weren’t for the types of projects they funded. So it was obvious that the applicants were not doing their research before they sent in the grant application.”

Helping nonprofit organizations get the right kind of grant application to the right foundation is the purpose of Erickson’s office, which OJC established in May 2006 with funds from a HSIAC grant. Erickson has been warmly welcomed, and her services enthusiastically used, by scores of nonprofits since she officially opened her doors. In her first 6 months on the job, the former freelance grant writer helped 65 organizations obtain more than \$100,000 in grant funds. Word quickly spread about that success, as well as Erickson’s role in writing the grant application for OJC’s \$600,000 HSIAC grant. That grant supports the work of Erickson’s office and helped OJC build the SCORE Center, a state-of-the-art facility that brings together regional economic development, housing, and small business development agencies under one roof. Erickson’s office, also located in the SCORE Center, is the college’s attempt to provide economic development resources to the nonprofit community, says Gary Ashida, OJC’s vice president of administrative services.

MANY NEEDS, MANY SERVICES

While Erickson’s reputation has grown since 2006, so has the challenge to fill the sometimes overwhelming need for her services. “For every person that I help with a grant, I have more who call needing help,” she says. “That is actually proving to me that we are doing something that is needed here. The challenge is trying to make sure that I am able to help everybody, because I am not going to turn anyone away.”

Erickson has met that challenge by offering a variety of services to her nonprofit clients, whom she describes as “the nicest people in the tricounty area.” And, she has tried her best to be flexible enough to allow clients to use the services that best fit their individual needs. Some clients need a great deal of personal attention because they “have absolutely no idea where to start, and they are petrified about the whole grant process,” says Erickson. “Some say they can do the writing part on the grant, but they cannot do a grant budget if their lives depended on it.”

continued on page 44

Other clients need less help. They might just want to get Erickson's opinion about possible grant ideas, or they may need tips on where to send a grant application. Some clients feel comfortable writing a grant proposal and only want Erickson to proofread their work before they send it off. Still others merely want to use OJC computers to research potential grants.

"A lot of people are more comfortable doing their research down the hall from me so if they have a question they can come in and say, 'I found this, what do you think?,'" says Erickson. "In that way, this office is a safety net for them. With me to bounce ideas off, they don't feel like they're taking such a big gamble."

When she is not helping individual nonprofit staff and volunteers, Erickson conducts group training sessions in which she explores grantwriting strategies, explains how to put together a grant budget, and shares other grantwriting basics. Those who need more information are always welcome to browse the collection of grantwriting guides Erickson keeps on hand or to copy from the extensive list of local statistics that she has compiled for easy insertion into grant proposals.

"Each grant application has got to show local need, and I've provided them with good, solid figures," says Erickson. "This is U.S. Census data, not a number that someone's neighbor told them. I've done the work for them, so they have these statistics right at their fingertips."

Erickson's goal is to raise the skill level of individual clients to the point where they do not need her services anymore. For that reason, she usually declines when asked to write a grant application for a nonprofit because she wants her clients to learn how to do that themselves.

"We are not planning to hold people's hands indefinitely," she says. "We want to help them now, get them on the right track, and show them where they need to go." Erickson hopes that this philosophy will truly build the capacity of local organizations and let her focus her energies on training new and less-experienced clients in the art of grantwriting.

Anticipating an ongoing need for grantwriting skills, Erickson is already planning a strategy to support her office after the HSIAC grant comes to an end. Current clients have been so impressed with Erickson's services that they have expressed their willingness to pay for those services if that becomes necessary. However, Erickson hopes it will not come to that; instead, she plans on using her grantwriting talents to ask private foundations in Colorado to support her technical assistance project. True to form, she is confident that she will be successful.

"The foundations are really excited that we are doing this," she says about the grant resource office. "We are helping them meet a real need in southeastern Colorado because they want to give their money to the right places."

Offering Emergency Assistance

While Keefer provides library patrons with technology they cannot afford to purchase on their own, fellow Las Animas resident Sharon Barber helps local residents pay for basic necessities like electricity, rent, food, and prescription drugs. Barber, whose husband is pastor of the First Baptist Church in Las Animas, directs Helping Hands, a nonprofit emergency assistance outreach program that she established with several partners she met through church circles.

Relatively new to Bent County, Barber says she never intended to run an organization that depended on grant funds for its very survival. In fact, Barber claims that before coming to Las Animas 3 years

ago, she had never even seen a grant proposal. However, when the pastor's wife heard about a local family in danger of having its utilities disconnected, she decided she had to do more than pray for the family. She also had to take some action. Since making that decision, says Barber, her life has been filled with a series of serendipitous occurrences that have brought Helping Hands the money it needed to make a difference locally. During 2006 alone, the organization distributed \$25,000 in emergency assistance to 165 families.

Barber's grants have come from fairly traditional sources, including the city of La Junta, a Community Services Block Grant, the Bent County Commissioners, and Energy Outreach Colorado,

a statewide utility assistance program. The stories Barber tells, however, seem to support her assertion that grant funds have an uncanny way of dropping into her lap. There was that tip from a friendly receptionist that led to a grant from the city of Las Animas. There was that postcard that Barber accidentally found while clearing her husband's cluttered desk, leading her to an agency that has become a strong supporter. Then there was that supportive grantmaker Barber met at a conference she would not have attended if she had not been offered a scholarship. Finally, there was that day when a friend of Barber's just happened to mention in passing that Erickson had just arrived at OJC.



Closeup view of the SCORE Center.

“She told me that Teri didn’t even have an office yet but that she was in La Junta,” says Barber. “And I said, ‘Do I need to wait until she gets into her office or can I talk to her right now?’ I tracked Teri down on her very first day.” That day just happened to be a full 6 months before OJC’s grant resource office officially opened its doors.

At the time, Barber was working on an application for a \$10,000 grant from the Colorado Compassion Initiative, and it was giving her particular trouble. The grant program is administered by the Denver-based JVA Consulting, a private firm serving faith-based and community organizations, government agencies, school districts, and foundations. Barber was thrown off by the fact that the JVA grant application was not like any she had written to date. For one thing, JVA was offering a capacity-building grant that would strengthen Helping Hands but could not be used to serve Barber’s clients directly.

“I had been on a really steep learning curve,” says Barber about her work with Helping Hands. “I had never done this kind of work before and I knew this grant could help us tremendously, but I didn’t really understand capacity building at all. I did not understand how people could give you funds that did not directly help your clients, so it was hard to write the proposal. When I found Teri, I sent over my draft

immediately. She is so positive and so helpful, she was able to get it down to a manageable size, and she gave us a lot of suggestions. We did end up getting that grant.”

Helping Families Pay Their Bills

When an individual or family asks Helping Hands for assistance, Barber typically meets with them to complete an application that collects all the information she needs to determine whether the client qualifies for any of the assistance programs to which Barber has access. In some cases, Barber has the authority from her funders to distribute the needed money directly. In other cases, she submits applications to assistance organizations for her clients. In most cases, says Barber, money is not the only thing her clients need.

“Sometimes they need to talk to someone who can help them problem solve,” she says. “At the end of those conversations, some people will say, ‘I think I know how I can do this now, and I won’t need help.’”

Often, one Helping Hands intervention leads to another. For example, a utility assistance recipient may later need help with a medical issue, or a home visit by Barber might reveal “a funny smell” around the furnace, a cold house, or an unreasonably high

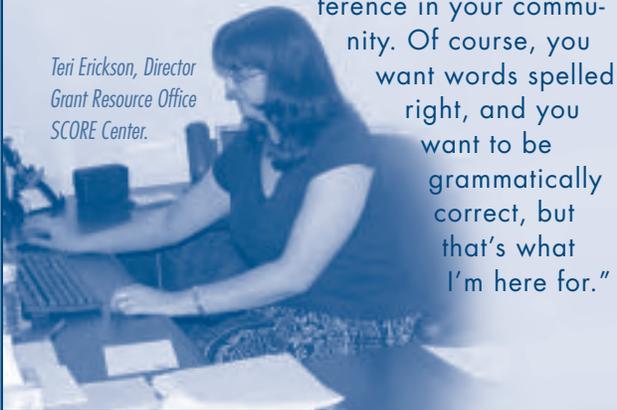
► TIPS FOR HELPING NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS OBTAIN GRANTS

Interested in helping nonprofit organizations in your area obtain grant funding? Teri Erickson, director of the grant resource office at Otero Junior College, has this advice:

Find out who your clients are. Before her office opened in 2006, Erickson conducted a survey of all the nonprofits in her tricounty service area. "I found out who they are and what they are doing, who is out there, and what kind of help they might need," she says. "You really need to get in touch with them and make sure you are offering the services they need most."

Build nonprofits' confidence. "It's important to break down that stereotype that you need to have an English degree to write a grant application," says Erickson. "You don't have to have a fancy degree to write a grant, but you do have to know about your program and you have to be passionate about it. And you have to want to make a difference in your community. Of course, you want words spelled right, and you want to be grammatically correct, but that's what I'm here for."

*Teri Erickson, Director
Grant Resource Office
SCORE Center.*



Make yourself accessible to your clients. "I want people to feel they can pop into my office without an appointment," she says. "I want them to feel that I'm their friend. I'm not lording over them that I know how to do this, and they don't. I want them to be comfortable."

Develop relationships with staff who work at foundations. Then ask them what they think about your clients' grant ideas. "The foundations are really good at coming back and saying, 'I like the idea but could they maybe go in this direction with it,'" she says. "They are willing to tell you what is going to be a better proposal."

Start off with a \$5,000, rather than a \$50,000 grant. "I start new clients out by helping them apply for a small, in-state grant from a private foundation because I feel that is an easier application process than a federal grant or a grant from one of the national foundations," says Erickson. "If you've never gotten a grant before, you are not going to get a \$500,000 grant on your first try, but if you apply for a couple of small grants here and there, then your chances of getting a bigger grant will be better down the road."

utility bill. In cases like these, Barber will write separate grant proposals for aid for needed, big-ticket items. She convinced a local foundation to buy hearing aids for one client and tapped a weatherization program in Pueblo to fix several homes that had problems with energy efficiency.

The capacity-building grant from JVC Consulting is already making it easier for Barber and her colleagues at Helping Hands to offer more and better assistance to their clients. The grant allowed Barber to attend workshops on such topics as grant writing

and financial management. Networking activities sponsored by JVC Consulting have helped her gain valuable ideas and make important contacts with other nonprofits in the state.

Barber also used grant funds to purchase a laptop computer for the organization, and she hired a college student to build a Web site that lets more people know that Helping Hands exists. She took computer training classes, then purchased a nonprofit version of a popular accounting software program and learned how to use it. That software alone has helped

transform Helping Hands into a more business-like organization that can easily track income and expenses, produce up-to-date figures on grant spending, and easily create financial reports that need to be included in new grant applications.

Like Keefer, Barber will not take full credit for the benefits that have come to her organization from the capacity-building grant. She, too, points to Erickson as the person who shares responsibility for her organization's success. OJC's grant resource office is not just about capacity building, adds Barber. Erickson's positive demeanor and her can-do attitude also help organizations like Helping Hands build their confidence: an attribute that may do more to strengthen a young organization than can money.

"Teri has been such a blessing," says Barber. "She's fast, she's kind, and she's encouraging. She brings all of us hope."

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Tennessee State University

University Computers Open Doors for At-Risk Youth

Friendship Community Outreach Center Nashville, Tennessee

When the Friendship Missionary Baptist Church in Nashville, Tennessee, decided to move to larger quarters in 2000, Pastor Janiro Hawkins was reluctant to sell the old church building that had served his congregation so well. Years before, a similarly abandoned church building in the same north Nashville neighborhood had been turned into a night club featuring exotic dancers. Hawkins did not want to take the chance that a similar fate would befall his beloved building.

Besides, Hawkins and his congregation wanted to maintain a presence in Nashville's Fisk/Meharry neighborhood, which is home to a predominantly African-American, low-income, and underserved population. Congregation members felt called to use education to change the negative mindset of local children and convince them that they could achieve great things in life despite the social and economic challenges they faced.

"You really can't serve people if you can't teach them," says Hawkins, who is also deputy executive director of Affordable Housing Resources, a nonprofit housing developer in Nashville. "Preaching is fine, but teaching is much better."

Friendship's educational mission has transformed its community as well as the small church where the faith community once held services. Now, the former church building houses Friendship Community Outreach Center (FCOC), which provides clinical and therapeutic services to children between the ages of 8 and 13 who have been victims or witnesses of crime. The center also runs afterschool and summer enrichment programs that help a combined total of 100 local youngsters improve their academic skills so they can succeed in school.

▶ TIPS FOR SETTING UP A COMPUTER DONATION PROGRAM

Interested in donating your university's computers to a local nonprofit organization? Dr. Deena Sue Fuller, Dr. Clark Maddux, and Robert Bradley of Tennessee State University (TSU) offer this advice for those interested in replicating their program:

Just do it. Sharing technological resources is such a natural outreach activity for universities, says Bradley. "It is so easy and available and the only tragedy is the fact that it is not happening more pervasively," he says. "Because the outcomes just make your head spin."

Give often. Develop a policy that promotes regular—rather than one-time—donations. TSU's policy calls for donating a portion of its used computers to local nonprofits every 3 years, when the university carries out regular computer upgrades.

Find responsible parties. Assign someone to be responsible for all the technical tasks involved in moving donated computers from university labs to a deserving community organization. "You need someone on your team who knows how to do all that," says Fuller.

Be there when things go wrong. Several TSU computer science students receive academic credit for maintaining community-based computer labs and solving technical problems when they arise. "Actually, so far there haven't been that many problems," says Fuller, "but we'll be prepared when those problems do arise."

Engage the imagination. "Lots of organizations set up big computer labs and then kids play games," says Bradley. "We are teaching kids to **build** the game. There's a big difference there. We're thinking one step ahead of where most people would normally stop."

Appealing to the Computer Generation

To make the new outreach center both useful and attractive to neighborhood children, Hawkins knew he would need computers on which the children could learn. Locating good computers, however, was a challenge. A corporate partner initially donated 10 older model computers, which, although welcome, quickly buckled under the center's demands for storage space and operating capacity. Then, Dr. Deena Sue Fuller, a professor and service-learning coordinator at Tennessee State University (TSU), approached the center with an intriguing offer. TSU

was upgrading its computer labs and needed new homes for the computers it was replacing. Could FCOC use a few extra machines? Hawkins jumped at the chance to upgrade his center's hardware and be relieved of what had become daily computer maintenance and repair headaches.

"Just having computers that don't lock up would have been a major thing," says Hawkins, "but when TSU gave us 70-gigabyte hard drives, I was blown away. When you go from 1 gigabyte to 70 gigabytes, you are in a whole different ball game."

College Students Came Too

The 20 TSU computers that arrived at FCOC in the summer of 2006 had an almost immediate impact on the center's educational work. The new computers helped FCOC double the number of youngsters who could enjoy computer learning at any one time. The new machines also gave center patrons access to the latest educational software—software that could not run on the outdated machines the center had been using. Finally, the computers helped to establish what has become a close relationship between Hawkins and the university. Hawkins now serves as an active member of the advisory committee that oversees TSU's HUD HBCU grant.

“Janiro is a real leader in the north Nashville community, active not only with Friendship but with the Rotary Club and with other organizations, so he was a natural fit for us,” says Dr. Clark Maddux, an English professor who runs classes at the center. “He was invaluable at helping us learn about the community's expectations.”

Hawkins' intimate knowledge of his community inspired the design of several TSU programs that now bring dozens of university students to FCOC several times each week to work with children in the center's afterschool program. In fall 2006, Maddux and fellow English Professor Robert Bradley formalized the relationship between Friendship and TSU by instituting a pilot program called Technopolis. The 10-year-old participants in the weekly program learned keyboarding skills and then worked one-on-one with TSU students to apply those skills to a far more complex endeavor: designing their own Web pages. By Christmas, the group of 10 had each

created Web-based holiday greetings, complete with soundtrack and personalized message, which were unveiled during a special holiday party.

“These kids can take anything apart. They can play all those video games, and they know their way around the Internet,” says Hawkins, “but they never knew they could build their own Web sites. Learning all of this has opened up a whole new world for them. Instead of seeing what other people do, they are now seeing what they can do.”

Learning on Many Levels

It may seem unusual for two English professors to be teaching computer classes at a community center, but Maddux and Bradley have always combined technology and the arts in their personal and professional lives. Maddux, who acquired his technical skills while serving in the

U.S. Army, views computers as valuable tools for learning and expressing language. When Bradley is not teaching English in a TSU classroom, he is serving as the university's director of technology integration. In that role, Bradley oversees the initiative through which TSU has donated a total of 83 computers to FCOC and five other Nashville nonprofits.

“Learning all of this has opened up a whole new world for them. Instead of seeing what other people do, they are now seeing what they can do.”

—Pastor Janiro Hawkins
Friendship Missionary Baptist Church

Both Maddux and Bradley believe that the Technopolis Web design workshops succeeded in teaching a variety of skills, often unbeknownst to young Friendship students. On the surface, it looked as if children were learning only technical skills such as keyboarding and HTML code, a demanding undertaking in itself. In the process of designing their Web pages, however, students were also honing their writing, reading comprehension, and organizational skills, says Bradley.

TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

BUILDING CAPACITY THROUGH COMPUTER DONATIONS

Television host David Letterman may get laughs from his nightly Top 10 segment, during which he lists the top-10 reasons why any number of comical things have happened. However, when Dr. Deena Sue Fuller, an educational psychology professor at TSU, saw a Top 20 list in an airline magazine several years ago, she did not laugh. The list contained the names of the 20 universities with the worst service-learning track record. To Fuller's horror, her Nashville university was one of them.

"I have always been really active in community service but I had never thought of it as being part of my profession," says Fuller. "So I came straight back to Nashville and wrote a proposal to study how TSU could implement service learning."

Service learning made perfect sense for TSU, says Fuller, because the university is located in the poorest section of Nashville. Fuller reports that the university's neighborhood has one of the highest dropout rates and the lowest graduation rates in the city. Neighborhood students have the lowest reading scores in the region, and they have trouble passing their year-end standardized tests. For most, college seems like an unattainable dream.

Many of the service-learning goals that Fuller originally proposed at TSU—institutionalizing service learning, enhancing university collaboration with community organizations, and increasing grant funding for community engagement—have been incorporated into the university's mission statement and 5-year strategic plan. In addition, the university now has a Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement, which provides the infrastructure to promote and support a growing number and range of service activities. Establishing this center is a major step forward, says Fuller, because "even

though TSU has done a lot of service over the years, that service was generally isolated, uncoordinated, mostly undocumented, and mostly just projects of individual faculty."

This piecemeal approach had been a sore point with local organizations, which complained that TSU's community activities have not always helped the neighborhood. When TSU received its HBCU grant in 2005, Fuller was determined to show partners that the university was really committed to them and to the development of mutually beneficial partnerships.

Fuller was true to her word. She organized town hall meetings to talk about the HBCU grant and to explore ways in which the university could work with community organizations. From there, says Fuller, the process was one of natural selection. The organizations that attended the meetings were already leaders in the community, and they all wanted to work with TSU. As luck would have it, many were already working in education, trying desperately to help local young people build their academic skills so those students could also build a brighter future for themselves.

"They talked about how most of the kids that come to their centers don't have computers at home and that the computers they had at the centers couldn't even run today's software," recalls Fuller about participants in the first community meeting. "That was so easy. Computers were something these organizations needed, and computers were something the university had."

Actually, TSU had a policy of upgrading campus computer labs every 3 years to make sure students have access to the best and latest technology. Each time a lab was upgraded, the computers were

During the spring of 2007 semester, the connection between computers and literacy became even more direct when Maddux brought 25 of his American Literature students to work twice each week at FCOC. On Mondays, TSU students and the Friendship youngsters began the afternoon reading novels

together. Fifth- and sixth-graders tackled *Flowers for Algernon* by Daniel Keyes, while seventh- and eighth-graders read *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon. Following each reading session, TSU students led games and other activities designed to familiarize the youngsters with

offered to faculty, but often, the older computers went to state warehouses where they sat unused.

Not anymore. By the end of 2006, TSU had donated 83 of its used computers to 6 nonprofit organizations in the neighborhood. Recipients included two community centers (Bethlehem Center and Watkins Park Community Center); two afterschool programs (Friendship Community Outreach Center and Preston Taylor Ministry); the Grace M. Eaton Child Care Center; and Galilee Missionary Baptist Church, which runs a construction trades training program and an ACT preparation program.

UNEXPECTED CHALLENGES

At first, the computer donation program seemed as if it would be an easy undertaking, but Fuller found it surprisingly difficult to get the program started. The first obstacle was getting permission from the state to make the donations, a necessary step since the computers were officially part of the state's equipment inventory. Fuller worked for more than a year to convince the Tennessee Board of Regents, which oversees the state university system, to approve TSU's plan to divert the warehouse-bound computers into the community.

After TSU Director of Technology Integration Robert Bradley received the green light, he began readying the computers for donation. Bradley estimates that this task initially took 10 percent of his time. Students and faculty from the computer science and engineering departments played a big role in the donation process by wiping computer hard drives clean, talking with community organizations to determine their software needs, and, finally, installing and networking the computers at each organization's site. TSU is now working on a manual that will guide the university through future donation cycles.

ASSESSING PROGRESS

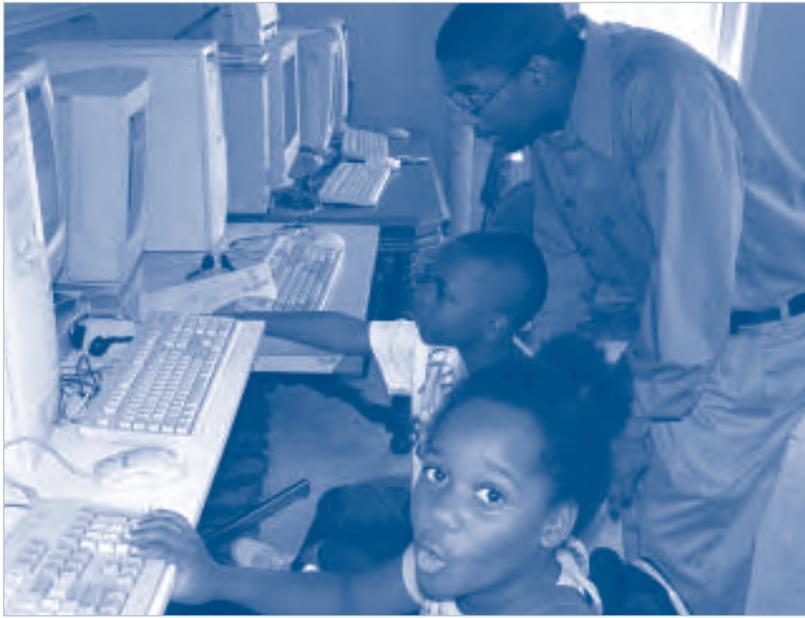
Fuller is also working on strategies to assess the impact that the university's computers are having on the academic success of neighborhood children. In addition, the university is working hard to develop and build strong relationships with its new community partners. HBCU funds are being used to renovate the facilities at a few of the organizations. TSU students are now working throughout Nashville to mentor young boys and girls, teach computer classes, tutor, participate in neighborhood cleanups, present health and fitness workshops, teach ballroom dancing, provide services to outpatient mental health patients, offer free dental cleanings, and organize a community chorus. During the summers of 2006 and 2007, TSU students even stepped outside their Nashville neighborhood to run an academically focused 4-week summer camp for 250 New Orleans children still recovering from Hurricane Katrina. That project was funded by a Universities Rebuilding American Partnerships (URAP)-HBCU grant from HUD's Office of University Partnerships.

Back at home, Fuller says she feels fortunate to have Nashville's nonprofit organizations as partners and is grateful for their help in planning TSU's community outreach initiatives.

"The more closely we work with our partners, the more we see the assets and strengths they bring to the partnership," says Fuller. "The folks who run and staff these nonprofits have big hearts and ambitious visions for their programs. They are such leaders and they work so hard for their clients. And they do it on a shoestring. All of them are doing their work because they love these kids."

such literary concepts as simile, metaphor, and plot elements. On Wednesdays, the Friendship students sat down at the center's computers to record stories they had written or to summarize the books they were reading. As with their Web design work, students were learning about more than reading, says Maddux.

"Here we have this beautiful art form called literature and we used it to help these children ask important questions about art and about themselves," says Maddux. "I wanted my students and the students at Friendship to concentrate not only on who they are as individuals but how they are members of



Former TSU student Darnell Preston tutors students at Preston Taylor Community Center.

larger groups. I wanted them to think nationally and globally.”

Important Lessons

The computer-based lessons taught at FCOC during 2006 and 2007 have brought about significant and noticeable changes in the students who attend afterschool programs there. Hawkins says he has witnessed improved behavior among the children while they are at the center. Their public school teachers, with whom Hawkins has regular conferences, report that the kids are also doing better in school. Maddux and his students have noticed the change, too. Maddux says he was thrilled at the detail, accuracy, and correctness of the book summaries the children wrote during the spring semester. “Last year, when we started working at Friendship, trying to get the kids to even write a sentence would have been painful,” he says.

In addition, Hawkins maintains that students in the afterschool program also received a critical psychological boost from TSU’s computer-based programs. That boost has given them a new lease on life.

“The level of self-esteem for children in lower socioeconomic environments is so low that they

usually think their only options when they grow up are to sell drugs and go to prison,” says Hawkins, “but when our students started viewing themselves as being technology-literate, it immediately enhanced their level of self-esteem and provided a healthy amount of self-worth and self-value.”

The time that afterschool program participants spent with TSU students also contributed to improved self-esteem and behavior, says Hawkins.

“It is a whole new experience for these kids to be talking to someone of their color who is in college,” he says. “That in itself is a wonderful

experience for them, but it gets even better when the college students tell our students that the gangster life is not really the correct way to live. When I tell them that, they think I am just an old man telling them what to do. The college students put it in perspective for them.”

TSU students have also benefited from their time at FCOC, sometimes in unexpected ways. Maddux says that teaching literary concepts to the children at Friendship has helped the TSU students gain a better grasp of those concepts. Falinisa Green, a TSU sophomore who volunteers at FCOC once a week, says that the trips to Friendship have helped her bond with the students in her American Literature class. In addition, says Green, working at Friendship has helped her to become more outgoing.

“It has really given me a feeling of how to deal with different people,” she says. “The kids at Friendship all have their own personalities. They are all different and it is so funny. I’m not really a talkative person, so doing this is helping me open up to talk to more people. You can’t be quiet around these kids. When you walk in, they say, ‘You better talk to us,’ so you have to.”

► TIPS FOR RUNNING A SERVICE-LEARNING PROGRAM

Looking for ways that your students can help build the capacity of local nonprofit organizations? Fuller, Maddux, and Bradley offer this advice for those interested in sending students to work in community-based educational programs.

Dedicate full-time staff to service learning. Guiding TSU students in their service-learning work got a little easier this year when Fuller was finally relieved of her teaching duties and took on service learning as a full-time job. “Having staff dedicated to do this is really important because unless you get it institutionalized, it won’t stay,” says Fuller.

Require it. TSU students are not required to take service learning courses. However, students who enroll in one of TSU’s 36 service-learning courses **are** required to do community service as part of their class work. “It is not a good idea to make the service-learning project an option within a particular course,” says Fuller. “All students in your class should be able to reflect on how the service is going, what the challenges are, and what they are learning.”

Keep ratios low. Involve as many college students as possible in a service-learning program that educates young people, says Maddux. The more personal attention youngsters get from college students, the more engaged in learning those youngsters will be.

Train the faculty. Fuller provides workshops and support for faculty so they understand and can implement best practices in service learning.

Train the college students. Before TSU’s American Literature students began working at Friendship Community Outreach Center



*Dr. Deena Sue Fuller
Director of Service-Learning and
Civic Engagement, Tennessee State University*

(FCOC), center staff visited campus and talked to students about what to expect from their experience and what challenges they would face.

Do not make them scold. TSU students are not expected to be disciplinarians during their time at FCOC. “That is a real key to making it work,” says Maddux. “My students never have to be the heavy. They can be the friend and let the center staff deal with problems.”

Be there. A TSU professor always accompanies college students when they visit FCOC. Maddux works at the center each Monday and Bradley works onsite each Wednesday. “Educators need to lead by example,” says Maddux. “If I believe that improving our society is important, I can’t do that from the confines of my office.”

Be consistent. It is important that college students show up each week to work on service learning projects because the children count on their being there. “You can see the kids’ excitement when we come in,” says Maddux. “They are just thrilled that we are there and they are upset if we’re not there.”

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University of Pittsburgh

University of Pittsburgh Interns Help Neighborhood Association Find its Voice Hazelwood Initiative, Inc. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Not long after landscape architect Lisa Kunst Vavro moved to Pittsburgh's Hazelwood neighborhood, her father-in-law told her a story that still makes the Chatham University professor wince. Back in the late 1960s, Kunst Vavro's father-in-law had taken his Czechoslovakian-born mother to a neighborhood meeting in Hazelwood to hear representatives from the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission discuss their plans to build the Mon/Fayette Expressway. The new highway would link Pittsburgh with the Monongahela

River Valley south of the city. In the process, it would devour a good portion of Hazelwood and would split what remained of the neighborhood in two.

When Kunst Vavro's father-in-law returned from the community meeting that evening, his mother rushed into her bedroom, pulled out a suitcase, and began to pack her clothes.

"He said, 'Mom, what are you doing?'" Kunst Vavro says. "And she said, 'Oh, we must leave! We must leave! The road is coming! We must leave!'"

Almost 50 years later, Hazelwood is still waiting with trepidation for "the road." Funding and design issues, as well as general economic declines in western Pennsylvania, have led to delays in building the expressway. While some sections of the road are completed as far away as West Virginia, many completed sections remain unconnected, and the final link to Pittsburgh is still in the design stages. No one knows for sure if that link will ever be built.

"My father-in-law now says that he goes up to Calvary Cemetery to visit his mother's grave and tells her, 'Mom, the road is still not here,'" says Kunst Vavro, a former city employee who now heads the Landscape Architecture program at Chatham. "And he says that soon his children will be coming to Calvary to tell him, 'Dad, the road is still not here.' Really, it is ridiculous."

Kunst Vavro, and many of her Hazelwood neighbors, do not really want the road to come. Nonetheless, its decades-long delay has been exceedingly frustrating for those who are eager to see their economically challenged neighborhood revitalized. While Hazelwood once had the distinction of being the top steel-producing neighborhood in the world, it has been on a downward spiral since the 1970s, when the steel industry in Pittsburgh began to falter. Residents like Kunst Vavro believe that the right developers could revitalize Hazelwood by filling its vacant lots with new commercial and residential construction. But they also understand why developers are reluctant to invest any money in neighborhood projects that could be devoured by concrete if the Mon/Fayette Expressway is eventually approved. These residents are eager to have a decision from the turnpike

commission about the future of the road, because their future is so closely tied to that decision.

At the same time, residents are thinking ahead to the type of development they would like to see in Hazelwood if the road does not come. They are very interested, for example, in having meaningful input into the design of a large-scale, waterfront development currently planned for the former site of the LTV Steel Company, which closed its steel-related operations in 1998. Development of the 178-acre LTV site, which is on hold pending a decision about the Mon/Fayette Expressway, would also have a dramatic impact on the neighborhood if it moves forward.

Faced with the potential impact of both of these major developments, a group of Hazelwood residents decided more than a decade ago that they could not just sit by and let outsiders (including the turnpike commission, the city, and outside developers) control their destiny. Since that time, residents have been working hard to organize themselves so that their development-related opinions and preferences could be heard. With help from the COPC at the University of Pittsburgh, they have been able to accomplish that goal.

Raising Concerns, Participating in Decisions

The first efforts to organize Hazelwood residents took place in 1994, when about a dozen individuals began participating in two ad hoc committees that had been established in the neighborhood with support from Pittsburgh's then-mayor Tom Murphy. One of those committees, Hazelwood Neighborhood Maintenance Task Force, carried out neighborhood beautification projects while members of the second committee, called the Hazelwood Economic Leveraging Planners, discussed economic development issues. Unfortunately, neither group had much clout outside of the neighborhood. Seeking to strengthen their political muscle, the two groups merged in 1999 to form Hazelwood Initiative, Inc. (HI). Not long after the merger, Kunst Vavro became the group's chair, Pitt received its COPC grant, and HI became a COPC partner. That is when Pitt began



Lisa Kunst Vavro, Chair, Hazelwood Initiative.

working in earnest to build HI's capacity so the neighborhood organization could represent the interests of Hazelwood residents, especially in discussions about the neighborhood's future development.

During the past 8 years, that capacity building has taken many forms, including student-conducted research that has allowed HI to catalog neighborhood needs and assets, establish a meaningful workplan, and apply for grants to carry out that plan. The COPC has also provided administrative support in setting up a centralized office for the organization, technical assistance to publish and fund the monthly *Hazelwood Home Page* newsletter, and a host of creative ideas to recruit more members for the grassroots organization. The efforts have borne fruit. HI membership has risen from 25 to 135 local residents; grants from the Advisory Commission on Community-Based Organizations have allowed the initiative to hire Executive Director Jim Richter. Kunst Vavro and two other Hazelwood residents have been invited to serve on the Mon/Fayette design advisory team; and Richter has gained a seat on the advisory group that is helping to plan the new development at the LTV site.

That development is being coordinated by a consortium called ALMONO (named for the Allegheny, Monongahela, and Ohio rivers that converge in Pittsburgh) composed of the Benedum, Heinz,

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

STUDENTS AT HEART OF UNIVERSITY'S CAPACITY-BUILDING INITIATIVES

Community engagement at Pitt starts, and often ends, with students. It is students, not professors or staff members, who carry most of the university's resources into the community and students who use their university training to build the capacity of local organizations. For that reason, the university's COPC has never set up an outreach office in any of the city's neighborhoods. Instead, it decided early on to establish a COPC presence within each community partner through its cadre of student interns.

"For the most part, our role is to nurture and support our students who are in internships," says COPC Codirector Tracy Soska. "Instead of us doing the work, it is our students who do the work in conjunction with the organization. That means that the organizations grow stronger, not us."

Pitt's community-based interns represent a range of disciplines, including social work, public and international affairs, urban studies, public health and health-related professions, and the arts and sciences. When they begin their work in Pittsburgh neighborhoods, they are not left to struggle alone in their particular community organizations. Interns working in such neighborhoods as Hazelwood, Central Oakland, South Oakland, West Oakland, and Oak Hill are encouraged to return to Pitt often for technical advice, direction, and support. COPC staff and faculty members also consult directly with a student's organization when their help is requested and provide strategic thinking, leadership training, or other university resources when needed, but the students take the lead in working with community organizations to determine those needs.

"We give them a good bit of autonomy," says Soska about the interns, who receive COPC-supported stipends for their work. "They are there to build the capacity of the organizations. If they do that, we figure that it is going to build the capacity of the COPC."

HAZELWOOD INITIATIVE

This belief that a community partner's success can affect the success of the university and the city as a whole is at the core of the COPC's work in Pittsburgh neighborhoods. Indeed, that approach has guided Pitt's work in Hazelwood, an at-risk community that sits 3 miles south of the university's campus.

Pitt's decision to ask the fledgling HI to become a COPC partner was based, in part, on its wish to revitalize a neighborhood that was not

immediately next to the university's Oakland home. But the decision also reflected the interests of the city of Pittsburgh—interests that were voiced by then-mayor Tom Murphy and the late Bob O'Connor, who at the time was city council president and the neighborhood's city council representative. Both officials encouraged Pitt to partner with HI as a way to strengthen Pittsburgh.

"A stronger Hazelwood helps build a stronger city, and for a university that carries the city's name, this is an important relationship," says Soska. "So when an elected official comes to you and says this is the group I support, and I think it has legitimacy in your neighborhood, that carries a lot of credibility with us, and we haven't been disappointed. Hazelwood Initiative has really been a good organization to work with."

During early discussions, a core group of HI's active members identified several issues with which they needed help: communications, membership recruitment, organizational development, and housing. Since those discussions took place, both graduate and undergraduate students have been involved in HI, writing and raising funds for the monthly newsletter, building up membership, and conducting studies that have helped build the organization's legitimacy with the city and with private funders.

"Their biggest need was for information," he says about the initiative. "So we committed a lot of our resources to community-based participatory research to help study housing data and to conduct other assessments. They had to have certain reports to apply for funds, and we wrote those reports. And through those grants, the initiative was able to hire staff to begin implementing the work."

In the early days, COPC interns did the lion's share of community organizing work in Hazelwood because they were the only staff that HI had, says Soska. Now the organization has a full-time staff and students play a different role.

"In building their capacity we have a stronger partner to work with," says Soska about HI. "Not that they were not good community leaders, but they had to go through all those stages of growth and development. With the help of Pitt, they've experienced a terrific amount of growth in a short period of time."

That growth, says Soska, can only help the university. "We believe that you can't have a good university without a strong city," he says. "And you can't have a strong city without a strong university."

McCune, and Mellon Foundations. Hazelwood residents want to ensure that ALMONO's residential/commercial development will not become a "gated community," cut off from Hazelwood. Instead, residents want ALMONO to continue Hazelwood's street grid into the new development, to re-establish residents' access to the river, to create a public and walkable environment along the waterfront, and to build a mix of affordable housing that Hazelwood residents could afford to rent and buy. "So far," says Richter, "we feel that we are in the loop of communication."

While it is not possible to give Pitt credit for every sign of growth shown by HI since 1999, the university has made a significant contribution to the organization's progress.

"Pitt helped us get on the radar screen," says Richter. "I can honestly say that Hazelwood would probably still not be on the radar screen if it were not for Pitt. A lot of that was accomplished by Pitt working in the background, letting people in the city know about our community's needs and about Hazelwood Initiative's mission."

Interns' Impact

Kunst Vavro and Richter agree that the 13 COPC interns who have worked at HI over the years have had the greatest impact on their group's capacity to represent its community. In essence, interns have been called on to staff an organization that otherwise could not afford a staff.

"It is very, very hard to expand an organization like ours and to hire paid staff," says Richter. "We would barely be paying minimum wage to folks whose skill sets are much higher than that."

HI's first intern was Juanita Sanchez, a social work graduate student majoring in community organization and social administration (COSA) at Pitt. Sanchez,

described by those who know her as an energetic "personality," now organizes janitorial workers for the Service Employees International Union in Detroit, Toledo, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Columbus, and Indianapolis.

In 2001, before the HI board really knew where it wanted to go or how it intended to get there, Sanchez arrived in Hazelwood as an idealistic 24-year-old, says Kunst Vavro. Without a clear job description, Sanchez played her 20-hour-a-week job by ear, providing administrative support to the projects that board members were already coordinating and slowly building up the organization's formal structure so that it could begin to grow. On some days that meant visiting neighborhood businesses to meet local residents and sell advertising for HI's monthly newspaper. On other days, it meant attending community meetings that board members could not attend, making phone calls that board members did not have time to make, and generally working "at the will of the board," she says.

As Sanchez' job description became clearer, member recruitment became a big part of her mission and her biggest challenge. Community perceptions that HI was an exclusive and closed group were hard to change, but the central office that Sanchez helped the initiative set up was an important first step in



Hazelwood Initiative Executive Director Jim Richter with Highmark Community Health Fellows.



COPC Codirector Tracy Soska (back row, third from left) with Pitt students and Hazelwood youth at Hazelwood Lewis Playground mural project.

bringing about that change. Initially located in a renovated gas station at the neighborhood's senior center, the office sent a strong message that the initiative was a very public organization, not an exclusive club. Sanchez' efforts to collect the wide array of organizational documents being kept in the home of individual board members helped to reinforce that message. Having those documents stored in a central location became critically important when the initiative began applying for grants, says Sanchez, and it also helped board members recognize that HI was bigger than they were and that the organization they had founded could no longer operate in back rooms and private homes.

"Hazelwood Initiative was no longer just these dozen leaders," says Sanchez. "It actually lived in that little brick building that was our office. By letting go of those documents and by allowing me to centralize their activities, board members really helped local residents see that Hazelwood Initiative wasn't just a closed group of people who were calling all the shots. This building would represent the activities of the initiative, the activities of the community, and the activities of people who wanted to see their kids grow up in a safe neighborhood."

Much of HI's real progress on member recruitment occurred after the organization hired Richter and

after intern Matt Galluzzo arrived from Pitt in January 2004. Galluzzo, another COSA graduate student, worked on various projects during his 3 years as an HI intern and, later, as an employee; however, member recruitment was where he made his mark in Hazelwood.

"Member recruitment was critical," says Richter. "We needed the rank and file. We needed dues-paying members to lend legitimacy to the organization. We have those members now, and I think it is pretty much recognized that we speak, by and large, for the community."

Galluzzo's first internship project, a neighborhood perceptions study completed with Dr. Mary Ohmer, found that residents' perceptions of HI had not changed much since Sanchez' day. "The organization didn't do a very good job of communicating the importance of being a member, the importance of getting involved in the community, and the successes that the initiative had been able to accomplish as an organization," says Galluzzo. "Obviously, with my training in community organizing, I knew that was something we had to work on."

Using information from the perception study, HI was able to obtain a \$15,000 grant from the Pittsburgh Partnership for Neighborhood Development that would help Galluzzo establish and train a membership development and recruitment committee that has succeeded in growing the initiative's paid membership from 40 to 135 and attracting additional minority members. When Galluzzo came to Hazelwood, HI had 6 minority members; now, 35 percent of the organization's members are minorities, a figure that more accurately reflects neighborhood demographics.

Galluzzo and the committee employed a mixed bag of strategies to get these results. First, they gained approval for a bylaws change that allowed individuals

continued on page 60

► TIPS FOR STUDENT INTERNS

Looking for ways to prepare students to build the capacity of local organizations? Share this advice from former Pitt interns Juanita Sanchez and Matt Galluzzo.

Be satisfied with small victories. “The one perspective I got from my experience in Hazelwood is that organizing is tough and it’s not always sexy,” says Sanchez, who now organizes janitorial workers for the Service Employees International Union. “Students sometimes want to be superstars; they want to change the world, but you have to be willing to set aside all those great things you want to accomplish and to accept that even the little things that you accomplish can be building blocks for future growth.”

Set aside your academic theories. “When you come out of academia, you think that if this community organization could just apply this theory or that theory, everything would be fine,” says Sanchez, “but I learned quickly that it doesn’t work that way. You have to meet people where they’re at and then move people forward.”

Do not ever think you have got it figured out. “There isn’t going to be one practice model that you can implement, one strategy, or one tactic that will work all the time,” says Matt Galluzzo about his membership recruitment efforts for Hazelwood Initiative. “You constantly have to have your finger on the pulse of the community to find the tactic that is going to work with a particular audience. It could be something as trivial as asking residents to take out a membership. Or it could be as complicated as organizing a special event for 1,500 people. It could be



*Matt Galluzzo
Arts District Manager
Penn Avenue Arts Initiative.*

a one-on-one meeting over a cup of coffee. You’ve got to vary your tactics. There is not one set model that works.”

Rely on the university. “Make full use of the university’s resources; that is what they’re there for,” says Galluzzo.

Structure your workplan to reflect your university’s outreach principles. In Pitt’s case, there are four such principles: applied research, capacity building, comprehensive community building, and service learning. “I think they are in place for a reason, and as I look at my work in Hazelwood, I hit substantively on all four of those principles with the activities that I engaged in,” says Galluzzo.

Do research early. Research is critical to successful internships, says Galluzzo, who conducted a public perception study when he first arrived in Hazelwood. “I learned so much about the community in the first few months just by doing a research project. Names became familiar, streets became familiar, and issues became really familiar.”



Hazelwood Sprout Fund Mural.

such as local teachers and librarians—people who did not live in Hazelwood but had an interest in the neighborhood—to join HI. The committee also recruited new board members who brought new ideas and a new feeling of inclusiveness to the organization. It took a fresh look at the types of events that HI had been sponsoring to build community spirit and decided that those events did not appeal to the residents that HI needed to attract as members: younger residents, families, and members of minority groups.

To gain the attention of these residents, the committee began sponsoring more family-oriented events, including a family night at a Pittsburgh Pirates baseball game that attracted 129 participants, the majority of whom were young African American families who had never belonged to HI. After that success, the committee recruited parents from the local Head Start program to plan Hazelwood's annual holiday Light Up Night. Using its member database as a guide, the committee then organized neighborhood cleanups on streets where the majority of residents were not members of HI.

"It was a real scattershot approach," says Galluzzo about the member recruitment strategy. "There was no one activity that got people to the table, but

gradually we were changing perceptions about the initiative. I think it is an ongoing cultivation, and it still goes on."

Lessons Learned

Galluzzo, who now works as Arts District Manager for the Penn Avenue Arts Institute in Pittsburgh, attributes his success in Hazelwood to the latitude he received from Richter and the help that he received from the university.

"I was able to lean on the COPC for everything, from new letterhead or a computer to guidance on what I needed to do next. You just don't get that when

you are fresh out of school. Plus, I was able to go to Pitt's theatre department to get props for one of our special events; I was able to go to the office of governmental relations to get tickets for a Pitt football game that we could give away as gifts. It goes on and on and on. Without the COPC, we wouldn't have had that ability to connect to the university with a phone call. We would have to write letters and keep our fingers crossed that those letters got to the desk that they needed to get to."

Another thing Galluzzo had going for him was the fact that he lived in the city's Squirrel Hill neighborhood, which is a short bus ride from Hazelwood, but far enough away to separate him from historical issues that were dividing Hazelwood residents.

"You have instant credibility when you don't carry that historical baggage with you," he says. "By pleading ignorance about some issues, I could implement projects that may have not worked in the past."

One such project involved a mural that the Sprout Fund was interested in painting on the side of a building in the center of Hazelwood. Galluzzo had been told by dozens of stakeholders that the

building's owner would never allow the mural because he had serious issues with HI, but Galluzzo did not listen.

"I met with him anyway," says Galluzzo about the owner. "I listened to his complaints about the organization. I told him I wasn't with the organization at the time the conflict began, but said I would work as a mediator to address some of his grievances. All that I asked was that he go along with the mural project, and he said okay. He signed the letter of agreement right on the spot."

The mural itself was a community-building activity, since a committee of Hazelwood residents (including residents who did not belong to HI) worked together to advise the artist about the mural's specific theme. The piece that finally emerged from the discussions, a faux mosaic collage that sparkles when it is lit at night, was the result of five or six design revisions that did not represent anyone's singular vision, says Galluzzo. That may be why everyone on the committee liked it so much, he says.

"It is one of those compromise pieces," he says. "That is what you have to hope for in a community, to reach common ground. This was a collaboration we could point to as a measurable success and say, 'We did this together; we can do other things together too.'"

Galluzzo left Hazelwood with more experience and more contacts than he ever expected, and he credits the unique dynamic at work at HI. "It was a small organization that was trying to build its capacity, and a lot of key functions of the organization were filtered through interns like me," he says. "So I was able to do things that I never thought I would be doing as a first- or a second-year graduate student, for that matter. That was invaluable experience. I found it to be pretty remarkable."

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Hazelwood Main Street.

University of California, Berkeley

Graduate Intern Helps Nonprofit Advocacy Group Enter Debate About Green Economic Development Urban Habitat Oakland, California

If you live or work in Richmond, California, you quickly learn that it is not a good idea to ignore the sirens that periodically send a piercing alarm throughout the city. These sirens are not mounted on ambulances or fire trucks. Instead, they are part of a network of 17 devices, mounted on high towers throughout Richmond, that sound an ominous and unmistakable warning whenever the city of 100,000 experiences a chemical accident, a toxic cloud, an oil fire, or some other hazardous materials incident.

Richmond's community warning system is a necessity because the city, located 16 miles north of San Francisco, is home to more than its fair share of potentially dangerous industries, including chemical manufacturing plants and oil refineries, and a roadway and rail network that carries a significant amount of high-speed, commercial traffic. When the

city's sirens blare, it is time for residents to *shelter in place*—that is, to get inside, close and lock all doors and windows, turn off all ventilation systems, and stay put until they receive the all-clear signal.

In addition to protecting residents from imminent environmental harm, the sirens have become an uncomfortable symbol that identifies Richmond as an industrial and environmentally vulnerable community. In light of its reputation, it may have come as a pleasant surprise to some observers when the city passed a resolution in February 2006 in support of *green economic development*. In that resolution, the city, whose main employer is Chevron USA, went on record with its intention to attract environmentally friendly industries as a way to improve its environment and add *clean jobs* to the local economy.

The resolution had been strongly supported by Urban Habitat, a nonprofit social justice organization in nearby Oakland, which has been working in Richmond as part of a coalition of organizations committed to the principles of equitable development. That coalition, the Richmond Equitable Development Initiative (REDI), is keenly interested in strengthening the city's faltering economy, improving its inventory of affordable housing, and modifying its land use practices in ways that improve the economic viability of Richmond's low-income residents.



UC, Berkeley Chancellor Robert Birgeneay, Heather Hood, Alex Schafran, Diana Abellera, Karen Chapple, and Amaha Kassah.

Green economic development had not been a priority on REDI's economic development agenda until California State Assemblywoman Loni Hancock (D-Berkeley) asked Urban Habitat to analyze whether a green economy would help Richmond address both its environmental and economic challenges. The city of Richmond soon made its own request for similar research after learning about an initiative, promoted by then-State Treasurer Phil Angelides, to use \$500 million in state pension funds to invest in the development of clean industries throughout California.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPING GREEN ECONOMY

In “A Green Wave of Economic Development in Richmond, California: Evaluating Green Economic Development Through an Equity Lens,” CDWSP Fellow Jackie Tsou offers these recommendations for a city interested in developing a green economy:

- ◆ Coordinate and invest in a workforce development program that will train local residents for the industry’s high-skill, high-wage jobs.
- ◆ Develop a set of criteria so green industry businesses will be selected according to their ability to provide quality jobs to low-income residents.
- ◆ Strengthen local hiring and living-wage policies to ensure that the benefits of such legislation include as many residents as possible.
- ◆ Preserve industrial lands to ensure that sufficient areas are available for incoming industries.
- ◆ Communicate a plan for a green economic future that lays out strategies for attracting green businesses, developing a cluster of green technology businesses, and integrating green technology business with a ready and able labor force.
- ◆ Create a green business-friendly environment that includes a streamlined permitting process, fee waivers, tax incentives, or a city commitment to purchase a company’s green product.
- ◆ Appoint a green economy advisory board to serve as a liaison with firms in green economic development fields.
- ◆ Create a position for a green economy manager who could ensure that efforts to attract businesses are aligned with efforts to train and prepare residents for new jobs in the green economy.
- ◆ Collaborate and partner with key stakeholders who can work together to build up a robust economic development program.
- ◆ Coordinate and partner with other regional cities to allow all to benefit from industries in the burgeoning green economy.

Source: Tsou, J. 2006. *A Green Wave of Economic Development in Richmond, California: Evaluating Green Economic Development Through an Equity Lens*. Berkeley, California: The Center for Community Innovation, University of California, Berkeley.

Available on the Web at www-iurd.ced.berkeley.edu/cci/04A!publications.html.

Eager to fulfill both requests for information but struggling with a small staff and an overwhelming workload, Urban Habitat asked Jackie Tsou to complete the green economic development research. Tsou, a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley (UC, Berkeley) was working as an intern at Urban Habitat through CDWSP sponsored by HUD’s Office of University Partnerships. The result of her green economic development research was a paper titled “A Green Wave of Economic Development in Richmond, California: Evaluating Green Economic Development Through an Equity Lens,” which provided a broad

analysis of how green economic development has worked in other cities and how Richmond might go about preparing to welcome green industries to its business community.

“With Jackie’s support, we were able to advance REDI’s equitable development agenda and strengthen our relationship with the city of Richmond,” says Elizabeth Tan, Urban Habitat’s director of development and planning and Tsou’s internship supervisor. “Jackie was interested. She was smart and could work autonomously with little supervision. She really did bring quite a bit of capacity to us at that time.”

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

WEARING MANY HATS HELPS CDWSP FELLOW UNDERSTAND MANY PERSPECTIVES

Ithaca, New York, located in the heart of the Empire State’s picturesque Finger Lakes region, was a perfect place for Jackie Tsou to earn her undergraduate degree in natural resources at Cornell University. The rural environment that surrounds the campus provided a host of ecosystems for Tsou to explore and presented a welcome change from the suburban Southern California neighborhood where she was raised. However, when Tsou headed back west after her 4-year course of study ended, the California she returned to was dramatically different from the one she left.

Instead of heading back to southern California, Tsou set down roots in the San Francisco Bay area. And instead of spending her time in the suburban environment that was most familiar to her, she created a professional life that revolved around the urban, industrialized city of Richmond, California. Tsou had traded Ithaca’s pristine waterfalls and colorful hiking trails for a city whose major employers are an oil refinery and a chemical plant.

Working at two part-time jobs in Richmond, Tsou found herself wearing a teacher’s hat some days of the week as she provided environmental education to urban teens for a local nonprofit organization. On other days, she wore the hat of a government employee working for the EPA to update a tool that local citizens could use to stay informed about the quality (or lack thereof) of their environment. That tool was the Toxic Relief Inventory (TRI), which provides detailed information about the type and level of toxic substances being released into the environment at specific facilities throughout the United States. The TRI was established in the 1980s after several chemical spills at home and abroad convinced the EPA that citizens had the right to know about the pollutants to which they were being exposed.

“There was a very real tension between the EPA and Richmond residents who were completely dissatisfied with what the EPA had or had not done about environmental issues in their community,” says Tsou. “So it was really neat to be out there as an environmental educator one day and the next day to put on my federal government hat and work on this really powerful tool that community members could use to educate themselves.”

The two positions had a profound impact on Tsou and would eventually affect her career plans. For one thing, she says, the positions developed her awareness of environmental issues in ways that her suburban upbringing and her rural college had not. “I was seeing the ramifications of pollution in a very, very different way that, because of where I grew up and where I went to college, I didn’t even fathom were possible,” she says. Her firsthand experience with serious pollution, and with the people who lived with that pollution everyday, also opened Tsou’s eyes to the many ways that environmental issues are tied to issues of social inequality and lack of economic opportunity. That awareness prompted Tsou to go back to school for a master’s degree in urban planning.

“I was really interested in looking at how urban planning could help achieve environmental justice,” she says. “I wanted to find out what tools of urban planning could be used to alleviate or prevent what I had seen in Richmond, which was the siting of dangerous facilities very close to residential neighborhoods.”

Finally, Tsou’s early work in Richmond created a bond with the city that would follow her through graduate school at UC, Berkeley. Tsou, a CDWSP fellow, made the conscious decision to complete two of her three graduate school internships in Richmond: one with

Putting Experience to Work

Indeed, Tsou’s background in environmental issues made her a perfect candidate for the green economy research job. A graduate student in the Department of City and Regional Planning at Berkeley at the

time of her internship, Tsou had received her undergraduate degree in natural resources from Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. After graduating from Cornell, she returned to California and worked part time as both an environmental educator for a local nonprofit organization and as a pollution

the Richmond Community Redevelopment Agency and one with the nonprofit social justice advocacy organization Urban Habitat.

"I wanted to work in the same geographic area, but on somewhat different projects, so I could see this city from different perspectives," she says.

Those two perspectives came together in the final project of Tsou's internship with Urban Habitat. That project was a paper that introduced city officials to the concept of green economic development, a community-building strategy that attempts to boost local economies through job creation in environmentally friendly industries. Not surprisingly, given her formative experience in Richmond, Tsou added an environmental justice angle to her paper, insisting that in order to be truly *green*, cities like Richmond must work to ensure that all residents will have access to the jobs and wealth created through the new green economy.

LESSONS LEARNED

There are definite signs that Richmond's mayor and members of the city council support green economic development, and Tsou hopes that such political support will eventually translate into an action plan to bring a green economy to Richmond.

"Political backing is absolutely necessary to achieve something like equitable green economic development," says Tsou. "However, the complexity of translating political support and national momentum into a concrete strategy to attract new green industries and jobs for Richmond residents will still be a monumental task."

It took Tsou a while to understand that complexity.



Jackie Tsou, CDWSP fellow.

"While I was doing my research, I would think, 'Why wouldn't a city want to pursue something like this?' It was easy to have this narrow vision because I was kind of isolated in the office doing this research and interviewing people who had really good things to say about green economic development projects in other cities; however, the reality is that something like this is not easy to implement. As discussions with the city progressed, I learned to see the complexity of the situation and why it might be difficult to move forward. It was a great lesson to learn," she says.

Understanding the political difficulties inherent in establishing a green economy does not mean that Tsou has given up on the idea, however.

"I'm optimistic that some version of green economic development will be in the Richmond spotlight in the future," she says. "I don't know when that is going to be, but I do feel optimistic about it."

data analyst for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Tsou was also well acquainted with Richmond: both of her post-graduation jobs had been located there and her first CDWSP placement had taken her to the Richmond Community Development Agency.

"She had good relationships there and people really liked her," says Tan. "It was an added bonus that she could tell us about some of the politics within the city, and she could help us make connections by placing phone calls to people who still worked there."

Tsou's prior work experience had also given her a first-hand look not only at Richmond's environmental vulnerability, but also at the economic frailty of its residents. Median household income in the city, now at an estimated \$44,200, is \$20,000 lower than incomes in surrounding Contra Costa County. In 2000, the city's unemployment rate stood at 7.3 percent, with some areas reporting rates as high as 14 percent. Residents who are lucky enough to be employed within the city are usually relegated to less-skilled and low-paying positions, while nonresidents take most of the skilled jobs. Crime is a major city problem, and violence has claimed the lives of 680 residents in the past 20 years.

However, despite these challenges, Richmond is also considered a city "on the cusp of big change," according to Heather Hood, director of the Center for Community Innovation (CCI) at UC, Berkeley, who placed Tsou in both of her Richmond-based CDWSP internships.

"Richmond is right next door to the university, and it is going to be the next frontier in terms of urban development in the Bay Area," says Hood. "It needs to figure out how to position itself to take advantage of the private development that is coming. It also needs to figure out how to create benefits for the people who live there."

Fourteen UC, Berkeley graduate and undergraduate students now work at CCI, which is directed by Hood and Dr. Karen Chapple, a professor in the university's Department of City and Regional Planning. CCI, an active member of REDI, has used its 2004 COPC New Directions Grant and multiple CDWSP grants to



Urban Habitat advocates for green jobs before an Oakland City Council Meeting.

form partnerships and build the capacity of Richmond organizations for the past several years.

"This has allowed us to play an instrumental role in mediating relationships and building trust between city government officials and community advocates," says Chapple. "That trust is gradually blossoming into the passage and implementation of policies supporting more equitable development for the city."

Most recently, CCI interns have been actively involved in a variety of efforts to ensure that Richmond residents, many of whom do not speak English as their first language, can understand and participate fully in an ongoing process to update the city's general plan. In addition, Hood says that Tsou's work on green economic development keeps resurfacing in discussions around the city, even though Tsou has since graduated and moved on to a job in the private sector.

A Green Wave of Economic Development

Green economic development remains a vague term that can encompass a range of potential industries and businesses that produce a variety of products, services, and processes. Those products—whether related to solar or wind power, electric cars, or biobased materials—all harness renewable materials and energy sources and, in the process, seek to reduce the use of natural resources or cut down on pollution and toxic wastes. Given the threat of global warming and rapidly rising costs for electricity and petroleum products, green industries are expected to grow by leaps and bounds in the next decades, particularly in California. In the solar area alone, according to Tsou's report, the state could gain 6,800 jobs in manufacturing and 3,500 jobs in construction and installation. The wind turbine industry could bring in 13,000 manufacturing jobs, and that is just the beginning.

Rather than simply touting green economic development as the answer to Richmond's growing challenges, Tsou's paper gave voice to Urban Habitat's unique perspective on this emerging industry. That perspective states clearly that green economic

development cannot be viewed only as a strategy to build Richmond's tax base. Instead, it must be viewed as a way to ensure the economic security of Richmond's low-income residents and its residents of color.

Green industries typically offer high-skill, high-wage jobs, according to the report, but what makes the green economy so compatible with Urban Habitat's social justice mission is that jobs in this emerging industry often do not require a college degree and, therefore, are accessible to anyone who has been trained in a particular set of skills. Tsou's paper suggests that Richmond's first tasks in developing a green economy should be to institute job-training programs geared toward the specific needs of green industries and then to make those programs accessible to low-income Richmond residents.

"We think Richmond is a great city to test out some of these green economic policies because it is such a heavily industrialized city with tons of environmental pollutants," says Tan, "but what we want to do is make sure that the issues of equity are first and foremost. The main focus of the green economic development movement has been on creating clean jobs for the environment, but Jackie's paper helps us focus on who will get those jobs and who will be trained for those jobs. That is why Urban Habitat is interested in the movement."

Hope on the Horizon

Several recent events have created the anticipation that concrete action will soon develop around green economic development in the city of Richmond. In February 2006, the city worked with Urban Habitat to craft its green resolution, which stated Richmond's intention to pursue a green economic development strategy that incorporated "economic opportunity, environmental integrity, and social equity." A few days later, the city hosted a Green Economic Development Symposium, which showcased

Richmond as an attractive site for green industries and explored the state's plans to invest in those industries. In addition, political support for a green economy has been growing since Tsou's paper was published. Several city council members now support green economic development and, in 2006, Richmond residents elected Mayor Gayle McLaughlin, a member of the Green Party, whom Urban Habitat hopes will actively pursue this development strategy.

"We try to take a comprehensive view of what makes a healthy community."

—Elizabeth Tan
Director of Development and Planning
Urban Habitat

Growing momentum and support for green economic development at the national level has also added to the concept's credibility at the local level. Tsou has had an indirect hand in creating at least some of that momentum. Not long after her paper was completed, Urban Habitat worked with a national organization called the Apollo Alliance to produce a paper, entitled "Community Jobs in the Green Economy," which

examined the potential for green economic development to create good jobs in low-income communities. Urban Habitat used Tsou's research to help frame the paper from an equity perspective, and it also added a Richmond case study to the report. According to the Alliance, local coalitions around the country are using the report to back their *green equity* proposals. In addition, the Alliance used the report to provide testimony on green economic development at a May 2007 hearing before the House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming.

For its part, REDI is poised to take full advantage of this growing support for green economic development. The coalition has completed a set of policy recommendations to influence Richmond's General Plan and has included specific language about green economic development in the recommendations that address economic development.

"We will be looking for opportunities to work with the city to implement these policies," says Tan, who explains that although green economic development is now part of REDI's overall economic development agenda, it probably will not be pushed as a separate

initiative. “This is how we work,” she adds. “We try to take a comprehensive view of what makes a healthy community.”

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Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Research Provides Insight About Refugees’ Growing Role in Maine’s Economy

Maine Department of Labor
 Augusta, Maine
 Catholic Charities Maine
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Two important facts about Maine have John Dorrer worried. First, Maine’s population is aging. Demographics experts estimate that by 2012, nearly half of the state’s residents will be “baby boomers” 65 years of age or older. Second, almost 97 percent of state residents are White.

Analyzed separately, these two facts might seem relatively harmless, says Dorrer, the Director of

Labor Market Information Services at the state’s Department of Labor (DOL). Taken together, he says, they represent a clear warning that Maine could face serious workforce recruiting challenges as early as 2011. Other states with higher numbers of foreign-born immigrants will be able to rely on those workers to replace at least some of these retirees, but Maine will not have that luxury. Although 12 percent of the entire U.S. workforce is foreign born, only 3 percent of Maine’s workforce is made up of immigrants.

“If the state of Maine is to continue to grow its economy, we must ensure that we have an available, well-trained workforce,” says Dorrer.

That challenge has led the DOL to examine how members of other population groups—those at the margins of the labor market—could help the state solve its anticipated labor shortage. To keep older workers on the job longer, the department has been considering a number of policy measures and has encouraged retailers to adopt workplace innovations that include creating flexible, part-time positions for retirees. To lure the state’s disaffected young people into the labor force, DOL has started developing strategies to help Maine’s employers target their recruitment efforts toward unemployed high school graduates who are younger than age 24. Finally, the department has set its sights on finding ways to train and hire members of Maine’s growing refugee population to fill jobs in a variety of industries and sectors. The exact number of refugees living in Maine is hard to pin down but the number is significant. Official population figures suggest that between 1982 and 2000, more than 4,000 *primary refugees*, many of them from the war-torn countries of the Sudan and Somalia, were resettled in Maine after demonstrating to the U.S. government that they had been persecuted or had a fear of persecution in their home country. These figures, however, actually represent only a portion of Maine’s total refugee population, according to Pierrot Rugaba, Director of Refugee and Immigration Services for Catholic Charities Maine, the state’s refugee resettlement agency. Refugees have been coming to Maine since the mid-1970s,

continued on page 70

RESEARCH FINDINGS IN BRIEF

Employment and Earnings Outcomes for Recently Arrived Refugees in Portland, Maine shares five major research findings on the employment experience of refugees in Portland between 1998 and 2004. Ryan Allen used a database composed of demographic data from the Refugee and Immigration Services at Catholic Charities Maine and employment and earnings data from DOL. The findings include the following:

Refugees in Portland have increased Portland's diversity and injected a substantial number of working-aged adults into the labor force. More than 90 percent of recently arrived adult refugees came from a country in Africa or Eastern Europe. About 75 percent were between the ages of 18 and 44. Most (85 percent) have found work since they arrived in Maine.

The administrative and support services industry emerged as the most important source of employment for refugees. Nearly half of the refugees who worked in Maine found their first job at a temporary help services business; however, employment in this industry is correlated with low earnings.

The average earnings of recently arrived refugees increased over time, but they still earned significantly less than typical workers in Portland. On average, inflation-adjusted earnings for recently arrived refugees increased by about 15 percent over 3.5 years of employment. Yet, average earnings in a refugee's most recent year of work were still just over half of the amount earned by a typical worker in Portland.



DDRG grantee Ryan Allen.

Refugees who worked consistently and stably earned substantially more and experienced greater economic mobility than those who worked inconsistently and unstably. These disparate outcomes are due, at least in part, to the large amounts of work experience in Maine gained by refugees who worked consistently and stably.

Economic success for recently arrived refugees was concentrated among those who were well educated and spoke English when they arrived in the United States. Refugees from Eastern Europe fared best: their inflation-adjusted earnings increased by more than 25 percent during their time in Portland. On the other hand, the earnings of refugees from Africa were nearly stagnant, and the earnings of refugees from the Middle East decreased during their time in Portland.

Source: Allen, R. 2006. *Employment and Earnings Outcomes for Recently Arrived Refugees in Portland, Maine*. Augusta, Maine: State of Maine Department of Labor, Division of Labor Market Information Services. Available on the Web at www.maine.gov/labor/lmis/pubs.html.

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

DDRG RESEARCHER FORMS PARTNERSHIPS AND BUILDS TRUST IN PORTLAND, MAINE

After about 1,000 Somali refugees had descended on Lewiston, Maine, during an 18-month period in 2001 and 2002, the city's then-mayor wrote a now-famous open letter to the refugee population. In that letter, Mayor Laurier T. Raymond, Jr. asked newly arrived Somalis to do Lewiston a favor: tell other Somalis not to come to their New England city of 36,000 residents.

"Please pass the word," the mayor's letter read. "We have been overwhelmed and have responded valiantly. Now we need breathing room. Our city is maxed out financially, physically, and emotionally."

The letter set off a firestorm of protest within Lewiston and across the nation and shed an uncomfortable spotlight on the sharp tensions between Lewiston's old and new residents. It also sparked another influx into Lewiston: this time, dozens of reporters and researchers descended on the small community to find out exactly what was going on and what it meant.

Ryan Allen wanted to be part of that influx. Just when Lewiston was grappling with its growing Somali population, Allen was getting ready to start work on his doctoral dissertation, with help from a \$25,000 DDRG grant. The dissertation would focus on how refugees use their social capital to find the help they need. Specifically, Allen wondered, how did refugees go about getting settled in their new communities? How did they find jobs? Did they depend on others in their social network for help? Which refugees were more likely to ask for help? What kind of help were they most likely to request? Whom did they ask?

At first, Lewiston seemed the perfect location to pose these questions, but Allen later reconsidered a move to that city when he discovered that "six other researchers were there already." Instead, he set his sights on Portland, about 45 minutes to the south, which is Maine's largest city and offered many research benefits. First, there were fewer researchers in Portland, which would make it easier for Allen to gain the attention of refugees. The city also had a larger and more diverse refugee population, which promised to add richness to Allen's dissertation. Unlike refugees in Lewiston, a significant number of Portland's new residents had been randomly assigned to the city and, therefore, had moved there without any social ties. That made them good candidates to answer Allen's questions about social capital.

"These refugees had to form their own community," says Allen. "They had to work their way into existing social networks. They had assistance from a refugee resettlement agency, but as far as contacts within the refugee community, they really were on their own."

TRADING REPORTS FOR DATA

Allen decided to balance his qualitative research on social capital, to be conducted through personal interviews and participant observation, with a more quantitative study of the employment outcomes that Portland's refugees were able to achieve. The qualitative interviews would help Allen identify who refugees asked for help in finding a job. The quantitative data analysis would help him

but comprehensive recordkeeping was not instituted until after the federal Refugee Act was enacted in 1980. That means official population counts often miss refugees who moved to the state decades ago. In addition, Maine has recently become a destination for refugees who originally resettled in other states and subsequently moved to Maine. No one is sure

how many of these *secondary migrants* now live in the state, but Rugaba estimates that 5,000 have arrived since Catholic Charities started keeping track of them in 2001.

Dorrer has long suspected that this sizable group of refugees could help Maine and its economy, but up

ascertain how useful those social ties had been in bringing about successful employment.

The data Allen needed for his quantitative research existed in two databases, which were maintained by separate agencies. The Maine Department of Labor (DOL) had data that would give Allen information about workforce participation and earnings rates for most of the workers in the state. Catholic Charities Maine, the resettlement agency that works closely with Maine's refugees, had demographic data that would help Allen identify which workers in the DOL database were refugees. Because the agencies had never worked together before, it fell to Allen to bring them together by suggesting a sharing of their respective data sets. Both agencies agreed to cooperate; in exchange, Allen promised to provide DOL and Catholic Charities with reports that Allen hoped would "answer a lot of their questions but also answer mine as well."

Allen's data brokering did not stop there. By the time he completed his research, the DDRG fellow had promised to write three additional reports in return for valuable access to Portland's Sudanese and Somali communities. He produced 10-page summaries of his research findings for leaders of both refugee communities. In addition, he wrote an analytical report for Portland Adult Education, a language-training program where he volunteered on a weekly basis.

"I got some great community contacts out of that experience and I got to observe firsthand how the refugees were learning English," says Allen. "Most important, I got to hear the concerns that refugees had about their communities. These concerns always come up when you are practicing your English in class."

until now, says Dorrer, "We didn't really know that much about this population."

The Researcher From MIT

With timing that Dorrer would later describe as "actually quite perfect," Ryan Allen, a HUD DDRG grantee, appeared in Maine just as the DOL was

BUILDING TRUST

Allen says that patience and a willingness to spend time building relationships was the key to his success in Portland. Rather than simply visiting the city every few weeks to analyze the DOL and Catholic Charities' data, he decided to live in Portland for 13 months.

"After a while it became clear to everyone that I wasn't going anywhere and that I was determined to do this project and to do it well," says Allen. "The second time I came back to an agency's office, I was a little more believable than I was the first time. The fifth time I showed up, I was very believable. There is an amount of trust that has to be built on both sides, and it is going to take some time."

Acceptance from the Somali and Sudanese communities came at a slower rate, but it did come after Allen attended weekly mosque services for 6 or 7 months.

"I got a lot of strange looks, particularly the first and second and third week I was there," says Allen about his visits to the mosque, "but eventually I started to make friends. Basically, I had to take myself out of my comfort zone. I had to show them that I wanted to be part of the community, and that I was interested in what was going on there. I had to convince them that I was legitimate and trustworthy."

"You have to let your actions speak for themselves and communicate what your intentions are," Allen continues. "If you don't have the ability to do that, you're not going to get very far."

beginning to understand the state's gloomy labor forecast and to investigate the role that refugee workers could play in brightening that outlook. Allen, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), had received a \$25,000 DDRG grant to work on his doctoral dissertation, which

DDRG-FUNDED REPORT RECOMMENDS THREE STEPS FOR PROMOTING REFUGEE EMPLOYMENT

Employment and Earnings Outcomes for Recently Arrived Refugees in Portland, Maine includes three recommendations:

Maine state government, in partnership with employers and refugees, should fund workplace English education courses. This kind of investment, writes Allen, could ease a relatively common dilemma. Federal mandates require that refugees find employment as soon as possible, yet this rush to employment necessarily limits English language training that would eventually help refugees become economically mobile.

Service providers should focus more intensely on refugees who are illiterate in their native languages when providing English language instruction and an introduction to working in Maine. These individuals may face the most challenges as they look for employment in Maine and work toward self-sufficiency.

The state government, local governments, and the Maine University System should take a more active role in helping refugees translate or adapt their existing skills to the context of the Maine labor market. A large proportion of refugees arrived in Portland with existing skills that could be valuable in Maine's labor market if they are appropriately translated, Allen writes.

Source: Allen, R. 2006. *Employment and Earnings Outcomes for Recently Arrived Refugees in Portland, Maine*. Augusta, Maine: State of Maine Department of Labor, Division of Labor Market Information Services. Available on the Web at www.maine.gov/labor/lmis/pubs.html.

would focus on the role that social capital plays in refugee communities. Attracted to Portland by its burgeoning refugee population and by the fact that immigration researchers often overlook small cities, Allen had already moved to Maine's largest city from his home in Boston and was looking for institutional partners who would be willing to support his work.

The DOL did just that and, in return, Allen agreed to research employment and wage trends among Portland's refugees and to write a report that would eventually be titled *Employment and Earnings Outcomes for Recently Arrived Refugees in Portland, Maine*. In addition, Catholic Charities Maine agreed to introduce Allen to some of its clients and to provide information about client work experience that would further illuminate the DOL data. In return, Allen agreed to provide Catholic Charities with a more complete look at how its clients had been faring in the job market over time. Both agencies have used Allen's research to help them change attitudes about refugees among local residents and employers and to promote policy changes that they hope will eventually make it easier for Maine's most recent residents to learn English, gain employment, and move up in the job market.

Catholic Charities Maine

When the U.S. government grants asylum to a refugee, that individual and his or her family is "adopted" by a nonprofit resettlement agency located in the city to which the refugee is assigned. In Maine, that agency is Catholic Charities Maine, which each year shepherds more than 3,200 primary and secondary migrants through every step of the resettlement process. Recently, the majority of those refugees have come from the Sudan, Somalia, and Eastern Europe.

The resettlement process is an intensive one. Staff members from Catholic Charities Maine meet primary refugees at the airport when they arrive. The agency provides the family with initial housing and furniture and helps enroll its children in school. Once these initial steps are completed, Catholic Charities then enrolls the family in "English as a Second

Language” (ESL) classes, helps the family’s adults find employment, and provides a host of services to help family members adjust to life in their new country.

Because of the intensive nature of the resettlement process, Catholic Charities staff members typically do not have time to collect and analyze data about their clients, says Rugaba. Catholic Charities knows how many refugees it has placed in jobs, how many have stayed in those jobs for at least 180 days, and how much those workers were paid. Before its partnership with Allen, however, the agency did not know if refugees were able to keep their jobs over the long term or if they experienced prolonged periods of unemployment. The agency was also missing rich data about how refugee employment rates differed by gender and age and how refugees’ earnings changed over time.

Clearly, Catholic Charities had much to gain from Allen’s study. At the same time, it also took a significant risk when it agreed to let the DDRG grantee analyze its data. On a practical level, Catholic Charities’ right to share client data with Allen proved a complex issue that took 6 months to resolve. In addition, Rugaba worried about the effect that Allen’s research might have on public perceptions of refugees. If the data analysis uncovered a poor employment record among refugees, Rugaba feared a backlash against his clients at a time when many Maine residents were already wondering if these newcomers to the state were a drain on its economy rather than its greatest hope.

“I was very concerned at the very beginning, simply because I didn’t know exactly what type of outcome there would be,” says Rugaba, “but at the same time I was willing to take that risk. I felt that if Ryan wanted to take on this project and was passionate about this, it could only help.”

An Active Workforce

Fortunately for Catholic Charities and the state of Maine, the results of Allen’s study were



Portland task force working to implement grantee Ryan Allen’s recommendations.

overwhelmingly positive. In what Dorrer and Rugaba characterize as the report’s most important finding, Allen discovered that Maine’s refugees were, in fact, working very hard. Almost all (85 percent) of Catholic Charities’ clients were working in Maine during the 7-year period covered by the study. This, says Rugaba, was very exciting and revealing.

“Refugees come to the United States as part of a humanitarian program, so people are not selected based on their English skills or their employment skills,” says Rugaba. “It really is a mix of people. There are people who are illiterate in their own language; there are Ph.D. holders, and there is everything in between, but to discover that 85 percent of the time these individuals have worked an average of 14 quarters (3.5 years) out of the total 16 quarters (4 years), that is a pretty good account for us.”

Dorrer, too, was impressed with Allen’s findings, and looks forward to using the report’s employment figures to convince Maine’s business community that refugees can make good workers.

“The popular myth around town was that these refugees were depending on welfare and not doing anything,” says Dorrer. “Truth of the matter is that these refugees came to this country, they entered in the workforce early, and then they stayed. So my basic message to employers is that this is a potential labor supply for Maine and that they might want to



John Dorrer, Maine Department of Labor

more aggressively recruit this group. The data shows that if they do, they might find that they have a pretty solid group of productive, high-performing workers.”

The Role of Temporary Agencies

In another interesting research finding, Allen’s analysis shed a positive light on local businesses that place temporary workers in a variety of industries. Catholic Charities routinely refers its clients to these temp agencies, and those agencies, in turn, have been extremely successful in helping hard-to-place refugees find jobs.

“They are doing something right and we need to learn what that is,” says Dorrer about the temp agencies and their ability to employ refugee workers. “I think that perhaps we on the public side don’t yet have an effective and efficient set of services to mediate between these workers and prospective employers, so we have lots to learn from this.”

Educating Refugees

Educating refugees so that they can achieve upward mobility in the workforce is a goal that Dorrer and

Rugaba share—and one that both now feel is attainable.

“The data is showing us that, with time and persistence, people are able to work their way up,” says Dorrer. “What we have to figure out is how to create opportunities and pathways to make sure these people get a crack at new employment opportunities.”

Rugaba was relieved to discover that refugees placed by Catholic Charities had maintained their employment status over time, frequently working with the same employer. Yet, he was somewhat surprised to learn that refugees with limited job and language skills had the most stable employment record.

“One would tend to think that people who are inconsistent (in the labor force) are those with very limited skills or very limited English,” says Rugaba, “but, as a matter of fact, it is the other way around. When you have limited work and language skills, you are less likely to change jobs. You are basically locked into a low-wage job because you have very few choices and so many limitations in the job market.”

These findings should raise concerns about whether refugees have adequate training, especially in English, to succeed in the American job market, says Rugaba. He has seen firsthand the critical need for additional ESL classes, and so have his clients. Their acute need was made painfully clear recently when a partnership between Catholic Charities and Husson College in Bangor resulted in the creation of an intensive English program that was held 6 hours a day, 5 days a week, for 36 weeks. Despite minimal advertising, Catholic Charities received more than 600 applications for the program, but could accept only 32 students.

“That just shows you how critical the need is felt in the refugee communities,” says Rugaba, who did not speak a word of English when he came to the U.S. 12 years ago. “I truly believe that economic self-reliance, if not success in life all together, goes through one’s language skills first. The ability to communicate with your fellow community members enables you to become a contributing member of that community.”



Pierrot K. Rugaba, Catholic Charities Maine.

The Power of Neutrality

Growing pressures on the DOL to find solutions to Maine's coming labor crisis meant that research on refugee employment and wage trends would probably have been completed eventually, even without Allen's help. Dorrer suggests, however, that the final report would have been very different if state employees had conducted the research. Allen brought a charming style, impeccable research skills, and the backing of a preeminent university to his work, says the DOL official. In addition, the DDRG researcher's status as a genuinely interested,

neutral party, not a government worker or a resettlement caseworker, may have been his most important asset. Rugaba agrees.

"He was very much involved in the community on his own, and they absolutely trusted him," says Rugaba. "These refugees have been overstudied. Every researcher who comes to Maine wants to talk to them. Part of Ryan's success was that he was considerate of who they are before he jumped in and started asking all those questions."

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