

NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORKS

Moderator: Michele Higgs
April 8, 2008
2:00 p.m. CT

Operator: Thanks so much for holding everyone, welcome to today's Neighborhood Networks monthly conference call. Just a reminder, today's conference call is being recorded.

And now at this time, I'd like to turn things over to our host, Ms. Michele Higgs.

Michele Higgs: Thank you, Beau. Welcome, everyone to the Neighborhood Networks April conference call.

I'm Michele Higgs and today I'm representing the technical assistance team that works to address the needs of the various Neighborhood Networks Centers around the country. I thank all of you for joining us for this month's call, "What are they doing? Constructive Activities for Young People." There are more than 1,300 Neighborhood Networks centers nationwide, and for the technical assistance coordinators who travel among them, we find that one of the top issues that centers wrestle with is providing appealing, engaging programs for youth. Centers want to know how to partner with or who to partner with in their communities to help them provide activities for their youth.

I want to tell you about the 14 new centers that we are welcoming to the Neighborhood today.

There are: Rebelwood Apartments Neighborhood Networks Center in Mississippi; Dellway Villa

Apartments Neighborhood Networks Center in Tennessee; Yorktown Senior House, Incorporated Neighborhood Networks Center in Kentucky; Highland Park Apartments Neighborhood Networks Center in Washington state; Queen of Peace Apartments Neighborhood Networks Center in Pennsylvania; Queen of Angel Apartments Neighborhood Networks Center in Pennsylvania; Holy Family Apartments in Pennsylvania; Antonian Towers Neighborhood Networks Center, also in Pennsylvania; Common Man Commons Neighborhood Networks Center in New Hampshire; Derryfield Village Neighborhood Networks Center in New Hampshire; Streeter Shores Neighborhood Networks Center in New Hampshire; the Meadow at Northwood Neighborhood Networks Center in New Hampshire; the Riverwood Tower Computer Learning Center in Tennessee; and Sycamore Meadows Apartments Learning Center and Community Room in Michigan. Welcome all 14 centers to the Neighborhood!

Next I'll tell you about the Neighborhood Networks resources. First, there's the Strategic Tracking and Reporting Tool also known as START. START helps you to assess your residents' needs, determine what resources in your community can help you meet those needs, and help you keep track of the partnerships that address them. START is a key to developing partnerships because an organized plan strengthens a center's profile as a business and makes the center more attractive to potential partners and donors. START also helps you examine the capacity of your center, provides the institutional memory for your organization, and builds the foundation upon which you can organize your activities.

If you have questions about the START business plan or resident surveys, success stories, special event ideas, or general questions about the Neighborhood Networks Initiative, call the toll-free Neighborhood Networks information line at 888-312-2743. Or you can visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.neighborhoodnetworks.org. And don't forget online networking through the Neighborhood Networks online message board. There, you can share information with other centers, post news, ask questions.

Be aware that this is not a real-time resource, but you can post your information, then revisit the board in a day or so to see what kinds of responses you've received. Just go to the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.neighborhoodnetworks.org and click on the Neighborhood Networks online networking link to the right under the green banner labeled "helpful tools." When you get there, follow the instructions and guidelines to learn how things work or dive right in and click on "enter online discussion." Go visit; check it out, post a message. Let me also remind listeners that a transcript of this call will be made available on the Neighborhood Networks Web site in about two weeks.

Let's proceed to our topic for today. What kinds of activities can centers provide for their youth that will educate, invigorate, and engage? Often the Neighborhood Networks center provides the starting point from which many young people face the world. Many times, the center supplements what the youth don't get at school or at home. It is no secret that each Neighborhood Networks center is unique. The ways that they address the needs of their youth are also unique. Today we'll hear from two leaders who will help listeners develop programs that will harness and hold the attention of the youth at their centers. In the process, they will channel their energies in directions that will develop good citizens.

We will hear from Jillian Spindle, who is director of development and marketing at the Neighborhood Technology Resource Center (NTRC) in Chicago, Illinois. NTRC operates three community technology centers in Chicago, one of which is a Neighborhood Networks Center. The centers offer a wide variety of technology centered programs for participants of all ages.

Our next speaker is a success story come to life. She's Deborah Backus, executive director of the Castle Square Tenants Association and the Castle Square Technology Center. Ms. Backus began as a resident of the Castle Square Apartments where she lived for 16 years. There she founded the Castle Square Tenants Organization, serving eight years as the president of the

board of directors. To date, she has raised more than \$350,000 to support the work of the Castle Square Technology Center.

Between these two speakers, I think you'll get what you need. So I'll ask Jillian to get us started, please.

Jillian Spindle: Sure. Well, I just wanted to say hello to everyone and thank you for having me on the call today. I'll share some of the lessons that we've learned at the Neighborhood Technology Resource Center about creating and sustaining programs that appeal to our young people and that keep them engaged in constructive activities when they're out of school.

But first, I'd like to give you an overview of NTRC and what we do in general. We were founded eight years ago by Dr. Nicole Turner Lee at Northwest Tower Apartments; a resident- owned section eight subsidized affordable housing building with 150 units in Chicago's West Town neighborhood. Northwest Towers is home to more than 380 residents. NTRC started when residents of the building asked Dr. Turner Lee for help in designing a computer lab. NTRC obtained a grant through the HUD Neighborhood Networks program to start the lab and began its operations in 2000.

After the initial success of Northwest Towers, NTRC opened a location at the Holman Square Community Center in North Lawndale in 2001; at the Charles Hayes Family Investment Center in Grand Boulevard in 2005; and at our newest location at the Riverdale Network Resource Center just last year in 2007.

For all of our sites, we offer community access programs that include free access to computers and high-speed Internet, low-cost print and copy services and a wireless community network that brings free high-speed Internet into local homes. Our adult workforce development program

includes basic and advanced computer training; certifications in Microsoft Office, Network Plus, and A plus; job coaching; and job placement.

For youth, we offer a range of programs for ages six and up. There are afterschool programs for ages 6-13, technology based internships and apprenticeships for teenagers, digital media programs, and youth led clubs.

I'm going to give you an overview of our most successful youth programs and the lessons that we've learned from implementing them. The Hip Hop Club in Northwest Tower started as a way to reach teenage males. We realized that many of the building's young men weren't interested in the programs we were running at the time that this program started. I was actually working there at the time and noticed that they weren't coming to the afterschool program nor were they interested in coming just for basic computer classes. So we thought about what they were actually interested in. Music was really big thing for them.

We responded to their interests and we worked with them to create the Hip Hop Club. The Hip Hop Club works with youth to develop skills in digital music production, lyric writing, and performance. While this program is centered on music production, youth gain literacy and writing skills, public speaking and presentation skills, and technical skills in the process of producing original hip hop music. They produced their first CD called "Why Hip Hop?" last year and they held a showcase for residents of the building at Northwest Tower.

Next I want to talk about the girls' empowerment initiative, which is popularly called Girl's Night Out. This program was borne out of the request of young female residents for a female-only time in the lab where they could be free to discuss the sensitive issues that were affecting them. This was in the summer of 2004, there were actually several teenage pregnancies in the building and we recognized that there was an urgent need for this type of program. Girl's Night Out pairs young women between the ages 8-18 with an adult female mentor who guides them through

discussions on difficult issues like sexuality and violence, but also explores careers in different fields.

They work on community service projects. They initiate the types of projects they want to work on and the mentor guides them. They explore the educational and cultural activities that Chicago has to offer. For example, we've taken trips to the Museum of Science and Industry and to the aquarium to explore science. We've visited all sorts of Chicago neighborhoods to try to build cultural awareness and get them out of their neighborhood. The building where they live can be somewhat isolated; Chicago is such a big city and there's so much going on. We like to expose them to all of the different neighborhoods and people.

Additionally, for this program, our partnership with the local university has actually helped the Girl's Night Out group explore different careers and higher education.

As a response to Girl's Night Out, some of the young men in the building who were coming to the lab asked for their own program, called Boy's Night Out. So we honored that request as well and created a program where young men are paired with an adult male mentor who guides them through life skills development; issues like conflict resolution and creative projects that engage their interests in digital media.

The next program, the Digital Connectors program, is a technology-based service learning program for youth ages 14-21. In this program, youth learn technology skills that range from A+ and computer refurbishing to digital video and civic journalism. Then they take their skills back to the community and work on projects that benefit their neighborhood. This program is actually part of a national initiative through an organization called One Economy Corporation. And they have Digital Connectors chapters all over the United States. Our program has been operating in Chicago since 2004 and has been extremely successful with very high participation.

The Digital Connectors program directly links youth to workforce development opportunities because as they're learning new skills, they're also applying them in real-life settings. So, for example, two years ago our Digital Connectors youth built a computer lab at a church in their North Lawndale neighborhood. The church came to the program and asked for a lab, so our youth put together refurbished computers with Linux operating systems, a very low-cost option, and actually built the lab for this church.

On a regular basis, they provide technical support to our lab users. I mentioned we have a wireless community network. So the youth have actually been trained on this network. They can provide support to people coming in the lab and people who are trying to get on the network outside of our lab.

Every summer, we place them in jobs with our own agency and others in the area. They serve in roles like administrative assistants, network administrators, and youth program assistants.

In the past year, the Digital Connectors have focused on civic journalism or citizen media, which has become very popular. Through civic journalism, youth explore issues in which they're interested. They develop stories on these issues through writing, documentary video, and podcasts. Just a few weeks ago they held their first digital town hall event, which showcased their civic journalism work and explored the role of hip hop music in their community.

The Digital Connectors also visit colleges and business to explore further education and careers. Now that I've given you an overview of a few of our programs, I just want to pull out some of the key lessons that we've learned from implementing them, and hopefully they can help you when you're designing your programs. One of the first lessons we learned, which was actually a response to youth, was to periodically take a gendered approach to programming. This means having girls only and boys only clubs, like our Girl's Night Out and Boy's Night Out programs. We found that gender-based programming was very popular, particularly with adolescents. They felt

very strongly about having a space that was theirs, where they could air issues that are sometimes sensitive or just pursue activities that interest them, in a safe and secure space where they were free to be themselves.

To build on this, we tried to pair the appropriate staff with the program. So, for example, with Girl's Night Out we seek mentors who are women close in age to the young girls' mothers but who are a neutral person in whom they can confide. For the Hip Hop Club and Boy's Night Out, our coordinators are usually males in their 20s. Our young men, usually between the ages of 10-18, can best identify with these mentors. This type of programming, being responsive to youth by really listening to them and taking into account what they have to say, reinforces ownership. We found that when they feel that they've helped to create or shape a program, they're much more likely to keep returning.

As an organization we try to be responsive. For this reason, we developed what we call the clubhouse model. The youth are directly responsible for designing the programs. As I mentioned before, Girl's Night Out, the Hip Hop Club, and Boy's Night Out programs were all direct responses to our youth.

The next lesson we've learned is that no matter what your program tries to accomplish it needs to appeal to youth's sense of fun. This doesn't mean you can't work hard skills or academics into the equation, but remember that often times you're working with youth right after school. When they've left school for the day, the last thing they want to do is go to something else that feels like school. The Hip Hop Club incorporates a high level of digital media skills as well as literacy development and leadership with performance and production. But, we appeal to their sense of fun through music. Music is something that they're interested in and they don't necessarily see it as academic. So they attend the program because they enjoy it and it's relaxing and fun.

We've also worked some of the more popular teenage Web sites into our curriculum. Young people are naturally drawn to technology, and as Neighborhood Networks centers, you all have the tools you need to keep them engaged. I'm sure that some lab coordinators probably struggle with trying to keep youth off MySpace, Facebook and YouTube and keep them engaged in the program. You know, we've had that same problem. But we've learned how to actually incorporate these sites into what we're doing and teach youth how to use them for marketing, portfolio development, and social networking.

Particularly with the introduction of civic journalism into our Digital Connectors program, we run some video production apprenticeships in other sites and schools. We found that these social networking sites can actually be valuable professional tools for youth and introducing them into the program that way gives it a value added for them.

Now we have all of our youth programs create sites and post their work to share with others, whether it's video or music or articles they've written. This way, they can comment on one another's projects, obtain feedback, and network with others all over the world. The advantage for us is that rather than fighting against MySpace and YouTube and Facebook we join with them as long as they're doing their work, too.

Appealing to a sense of fun can even apply to what you name your program. For example, the Girls Empowerment Initiative is the program's formal name, but popularly, we call it Girl's Night Out. This name draws in many more young females because they come with the expectation that they're going to have fun.

The next lesson we learned is that, in particular, older youth are looking for meaningful experiences that can help them find employment. In Chicago, we're lucky because the city's Department of Children and Youth Services and another organization named After School Matters are very devoted to out-of-school time youth development. They even offer stipends to

youth to participate in programs. Our Digital Connectors earn stipends through After School Matters, for example. But even if you don't have the funding to offer youth stipends, you can provide incentives for participation, whether it's getting donations of gift certificates from local businesses or finding ways to give a used or refurbished personal computer. Even free snacks are a good incentive. They can be obtained through food programs, perhaps through your local board of education or a food pantry.

Every summer we help employ around 40 to 50 youth in apprenticeships and internships. As I mentioned before, there are great funding streams through the city of Chicago that allow this to happen. But if you're lacking these types of opportunities in your city or town, you can talk to local businesses and see if they have summer internships. Another option is to talk to some of the larger workforce development agencies in your area to find out if they know about summer opportunities for teens.

Museum and local attractions, as well as other community-based organizations or nonprofits, are also great places to look for summer youth employment options. In the absence of stipend or employment opportunities, we find that youth respond well to community service projects. They are usually eager to have the opportunity to work in a real life setting to gain skills and build their resumes. Whatever types of opportunities you can offer in this realm will likely be well-received. For example, we offer youth employment and volunteer opportunities in our labs as lab assistants or as administrative assistants. Many school districts require high school students to complete service learning hours and they can link up with your organization to fulfill this requirement.

I'm on the end of resource development, so I want to talk a little bit about how you can form partnerships to help build and sustain your programs. I know that funding is an issue and a lot of times you can leverage a lot of resources through partnerships. In particular, finding money for staffing is always a big concern. With a little creativity and some research you can often find volunteers and interns and partner up with programs that will provide free services.

My organization takes advantage of all of the opportunities that we can find, so I have some tips about how you can get started.

One is the AmeriCorps Vista Program, which is a national volunteer service program that places volunteers with a nonprofit for a year. Volunteers are paid a stipend by the Vista program and work full-time at your organization on a special project. You can also look at the CTC Vista program which specifically places Vistas in community technology centers. This is managed by the University of Massachusetts in Boston. My organization has hosted several Vista volunteers during the time I've been here, and we've had great experiences.

Public Allies is another service program that pairs volunteers with nonprofits on special projects. The Princeton 55 Fellowship Program places recent college graduates with nonprofits. On some national Web sites, you can post volunteer descriptions, such as idealist.org and volunteermatch.org. While it can be challenging to start a volunteer program and get consistent and dedicated volunteers to your program, the benefits can be great.

Another great source for interns, volunteer, and mentors, are colleges and universities. You can check out volunteer work-study and public service programs at local colleges. NTRC has had interns and work-study students from Robert Morris College and the University of Chicago that have helped implement our youth programs. We also have a partnership with the University of Illinois. Chicago's Women and Science and Engineering Program, called the UICWise, is an organization of students and faculty that works to engage women in science, technology, engineering, and math fields. As part of their mission, they have an outreach component that works with local community-based organizations. They provide us not only with funding support, but with online and offline mentoring opportunities for young women who are part of our Girls Empowerment Initiative.

They have also helped us to run career night, a program where women from science and technology-related fields come and talk to the girls at Northwest Tower about their professions. We invite all of the youth of the building to these events so they benefit our whole center.

Like most universities, the University of Illinois has an extension program, which conducts outreach to the larger community. In particular, they partner with community-based organizations to bring onsite workshops in everything from health topics to job readiness and college searches. Colleges usually have numerous opportunities for their students to volunteer and intern. In particular, you might want to look at programs specific to social work and education to find people interested in youth development.

I mentioned before that Chicago has a vested interest in youth development. So we have many opportunities to link youth with employment in the city. I would definitely recommend checking on what types of youth development opportunities are offered through your local government agencies. If there aren't many initiatives going on right now, you can suggest some options to your government leaders.

Another strategy is to look for larger organizations in your area that may be interested in having additional places to run their programs. Sometimes in exchange for opening up your space and having interested youth involved, you can get an organization to come in and run a program. Some of the larger national organizations, YMCA, YWCA and Boys and Girls Clubs may actually want additional outreach sites.

NTRC has benefited through this type of arrangement with One Economy. We were very successful in linking up our Digital Connectors with other Digital Connectors groups from around Chicago. This allowed us to gain additional resources for the program such as cameras, personal computers, and stipends for our participants. One of the biggest benefits was that we were able to bring our neighborhood Digital Connectors together with other digital connectors for

city-wide forums. In a place like Chicago where youth violence is on the rise, bringing teens together from different parts of the city to showcase the positive work they are doing is really critical.

That's my presentation for today. I'll be happy to answer any questions after the call.

Michele Higgs: Thanks, Jillian. You've given us a lot of good information. I will hold my question until the end, and I will ask Deborah Backus to tell us what's going on at Castle Square. A couple years ago, I had the opportunity to witness the center's music program. There, the young people were creating CDs, even when I was sitting there. I thought it was just fantastic. Deborah, I'll ask you to please tell us what's going on at Castle Square.

Deborah Backus: I'd to welcome everybody to the call today. The Castle Square Tenants Organization was founded in 1987 out of residents' fear of losing their homes because the property was being sold. So the residents at Castle Square organized, and formed, the Castle Square Tenants Organization. The organization is now 20 years old. They have now owned the property for 17 years. We have 500 units and 10 commercial spaces that we own. We lease commercial spaces out to different businesses.

The Castle Square Technology Center was formed in 1996. From 1996 to 2002, most of the focus of the technology center was based on adult programming. In 2002, the board of directors decided that there weren't enough children participating in the technology center, so they started a focus group with the children at Castle Square. We have 500 residents; it's 60 percent Asian, 30 percent black, 5 percent Latino and 2 percent white. Out of the 1,500 residents that live here, we have 500 children; 225 children are teenagers.

We formed our focus groups to create the program for the teenagers. At that time, we were offering a lot of activities for the children such as field trips. We quickly found out that foundations

do not want to fund field trips and activities; there had to be more focus on the education aspect for the children.

So we quickly started developing our programs. Our first program, the digital music and film program, started in 2005. We received the grant from CTCNet to help us develop that program.

From that program, the children produced a public service announcement called "Smoke Yourself to Death" and that project is used in our entrepreneurship program to help the children raise funds. So the children are now marketing that particular piece of music and film.

The other program that we have developed is a program called the Gearing Up for Independence Series. That's a program for youth in high school and young adults.

The reason we developed this program was because we felt that a lot of the foundations were for younger children. We wanted a program that would also help youth, especially those youth that once they graduate from high school may not be interested in going on to college. There are also youth that can't wait to get an apartment once they're finished high school. So we offer a number of different programs in the Gearing Up for Independence Series.

We offer the free SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) exam preparation. We offer homework assistance. We offer career explorations. Also, we offer programs about money management and apartment hunting, and tools for college.

To get youth involved in this program, we offered raffle prizes to entice them. There are numerous MCAS (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System) and SAT programs from which children have to choose. So we wanted to make our program a little different from the basic standard SAT prep.

Also included in this program, we offer field trips and college tours. We offer other field trips, such as rock climbing and camping. We believe it's very important to get the youth out of the city and experience other activities.

The other program that we offer is our Peace on the Move teen center. That program was started from a Boston Foundation grant. Those funds allow us to extend the hours of our programming from 6 p.m., until 10 or 11 o'clock at night during the summer. That program is geared basically for the teenagers. The program offers entrepreneurship and apprenticeship. The purpose of this program, which we just started about a month ago, is to help youth understand the principles of starting and operating a business. The entrepreneurship program will bring all tech center youth together to discuss different ways to make their projects sustainable. It will encourage them to always keep business in mind as they work on day-to-day activities. Youth will meet every Monday to discuss new ideas and work toward sustainability, while receiving training in different business practices, such as customer service, management, marketing, outreach, inventory management, and financial management. The goal is to have the team program at Castle Square operate as a business selling all youth-produced products. All youth will have a role as employees and shareholders in the company.

Another program that we offer at the Castle Square Technology Center is our Wi-Fi program. We received a grant from the Boston Foundation for \$45,000 for a pilot program. The program now has been in existence since 2005. We have 175 apartments online that receive free wireless Internet. Also, we provide the IT support for those computers. We found that a number of residents do not have the funds to get their computers repaired, so we offer that service here free of charge.

We've also been able to set up wireless Internet at a number of other housing developments, such as the Whittier Street public housing development owned by the city of Boston. There, we also trained youth to provide IT support for the computers in their neighborhood. We've also set

up wireless Internet at the Tent City housing development. There, the youth also receive training to fix the computers at the Tent City housing development.

One of the projects that we're working on is "Tech Day". We have found sponsors in Boston to help us conduct this event. We will fix computers for low- and moderate-income residents that live in the South End and lower Roxbury neighborhoods. We're asking them to bring their nonworking computers so that we can fix them. At the same time, we'll be offering workshops on how to use the computer and the Internet. We will also set up a separate workshop on digital music and film production for those parents who bring their children. We will also try to have the younger youth also interact with the older youth.

We have two events throughout the year that we offer. Black History Month and the Chinese New Year celebration bring all of the different cultures of Castle Square together. The younger youth work on products that they can also sell at this event, but they also learn about Black History Month. This year, the teens had a fashion show and we were able to find a local designer to donate clothes. We were also able to get local businesses to donate food.

Another program we have every year to engage the youth is a School's Out barbecue. As you might think, all the children look forward to it. The barbecue has a carnival atmosphere and we're also able to get a number of parents to participate in planning that event. Another event that we conduct every year is National Night Out. This is another huge carnival event and we offer different workshops crime prevention in the neighborhood.

We have a number of partners. The Ben Franklin Institute of Technology is located right across the street from Castle Square. The partnership provides work study students to work on our Wi-Fi program and provides IT support for our residents' computers.

We have another partnership with a company called Boston Cares. Boston Cares provides volunteers from different companies to work on a variety of our projects. We have a number of Boston Cares volunteers that are going to work at Tech Day. Another partnership we have is with Kaplan Inc. Kaplan provides the tutoring materials for the MCAS youth program that we offer twice a week. We also have a partnership with the 4-H club that provides career exploration workshops for the youth.

We have a partnership with the local banks for financial management training for the youth here. We also have a partnership with Microsoft. We are a Microsoft licensed re-furbisher. So we receive the licenses from Microsoft and put them on computers. We have a donation repair program. Downtown businesses and the Boston public school system give us their old computers. We refurbish them and give them to families that do not have a computer.

We also have partnerships with the local churches. The Vineyard Church provides volunteers for our teen program on Friday evenings. Friday night in the community room is the night for all of the children to come together to play board games, play videos, and watch TV.

We're a member of the Youth Worker's Alliance Program, an agency that works with about 50 youth programs in Boston. We collaborate with other youth programs in the area. Another program that you should know about is Hostel International. They provide funding for camping trips. So each year we take the youth to a retreat at Nantucket Mount on the island.

As a member of Tech Soup, we get discounted software for our tech center. We also have a partnership with Read Boston. That's a Boston afterschool coaching initiative. Read Boston comes to the center and sits with our children to help them read. They also bring in different activities for the children and they've set up a library at our technology center.

We also have the Peace on the Move program, which runs five days a week. For this program, we have a night dedicated for the girls and a night dedicated for the boys. It has been very successful for us. So on that note, I'm going to open it up to any questions that you may have.

Michele Higgs: Thanks, Deborah. I was just going to say you both have some very creative programs and I'm hoping that our listeners are ready to ask some questions. Beau, do we have anyone on the line?

Operator Ladies and gentlemen, at this time if you have any questions or comments simply press star one. And if you are joining us today using a speakerphone, please make sure your mute function is turned off to allow your signal to reach our equipment. Again, star one please, for any questions and we'll pause for just one moment.

And we'll take our first question today from Karen Heppler; Karen, please go ahead.

Karen Heppler: Both of you have very, very impressive programs with all kinds of activities and very, very large programs. What advice can you give to someone who's just starting out? What would you say would be your first step in trying to start your youth program?

Deborah Backus: This is Deborah. At Castle Square in 2002, we didn't have that many programs for the youth. What helped us was that we were able to hire a program development consultant. If you're unable to hire one, maybe you can find someone that would be willing to donate their time. We needed someone to put us in the right direction. Our first program was the digital music and film program and we progressed from there.

The other thing you can do when you're hiring your staff is to hire personnel that can also bring services to you. That's another way to start your program.

Karen Heppler: Thank you.

Jillian Spindle: This is Jillian. I would just add if you're very small and you're just starting out take a look at who is coming to your center. Who is it you're trying to serve? If it's a particular age group or a demographic then just talk with them about what they're interested in and try to go from there. Just find out what they like to do and see how you can build a program around those interests.

Karen Heppler: Thank you.

Michele Higgs: Thank you. Beau?

Operator: We'll take our next question now from Hillary Nicholson.

Hillary Nicholson: Hi. You guys have a lot of awesome programs. My question pertains to the computers. How exactly would you go about getting the Microsoft license for the refurbished computers, what exactly would we need to do to be a part of that program?

Deborah Backus: Can you give me your name and phone number and we can call you right back with that information?

Michele Higgs: What I can do is exchange that information once we're off the line, ok?

Hillary Nicholson: OK. Thank you.

Michele Higgs: All right. Thanks. Beau, have we anyone else?

Operator: Not at this time, Ms. Higgs, but I would like to remind everyone, star one please for any questions or comments.

Michele Higgs: OK. I'm just going to say there re a lot of creative programs that both of you have discussed this afternoon. Jillian, when you were talking about having mentors, the other young people to come and work with your young people, I wanted to ask where you get these folks? Were those volunteers from the schools and universities that were involved with Girls Night Out?

Jillian Spindle: Yes. Girls Night Out has been a combination of us pulling in both paid staff and interns. The program's actually been going on for several years now. Our relationship with UIC's WISE program has been really great because they provide us support on an ongoing basis. And if they have students who are interested and available to come and tutor or mentor, they send them. They also actually linked us up with an online mentoring program called Gem Set.

Michele Higgs: Could you repeat that?

Jillian Spindle: It's G-E-M and then S-E-T and it's through the U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau.

Michele Higgs: OK. I'm asking that question because it might be something that we can attach to the transcript so that people can find out about it.

Jillian Spindle: Yes, and that's an online mentoring initiative for girls who are interested in the science technology engineering and math field.

Michele Higgs: All right, great.

Deborah Backus: You may be able to get workshops from your local health centers; they may be interested in providing some pro bono workshops for the youth.

Michele Higgs: Deborah, you mentioned incentives to get students to participate in some of these programs. What kinds of incentives would you suggest?

Deborah Backus: Well, we've used movie gift cards. The way we've been able to get the movie gift cards every year; each management office at a property has a list of vendors. And we use that vendor list to solicit the donations for the gift cards.

Michele Higgs: I see. All of the children like to go to movies.

Deborah Backus: Yes.

Michele Higgs: How about pizzas and food and things like that?

Deborah Backus: Yes. Because we were on the extended program that runs until 8:30 at night, the youth get close to a dinner every night that they're in the program.

Michele Higgs: Beau, do we have anyone else on the line?

Operator: Yes.

Deborah Backus: I just want to say that we also employ the youth to work at the technology center and the afterschool program. During the summer, we make sure that there's enough money in the property operating budget so that we can hire youth in apprentice jobs at the property.

Michele Higgs: All right. Beau, do we have anyone on the line?

Operator: We do, Ms. Higgs; we have a few more questions in queue. We'll go first now to Elisa Hagan.

Michele Higgs: OK. Hi, Elisa.

Lisa Hagan: Hi. Yes, I would just like to say that both of them have wonderful programs. I have two comments. One is that you all are from big cities and I'm from a very small town here in North Carolina. I'm looking for ways to get the youth around here more involved with the center, so you gave me some great ideas.

My direct question is to Jillian. I would like to know more about how you used MySpace, YouTube and Facebook to get the youth involved in marketing skills and the other type of things that you mentioned. Is there some way you and I can perhaps communicate after this and you give me a little more information on that?

Jillian Spindle: Yes. That's definitely fine with me.

Michele Higgs: I can also make that information available to you; I'll do that after the call.

Lisa Hagan: Yes, thank you so much.

Michele Higgs: Absolutely. Thanks so much.

Operator: We'll go next now to Beatrice Spradley.

Michele Higgs: Hello.

Beatrice Spradley: Hello. The last caller voiced the concern I have because we're small. You gave us a lot of information to work with, but how can you bridge the gap between the adults and the teens?

Deborah Backus: At Castle Square, we're in the city and, we have a lot of issues between the youth and the adults to get them more involved.

Beatrice Spradley: OK. One of the things we're going to try to do is this weekend, starting on Friday West Virginia has an Arbor Day celebration. We're trying to clean up and plant flowers on that day. We're hoping to get some of the adults and children to come out that day. But did you say that the information would be available in two weeks online?

Michele Higgs: The transcript, yes. Yes, it will.

Jillian Spindle: I'd like to add a little bit to that response. It seems like both of our programs are training youth to conduct tech support in the lab and serve as lab assistants. There are only a few youth there when the adults are there, but more and more adults see youth in positions where they're being helpful, working, and sharing knowledge and they have skills that the adults can actually use and need. And I think that once you start building those bridges, the adults trust the youth a little more and, you know, there's just more interaction between the two age groups.

Beatrice Spradley: Well, I'm hoping Friday we'll be coming together. We also have a lot of veterans in our complex and I have ideas about having them work with the children because that's my background. But, we're small and trying to get started up all over again. I think you mentioned that sometimes you just have to scrap what you're doing and start over. In the morning, the adults come to the center, and in the afternoons, the young people, I would like to bridge that gap. I think our young people don't know how much of a cost our veterans paid to keep us free.

Michele Higgs: I'm going to stop you right there, Beatrice, and also ask if you'd had any kind of event to link these people together, either a grand opening or a cook-out?

Beatrice Spradley: Yes, we just had our open house last week and conducted our survey. The most popular things are movie night, or like you said, a cook-out or potluck dinner.

Deborah Backus: Another thing you may want to look at, like in the city of Boston we have the huge arena where they hold the circus and other events. So for that arena, you could contact their

office for free tickets. We try to make that day a family day. For instance, the Big Apple Circus is in town in Boston. So instead of us taking only 40 children, we turn it into Family Day where the parents have to accompany the children.

Beatrice Spradley: OK. All right.

Deborah Backus: We go to the amusement park once a year as another Family Day event.

Michele Higgs: May I just make one more quick suggestion and then we're going to have to move on to our next question.

Beatrice Spradley: Yes.

Michele Higgs: The technical assistance staff has templates available to help you contact the circus, and other organizations, to ask them for the kinds of materials that you'd like to have for your center. Those are the resources that are available to you as a Neighborhood Networks Center.

Beatrice Spradley: OK. Thank you.

Michele Higgs: OK. Thank you so much. We've only got a few minutes left, so Beau, I'd like to know if we have anyone else on the line.

Operator: We have a couple of more questions, Ms. Higgs.

Michele Higgs: OK. Maybe we can do a couple.

Operator: OK. We'll take our next question from Tara Edwards.

Tara Edwards: Hi. I want to implement a character-building program for the youth. I heard you say don't make it a school-type atmosphere but that's how I had it designed. But I'm in the process of redesigning it because I realized that wasn't going to work. Do you have any ideas for that?

Deborah Backus: I probably would need you to speak with Emilio Flores, our program manager, because he set up the entrepreneurship so that it doesn't have a classroom atmosphere. I think that's what you're probably looking for.

Michele Higgs: Yes, and you may want to consider partnering with a university to get someone with training in social work or education who would know how to approach young people. I can see to it that Deborah gets your information so that she can put you in touch with the program manager on her staff.

Tara Edwards: Oh great. Thank you.

Michele Higgs: OK. Thank you much. Beau, you said we had another question.

Operator: We still have two more questions in queue, Ms. Higgs. We'll go next now to Francis Henry.

Francis Henry: I am interested in your digital storytelling and how to get this program started with music. Is there software out there that I could get to help get it started? Do I go to the local college? Where do I need to start?

Jillian Spindle: Well, you know, we have a lot of programs built around different sorts of storytelling and we don't necessarily call it digital storytelling. There's civic journalism, there's video production. I don't think you really need any special software if your computers have the basic Microsoft Office suite and the Internet. You can really start creating things with digital cameras. A lot of digital

cameras nowadays enable you to take short videos. Our children used camera phones to do their last civic journalism project.

The technology has gotten so inexpensive that there are a lot of options for creating stories. You can use visual media and post pictures on the Internet, or developing your own Web site or a PowerPoint presentation.

Michele Higgs: Digital storytelling is also a strong program with Neighborhood Networks. We held an in-depth digital storytelling workshop a couple of years ago. So you might want to check the Web site, www.neighborhoodnetworks.org, for more information. Let me get your name again, please.

Francis Henry: Francis Henry.

Michele Higgs: OK.

Deborah Backus: You may be able to get someone from the local colleges. Here we have Berkley College of Music and Emerson College whose students focus on music and film production and have been able to help us.

Francis Henry: Great.

Michele Higgs: All right, thank you much. Beau, we can take one more question.

Operator: We have one more question and that will be a follow-up question from Hillary.

Michele Higgs: OK, Hillary.

Hillary Nicholson: I think most of my questions have been answered. I have two questions remaining. Is there any way we can get this information offline about all of the programs that both of the speakers presented?

Michele Higgs: It will all be in the transcript in about two weeks. Everything you heard today will be in the transcript.

Hillary Nicholson: That's fine. If I can get the transcript, that's great.

Michele Higgs: Right. It will be on the Web site, I'd try in about two weeks. Just look for the April conference call.

Hillary Nicholson: I was listening to the question Ms. Henry asked about the programs and using the computers that have basic programs. Is there anyone that can explain to us how to set up programs besides PowerPoint? In other words, do we have options for using the programs we already have on our computers to develop our youth programs? For instance, I'm into the music program and I think that's pretty good for the youth.

Deborah Backus: Yes. Michele, if I could talk to her offline.

Michele Higgs: I'll see to it that you get her contact information.

Deborah Backus: Yes.

Hillary Nicholson: OK.

Michele Higgs: OK, excellent. Thank you much. OK, Beau and everyone, I think we're going to have to draw to a close. This has been a very, very energetic and good call. We've gotten a lot of good

information out there. Thank you so much. Thanks to our speakers Jillian Spindle and Deborah Backus, thank you so much. And thank you to all of our callers today.

I want to remind you of the resources available to you through the Neighborhood Networks Initiative. Because of our time limitations, we don't always get to hear all of your questions. If you have a question and didn't get to air it during the call, you can go to the Neighborhood Networks Web site and post it on the Neighborhood Networks online message board. There, staff or your peers will see that your question gets answered.

Of course, you can always call the toll-free Neighborhood Networks information line with your questions at 888-312-2743 or, you will find abundant resources and current information on the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.neighborhoodnetworks.org. The Neighborhood Networks Regional Technical Assistance Workshop, the RTAW, is coming to Nashville, Tennessee from April 23 through 25. I understand that online registration is open until April 18 and, of course, you can register onsite. A few slots remain in the pre-conference grantwriting sessions.

The next RTAW is July 9 through 11 in San Francisco, California and there will be a two-day grantwriting session preceding that workshop as well. For more information you can review the online brochure available on the Web site, www.neighborhoodnetworks.org

Our May 13 conference call is entitled "Event Planning: How Events Spread the News About Your Center." Learn how events can benefit your center and how you can plan interesting, appealing activities. Job fairs, health fairs, grand openings, potlucks, you name it, our presenters have done it and they'll tell you how. So please save the date for this call.

Thanks to all of you for joining us today, thank you again, Deborah and Jillian. Take good care everyone and we'll talk again next time.

Deborah Backus: Michele, I'd like to leave the phone number here at the Castle Square Tenants Organization in case anyone wants to call directly.

Michele Higgs: Of course you may.

Deborah Backus: 617-357-8548.

END

Additional Resources

[AMC: Education — FAQs offer details on Teen Wilderness Adventures](#)

Americorps.org — Gives opportunity for adults of all ages to address critical needs in the community through network of local and national partnerships.

GEMSET— <https://www.dol.gov/wb/> — Online mentoring program through the US Department of Labor.

Hiusa.org – Hostelling International USA

Idealist.org — Clearinghouse for nonprofit and volunteer resources.

Project55.org — Princeton students and alumni provide civic leadership that impact the public interest.

Publicallies.org — Identifies talented young adults for diverse backgrounds and provides full-time apprenticeships.

Volunteermatch.org — Helps those who want to serve find a good place to volunteer.