

## **Neighborhood Networks**

**Moderator: Michele Higgs**  
**August 14, 2007**  
**3:00 p.m. EDT**

Operator: Good day everyone, and thank you for joining the Neighborhood Networks monthly call. This call is being recorded. At this time, I would like to turn the conference over to Ms. Michele Higgs. Michele, please go ahead.

Michele Higgs: Thanks, Katie. Greetings everyone and welcome to the Neighborhood Networks August conference call. The topic for today's call is "Connecting Residents to the Labor Market, Effective Strategies to Develop a Workforce Development Program". My name is Michele Higgs, as you've heard, and I'm joined today by Brian Franke, who coordinated the content for this call. Together, we represent the team of technical assistant coordinators who work with you to address the needs of the various Neighborhood Networks centers around the country.

I want to thank all of you for joining us today. But before we get started, may I first say what a tremendous treat it was to see and meet many of you at the Neighborhood Networks National Training Conference last week in Washington, D.C. Some of you even sought me out personally to acknowledge that you listen to our calls or pick them up on the Web site. You don't know how gratifying it is for us to have our work distinguished in this way. Thank you for seeking us out, and thank you, also, for your thoughtful suggestions for conference call topics. We'll throw them in the hat for next year.

Now for today's topic. A workforce development program is essential for Neighborhood Networks centers because it can be useful for a majority of residents, and is a key to improving their job skills and, ultimately, their progress towards self-sufficiency. While it is important for residents to have access to job postings and resources for approaching these positions, it is equally important to keep residents in the positions that have resulted from the success of their efforts. During today's call, we hope you will learn how to bring residents to your center for workforce development activity and how to keep them interested and engaged. We will also identify strategies for working with stakeholders in your community, toward the goal of establishing workforce development opportunities for your residents.

One of the more challenging issues that Neighborhood Networks centers face as they attempt to help residents improve their circumstances is arming them with the skills to address their employment needs. This means helping residents to help themselves. Many residents are hampered by the lack of basic skills, like reading comprehension or math. Others need the specialized skills to keep up with today's technology. These are key barriers to employment and advancement. I'd like for our speakers to address these topics. Brian, would you introduce our speakers for today?

Brian Franke: Sure. Thank you very much, Michele. Today, we will have speakers from three excellent organizations, who will discuss a few strategies you should use when developing or enhancing your workforce development program. Let me tell you a little bit about each of them. Our first speakers today will be from the LaGrave Learning Center from Grand Forks, North Dakota. One of them is a gentleman who you have heard from before, Mr. Craig Knudsvig. Craig has been the client services manager at the Grand Forks Housing Authority for more than 10 years, having come to his post with 10 years experience with the Job Service in North Dakota.

Craig is joined by Christina Hutchison. Christina is the Neighborhood Networks coordinator for both the LaGrave Learning Center and the Kvasager Learning Center in Grand Forks, North

Dakota. She leads LaGrave's Tech Force program, which is designed to provide computer skills to the residents and the community members of Grand Forks to help them find new employment. Together, they will be talking about how to keep your residents engaged in a workforce development program.

We'll also hear from Tracey Allard from Public Private Ventures, where she is a Program Director. Tracey comes with experience in nonprofit program management with a special focus on community and workforce development. She will discuss strategies for partnering with employers, meeting their needs, and connecting job seekers to the jobs employers offer.

Finally, we will welcome Anne Meyerson and Antoinette Bryant from YMCA Training Inc., in Boston, Massachusetts. With nearly 20 years of experience, Anne, the director of YMCA Training Inc., has provided employment assistance, to persons facing a variety of barriers to full employment including older workers, low income workers, immigrants, the homeless, and persons with mental disabilities. Antoinette is the retention support specialist at YMCA Training Inc. She will help us understand how to keep participants of your workforce development in the jobs they obtain once they have completed your program, otherwise known as job retention.

Thank you to all of the speakers for being here today and for being able to share your expertise with us.

Michele Higgs: Thanks, Brian. I've got a little bit of housekeeping before we get started, so bear with me.

We have seven new centers to welcome to the neighborhood today. They are: Country Village Computer Learning Center in Connecticut; Full Gospel Foundation Building Ministries Computer Center in Connecticut; Baptist Manor in Pennsylvania; Ridgemont Terrace Neighborhood Networks Center in Tennessee; Walnut Manor Apartments/Vineland Gardens in New Jersey; McBurney Apartments, Neighborhood Networks Center in Iowa, and Fairmont Arbors Neighborhood Networks Center in West Virginia. Welcome to everybody.

I want to remind you about the Strategic Tracking and Reporting Tool, also known as the START business plan. START will help you assess the resources and capacity of your center. START is easy to access and easy to update online; just gather your START workbook and your information. Follow the instructions and fill in the blanks. Go to the Neighborhood Networks Web site, which is [www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org](http://www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org), and click on the link for the START business plan on the left side of the home page. START will help you assess the needs of the residents, and determine what resources in the community can help you meet their needs.

If you have questions about the START business plan, resident surveys, or general questions about Neighborhood Networks, please call the toll-free Neighborhood Networks information line at 888-312-2743. You can also visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site, which is [www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org](http://www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org).

Also, let me tell you about online networking through the Neighborhood Networks message board. There, you can share information among yourselves, post news, ask questions. Although, this is a not a “real-time” resource, you can post your information and then revisit the board in a day or so to see what kinds of responses you have received. Go again to the Web site, [www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org](http://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 or select “enter online discussion.” I encourage you to give it a try. The message board is just one more way to connect with your peers and learn more ways to help your centers.

Finally, let me remind listeners that a transcript of this call will be made available on the Neighborhood Networks Web site in about two weeks.

Now, our callers are very interested in helping their residents with their workforce development needs, so Craig, would you start us off, please?

Craig Knudsvig: OK. I'm going to have Christina go ahead and describe a little about our program and some basic details, so go ahead.

Michele Higgs: OK. Perfect.

Christina Hutchison: OK. As, Brian said, we have a Tech Force program and we also have a Tech Force Flash program which is our shorter version of the same program. Participants can cover an entire Microsoft Office package, if they would like during the program or they can just pick and choose specific programs. They also get a soft skills training.

How do we get our participants? Well, we get them from referrals from the job service, work rehabilitation and also workmen's comp. Sometimes, we just get individuals off the street that have heard about our program, who come in and say, "I'd like to take your Tech Force program"

The first thing we do is give the participants an assessment to find out what kind of barriers they might have, what kind of skills they already have, and what kind of skills they are trying to attain. The participants come and stay because we have a community atmosphere, and even though its self-directed learning, we have staff, volunteers and other participants who like to assist with the growth of the participant. So the participant is not only getting technical skills, but they are also getting soft skills to add to their arsenal for their new job.

Craig Knudsvig: OK. as Christina and I were going over some notes before this, one of the things that didn't come out, that I just happened to note as she was speaking, is there's a real sense of teamwork among the people that come into that program. So that's one of the words that we should mention here and all the way through.

Brian asked us to address the issue of how to keep people engaged. How do you keep them coming back or continuing? How do you help them complete the program? We brainstormed a number of things that we've observed and that people have pointed out, and they fit under all three of those points, but I'm just going to go down the list that we came up with.

I think the first thing that happens is that we help them create some goals, a goal statement, some targets and objectives. They can focus on that and they know that we're focused on that. So as we're working with people, and reaching various points in their learning process; that focus on their goals is always there. Because if they start to see it as being *our* goal, instead of *their* goal, on the days when it's drudgery, when it's hard work, when the learning doesn't come so easy it's important that they see it as a goal that *they* set, not a goal that was sort of forced on them or given to them.

We have a formal recognition program when somebody graduates. We give them a certificate. But also, we try very hard to recognize how they are doing during the process; and when they do well, we try to make sure that they know about that.

When they are not doing so well, we try to make sure that they know about that too, but recognizing that they need to work harder is done not from the point of view of failure, but from the point of view of, "you set this goal, you want to reach this goal, in order to reach it, here's what has to happen, so how can we help you," get over this hurdle or get around that struggle.

That also means recognizing what's going on in their life. The assessment that we do has to be an ongoing assessment. As barriers come up, whether it be childcare or transportation or health issues, or whatever they are doing while in our program, we need to be positioned to recognize those things when they come up and to help resolve them; because our program is part of a larger program of self-sufficiency that is connected in the community. When somebody has a

barrier like that, if we know about it, we're generally able to help them resolve it, and so we make it a point to do that.

I asked Christina, why do people stay in our program? After some thought and some furrowed brows, she said, "well I think we have a good program." I think that's maybe the thing that we sometimes overlook is that the results will be there if you have a good program. We feel good about, it's taken us several years to develop this, but we feel good about where we are, and we think participants recognize that.

We have a good atmosphere in the center. It's very positive, very upbeat. The people that are in Tech Force are self-directed, and that means they provide their own motivation. Now there can be days that are a little tough and that motivation can come from recognizing that you are responsible for doing this. You set the goals and you are responsible for reaching them but there's a nurturing feel that the staff has and that the participants provide to each other. We tried to figure out how we would describe that, and what we came up with is that it's a group of people working alone on individual goals with a common effort. So on the days when I am not doing so well, somebody else might be having an up day and I can benefit from their positive results and their good feeling. To me, why they keep coming back, and "coming back" means when there are days when it's harder to do than others, I think that atmosphere, and that camaraderie that goes on in there, I think, is a real big part of that.

I think another piece of the motivation to keep doing well, is we have people that finish the program that we stay connected with. We encourage all of them and some do and some don't. They go out and get a job, or perhaps they move, or whatever, but a number do stay connected with us, and that is a powerful motivator for the others in the program who are still trying to fight their way through a learning process. We think that having those graduates, if you will, or those alumni stay connected, or at least for the people that are in the program, knowing that we

maintain that contact has got to be a big lift for them and we see that happening, because we stay engaged with those people, even after they leave and I think they can feel that.

We provide a program of soft skills, as Christina mentioned. When you talk to employers about what candidates need most, they will tell you that by the time they get done hiring somebody with computer skills, they've all probably got the computer skills, but you still need to have that ability to do the people things, the soft skill things. We believe that helps our clients stay engaged, too, because they know that when they get done, they won't simply be somebody that's never had a job interview, and now knows computer skills. But they will be somebody that has also learned how to look an employer in the eye and answer questions, and how to dress, and how to be on time and those kinds of things. We think that helps their confidence level, and by doing that, we think it helps them get over the final hurdles towards completing their computer education as well as the other things.

Once again, focusing on their goals, staying connected with them, all the way through the process; allowing them to work together with others in the program, even though they are all in different spots, I think, is the thing that's worked the best for us. Yes, we have good equipment, we have good software. Christina and her folks are excellent teachers. I think the sooner centers can transfer responsibility for the learning to their students, and the sooner that they can show those students that it really is a team effort, the success numbers will not only show that, but I think they will increase.

So I think that's about the time we had allotted here. Again, keeping connected is probably the most important thing that I would mention, and that's a daily, hour-by-hour, minute-by-minute thing to let participants know that you are there and helping them reach their goals.

Michele Higgs: Thanks, Craig. As I was listening to you I was recalling a success story about your center, and the key to it was that there was a young lady who had gone through your program.

She had some difficulties at the outset. She persevered and she got a job with your center, I believe, a part-time, then a full-time job and she just did the whole graduate piece, and she got all the way through, was very successful, and still remained in contact with your center.

Craig Knudsvig: Yes, and we use her as an example, a lot. We have another thing that Christina mentioned, and maybe I'll ask her to just repeat that about something that happened just recently, that kind of exemplifies again, how people can pull each other along, so maybe I'll let Christina do that as a finish here.

Michele Higgs: OK.

Christina Hutchison: Just this week, All True is going to have a job fair. We just had part of our cohort graduate and one of them got onto the All True staff, which is a hospital. All of the participants are sitting in the building, and they are saying, "Wow did you see that All True is having a job fair, and Renee works there now? Renee is part of our cohort and she's got all of this technology now, and she knows what to do and she's got the soft skills training." They're all really excited and saying, "well I'm going to go to All True, and I'm going to go to the job fair, and I think I can get this job too."

So just knowing Renee and how she was able to succeed, makes everyone in the building think, "you know, I can do this too. I have the skills now, the soft skills, and the technology skills, and now I am ready to go and I can do this." So it was really exiting, it's been an exciting week in the center, and it's only Tuesday! So you can imagine how much more we're going to get for the rest of the week.

Michele Higgs: It can only get better.

Christina Hutchison: Yes, exactly.

Michele Higgs: That's fantastic and I think what you're talking about is teamwork in the broadest sense of the word. You know, everybody is part of the team, from the folks that participate, to the staff, to volunteers, everybody.

Craig Knudsvig: Including participants. They help each other. When they've been around longer, and they know their way around the building a little, we have them answer the phone, and greet people, and so on, whatever. They just help each other a lot. Again, it's easy to sign up for a computer class in addition to this training program, but after two or three weeks of working very hard, there can be days when it isn't quite so exciting to come in and to have that atmosphere where other people are being engaged and helping and seeing their success. This is the reason that we're able to encourage continuity.

Michele Higgs: Thank you much. I'm going to ask Tracey...

Tracey Allard: Hello, yes.

Michele Higgs: To give us your presentation.

Tracey Allard: Thank you very much, and good afternoon everyone. Just a little bit of background on Public/ Private Ventures or PPV. Our mission is to improve the effectiveness of social policies, programs and community initiatives in the area of workforce development. We conduct research and create research-based reports and tools that help practitioners in the field, to strengthen the field.

On the topic of working with employers, specifically, we've done considerable work. Today I am going to share with you a few key tactics for engaging employers as you develop or enhance your workforce development program. You all may know that in recent years, there has been a big push to respond to the business or what's called the "demand side" of workforce development, in addition to serving the job seeker or "supplier side." This move is linked, in part, to the growing

emphasis on global competitiveness, and the need for a viable workforce that can meet businesses' demand for skilled workers. What this means is every workforce program must build its own skill and capacity to meet the needs of its business customers. I think that's putting in the same energy that you put into supporting the job seekers, as Craig and Christina shared.

To do so effectively, you must be able to get inside the employers' world, really, in a variety of ways, to understand where the needs and the opportunities are. So there's a lot of work that we have done on this topic, and I will send to Brian some links and resources. What I'm going to do now is offer six specific strategies that come out of our research on this topic.

The first three are concepts that re-orient thinking towards the employer, and the last three will be strategies for developing employer relationships. So the first concept in re-orienting thinking towards the employer is one, and this may seem simple, but remember that you have two customers. So many organizations have long seen residents or job seekers as the primary customer, but the employer is not just a means to meet job seekers needs. Both customers require the organization's attention. By focusing more on employer needs, you will be able to actually assist your residents better, because with happy employers, you will have more sustained opportunities for your pool of job seeker residents.

Two, immerse yourself in the employer's world. Getting to know the employer's world should be a starting point for organizations. By researching the local labor market, finding out where jobs are opening up, identifying difficulties that employers have in finding qualified workers and in keeping those workers after they have made a hire, you can really position yourself to better serve employer needs.

Three is to make the business' case, and I'll offer some specific strategies on that. Use a service, and not a mission-based pitch. A lot of times, as human service organizations, talking about mission is second nature. What the employers want to know is: "what can you do for me?" This

doesn't mean that they are not interested in your organization's mission, but you do need to emphasize the high quality human resource services that employers can expect from your organization. So, just as an example, a mission-based pitch might be, "we are a nonprofit that has been dedicated to serving homeless men since 1989. We serve more than 300 homeless participants a year. I am calling to help find them jobs." A service-based pitch might go something like "we are an employer service organization that helps companies find high quality entry level workers at no fee." Both of these descriptions might be accurate to your organization, but to an employer, the second one is more in line with its business needs.

You also want to use business language. Every business has its own jargon. Organizations must be able to identify and use language that will make sense in the employer's industry. When you talk to businesses, you have to talk services, not candidates. When the basis for the relationship is your resident, or your job seeker, both your organization and the employer can feel that the relationship is in peril if a candidate fails. By emphasizing the services that you can offer to the employer, rather than the participants you can deliver, you are focusing on something that you can actually control and that can be of high value, i.e., your services. Instead of something that might be a little bit more difficult to control and may have limitations, specifically, job seekers.

Finally, you want to establish realistic expectations. It's going to seem overwhelming at times to sell your job seekers, many of whom may have spotty work histories and limited skills, to seemingly all-powerful employers. Identifying and valuing your services will help organizations see that your relationship with an employer is based on two equals who are working together to meet a mutual set of needs.

So just to summarize those three concepts for re-orienting thinking, you have two customers, immerse yourself in the employer's world, make the business case, by using a service-based pitch using business language, talking services, and establishing realistic expectations.

The next three strategies are those that we have found work well in developing relationships with particular employers. The first is to get employers talking. As any good salesperson will tell you, getting the customer to talk about their needs even *before* you start talking about the product that you are selling, is the first important step in making a sale. So when you open up this kind of dialogue with an employer, it's really a process of asking the right questions, listening to what the employer says, and then making the right connection. So you want to ask open-ended questions and encourage the employer to talk.

Once you get them talking, keep them talking. Once you have the employer on board, the key to retaining a strong relationship is maintaining two satisfied customers: your resident job seeker and the employer. As we all know, sometimes some matches won't work. A job seeker might fail to show up at an interview, or might be late on the job in the second week, and this happens to every organization. You have to develop an ability to move past such experiences and onto a more productive, ongoing conversation and relationship with employers.

Finally, you want to involve employers in your organization in other ways. You want to make them part of the woodwork. So this can be an effective way of deepening your relationship with employers, and keeping those relationships with employers. You might ask them to mentor some of your job seeker residents, to conduct mock interviews, participate on an advisory board, and serve as a guest speaker. Those are just a few of the ways that you can further engage businesses in your organization, and hopefully develop business members as champions of your program, so that they can speak to other businesses about the value that you provide.

Just to recap, in developing a relationship with a participate employer, you want to get them talking, keep them talking, and involve them in your organization in other ways. So those are just a few promising practices for developing employer relationships. As I mentioned, there is much more information on this topic, and I will send Brian some PPV resources, that he can then pass on to you.

Michele Higgs: Excellent. Thank you, Tracey. I'm certain those resources are going to be very helpful. I think we're going to move on now to talk with Anne and Antoinette at YMCA Training Inc.; are you ready?

Anne Meyerson: Yes, we are. Thanks very much. This is Anne. I'm going to give a brief overview about what we are and what we do and then Antoinette will focus more specifically on helping maintain job retention.

So, very quickly, Training Inc. began in Chicago about 32 years ago and has been in Boston for 23 years. There are also Training Inc. programs in Indianapolis, Newark, and Philadelphia. In Boston, we have graduated more than 3,500 persons who are employed with more than 200 employers. Every year, we train about 100 to 120 people and we run 20-week training cycles. Each cycle will have 20 to 40 people in it depending on how the funding is going. They will stay together and work for 20 weeks. The cycles are full time, Monday through Friday, from 9–4.

The primary program is computerized office skills. Just for the record, we also happen to be running a bus and truck driving CDL class B program, but we're not even going to try to explain that one. We happen to think we're extremely successful. We have more than an 85 percent placement rate, and a 95 percent job retention rate, which is, really I think, quite extraordinary. Very quickly some of the primary practices that make Training Inc. so successful are first and foremost that we simulate a business professional environment. We recreate the workplace, right here, in the training center. That means everything from our location in a downtown office building, to the expectations of the trainees, which Antoinette will talk about. We set high expectations and high standards for ourselves and for our trainees. There is intense close staff training involvement and support. We collaborate in partnerships with employers and professionals, very much the way our colleague at PPV was describing. So that's an overview of who we are. Antoinette is going to talk a little more about how she provides retention support.

Antoinette Bryant: Thank you, Anne. Good afternoon. In maintaining job retention, during the 20 weeks of training we build rapport and trust with our graduates from the start. We find that in building these relationships with them, once they leave and enter into the workforce, they are more apt to maintain communication with us.

During the 20 weeks, we stress that this is not just a training program; it's their way of going to work. We ask that they follow a dress code. We have a strict attendance policy and punctuality is very important. Early on, we also make trainees accountable for their actions and behavior within the workplace, and we make clear expectations of what they will have to do once they enter the workforce.

In our job prep class, we also address different workplace scenarios that may arise, and how to cope with different scenarios.

We also include workshops during training to address my role as a retention specialist. They are able to have a one-on-one with me and ask any questions or any concerns that they may have about returning or entering the workforce for the first time. We also identify obstacles that may prevent success such as: childcare, healthcare issues, housing, and transportation.

We make sure that the graduates understand how their benefits work. What I mean by this is a lot of our graduates are either on unemployment or on welfare, so we let them know that once they return to work how their benefits will be affected.

We also give them information about possible incentives, or bonuses, that are available for maintaining employment. We provide some incentives for our graduates at 30, 60 and 90 days.

The second step for maintaining job retention is communication. During their first week of employment, we visit them – or I should say I visit them – at their job site just to see how things are going, answer any questions or concerns they may have. After that, I contact them once a month for the first three months, and quarterly, thereafter. And those contacts can be by phone call, or e-mail. It may be a job site visit, if there's an issue, or I may send a letter. It just depends on my relationship with that graduate.

I also create and distribute a monthly alumni newsletter where our graduates and staff can submit articles, whether they are success stories, a promotion, job opportunities at their place of employment, et cetera.

We also do evening career and life planning workshops. Some of the workshops that we've done, and/or are planning to do are: tax preparations, applying for financial aid if they have been on their job and are now eligible for tuition reimbursement, budgeting, and credit repair. We also provide childcare and food at these workshops, as well as offer them at accessible locations because usually the graduates are coming after normal work hours.

One of the other components that prepare them for working is our internship. During the 20 weeks, they have 12 weeks of training here, and then we send them off to employers for eight weeks of internships. Every Monday, they are required to come back into Training Inc., and we discuss their progress. We have them fill out an attendance report. We identify, again, any issues or concerns that they may have. I think that it's. That our presentation.

Michele Higgs: Thank you, Antoinette. There was a lot of good information there, and I'm sure we have some questions. Brian, did you want to throw anything in?

Brian Franke: Not right now.

Michele Higgs: OK. Katie, are you there? We need to open up the line and see if there are any questions.

Operator: Thank you. If you'd like to ask a question, you may do so by pressing the star key followed by the digit one on your touch-tone telephone. If you are using a speakerphone, please make sure your mute function is turned off to allow your signal to reach our equipment. Again, star one if you'd like to ask a question. We'll pause for just a moment to allow everyone an opportunity to signal.

Craig Knudsvig: Michele?

Michele Higgs: Yes, Craig.

Craig Knudsvig: While that's going on, I just have a question for the last speaker and that's just, do trainees, once they are out on the job, have the ability to contact you at the training site with questions about something that they learned or thought they learned and maybe need some help with. Do you make that available to them?

Antoinette Bryant: Actually, yes, and we encourage it. One of the things that we do before they go out on internships and after they receive employment is have every staff member give them a business card. So, for instance, we'll have graduates that will call when they are working and there's something in Excel they are having a hard time doing. They'll say, "I really need to do this spreadsheet, is there anyway you can help me?" We make sure that information is available to them.

Craig Knudsvig: That's kind of what I had in mind. We've done that, too. And that has been really helpful in some cases, where people can go to work and if they are not perfect when they start,

which they probably aren't, we've provided that as a service to the employer, but also to the worker. It eases some anxiety, I think.

Antoinette Bryant: Absolutely.

Michele Higgs: That sounds like a winner. Let's see if we have any other questions. Thank you, Craig.

Operator: Thank you. As a reminder, it is star one if you'd like to ask a question. And we'll go to Elbert Louis.

Michele Higgs: Thank you. Hello?

Operator: Elbert, your line is open.

Elbert Louis: Hello, can you hear me?

Michele Higgs: There we go.

Elbert Louis: Hi, good afternoon. This is Elbert Louis with Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority. To the last speaker, my question has to do with how many persons at a given time are you case managing – this is to the retention specialist-- that you are going on site visits, or having this kind of close contact with the employer and the employee?

Antoinette Bryant: Well that's an excellent question. As Anne said earlier, we have anywhere from 20 to 40 students or trainees per cycle. We typically run about three cycles per year. So you figure for each cycle that graduates, I am responsible for tracking, visiting, and corresponding with those graduates.

Elbert Louis: Site visits as well?

Antoinette Bryant: Well the site visit is really something that I only do within the first week.

Elbert Louis: First week, OK.

Antoinette Bryant: Unless there's an issue that comes up or, you know, there's a concern, or if I am meeting a trainee for lunch, and it's easier for me to meet them at their job because they have a half an hour or an hour. So the numbers vary. Obviously, if a trainee has graduated two years ago, I don't typically have that much contact with them unless they call me, or unless I am doing just a periodic call of every graduate to see how they are doing in a followup.

Elbert Louis: OK. Thank you very much.

Antoinette Bryant: You are welcome.

Michele Higgs: Thank you much. Katie, is there anyone else?

Operator: Thank you. As a reminder, it is star one if you would like to ask a question. And it appears we have no further questions at this time. I'd like to turn the conference back over to our speakers.

Michele Higgs: OK. One of the questions that I had and this one I would ask Antoinette: we talked about addressing the obstacles to employment like childcare and things of that nature. How are those things addressed? Do you have childcare for some of your participants, or find childcare for them?

Antoinette Bryant: Well, actually, during our intake process, that's one of the things we try to identify is who is at childcare. What is your back-up plan in case your daycare is closed or in case a child

is sick and cannot go to the daycare, what is your plan B? We establish that early on. We maintain it through training. After they graduate, again, before they start employment, again, how's your childcare, what's your back-up situation? If somebody calls and they are having a bad situation with their daycare provider, or they are trying to change centers, then yes, I do have a resource list that I can use to point that person in the direction or refer them to Childcare Choices, if they need a voucher.

Michele Higgs: OK. Thank you much.

Antoinette Bryant: You're welcome.

Michele Higgs: Let's see if there's anyone on the line now, Katie?

Operator: We'll take a question from Joyce Mortimer.

Joyce Mortimer: Hi. I'd like to know whether you have an image development component, Dress for Success, and live interviews so that participants can see how they represent to others.

Anne Meyerson: Was that to Training Inc.?

Joyce Mortimer: That's to everyone.

Anne Meyerson: Well, we can start. Yes, we do a great deal around presentation, and dress is a big part of that. We're fortunate to have a huge amount of work-ready office clothes donated to us that all of the trainees can take at any time and then another section of interview quality clothes.

Again, everything that's going to be required on the work side happens throughout training. People have to be wearing office clothes throughout the time that they are here.

We do have Dress for Success that we refer people too, as well. Antoinette...

Antoinette Bryant: Also, you mentioned interviewing. We also do have mentors that come in from the business sector every Monday and work with our trainees on interviewing techniques, questions about gaps in their resumes; they also help them with their cover letters and so forth.

Michele Higgs: Terrific. That was Training Inc. Craig, do you have anything similar at your program?

Craig Knudsvig: Well, we have a relationship with Dressed for Success, which has not only been good for us, but we've -- as Brian kind of knows -- we've talked a little about expanding that and we'll see where that might go. We recently had a job fair that featured, among other things, some interviewing demonstrations about the right way and the wrong way to do it.

We have a program that we call Employment Empowerment Series, which is a series of classes taught by our self-sufficiency staff that goes through a lot of the things that are intended to help people focus on why they might get hired, why they might not. Again, the idea, from our point of view, is to raise that level of confidence and willingness to go out and tackle the job market.

Yes, it's important that we meet employers' needs and that we serve the employer. From our point of view, the only way to do that is to have well-versed, well-dressed, and well-trained folks to represent us. That Employment Empowerment Series has been a real key to making that work.

Joyce Mortimer: I have one last question.

Michele Higgs: Go right ahead Joyce.

Joyce Mortimer: Yes, that question relates to age groups, what do the age groups tend to look like? How many older re-entry or adults close to retirement do you have, what are the age breakdowns?

Michele Higgs: Can anyone respond to that one, just serving the older workforce?

Anne Meyerson: At Training Inc., we can range from 20 to, there's no top limit. Primarily, most of our trainees are in their 20s and 30s, some 40s and 50s. It's very rare to see anybody beyond the 50s. That's basically because of who funds the Workforce Investment Act to get a voucher to go into training. So we really believe in a real mix of all of the ages here. I would say an average in the 30s would be about the best.

Michele Higgs: Great, thank you. Craig, do you want to respond that one?

Craig Knudsvig: I think Christina has got a little better handle on our population.

Michele Higgs: OK.

Christina Hutchison: For the Tech Force program we have a lot of people that are in their 40s, who either have lost a job or have had physical barriers and cannot do a job any longer. We get more of the older population, the 40s, 50s. We've noted that a lot of agencies are asking for people who are little bit more mature. They understand how to work. So a lot of them are just getting snapped up by the agencies that we work with.

Michele Higgs: I see. Tracey, I'm going to throw that to you. Do you have any specific focus on the older worker or someone with other barriers?

Tracey Allard: Well we don't actually – hello?

Michele Higgs: Yes, are you there?

Tracey Allard: Sorry. We don't actually operate programs ourselves, but certainly, I think, what has already been discussed are some of the practices that we have observed in some of the organizations in the field.

Michele Higgs: I got you.

Craig Knudsvig: Michele, this is just purely anecdotal, there's no scientific value to this.

Michele Higgs: OK.

Craig Knudsvig: One of the things that we see, we do have younger people in the center learning, as well as older people. We have one lady who has worked for us under a program that's part of the Title Five of the Older Americans Act, the senior employment work experience program. She just had her 80 birthday. Now, she's not out in the job seeking force as some of the younger people are. However, I talked earlier about this whole idea of mentoring and leading and sharing, and I'll tell you what, that older population can be a wonderful, wonderful connection for someone who is, let's say, a young single parent, or somebody that hasn't really worked. Boy they can really, really be a help and a mentor and sort of a target and ideal, if you will, for that younger person.

Michele Higgs: Yes. I see, just as a sounding board and a mentor for all of the time they've lived, and all of the experiences they've had.

Craig Knudsvig: Yes.

Michele Higgs: Yes, they can be definitely a good, rich mentor. I'm going to ask Katie, if we have anybody else on the line.

Operator: We do. We'll go next to Cynthia Harris.

Cynthia Harris: Hello.

Michele Higgs: Hi, Cynthia.

Cynthia Harris: When Christina mentioned assessment of skills, I was wondering what kind of assessment tools they were using.

Christina Hutchison: We have a form that we've created ourselves. We ask them certain questions such as, on a scale from strong to weak, do you see yourself as being able to play solitaire, as far as the technology goes, can you play solitaire? Do you know what a mouse is? Do you know what a hard drive is? Questions like that.

Then when we ask their barriers, we'll ask, do you have day care? Do you have a working vehicle? Do you have access to public transportation? So we've kind of created our own little model of how to assess people.

Cynthia Harris: OK. Would you be able to share that form with me?

Christina Hutchison: Yes, I don't know how they do that, but maybe...

Michele Higgs: We can arrange to do that for you Christina, not a problem. We'll touch base and get that for you.

Christina Hutchison: Thank you.

Cynthia Harris: Thank you.

Michele Higgs: OK. Thank you.

Craig Knudsvig: Another piece of that is a lot of people are already working with (Grab) Job Service or somebody and there may be testing that's going on. Generally, we make sure that we have access to that when they come into our program.

Michele Higgs: Great. Thank you. Katie, can we check again?

Operator: Absolutely. And as a reminder, it is star one if you'd like to ask a question. And we'll go back to Elbert Louis.

Elbert Louis: OK, thank you. Thank you, again. This question goes to Christina. You mentioned earlier about skills that the participant may have and others that they may want to obtain. You help them to create goals and goal statements. Do you track them along those goals? What type of timelines do you help them put on those particular goals and goal statements, and the other types of skills they want to obtain?

Christina Hutchison: The answer is yes, we do track their goals. We start off with a goal and a timeline. Sometimes there's a barrier that will stop the goal from happening at a specific time, but then we reevaluate the goal and then we continue on with it.

Elbert Louis: OK. I know there are short-term or long-term goals. So two weeks, a month, two months, or it just varies based upon the barrier that they may face? If they don't face a particular barrier, are there some successes within a specified timeline that you are familiar with?

Christina Hutchison: Yes, we have people that can, from start to finish, be out of our program in two months.

Elbert Louis: Two months, OK. Thank you very much.

Christina Hutchison: Yes, you're welcome.

Michele Higgs: OK. That was good. I'm going to check back with Katie.

Operator: Thank you. Once again, it is star one if you'd like to ask a question. It appears we have no further questions from the phone line at this time.

Michele Higgs: Well I think Brian may have one for you.

Brian Franke: Well this is not a question but just a recommendation for centers, just a great stakeholder in your community that you should use is the One-stop Career Center. They are sometimes called different things, like in Grand Forks, it's Job Service Center, or it's called the workforce center.

The One-stop Career Center is a very valuable resource for you to get program ideas, or maybe to partner with, or even as Tracey was talking about, to gather information about employers in the community about who is hiring and so forth. What the One-stop Career Center is, it's basically what it says it is. It's a one-stop place where you can get any type of employment service. They do things like assessments, they have numbers on the types of employers that are hiring, so they can give you job postings each month. They also have their own services there, like GED classes, and interviewing and so forth. So I highly recommend that centers reach out to their local One-stop Career Center; the Web site to find your local one stop is [www.careeronestop.org](http://www.careeronestop.org). You just type in your zip code, and you should be able to find it there. They offer a whole host of

great services. This is the government's arm for workforce development. They give training vouchers for different programs. So I would certainly check that out, if you have not been to your local One-stop Career Center.

Michele Higgs: Excellent. A commercial for One-stop. I also want to add to that, that in some states, where there are concentrations of folks for which English is not their first language, One-stop also has services available to them in their native language. I happened to have worked with a One-stop Career Center in Washington State which had staff that spoke Russian. A number the residents in the nearby Neighborhood Networks center were Russian, but didn't access a lot of different services because they didn't speak English. They could go to the One-stop Career Center and have materials in their language, workshops in their language, and get access to a lot of the services that could open up opportunities for them.

Now, Katie, I'm going to ask if you have anybody else on the line.

Operator: Thank you. As a reminder, it is star one if you would like to ask a question. And it appears we have no questions in the phone line at this time.

Michele Higgs: OK. Well I think with that in mind, I've got just a few minutes before four. We've talked a lot about workforce development today and one of the questions that I was concerned about was the issue of obstacles and barriers for folks trying to find jobs. I hope we hit on your concerns today. On the points that Tracey gave to us, I hope you all were sharpening your pencils and getting those down. Be advised that there will be a transcript of the call on the Neighborhood Networks Web site, and that's [www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org](http://www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org). It will take about two weeks for the transcript to be available. Cynthia Harris, I believe, asked for a piece of information from one of our speakers, and we shall be sure that that piece of information is transferred.

With that, I am going to tell you about next month's conference call. The topic on Tuesday, September 11, at 3 p.m., is Healthcare Networks. We will bring speakers that will discuss developing relationships with healthcare agencies, and finding out information about healthcare for the residents of your properties to use at your Neighborhood Networks Centers.

I want to thank Craig and Christina and Tracey and Anne and Antoinette for taking the time to speak with us this afternoon. Your information has been very helpful. I thank you again.

I want to remind everyone that the resources that are available to you through the Neighborhood Networks Initiative include the Neighborhood Networks information line, which is toll free at 888-312-2743. On that line, you can get help with just about everything from START to finding out about information for what's happening with Neighborhood Networks.

Further, on the Neighborhood Networks Web site at [www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org](http://www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org), you will find information about publications, funding resources, and success stories. Again, I want to thank all of you who participated in our two great events this summer. Neighborhood Networks Week was a smashing success, with more than 600 activities taking place at centers all around the country, and some wonderful events in collaboration with our national partners.

Plus, this month we hosted our National Training Conference in Washington D.C. where we connected Neighborhood Networks Center staff with Neighborhood Networks HUD staff, to share networking opportunities and information. Again, it was a delight to meet and greet all of you.

Once more, thanks to Craig, Christina, Tracy, Anne, Antoinette and to all of you callers for joining us today. Take good care, and we'll talk to you next time.

Christina Hutchison: Thank you so much.

Anne Meyerson: Thanks very much. It was a pleasure to participate.

Michele Higgs: Great.

Brian Franke: Thank you, guys.

END