

NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORKS

Moderator: Michele Higgs
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3:00 pm EST

Operator: Thank you for standing by and welcome to the Neighborhood Networks conference call.

Today's conference call is being recorded.

At this time, I'd like to turn the conference over to Michele Higgs. Please go ahead Ms. Higgs.

Michele Higgs: Thanks. Welcome everyone to the February Neighborhood Networks Conference Call entitled, "Resident Participation: If You Involve Them, They will Come."

I'm Michele Higgs and I'm joined by staff member Joyce Mortimer. You would recognize us as members of the technical assistance coordinator team who help you to address the needs of your Neighborhood Networks centers.

We are joined today by two gentlemen who have worked to energize their centers and the residents of the properties they serve.

When have you looked through the doors of your center and noticed that there weren't many participants? The computer is quiet except for one intrepid soul looking up something on Google.

Neighborhood Networks centers are meant to be used. Activity should be rolling along regularly, residents merrily clicking away at the keys of computers, kids in homework clubs, teens looking for money for college, adults and seniors researching jobs, seniors checking out "old school" music or sending notes to their grandkids.

Our topic today is geared toward helping you increase resident participation at your center by getting the residents invested in the activities and the success of the enterprise.

But before we commence with our call, let me welcome our newest centers to the neighborhood with a reminder of the resources they get as Neighborhood Networks centers. There are eight new centers this month:

Castlewood Neighborhood Networks Center in Davenport, Iowa; Midlothian Village Apartments Neighborhood Networks Center in Richmond, Virginia; Pinecrest Manor Neighborhood Networks Computer Learning Center in Mount Kisco, New York; White Cliff Neighborhood Networks Center in Cincinnati, Ohio; Lindenwood Apartments Neighborhood Networks Center in Winsted, Minnesota; AHEPA 250-3 Computer Center in Groton, Connecticut; Pathways Vision Computer Center in Greenwich, Connecticut; and Pathways Future Computer Center in Greenwich, Connecticut.

Let me tell you about the resources that are available to you through Neighborhood Networks.

I'm sure you're familiar with our toll-free information line, which is 888-312-2743, where you can talk about Neighborhood Networks. Learn all about designing resident surveys, creating success stories, or hosting a special event for your center.

There's also the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.neighborhoodnetworks.org, where you'll find out what's current, learn about funding opportunities, learn about special events, and connect with your peers.

I encourage you to try online networking through the Neighborhood Networks online message board. You can share information with other centers or ask questions. Be aware that it is not a real-time resource but you can post your information and revisit the board in a day or so to see what kinds of responses you have received. You would go to the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.neighborhoodnetworks.org and click on the online networking link to the right, under the green banner, labeled "Helpful Tools."

I'm going to give you a little more information about that, this time because there is a string of messages that has been established there since the beginning of this year that you might find interesting. First, go to that banner labeled "Helpful Tools," and connect to the online networking link, then click on "Enter Online Networking Discussions." Then go to the blue triangles to expand the topic.

There's a topic there on the current economic crisis which might be of interest to you. 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. You would look for it on the Web site, under the conference call archive at the bottom of the home page.

Now last among our resources is the Strategic Tracking And Reporting Tool known as the START business plan. START is your online resource for organizing your center's activities and moving it to the achievement of specific goals. By recognizing the needs of your residents and applying the resources in your community to address those needs, your center can grow into a strong resource for your property and community.

As centers complete their START business plans, they can focus on the annual assessment, review their progress, and commence their ascent through the Center Classification process. Completing the assessment and having it approved by your HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinator elevates your center to Certified Center Classification.

However, for a center keen on serving its residents and making a mark in the community, Model Center Classification is the goal. Moving through the six steps from Certified to Model Center Classification requires commitment, organization, and dedication, but the benefits to a center are multiple.

Visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.neighborhoodnetworks.org for details on advancing through the Neighborhood Networks Center Classification process or contact the Neighborhood Networks toll-free information line at 888-312-2743. Now with that in mind, let me give a shout-out to a center that has gained Certified Center Classification this month, the Pendleton Community Networking Center in Philadelphia, Mississippi.

Congratulations to all of our new centers and to our new Certified center. You are making it happen for the Neighborhood!

Now to our call.

Never, ever should a Neighborhood Networks center sit idle. You and I know that's a bit of an exaggeration but there are ways to keep residents engaged and interested in a center so that it remains a vital contributor to their lives, the property, and the community where it resides.

To help us discuss this topic, I would like to introduce our speakers for today. We will hear from Clarence Hogan, who is coordinator of the Jane Adams Hull House Association's, LeClaire Neighborhood Networks Center in Chicago, Illinois.

Mr. Hogan has directed four inner city community based computer centers offering afterschool programs, educational enrichment programs for students, and job-readiness and computer training for adults.

We will also hear from Dr. Ron Milligan, who is the Neighborhood Networks coordinator for BMLR properties in Jacksonville, Florida, where he has responsibility for opening and implementing programs for all of the BMLR properties. He has directed programs for residence of all ages including an afterschool program; tutoring programs; general educational development; that's GED classes, youth programs; job search assistance; employability training; money management classes; and computer classes.

Both speakers worked with us on our Regional Technical Assistance Workshops (RTAWs) and I think you will find both of these gentlemen more than authorized to handle this topic.

And with that, and a question, I'll yield the floor.

Gentlemen, I'm going to throw a question out there and it's a general one. When energy is flagging around your centers, how would you recommend pumping things up? I'll just throw that out for either one of you.

Clarence Hogan: Dr. Milligan, do you want to go first?

Ronald Milligan: Okay, Clarence. Thank you. This is Dr. Milligan. You can call me Ron, if you'd like.

When I first came to this center it was actually closed. The doors were not even open because there was no activity at the facility. So the first thing I did was to find out the needs of the people. Once I identified the needs, and knowing that I could not accomplish everything at once; I decided that the children were a very good place to start. If you get the children into the center,

then you're going to bring the parents in. Once you bring the parents in while the child is being taught, the adult will actually get involved.

What you do then is start your tenant organization. Please get one because that's your key.

Clarence, you want to add on?

Clarence Hogan: Yes, I want to add a few things. But I just want to piggy-back on what Dr. Milligan said about needs assessment. That's where we started off in most of the centers where I worked. We started off there assessing the residents' needs of the residents and once the doors opened, the kids came. Then we built programs based on their needs.

We also encouraged participants with incentives and gifts and recognition; not necessarily real big gifts, but door prizes. We had contests for "student or resident of the month". We even made it as simple as putting residents' pictures in our newsletters or putting pictures of residents on our desktop computers or on our Web site or even in our monthly publication like our newsletter.

Then document the moment. We had a grand opening and then we had an anniversary celebration. So we took some pictures and some videos, stuck those on our Web site, and tried to make them into events annual so people could look forward to them.

We pulled in some residents, asked them questions, and let them speak, letting them be a part of the process. That is what Dr. Milligan was talking about when he talked about the resident involvement committee or steering committees.

Ronald Milligan: The other thing I do to help keep my residents involved is give them titles. I put them in charge of different projects within the community. But if you have a community such as mine, you may not have the qualified personnel. So I actually tied the resident in with the community

organization that I'm using and I introduced the resident as a viable part of the whole process. So they feel they're there from the start all of the way to the end. So I introduced the residents to the community resources that I also use.

Michele Higgs: This brings me to another question, as you're talking about, resident advisory panels and having people get involved: How do you identify a leader and people who you think would be good to involve with the programs that you're trying to develop?

Ronald Milligan: Okay. Actually what I did was to spend time with the residents. When I was trying to find someone I could depend on I went to the manager's office and asked a simple question. "Who pays their rent on time?" If they paid their rent on time, it gave me some idea that they had at least the incentive to do the right thing.

Then I would have training sessions for the residents so that they don't feel all alone or like they have to know everything to help the other residents. So I actually bring them in and train them in administrative skills. At the same time, I lose my participants because through their work with me, I would also help them find jobs. My General Education Development (GED), afterschool, and mentoring programs are run by one of the residents. I make sure to place a resident with that organization.

Clarence Hogan: Yes. I want to talk about involvement too. What I look at are residents that are already involved in other stuff, whether with the school or the local advisory council in the community. So I look for involved and committed people, who are also honest and will challenge the institution, speaking up and letting us know what we need to do to help them. A lot of times people came to my classes and were very involved and very engaged. Their involvement turned into a volunteer position, which then turned into a job at the same agency.

So we end up having an employment component that they end up going through, getting some on-the-job training. They started as a volunteer, and ultimately got paid to help. Further, they were the best people to act as spokespersons because they knew people and were involved in the community. People knew them. They helped us build other alliances with other community-based organizations that are already involved and invested in the community.

Michele Higgs: Those are all fantastic ideas. I want to ask both of you; let me start with you, Clarence.

Would you expand a little bit on what goes on at Jane Adams Hull House? What kinds of activities you're doing there? The kinds of things that you are looking to get residents involved in, because this whole idea of "if we involve them, they will come." You both have been speaking to that. But what's really happening at Jane Adams Hull House?

Clarence Hogan: Well, Jane Adams Hull House is a social service agency here in the Chicago area. It's been in existence for over 100 years, founded by Jane Adams. We provide a variety of different services for residents, including sustainability, job readiness, childcare, health issues.

My component is dealing with technology. Fortunately, technology overlaps into a lot of those areas. I provide technical assistance to residents throughout our programs and throughout the city, whether it is computer training and job readiness programs or GED, Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes for adults or afterschool and out-of-school programs such as summer jobs, summer interns, digital video, video club, and digital story-telling.

This allows us to expand technology to more than just a computer, but we're using computers to help find jobs, to help conduct entrepreneurship, to actually hosting workshops with adults on taxes and financial literacy. Again, fortunately, technology is so broad that it can fit into a lot of different venues; we have to play with it and tweak it a little bit.

Michele Higgs: Thank you much. And Dr. Milligan, when we last spoke, you had a different hat on in Jacksonville.

Ronald Milligan: Yes.

Michele Higgs: Now you're developing centers from the ground up. But what kinds of activities did you run in your past life and, from that, how are you encouraging feedback from your residents now? Did you do surveys? I know, you conducted walkabouts and talked to people, but what else did you do to encourage participation?

Ronald Milligan: I did surveys, and as a matter-of-fact, I'm still doing surveys. But one of the strong points I found was, at my previous position, my senior group, because they're a mainstay. Those are really the ones that will stay in the complex longer.

My younger people are trying to get in the complex then out again. But the senior group is the group that I would bring together. We meet three times a week and they are in charge of some of the activities that we perform in the neighborhood.

The senior group may sponsor a bingo night. They have to plan it, put it together, bring other residents in to play bingo, and give out rewards for those people who come. So when I open up in the morning, my seniors are here because they know they have a responsibility.

Also, I tie in family support services. I have no intention of trying do all of this by myself. Family support services, which is a service in the neighborhood, is supporting my afterschool program by bringing in 10 qualified teachers to help. I have a local church that brings in 20 volunteers to help with the mentoring program. My job is to find my resources, bring them in and connect them with what the needs of our community. What they bring is what we need, which is determined by the

surveys. When I ask who needs an afterschool program and everybody raises their hand or indicates it in a survey, I go out and find that afterschool program.

Another resource is the Department of Children and Families. I collaborate with them. They're the ones who bring my computers and try to keep them updated as much as possible.

The idea of the center is to go out and receive resources and tie those resources into the community and make sure they're not going anywhere. Because, not only do I have responsibility here, I have six other centers that I need to get opened before this summer.

They are going to be duplicated exactly by what I am doing here, working with Neighborhood Networks to make sure that everything I do is by the numbers. Then when it's duplicated, I just follow the pattern. So the same things would happen for me. The resources would have to go out. I have to find them and bring them in.

I have to sit with folks and go through their training. I actually went through the mentoring training. I actually go through it all; if I'm going to bring training to the center I go through that training to make sure it's going to accomplish the goal that we have set in mind by the surveys from the residents.

I hope that answered your question.

Michele Higgs: Indeed it did. I am going to stop now and see if we have any questions from our participants that'll fuel the remainder of our call.

Justin, do we have anyone on the line for our speakers?

Operator: Thank you. The question-and-answer session will be conducted electronically. If you would like to ask a question, press star 1 on your touchtone telephone. 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. We will proceed in the order that you signal us and we'll take as many questions as time permits. Once again, press star 1 if you'd like to ask a question. And we'll pause for just a moment.

The first question is from Shati Gerald with Housing Authority.

Shati Gerald: Yes, good afternoon. I wanted to know what do you do to continue to keep the adults interested in the program? I did the needs assessment and the residents told me specific things that they wanted. We brought the services to them and they signed up, but in the middle of the program the participations dwindled. How can I keep their interest in completing the entire service?

Clarence Hogan: One of the things that I've learned is that sometimes when you're holding a program or a class and you've got it structured as six days, or over three weeks, sometimes you may have to rescale it, break it down, or change it. If you see people are dropping out halfway, maybe make it a part 1 and a part 2 program.

Also it might be best to see if there are some influences in the community that may be causing this. Are there other meetings or other opportunities that you're clashing with?

We had a food depository truck come to our community on the first of every month. No matter what I was offering I could not compete with that truck of food. So I made sure that on that day I went out and passed out flyers and I was at the truck myself.

So it might be best to listen to the residents. Maybe you have to meet people where they are. Your center may not look like other peoples' computer centers or even another computer center

around the corner. Because you want to make sure that at the end of the day people are getting exactly what they want.

Shati Gerald: Okay. Thank you.

Michele Higgs: That was terrific. Justin, is there anyone else on the line?

Operator: Not at this time. But as a reminder if you would like to ask a question, please press star 1. Again, that's star 1 if you would like to ask a question. We'll pause for just a moment.

The next question comes from Kimberley Fowler with Greenhills Learning.

Kimberley Fowler: I would like to know some of the other activities that you do with the seniors. You mentioned bingo.

Michele Higgs: Ron, that sounds like one for you.

Ronald Milligan: Kimberley, what I do with the seniors is for my foundation group. Bingo is one activity that we do. But every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, their incentive is to come to the center for coffee, doughnuts, and the morning paper.

Kimberley Fowler: Okay.

Ronald Milligan: What we do with the seniors is talk about what's going on in the paper, what's going on in the world. We keep them in touch with that. Also, I may get a bus and take them to an event. The seniors actually schedule some of their own events and I try to keep in mind what they would like to do. For instance, going to the farmers market is fantastic. They just love going, seeing the fruits and the vegetables, and buying something to bring back.

Kimberley Fowler: Okay.

Ronald Milligan: I found seniors will get bored very quickly if you don't have anything for them to do. This spring they're already planning to do a senior garden plot where they are going to build their own stands. Instead of potted plants there are going to be tomatoes and other vegetables.

Kimberley Fowler: Okay.

Ronald Milligan: They have already started to draw that up. So when they come over on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, they already know that they have something to do and to look forward to. Also, we had a senior breakfast and their role at the senior breakfast was to go out and get other seniors who were not coming and bring them to the breakfast with them.

Kimberley Fowler: Okay.

Ronald Milligan: BMLR is a good supporter. They basically say yes to just about anything I do. So when I need to host a breakfast, I just tell them what I need and they bring it in. But the seniors are also fine if you let them write poetry or just sit around and read. They love doing what they used to do. Also, let them talk about what is important to them. Then make them feel important to you.

I have seniors over here right now. They meet every morning but they won't go home. They just hang out with me. They're out there now waiting on me to come back out.

Kimberley Fowler: Okay, that's great.

Clarence Hogan: Let me add something to what Dr. Milligan said.

Kimberley Fowler: Okay.

Clarence Hogan: Seniors are definitely a fascinating group to work with; they have a ton of stories and resources that are valuable not only to younger people but specifically to teens. We've done a couple of intergenerational programs that went over well. One of them we call BRATS. Some of the seniors we worked with were very bratty and dealing with them was just like working with teens. So the "BRATS" stands for "Building Relationships among Teens and Seniors." We held an intergenerational program where youth and teens can become pen pals and communicate with one another over the Internet.

Seniors were able to write about themselves by creating an e-mail account and sending these random e-mails to teens that we hooked them up with in the community. Then they got to meet each other even though they may have known each other already in the community.

Secondly, we did what's called a Digital Cookbook. Our video club, which is made up of teens, videotaped the seniors' stories, because behind each one of these recipes is this fascinating story about their grandmother, about growing up in the South.

Most people here from Chicago are from Mississippi, so they always start off talking about cooking green beans and next thing you know they start talking about growing up. So we encapsulate that on video and create a cookbook that comes with a DVD that tells the story behind the green beans. So it allowed the teens and the seniors to build a relationship around cooking, technology, and writing, and history.

Kimberley Fowler: Okay.

Ronald Milligan: And Kimberley, the last piece of information I want to give you on the seniors. They love to read. So I called the public library and set up a 6-week program for seniors to learn to read to

children. The public library will send a professional to actually teach my seniors and remind them how to read to kids and make it active and fun for the kids. They're also going to run the reading club for me. So they have something to look forward to.

Kimberley Fowler: Okay. You have a way with getting the residents to run things do you.

Michele Higgs: This is great. Thank you so much. Thanks for your question, Kimberley.

Kimberley Fowler: Okay.

Michele Higgs: Justin, do we have any others?

Operator: The next question comes from Shamanique Jeter with Westminster Company.

Shamanique Jeter: Hello. I heard you say you would involve the children first and then the parents would come along with their kids. One of my problems is that the parents will send their children to the different functions but they don't attend. Or they'll bring the kids and then they'll leave. How can I make the parents understand how important it is that they get involved in the activities and functions with their children and not just use the functions as a babysitting service?

Ronald Milligan: Baby sitting service? What is your complex like? Are you in a complex or are you in a neighborhood?

Shamanique Jeter: We are in an apartment complex.

Ronald Milligan: What I did was give the children homework. If the child shows up without the parent, you don't want to dismiss the child because they're trying to do better. But then you give the child homework that must be signed by the parent and who must return the sheet. So when the parent brings the sheet back, you get a chance to meet with the parent.

Another thing we do is I have my volunteers to go out to the resident. For instance, if Susan is not showing up to the functions, they will go visit Susan. They don't go to beat Susan up, they just go to let her know what went on and that we really miss her when she's not there, those type of things.

So those are some of the things that we do. Because I have a mother with multiple children and some of the children may not fit in some activities because of their age groups. So the parent may have to stay home with that child. There are also little groups where parents cooperate. A parent may drop the child off at another parent's house, which is a safe place because we have to know each other. That parent will attend the event this time and the other parent can attend the next time.

Clarence Hogan: Yes. One of the problems we also had was that the computer center got labeled as a "kids" place. You know, people thought it was just for kids. Some of the programs I did were just for kids and I had to make sure that the adults realized that I have separate programs totally for them, the adult user.

So dropping off the kid here as a babysitting was not what I wanted to endorse. I created a program so that even though they thought I was babysitting I was not. I created programs that were specifically for adults that were at separate times. Usually they were in the mornings or in the late evenings. Because I stay open sometime as late as 7 and there are no kids in the building at all.

Sometimes parents with multiple kids do not want to be in the computer center where there are 12 other kids in there because they've got the music up loud, they're playing videos, and stuff that can be very distracting. So I make sure that the adults know that I have programs set aside just for them, with incentives, activities, and trips showing they too can be involved with the computers. I encourage them like we do with the kids.

Michele Higgs: I hope everyone has their pencils out because there's a lot of good information coming out of this call. Joyce has a question for our participants.

Joyce Mortimer: Hello there. My question is about working-age adults and older youth who are job hunting. They've gone through the General Educational Development (GED), the ABE. They know about workplace literacy. They're getting discouraged in many instances because that seems to be the top of the lid. They've reached their ceiling. How do you encourage people who are just entering the job market, whether older people or youth, to continue?

Clarence Hogan: We've been fortunate enough to have some programs that deal with job readiness training or on-the-job training where youth and seniors -- they consider senior citizens being above 55 at this particular agency -- where they can work at the computer center, get paid, and get on-the-job training.

Since we conduct some employment activities, some of those positions ended up turning into full-time jobs. We also collaborate with the After School Matters program, which is a part of Chicago Public Schools. It's an apprenticeship program where the youth get paid to work in the summer as interns. In the fall and in the spring they actually are apprentices related to technology or another field.

So we had to find collaboration specifically for young adults and teens. Plus, we wanted to make sure they have financial literacy, ABE, GED, and some other background training. But money was one of their main resources. So we were able to hook them up with some agencies that will pay them to learn and be involved in the program.

Ronald Milligan: Clarence, you'll have to give me your program. I like that one. Here, I may have a young adult and their rent may be \$25 or \$50 a month. What I do is to try to get some, not all, to

come to the center and volunteer. And while they're volunteering, we're giving them job training. We pay their rent for them, for a month or so, or maybe three or four.

That way they don't have to worry about paying the rent because that usually is a big thing. Also by volunteering, they aren't just sitting around waiting for something to happen.

They actually take an active role in trying to make it happen by coming over and volunteering. Because we have the different programs going there's always something that we can do to help train them. If they want to be in administration we have enough that we can teach them hands on administrative skills on the computer. So those are the kinds of things we're looking at.

We pride ourselves in keeping our center clean inside and out. We dump the trash every day. We clean up every day. So those are the kinds of things in which the volunteers get involved. That way, when they compose their resume then I'm a reference for them. I'll say, "Well sure I'll sign for you because you've been here with me and I know your pattern. I know that you are a hard worker and that you are a go-getter, and you follow instructions well." So I can give them that endorsement.

That's helped when we have had people apply for jobs. They've been pretty successful getting them because of the interview process we teach. So when you're here, you're not just sitting around doing nothing. You're actually being active and trying to find a job.

Michele Higgs: Okay. Thanks so much for that. Now I have another question for you. How do you determine what's working and what isn't? What kind of tracking and evaluation tools have you found yielded the most information with regard to what's working and to who's doing what at your center?

Clarence Hogan: Of course, the initial response when you see people coming out and attending your event is one way to know that people are responding to it. Also, we take attendance sheets and we document who came, what time, so on and so forth.

But we also conduct evaluations at the end of programs and have people fill out forms. We ask them questions at the end and throughout the process like, "Say how can we make this better? Would you like to do this again? Do you want a continuation? Can you get more people to come? Who do you think would like to be involved?"

Then we had to develop our own tracking sheet based on what we needed from our funders so that we can measure. We need this many adults and this many kids. We need other resources. So how do we do that? Through After School Matters, through CARES Chicago, through the local school council, and through the local advisory council, we were able to collaborate with some other community-based organizations to help us reach those targets.

So paperwork is very important. Keeping track of attendance sheets, evaluation forms, and listening to residents, then watching the numbers.

Ronald Milligan: What we're doing here in Jacksonville, Florida is before I even would associate with a resource or potential resource provider I would ask them what should I expect as an outcome? What would make my residents better for being with this program rather than just staying in their homes?

A prime example is the mentoring programs. We started the mentoring program with just two mentors and two children. That was okay because their potential was to grow to 10 mentors within a certain timeframe. Now we have 20 mentors and we're adding another program. So we're constantly having accomplishment goal-setting and rewards for goals being met.

We also publicize it. I've been in the news twice since I've been here, once for the mentoring program and another time for the resume writing program. That way, I'm sure we're in a place where we're drawing the people that need to be here. They participate. Mind you, the initial surge is always going to be good.

But when the initial surge is gone then you get down to the true meaning of your activity, that's who you're really working with. Then that's when you want to bring media in because you know these people are really with you. That number will continue to increase because there's a need and that desire is coming from the residents, not from you.

Michele Higgs: One of the questions that I want to go back addresses some of the things you gentlemen have been talking about. The media is important for getting attention for your centers. But how would you describe a tool used to capture information for funders to get their attention for your center?

Ronald Milligan: I use the START Tool. When I came over to BMLR and they asked me to be their Neighborhood Networks coordinator I said, "I would, with one goal." They said, "What?" I said, "I already have a pattern that we're going to follow. We're not going to make up anything." And that was Neighborhood Networks START. That's what I follow.

Clarence Hogan: I just want to add to that. Neighborhood Networks does a good job of helping us to publicize our work. They also have what they call "Success Stories" and we've had stories in there twice. So when it's time to go to our funders we print those articles out. We've also been in the Chicago Tribune two different times for two different events.

We've been on a Community Access Network Television show in Chicago (CAN TV), and we've got a video tape of that. We can then use it for whatever we want to, including our Web site. We use it to publicize and to seek other funding as long as it fits.

So we just make sure we keep good records from attendance sheets or of anything that can tell our story to different groups of people.

Ronald Milligan: Right. And the other thing you want to keep in mind; if you're going to work with media, know who you are working with. So I have Amy as my person. If I have anything that I want to pitch to the media, I am calling Amy because I know she's going to give me a good story. I don't have to worry about the underlying story about the way the neighborhood used to be. I don't have to worry about that with her. So I work with her and I work with her only.

Michele Higgs: That's great. You know what I'm going to do, gentlemen? I'm going to stop us for a moment and see if we have any callers on the line.

Justin, is there anyone out there?

Operator: Yes there is. Next question comes from Laura Aranda with Sister Mary Lucy.

Michele Higgs: Laura?

Josh: Hello. How are you doing? Actually, this isn't Laura; this is her volunteer, Josh.

We really wanted to know what kind of programs or what kind of incentives do you have to get the adults more involved? I think that one of our big problems here is getting adults excited about coming to the computer lab to learn different skills.

What kind of incentives are you guys using that can help them get in here more and then maybe lead into something else where we have an interaction with the kids coming in the afternoons and the adults hopefully coming in the afternoons?

Clarence Hogan: At one particular time we had a slogan in our computer center. It was specifically for adults and it was called, "Come, See and Stay." You come to the computer center; you are going to see what we have to offer. We guarantee you that you will stay. So we wanted to make sure we had tech resources there. This is not an incentive, but we had a printer that was accessible for people.

Then we had some stuff like workshops that dealt with taxes, financial literacy 1-day, 2-hour type things. We held another workshop on how to use a digital camera. We wanted to get people in the building. We believe we got them in the building because it always looked nice. It was always clean. Since we had state-of-the-art equipment; they were going to want to stay.

Then when they got involved in the programs we gave them, interestingly enough, people really loved getting certificates. When they got their certificates we took pictures of them. We had pictures of other residents throughout the building, on the wall, and people would come and ask me all the time, "Why isn't my picture on the computer? Why isn't my picture on the wall?" I would respond, "You have not been involved in any programs." So they would get involved and get a picture taken and want to know where their picture was.

Then we had gift certificates that we would get from places like Wal-Mart, real small things. Or we'd buy a bunch of flash drives or discs and give those out; something to keep them encouraged. Food always works but, of course, food and technology don't mix. You've got to do that in a separate spot. But we always want to make sure we encourage them; and maybe we had incentives in the middle of the program instead of at the end to keep them going.

Ronald Milligan: What we've done on Tuesdays is give away bread. Tuesday is our bread day. If you came around here and say, "What happens on Tuesday? It's bread day! Bread day is at one

o'clock. So what you do is you schedule an event either right before the bread gets here and usually we give it away from 1:00 until about 2:30, or schedule an event right after the bread because people are going to come over.

You use that to build a relationship. We build a relationship before we try to host a program. If residents don't know who you are, you're not going to have a program here in the center because you have not done enough footwork for them to trust you and want to be with you.

We get them, bring them to the center, and once they get into the center, especially my elderly, we teach them how to use the computers. Some of the young people do not know how to research for jobs or they'll say, "Well I have this job interview and they're asking for a resume. What do I need to do?" So we have to go back and develop the resume, show them how to post it on the computer so they can use it for their job hunting. That draws them in every time.

Then I ran into a problem about feedback with jobs. I would find my young people or my adults getting jobs but they'd forget to come back and tell me. The only way I would find out is they're not coming to the center. So I say, "Go check on Joe." "Oh Joe's at work." "Oh did Joe get a job?" And that's a part of the feedback, of being out in the community and getting that feedback. Don't think they're just going to come to the center. You have to impel them to come to the center. Once they get there -- the programs, the resume writing, the interview process -- that's what keeps them there. The food, the incentives; all of that is keeping them there but while you have them there don't waste their time. You'll find out when they have something to do they will come back. That's what you want to do. Do not waste their time. It's very valuable.

Michele Higgs: Great. Does that answer your question?

Josh: Definitely. I really appreciate it fellows.

Michele Higgs: Justin?

Operator: Your next question comes from Elaine Bennett with HUD.

Elaine Bennett: My question for the two gentlemen is about mentors. I just wanted to know how do you get committed mentors and are your mentors residents from within the community surrounding your center? Because I know they can provide a good resource to help the center grow, but my question is how do you secure those committed mentors?

Ronald Milligan: Well mine was easy, Elaine. As a matter-of-fact, I had two groups that wanted to be mentors onsite. The one I chose to be a mentor was the one whose training I attended. I was impressed with the training they gave each mentor and the background checks on each mentor.

They have follow-up training and they are required to mentor in couples. There has to be somebody with them. They were not alone with the child for any length of time. So I was impressed by that.

What they're doing now is they're not only having the mentors come in but they are having mentors' group meetings. This Saturday, I'm having a meeting here for the mentors.

So it was easy for me because I had a group that wanted to mentor. That's what their desire was; to mentor the people of Eureka. Once I went through their training program, I was really pleased with it. We sat down and talked about the outcome; that was the one where we started with two mentors and now we're up to 20 mentors. I don't see where we're going to stop obtaining mentors.

Clarence Hogan: I just want to add to that we've established relationships with this program called Sister-to-Sister. We sat down and talked with them along with some of our residents and staff members. That was a program specifically for young ladies. They went through the training, came back to the community, and started a Sister-to-Sister program.

The same thing happened with a program called Street Soldiers. We found some funding for it. We sent a guy to training. He came back, trained some other people, and started a prevention, intervention, and violence program for young men that's very successful. So that's how we did it.

Elaine Bennett: Thank you.

Michele Higgs: All right. Thank you so much. Justin, we've got a few minutes to go. Do we have anyone else on the line?

Operator: Yes. The next question comes from Christen Branch with Housing and Community.

Christen Branch: My property is predominantly seniors. Most of them are handicapped. I try to have a lot of programs for them. In the spring, we're going to start some exercise classes for them. They now have walking in the morning. They are interested in computers, wanting to know about keyboarding and things.

I'm doing okay, but I'm just wondering do you have any other suggestions how I can get a larger number of participants? I have an okay number now, but I would like to get more involvement. What would you recommend?

Ronald Milligan: Are the seniors mobile?

Christen Branch: Most them, yes.

Ronald Milligan: Okay. So you have a gathering room for them?

Christen Branch: Yes, we do have a community room and I do have a computer room.

Ronald Milligan: Okay. Then you're probably at the point where you need to bring more people from the outside. They can bring some flexibility to what you're doing and add new programs just for the seniors and those with the physical difficulties.

Christen Branch: What other program would you have in mind?

Ronald Milligan: I would think a green thumb program like we have here in Jacksonville. They will actually bring people that would work with the seniors. I think Clarence has a great one with the videos because those are things that don't take a lot of physical strength, but it's great. So Clarence probably can give you some ideas with the videos.

Clarence Hogan: Yes. I was going to say a couple of things. You know, it looks like you got some specific needs with the seniors and the handicapped, I would look at those needs and I would try to see how if you wanted to use technology to address some things like taxes, can we do our taxes online? Like bill payment, instead of seniors going out and paying their bills, can they do that through the computer, through the Internet? Another example is shopping or doing some ancestral or genealogical type of thing.

You know, these things will tie in with what seniors' regular needs are, or what they're interested in, like technology, which is what we tried to do with the video and the Digital Cookbook. We wanted them to tell their story. Even though it was centered on food, we videotaped it and it developed into something a lot more beautiful.

So the seniors were excited saying things like, "Well, man when can I see this? When can I get a copy? Can I do this? Can I do that?" And I said, "Yes, let's put it on Facebook. Let's set you up with a Facebook account or e-mail this to your grandson." They would come back with, "How do I do that?" Well that was my inroad to teach a class or do a workshop or something that they've already been involved in.

Michele Higgs: Okay. Thanks so much. That was a good one. I want to contribute one little point too. I'd spoken with a senior center that I worked with in Cleveland, Ohio. There was a gentleman there who was in his 90s, from Lithuania. And he missed listening to the music of his homeland. But he found a site online and that was his joy coming down to the computer center and getting to listen to music.

So, again, that's something that doesn't require a great deal of physical strength or agility, that you might want to bring seniors to do as well.

I am going to move on. We have just a few more minutes left. Justin, have we anyone else on the line?

Operator: Yes there is.

Michele Higgs: Okay. We'll take one more.

Operator: Okay. We have Joann Owens with Troy Housing.

Joann Owens: Yes, hello. Good afternoon to everyone. I was listening about volunteering; years ago there was a Senior Aides program. I think they now have something called Senior Corps. I went

online as I was listening and seniors can actually get stipends, tax-free stipends, for volunteer services. I wrote the Web address down. If I may, I'd like to give it to you.

Michele Higgs: By all means.

Joann Owens: It's www.seniorcorps.org/about/programs/sc.asp.

Michele Higgs: Okay, terrific. Thank you for sharing that with us.

Joann Owens: Oh you're welcome. That's a part of AmeriCorps. And it's just for the seniors. I'm going to try this. I haven't tried it yet. But some of the residents from the different sites might be able to sign up for AmeriCorps. I think you have to be 17.

Michele Higgs: I see. Well I will say that the site will be visible when the transcript is published in the couple of weeks on the Web site. So if you didn't get it this time, you will be able to get it there.

Thank you so much for that information.

Joann Owens: You're very welcome. Thank you for listening.

Michele Higgs: Absolutely. We've got just about one minute. I think at this point I'm going to close out, unless we have anymore questions. Justin?

Operator: There are no further questions.

Michele Higgs: Okay. Since we have no further questions, I am going to tell you about the resources that are available to you through Neighborhood Networks. If you still have a question after the call, you can go to the Neighborhood Networks Web site and post it on the online message board.

You can always call the toll-free Neighborhood Networks information line with questions at 888-312-2743. And of course there are resources and current information on the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.neighborhoodnetworks.org.

Now the Regional Technical Assistance Workshops (RTAWs) are coming. Look for your save-the-date cards. The RTAWs will be held this year in April and July.

The April RTAW will take place April 29 through May 1, in Dallas, Texas at the Fairmont Hotel and there will be a pre-conference grantwriting session April 27 and 28. The July RTAW will take place in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, July 15 through 17 at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel with the pre-conference grantwriting session available on July 13 and 14. Additional information will be available on the Neighborhood Networks Web site and through the toll-free information line.

If you listened to our call last month, you no doubt heard our respected speakers note how attending an RTAW recharges your batteries. The energy is with you because you are in the presence of hundreds of people who are doing the same thing you're doing.

Also note that Neighborhood Networks Week will be held August 3 through 8, 2009. It's never too early to start planning an event at your center.

On March 10, please join us for our call, "Special Events: Fun With a Purpose." We will talk about planning fun and meaningful events for your centers.

Thanks to all of you for joining us today.

Thank you again to Clarence Hogan and Dr. Ron Milligan for helping us discuss options for bringing residents to our centers.

Thanks to all of you. Take good care everyone. We'll talk to you next time.

Operator: And that concludes today's conference. Thank you for your participation.

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