

NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORKS

Moderator: Michele Higgs
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3:00 p.m. EDT

Operator: Thank you for standing by and welcome to the National Roundtable Discussion: Workforce Development conference call. This call is being recorded.

Also during the conference today, we will be taking questions throughout, so any time you have a question, please press star one.

At this time, I would like to turn the conference over to your host, Ms. Michele Higgs, please go ahead, ma'am.

Michele Higgs: Thank you, Darrell. Welcome everyone to the Neighborhood Networks March conference call. As you've heard, my name is Michele Higgs and I'm a technical assistance coordinator.

Today, I'm joined by Brain Franke and together we represent the team of the technical assistance coordinators who work with you to address the needs of the Neighborhood Networks centers around the country. I thank all of you for joining us today.

We're planning a more interactive format for this National Roundtable Discussion on Workforce Development, so let's see how it goes.

One of the most challenging issues that Neighborhood Networks centers face as they attempt to help residents improve their circumstances is in arming them with the skills to address their employment needs. Many residents are hampered at the start by a lack of basic skills, like reading comprehension or math. Others need help with specialized skills to keep up with today's technology.

What we're asking you participants to do today is to bring your own experiences to the table, to help your peers learn how to address these challenges. Today, we'll have representatives from two centers joining us from points as divergent as North Dakota and South Carolina.

We'll welcome Craig Knudsvig, someone with whom many of you may already be acquainted. He's the client services coordinator with the Grand Forks Housing Authority in North Dakota, operating two Neighborhood Networks centers, one of which, the LaGrave Learning Center in Grand Forks, will be in focus for us today.

Also, LaGrave's workforce development partner, the North Dakota Job Service, will be represented by Penny Olson. She's the parental employment pilot program coordinator (PEPP). She works with individuals that have been referred by the court system, and her job is to help them find and keep employment so that they can pay their child support. LaGrave Learning Center's computer classes are very important to these clients, as they often need basic computer skills.

Now, making use of these services available through the LaGrave Learning Center, and the job service, Mandy Carlson came back from illness to wellness, worked part time with LaGrave and was able to take a series of steps to move to wholeness and self sufficiency. In fact, she's calling in to join us from her job today, thanks so much Mandy for using your break time to join us.

If you visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site, you can read about the success at LaGrave with workforce development in the success story that is posted there.

From South Carolina, we will welcome Mary Johnson, who is center director from the Woodstream Apartment Center in Greenville, South Carolina. Her workforce development partners are Melyssa Harrison, program coordinator from the County of Greenville workforce development office and Holly Burts from the local One-Stop Career Center. Also joining us are two Woodstream residents, Edricka Grayton and Tamika Vaughn who have made use of the workforce development resources available for center residents.

The purpose of this call is to help center staff learn how to address the need for workforce development activities at their centers. You will help yourselves attack the issues with the assistance of centers that have been successful with their efforts. Now, we have one new center to welcome to the neighborhood today and that is the Sunflower Lane Apartments in Mississippi. Let's hear it for Sunflower Lane!

Now, I want to remind you about the strategic tracking and reporting tool which is also known as the START business plan. START contains resource materials that help you look at the capacity of your center, and provide the foundation upon which you can organize your activities. It will help you look at and assess the needs of residents, and determine what resources in the community can help you meet your needs. START will also help centers craft the partnerships that address their residents' interests and strengthen the center's profile in the community.

Now, if you have questions about the START business plan, or resident surveys, internal marketing plans, or general questions about the Neighborhood Networks Initiative, please call the toll free Neighborhood Networks information line at 888-312-2743. You can also visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.neighborhoodnetworks.org.

Also let me tell you about the online networking that's available through the Neighborhood Networks message board. There, you can share information among yourselves, post news, ask questions. Now be aware, this is 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. Just go to the Web site which is 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." Go visit. Check it out. I also want to remind listeners that a verbatim transcript of this call will be made available on the Neighborhood Networks Web site in about two weeks.

Now in order to make this a more interactive experience, this call requires a few special instructions from me to you. As you've heard from our operator, he will tell you exactly what to dial, but of course, I've forgotten. But *you* are the featured speakers for today's call. The representatives from the two centers we have with us are prepared to speak about the successes that they've had, but we also want to hear about your efforts. After each speaker, at the outset, callers will be given the opportunity to dial in with questions or comments for our presenters.

I'm going to start off with a question or two and then you can address your questions to the speakers on our panel, or to yourselves. Please remember to identify yourself and your center in the event that someone has a question or a suggestion for you. Also, if you have any innovative ways that you've addressed workforce issues at your centers, please call in with them. After all, one of the best ways to learn is from the experiences of your peers.

Remember, follow the instructions of the operator, and you can call in throughout this call. One of our speakers, Craig Knudsvig had an engagement at the outset and has not joined us yet. So I'm going to see if he's clicked in yet. Darrell, have we heard from Craig yet?

Operator: No, ma'am. But Craig, if you're on the line, please press star one now; star one.

Michele Higgs: OK. I guess he hasn't gotten to join us yet. So, what I'm going to do is open the discussion by talking with our first director here, who is Mary Johnson with Woodstream Apartments in Greenville, South Carolina. She has her workforce development partners, as well as residents from her center and what I'd like to start out with . . . Mary, are you with me?

Mary Johnson: I am.

Michele Higgs: OK. I just wanted to find out what started you to look at workforce development efforts for your residents? Did you survey your residents? Did you have residents come to you with questions and problems, did you see a need? How did that all begin for you?

Mary Johnson: Basically, all of the things you just mentioned. We did do surveys and we often have residents that come to us, that are concerned about employment opportunities. But the way we actually began working with One-Stop was that we signed up for technical assistance for our Neighborhood Networks center. Our technical assistance coordinator, Laura Thomas, and I met with Dean Jones, of the Employment Security Commission (SCESC), and he mentioned that the SCESC provided extension site centers. We asked if Woodstream could qualify to be an extension site.

Michele Higgs: OK. Excellent. Where did you start with the efforts that you made for your residents? What was the first thing that you did?

Mary Johnson: The first thing that we did was to contact the residents, let them know through our monthly newsletter that a One-Stop extension site was going to be available to them. As they come in and out of the office for different business matters, we let them know in person about the extension site. Also, the residents that participate in other programs here on site, such as the computer classes, those that were seeking General Education Development (GED) help; we let

them know that One-Stop was coming. As the One-Stop came in, the residents, started asking questions about when they could come in and we gave them times and days that One-Stop would be available for them.

Michele Higgs: OK. Excellent. So a lot of it was word of mouth, and then some of it was the posting of newsletters and just basically passing information for them?

Mary Johnson: Correct. Also, the One-Stop agency recommended people that were closer to our area that were coming to their site, to let them know that this site was available to them as well.

Michele Higgs: OK. Excellent. Thank you. I'm going to jump to North Dakota, and I'm going to ask Mandy, who made use of the services at the LaGrave Center to tell us a bit about what her experience was, Mandy?

Mandy Carlson: Yes.

Michele Higgs: Thank you. I know that you had suffered an injury and you were confined, basically, and couldn't work for a while. Then, you made use of the tech services, the TechForce program at LaGrave.

Mandy Carlson: Right.

Michele Higgs: There's been a lot of growth, since then. Can you tell us some about that?

Mandy Carlson: Sure. I kind of walked into the center not knowing what to expect or what to do with myself, actually at that point, and I got a lot of help, and I guess, a lot of vision on what my life could be like. When I walked in--you know, I graduated in high school in 1994, and computers were there, but not like they are now--and learned about the tech -- I think it was called

TechForce, when I was there, the TechForce program. The self-study program that you could learn the computer and do some job seeking and learn to create resumes. I had never done anything like that before. So when I walked in, I signed up for the whole *shebang*. I thought, "I'm going to do that whole thing I'm not doing anything else. I have a son who is in school. I'm tired of sitting at home. I'm tired of not doing anything else."

So, I spent eight hours a day, actually, at the center, and learned everything from how to turn the computer on, to doing small business accounting and I learned everything on my own with the tech support help that was there.

Michele Higgs: Excellent. So you just basically made use of TechForce and they had the appropriate equipment, as well as the staff to help you learn what you needed.

Mandy Carlson: Correct, they provided, you know, all of the books, all of the computers, everything. Then, any time I had a question or needed somebody to help me answer something, somebody was there within seconds to help me. All I had to do was ask.

Michele Higgs: OK. Well that all sounds great. I'm going to stop for one second and say, Darrell.

Operator: Yes, ma'am.

Michele Higgs: Has Craig joined us yet?

Operator: Yes, he has.

Michele Higgs: Hi, Craig.

Craig Knudsvig: Hello, Michele.

Michele Higgs: How are you?

Craig Knudsvig: Good. Good. Hi, Brian.

Brain Franke: How are you doing, Craig?

Craig Knudsvig: Good.

Michele Higgs: That's right, you guys are buddies. Is Penny with you?

Craig Knudsvig: Yes, she is.

Michele Higgs: OK. Hi, Penny, how are you?

Penny Olson: Hi, Michele.

Michele Higgs: Over the wires here, we're going to introduce everybody. Craig, on the other side of the line and the country is Mary Johnson who is the director of the Center at Woodstream Apartments in Greenville, South Carolina and she is joined by her workforce partners and that's Melyssa Harrison, and I think, has Holly Burts made it yet? I don't think so.

Holly Burts: I'm here.

Michele Higgs: OK. Good. And then she has residents joining her as well, and we have Mandy on the line too. One of the questions that I had just posed with Mary, Craig, is where did this effort begin for you in terms of establishing a partnership with the workforce development center and how did you determine that it was necessary for your particular site?

Craig Knudsvig: I don't know – thanks. I don't know that it was ever . . . the light bulb didn't go on and we decided we needed it. It was always sort of understood that this is a family property that we're working at. An awful lot of folks are there wanting, seeking, needing employment and this was in 1996, that we opened the center. While the use of computers in the workplace was different then, the understanding of its importance wasn't much different. So, as we made the decision to go ahead and establish the center with equipment and that kind of stuff, we always had workforce development as part of our plan. We had gone at it a couple of different ways, and we'd like to think we kind of got it right about three years ago, but we've taken different runs at it.

This is the first time, though, that we've really had a formal partner helping us, and that, of course, is the Job Service Office.

Michele Higgs: OK. Thank you. Now, we've had a couple of questions just tossed out before you and Penny joined. So I'm going to ask Darrell if we have anyone on the line that has a question or a comment for any of our speakers.

Operator: Once again, if you have any questions, please press star one; star one for questions. If you're on a speakerphone, please make sure your mute function is turned off to allow your signal to reach our equipment. Once again if you have any questions, please press star one now.

Michele Higgs: We're just going to wait for a second and see if anyone has a question.

Operator: We have no questions at this time.

Michele Higgs: There aren't any, OK. In that case I've got a list of them. This question will be posed to any of our – either of our workforce development professionals. That would be, as a partner with the Neighborhood Networks center, how do you see that partnering with the center, or even other

community organizations, is a benefit for you, as a workforce development partner? Do you see plusses for your side as well? Not just what you're giving to the center, but what you get back? And that could be either for Penny or Melyssa or Holly.

Penny Olson: I would like to answer that, Michele.

Michele Higgs: OK. Is that Penny?

Penny Olson: Yes, it is.

Michele Higgs: OK. Thanks.

Penny Olson: At Job Service in North Dakota, we have contracts to work with a lot of at-risk populations, such as people on Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Workforce Investment Act (WIA) clients, WIA youth, the people that are non-custodial parents. So these people have a lot of barriers to employment. And we certainly love our partnership in that it allows us to get clients some computer training, so that they can be helped to become work-ready.

We see an awful lot of people just over the age of 30-plus, that come to us with very little or no computer skills, and it's very difficult in this high tech world to get a job without those skills. So having some place to send them is absolutely awesome.

Michele Higgs: OK. So you say having a place to send them to learn what they need to get out in the world is what you find as a benefit.

Penny Olson: Correct. Then, also that they're – that is the center--they're willing to do a program that fits the individual needs of the clients, so that they are doing it on their own, and it can be as little or as much as they have time to do.

Michele Higgs: OK. That sort of goes back to what Mandy was saying earlier, that she had the time, her son was in school. She put everything she had into it, eight hours a day, and that was what she could contribute to the whole process. So what you're saying then is that whatever that could be, whether it's eight hours or four hours, the centers can adjust their programs to work with the individual's needs and capabilities.

Penny Olson: Correct.

Michele Higgs: Great. Mary, on your side, is there anything from your workforce development end that you think might be what you consider a benefit, or would it be basically the same thing?

Mary Johnson: Just to reiterate what Penny was saying, I also want to add to that that being out in the community where the people are gives a level of confidence. Gives them a level of knowing – of being comfortable that they can share more detailed information, more intimate information or be willing to share when they come into the workforce office or the One-stop Career Center itself. It helps alleviate some of the barriers that the customers may have. They may have a lack of transportation. They may have a lack of child care. They may have other barriers that pose a problem, or hinder that individual from actually coming across town and meeting in our larger One-stop Career Centers. So if we could come to the customer, we want to help eliminate as many of the barriers as possible. But also, make them aware that when they do gain employment, they need to be working on a plan so that those barriers can be addressed, and they won't be prevented from actually attending their employment.

Michele Higgs: Great. That also speaks to something that another question that I had had going with Holly Burts who works with the onsite One-stop Career Center. As I understand from Holly, you go around to different centers to offer resume assistance, and writing cover letters, the kinds of things that people need and they can't get out to get. Am I correct with that Holly?

Holly Burts: Yes, you are.

Michele Higgs: Now, what do you find is the greater benefit, I would suspect, is just as Mary just said, you have the confidence of the people. You have a certain comfort level when you are available in the center.

Holly Burts: Yes. I think it helps that I go out to the different extension centers, because I can work with individuals on a one-to-one basis and they do feel more comfortable and they are able to communicate their problems and the things that they're going through. I can help them with things – with their resume. A lot of times, their resume might be outdated, and there might need to be changes made to that resume, or just update it, or add things. A lot of times, some individuals might not know how to do that, or they might not know the right format or things like that. I can help them and assist them in doing that.

Michele Higgs: I just want to throw in that One-stop Career Centers exist all around the country and by just going onto the Department of Labor Web site, you can locate a One-stop Career Center in your vicinity and perhaps get the same kind of service that the Woodstream Apartments is getting by having someone come and visit your center to work with your residents. Sometimes that happens, and sometimes it doesn't, but it's worth a phone call. Once again, you drill down into the Department of Labor site to One-stop Career Center, and you'll be able to find that information.

I'm going to check once more with Darrell to see if there are any questions on the line or comments. Now once again, let me remind you that this is an interactive call and if you have some special services at your center that you think might be helpful to others, by all means give us a call and let us know about them. This is a good time to toot your horn. So Darrell, do we have anyone on the line?

Operator: Yes, ma'am. We sure do.

Michele Higgs: Great.

Operator: We have Mary Rodriguez from the Housing Authority of Milwaukee, please go ahead.

Michele Higgs: Great. Hi, Mary

Maria Rodriguez: It's Maria.

Michele Higgs: Hello, Maria.

Maria Rodriguez: Yes. I was wondering if any of the presenters utilized their Neighborhood Networks centers as sort of job seeker clubs?

Michele Higgs: OK. Let's just see . . .

Craig Knudsvig: Michele?

Michele Higgs: Yes.

Craig Knudsvig: Craig. Our TechForce program is – I wouldn't want to call it a club, but it's very informal and everybody sort of works on their own. We have both a computer lab that has towers but we also have some laptops and when people get far enough along in the program, they get to take those with them, bring them home and then bring them back. So we've got people working in there all day long and they sort of become a support group for each other.

I don't know that that's a club idea, because I've tried that too, but it certainly is a good way for people to sort of lift each other up, and to help each other with hints and ideas and that kind of stuff because it can be kind of lonesome when you're looking.

Maria Rodriguez: It sure can. I think this is something that we've tried, and we've been doing for the last couple of years and people come and go and I think you're absolutely right; it does help them not to feel so alone. But also there's our staff person who helps them through a discussion period and then the resume, the cover letter, working postings online, and then learning to use the Neighborhood Networks center to do all of that. So that's one of the things that we do in Milwaukee.

Craig Knudsvig: Michele, Craig, again.

Michele Higgs: OK.

Craig Knudsvig: Penny just reminded me of something, and I can let her talk about how it works on their end, but we certainly – we have benefited. We think that other learners and job seekers have benefited by having paid *work experience* participants that came for the programs that job service operates in our center, and maybe Penny can quickly just talk about how that works on her end.

Michele Higgs: OK. Excellent.

Penny Olson: OK. Michele, this is Penny. What we do is if we have clients that have gone through TechForce, but have no actual work experience, we will do a paid work experience at LaGrave Center for a period of three to six months to give them the experience of actually working for a paycheck and then, also allowing them to help other people that are going through the program. That's been a tremendous help for our *work experience* people. I think it's been also a good help at the LaGrave Center for having extra teaching people.

Melyssa Harrison: Michele, this is Melyssa, I just wanted to mention that here in Greenville County and our WIA office, we also offer what we call a job club. It's formed by our students or customers that are coming in that are in the midst of job search. They get to network with other customers in the same situation. Share job leads. Share what's working. Share what's not working.

We also offer what we call our "barriers workshop" where we can sit down and have one major discussion, for instance, on resume writing. How to dress for an interview. How to interview as far as what not to say. What are legal questions? So we have various activities going on here in Greenville that can assist. It just depends on the customer's needs. So we'll allow – get feedback from the customers. We'll ask them, what interests you? What can we do to help you? How can we benefit you? What areas or topics are interesting to you to get you to the next step?

Michele Higgs: Well it sounds like you both have projects in motion that work with this question. Maria, are you still on the line?

Maria Rodriguez: Yes, I am here.

Michele Higgs: OK. Does that sound somewhat like the job club thing that you're discussing?

Maria Rodriguez: Yes. We're not connected to any One-stop Career Center. We're lucky enough, though, to be connected to the Milwaukee area technical college, which helps us, also, move people into GEDs and testing. We have a teacher onsite, directly from the college, but there certainly are all of those aspects that the One-stop Career Center has. I think those are pretty much available to most housing authorities which they should utilize and take advantage of.

Michele Higgs: OK. Excellent. Thanks so much. I am going to ask Darrell, do we have anyone else on the line?

Operator: No, ma'am. We have no further questions at this time.

Michele Higgs: Then, I have one. In terms of the kinds of programs that you both have done at your centers, and I'm throwing this out to both LaGrave and to Woodstream, what have you seen in terms of progress for the folks that have participated in your programs? Now, I know some stellar people are going to stand out but in general, are residents taking advantage of the offerings? Are they really using them? Getting into positions? And that leads to another question, are you tracking all of that? And either one of you can respond on that one.

Craig Knudsvig: I'll go first.

Michele Higgs: OK.

Craig Knudsvig: Certainly, there are participants in our program that get jobs, and that's – I'm sure nobody is surprised to hear me say that and we certainly have that as a primary goal, but there are other things. First of all, I'll just throw this out. We have opened ourselves up as a community resource, and so we not only have residents that use the center, but folks that come from outside.

Some parts of our program actually have a fee, and we work out ways that users can pay for that, or that other agency partners can pay for that. That fee has helped us in other ways, it largely pays for some staffing, but also for our afterschool program at the center. So there's sort of a spin-off value. But I think, the thing that I would speak to the most is how participants understand their role in their own success. It builds their confidence. They're around others who are trying to accomplish the same thing and working hard at it, or on any given day around others who are having a tough time and need to be, have their own spirits lifted a little bit. All of that is only of

value if, I guess, you do have people that find employment, and we do measure that and try to track it.

But I think, the thing that we're seeing is even when they're done with your program if they're not working at that point, we see a very high level of continued use of our center and of our facilities, and of the job search motivation that gets developed while they're doing this, and their understanding of personal responsibility.

Michele Higgs: Well that's good. So there are developments within individuals, even if they haven't gotten a job just yet.

Penny Olson: Michele, this is Penny in Grand Forks. We definitely do track all of our individuals to find out if they're employed, and how long they remain at that employment and so all of the clients that we send over to LaGrave are tracked.

Michele Higgs: Great. Thank you. Thanks, Penny. Now one set of folks we haven't heard from is Tamika and Edricka; did Edricka make it in?

Edricka Grayton: She did.

Michele Higgs: Oh, good. Hi, there. How are you? Welcome.

Edricka Grayton: How are you?

Michele Higgs: I wanted to find out, now that we've talked all about the programs, I want to talk about . . . a little bit what have you seen as – and Mandy -- I'll put you into this group as well. What have you seen in terms of your own development? We were just asking what progress have the centers and the workforce development folks seen.

What have you seen in terms of your progress with regard to your career goals, or your job searches? You know, just how has this whole workforce development effort helped you? And I'm going to start out with South Carolina, and that would be either Edricka or Tamika.

Edricka Grayton: I'm Edricka.

Michele Higgs: OK.

Edricka Grayton: For me, it helped me maintain my career and it's like a safety net for me, whenever I have any problems I can come back here, and I can ask a question and, you know, go from there. I get my answers and I'm still able to progress without quitting. You know, I guess it's like a backbone, I guess that is what it is for me. You know, a support group.

Michele Higgs: Now, if I understand correctly that you are now a part-time property manager.

Edricka Grayton: That's correct.

Michele Higgs: With Woodstream.

Edricka Grayton: Yes.

Michele Higgs: All right. When you started with your own workforce development efforts, did you have the capabilities on the computer or any of the kinds of things that you have in your repertoire now?

Edricka Grayton: No. It actually helped me to be able to get on the computer and I learned how to navigate. I learned how to do my resume. I learned how to work on other things besides

resumes; like I was the president of our resident action council here at Woodstream. It helped me be able to -like we would do little thing – a spin-off, like the Black History program, and I implemented little questions for the month for people to answer and get prizes for. It's just a lot of different things that contribute to it.

Michele Higgs: So it sounds like it wasn't just the technical skills, but perhaps leadership skills as well that you gained.

Edricka Grayton: It helped me with job search and Internet searches.

Michele Higgs: Tamika?

Tamika Vaughn: Yes.

Michele Higgs: Are you there? You're still searching is that correct?

Tamika Vaughn: Yes.

Michele Higgs: And using the center to assist in your job search? Are you working also with the workforce development center with the One-stop Career Center effort with Holly, and how are you advancing with your search?

Tamika Vaughn: I'm working with One-stop Career Center to try to find a job, but I've come to the conclusion that I'm ready to go back to school to finish my degree.

Michele Higgs: All right. That's never a bad thing. That's fantastic. So did the work that you've been doing at least help you to reach that decision?

Tamika Vaughn: Yes, ma'am. I'm in the process of now finishing my last year in college.

Michele Higgs: Great. Well go ahead, I think that deserves some applause. Always the degree is a good thing. I'm going to stop now, and ask Darrell if we have anyone on the line.

Operator: Yes, ma'am, we sure do. We have Tim White with Huntington, West Virginia, please go ahead

Tim White: Yes. We just got our grant, and we are in the process of getting it underway and have a target date of July one. What I would like to do, and while I certainly believe in the copyright law, whatever you all are doing that's successful we would like to copy it.

Michele Higgs: OK.

Tim White: If you could just tell us all of the good things that are working and we'll do that and not make any mistakes. But what I would like to ask is to find out what has worked for everybody as far as timeframes? Are your centers open during the day, evenings, weekends? What have you seen that's worked out the best?

Second of all, what are some of the specific programs that you've implemented? Number three, are there any type of unique services, or partnerships that you developed that are really outside of the box and what have you done to integrate adults and youth?

Michele Higgs: Did everybody get that one? Timeframes, when are you open? Who wants to grab that one?

Craig Knudsvig: That's fine, I'll do that. We're open all of the time.

Michele Higgs: That's easy.

Craig Knudsvig: Well it's not quite that easy because if you're going to be open, you have to have staff, and that isn't always possible of course, but we generally are open Monday through Thursday, everybody from 8:00 a.m. until to 5:00 p.m. or 5:30 p.m. depending on when the last kids leave the afterschool program. We are open a couple of nights a week, for different activities, but generally, our workforce development people, our TechForce people, can be in there during all of those times.

We close on Friday afternoons. We've tried some Saturday hours, sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn't. Then we have classes that we schedule on various topics, and that would fill in some of those other evening and other times as well. I'll tell you what; it's sort of a guessing game. Right now we're in the busiest time of the year. February and March and October and November are always our busiest months. In the summer, obviously, we cut back a little. December and January are months where we tend to cut back a little on our evening hours.

Michele Higgs: Mary, did you want to attack any of those questions?

Mary Johnson: We are open Monday through Friday, basically from 9a.m. until 5 p.m. We receive our assistants from One-stop Career Center from Holly. She comes in twice a month and that gives our residents a set day they know that she'll be here if they need help with anything as far as job search or resume preparation. I think that's a plus for them to have a set time to know that a representative will be there onsite to help them.

Then they know that during the day, any time during the day, they're free to come in and receive assistance from me as far as resume preparation or local job search.

Michele Higgs: Tim?

Tim White: Yes, ma'am.

Michele Higgs: I have a feeling we didn't get all of your questions.

Tim White: Well the other one was, what do you do, or how do you work integrating adults and youth? I also coordinate our local youth build program, and our local out of school youth program and we also have an adult program. So we work with youth from basically 14 years of age, up to 65. Not everything that you do for youth works for adults and vice versa. So how do you all integrate the different groups? Do you have set times when you specifically target younger adults? Do you have a time when you target specifically for the older adults, or is it just kind of open and they kind of come and go?

Craig Knudsvig: Michele, we – our afterschool program, which is a grade school aged afterschool program, operates from 3 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. During that time, we do have adult learners in the building, and they do interact. It isn't a formal, planned interaction for the most part. We also have a program for middle school and high school kids called CSI LaGrave that operates right in the computer lab. Those little bit older kids are often in the lab with our afterschool program folks. Then, right almost next door to LaGrave, we manage two buildings for the same nonprofit that house elderly folks, and the disabled adult population. So we regularly schedule programming that involves our younger afterschool kids.

Michele Higgs: Great. Thank you so much. I am going to ask Darrell, if we have anyone else on the line?

Operator: Yes, ma'am, we have a few other questions. We'll take our next question from Joyce Couch from Jacksonville Housing Authority.

Michele Higgs: All right, thank you.

Joyce Couch: Hello, can you all hear me?

Michele Higgs: Yes, ma'am.

Joyce Couch: OK. My question goes back to the gentleman who said that his center gets fees for their services, and I would like to hear a little bit more about that.

Michele Higgs: Craig, I think that's you.

Craig Knudsvig: Yes, I expect it is. We have done our workforce development in a variety of ways. For a long time, we've offered specific classes on some of the things that are logical, Word and Excel and Access. We offer a class on just basic understanding of the Internet and e-mail. We offer one on the Windows operating system and those are open to the community. So we charge for those. It's a small fee of \$25 and anybody can take those and that helps offset some of the cost of operations.

For our TechForce program, I had talked to other centers around the country that had done this and did some other research, if you will. We decided that a fee would serve a variety of purposes in addition to just giving us a little money. It also helped keep our relationship with those partners, and with the participants on a little more of a business-like basis and it – I think it gets everybody paying a little bit more attention.

So we – what we charge, I think it's a very small amount, it's \$120, and that can buy you access to our center and our staff for, as Mandy said, eight hours a day for five days a week. We like to get people finished in 10 to 12 weeks, but if it goes beyond that, you may even have access to your own laptop to take home for awhile. So it doesn't sound like a lot of money but when you have enough people involved it can keep everybody focused, as I said. And it also can generate

a little bit of money for our afterschool program. The idea is not to support the program with the fees because if you're going to do that, you're going to need to charge so much that your price yourself out of serving the people that are your target.

Joyce Couch: And you all have the Neighborhood Networks grant?

Craig Knudsvig: No. We're not public housing, so there's no – our funds are all generated, by a 236 property. Our funds are generated by some of the property operating budget and mostly by other grants, and just the management funds from the Grand Forks housing authority.

Joyce Couch: OK. Now the other question was, in terms of paid work experience, Penny, I think that question came from Penny, can you elaborate on that a little?

Penny Olson: OK. Those people that do the paid work experience are in WIA programs, for the most part, or Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF) programs and so those are the dollars that are used to pay their wages. So usually, when we do a paid work experience it's for between three to six months, eight hours a day, 40 hours a week and we usually pay the participant \$8 to \$10 an hour.

Joyce Couch: OK. That money comes from grants or some other resources?

Penny Olson: No. It comes from Workforce Investment Act dollars.

Joyce Couch: Comes from Workforce Investment Act, OK. The partnership with the workforce development people that was something you all sought out with the Department of Labor, that you had to and – I guess my question is, how do you become a One-stop Career Center with the Department of Labor, just go on their Web site, and request that you...

Michele Higgs: Can I jump in there on that one? The One-stop Career Centers are an agency of the U.S. Department of Labor. The partnership with the One-stop Career Center is just that. It's an opportunity for the Neighborhood Networks centers to connect with a One-stop Career Center to benefit from the activities that they offer. So it's not that the Neighborhood Networks center is an agency of the Department of Labor. It's basically you're partnering with the One-stop Career Center. So you would make a connection with the local One-stop Career Center to find out who would be the individual that you would speak with there. Let them know what you're doing. Let them know what your needs are for your center.

Between the center or the center director, or the client services person, you would find out and work out and negotiate a plan for residents from that center to utilize the services of the One-stop Career Center. That may involve going to the One-stop Career Center site, or in the case of Woodstream, you have someone who comes out to the Neighborhood Networks site and works with the residents there. Does that clear that up a little for you?

Joyce Couch: Yes. I guess it's more like a memorandum of understanding type of arrangement.

Michele Higgs: That's exactly what it is.

Joyce Couch: OK. So we just need to make contact with our local One-stop Career Center workforce development site here.

Michele Higgs: Exactly – and where are you?

Joyce Couch: In Florida, Jacksonville, Florida.

Michele Higgs: OK.

Craig Knudsvig: Michele?

Michele Higgs: Yes, sir, go ahead, Craig?

Craig Knudsvig: Let me just jump in. I know you've got other questions waiting, and that's good, but one of the things that you need to do is kind of like the caller said, make that connection and sort of share ideas, and whatever. We have a program called TechForce Flash, which is a little shorter than the regular TechForce program and that was actually Penny's idea. There are people out there today looking for jobs that may not require computer skills, but at least what we're seeing up here is more and more jobs if you can't go online, you can't even apply. You can't find the job listings. You can't do the online applications.

So she suggested to us, one of the things we needed to work on was simply providing those very, very basic skills to the Windows Operating System, Internet and e-mail. So of course, we plugged into that and sort of changed our program a little to do that. The suggestion I would make to other centers is just be a solution. It's fine to go and ask for partners, and ask for help and you need to do that. You can't be afraid to do that. You also need to see yourself as a solution to somebody else's need. In this case, our job service, our One-stop Career Center, didn't have the means to necessarily train people on that kind of stuff, but saw the need and they identified and we were able to sort of plug into that with our in place programs.

Michele Higgs: Does that answer your question?

Joyce Couch: Also, we had another question, how many people are usually working in the centers, in the Neighborhood Networks centers? How many people?

Michele Higgs: Anybody want to take that? Either of our center directors?

Mary Johnson: This is Mary at Woodstream. As far as if you're talking about the One-stop Career Center program here, Holly and Melyssa both come out and assist when necessary. Also, I work in the center, but I work through the company and they work through workforce development.

Joyce Couch: OK.

Michele Higgs: I think you might also be asking just in general, how many people work at a Neighborhood Networks center?

Joyce Couch: Yes.

Michele Higgs: OK. It can go from one to three or two. It varies. As technical assistance coordinators we get to see how these things work and in many cases, you have one person who is working with the center. However, they may be assisted by a couple of volunteers or a resident council. It varies from one center to the next.

Craig Knudsvig: Michele, my answer would be as many as we can afford.

Michele Higgs: Well yes, there's that.

Joyce Couch: OK.

Michele Higgs: All right. Darrell, can you tell me who else is on the line?

Operator: We have (John Harper) from Charleston, please go ahead.

John Harper: Hi. Can you hear?

Michele Higgs: Yes, we can.

John Harper: All right, that's great. We're really excited to be part of this today. A while ago I heard you speaking about thinking outside the box and every year since 2003, when the program initiated, things have just snowballed, and we're getting ready to launch a new Web site.

A while ago, someone was talking about resources from around the different Neighborhood Networks centers, what's out there. We're getting ready to launch a Web site at (wvsuwebcafe.com) and we have several partners involved. We're going to have a podcast on there and tutorials, downloadable things. Things people can print off that focus on computer literacy and life skills and workforce development.

We were excited to have this group's program coordinator here today and I also have one of our partners here from career consulting services.

Michele Higgs: Great.

John Harper: Two of her participants are with us right now. They're going through a program together, and I was hoping that they might be able to speak for a minute as well.

Michele Higgs: Well we can spare a minute and can you tell me what center you're calling from, please?

John Harper: I'm calling from the Charleston & Kanawha Housing in Charleston, West Virginia. We have 10 centers, and we're at the Carol Terrace location right now.

Michele Higgs: OK. Good. You have with you your workforce development partner, as well as a couple of residents?

John Harper: Yes, ma'am.

Michele Higgs: Great. Well I'd love to hear about your successes. We've got a minute or two, go ahead.

Female: Within the past five weeks, we started a program on identifying skills, and how skills can be used to write a more effective resume, as well as for interviewing purposes, and to ...

Michele Higgs: Are you still there? Hello? Darrell?

Operator: Yes, they're still there. Did you want me to go ahead and go to the next person?

Michele Higgs: Yes, would you please.

Operator: We'll take – are you there?

Michele Higgs: Hello?

Operator: OK. We'll take Harvey Collman with West Harlem Group Assistants.

Michele Higgs: OK. Thank you. Hi, Harvey.

Harvey Collman: Hi. How are you doing?

Michele Higgs: Good, thank you.

Harvey Collman: I have a general question about the – I wanted to know, do you have any workforce development certifications in areas of information technology? For example, they have Microsoft certifications...

Michele Higgs: Can you speak up just a hair? OK, go ahead.

Harvey Collman: Like do you have Microsoft certifications or A+ networking, or any other industry specific certifications that would immediately place the resident one step above their other people in the neighborhood?

Michele Higgs: OK. Well let me throw that out for our workforce development folks. I know those certifications in the Microsoft programs, ladies is there any specific program that – is that what you're asking, Harvey, is there a particular program that residents can participate in to get these certifications?

Harvey Collman: Yes. These specific certifications will land them specific job – industry jobs. The jobs – these particular jobs require these specific certifications. So I wanted to know whether your workforce development programs provide these.

Michele Higgs: Whether they offer those particular programs.

Melyssa Harrison: Michele, this is Melyssa in Greenville.

Michele Higgs: OK. Thanks, Melyssa.

Melyssa Harrison: Any WIA-registered customer has the opportunity of requesting a particular training. Here in the Greenville area, we have a list of approved trainings that we may offer to an individual. We're doing assessments on individuals, so we look at what skills they currently have, what skills they need to acquire in order to obtain the career goal that they're looking for. If a trainer is able to assist them, then we look at possibly funding that training for that individual.

So if that includes a certification for Microsoft office, then we have partners that we work with that provide the training, WIA sponsors that fund it for that customer. We also help them seek employment opportunities once they've gained that certification. Does that answer your question?

Harvey Collman: Yes.

Michele Higgs: OK. Good. Thank you, Melyssa.

Craig Knudsvig: Michele.

Michele Higgs: Yes.

Craig Knudsvig: We test everybody at the front and at the back, and every day in between if they want to. We test them on all of the Microsoft office software that they're interested in learning. We were fortunate a few years ago--and this is kind of an idea for everybody. Microsoft gives grants called Unlimited Potential Grants and they're given regionally by Microsoft through representation and offices around the country and around the world.

In that grant, we got some funds, but we also got some software, and some training material, as well. So we are able to say to employers on behalf of our participants, that they have been trained on Microsoft approved software, and Microsoft approved training programs. In fact, we give them a certificate saying that and the job service people test them as well, as part of their progress through the program. So, that's a good question. That's an important piece, because employers need to know that they're getting trained folks.

Number two, I think the participants need to feel good about themselves, as they represent themselves to an employer and that's how that works in their regard too.

Michele Higgs: Thanks, Craig. Harvey, is that OK with you?

Harvey Collman: Yes, that is.

Michele Higgs: OK. Great. I want to throw in one more thing before I ask for our next question and it was a discussion that I had held earlier, and Craig, I hope you'll remember about this, we were talking about, I guess, what you would call "soft skills," you know, being mature, working and ready to be out in the workforce, and the soft skills being, you know, knowing how to conduct yourself in the workplace, knowing how to, not just dress for success but to act for success. Craig, did you want to address that a little bit? I thought that was very important, what we had talked about.

Craig Knudsvig: Yes, I'll be glad to and then I think maybe Mandy might have some comments about that too.

Michele Higgs: OK.

Craig Knudsvig: We offer a program called Employment Empowerment that is open to others as well as those in our workforce development program. It covers things like problem-solving skills, and communication skills, and personal qualities, teamwork, interpersonal skills, all of that kind of stuff. People take curriculum, it's a few nights of classes taught by people that know that material, obviously but if they do that, while they're in our workforce training program, our TechForce program, they have a chance to sort of try those things out every day. They see other participants and our other staff, and our volunteers, sort of modeling those things.

Because today, just having computer skills it's absolutely brutally important. There's a lot of people out there that have those skills, and you need to be able to represent yourself as knowing

how to – as you said how to act. You need to represent that you have what we call “workplace maturity,” and that you’re able to be a good employee for the employer and with other employees around you. So I’m going to suggest that that really is probably as important as anything that we do in the center and I don’t know, if it’s all right, I’d like to ask maybe Mandy, if she’d comment on that too.

Michele Higgs: OK. Mandy, I’m going to jump in, we’ve got just a minute or so left, so you go ahead.

Mandy Carlson: All right. I guess I took that class actually a couple of times. I took it once as a participant, and then once when I was working there; I set the class up and was involved with the other participants. You know, having an employee empowerment class is absolutely beneficial and knowing how to interview – just knowing how to interview, and how to react to questions that you’re asked, that you normally wouldn’t know the answer to or not know how to answer.

Like they said, learning how to dress. Learning how just to conduct your own self. I think those classes are very important. In fact, a couple of the participants that I taught, later on after I worked there, told me that was probably the best class they took out of all of the whole TechForce program, that was what they got out of it the most, was the employee empowerment.

Michele Higgs: Mandy, thank you. I think you said that very eloquently, under the press of short time, and I appreciate it and I think we actually saved the best for last; that was a good point, when you all are considering your workforce development programs also include and consider what we just talked about and that is workplace maturity.

It looks like we have just a minute or so left, and I’m going to take that to thank, heartily, all of our speakers today and that is those of you who called in, and those of you who are presenters. That would be Craig Knudsvig, Mary Johnson, Penny Olson, Mandy Carlson, Tamika, Edricka, and Holly Burts. I think I’ve got everybody. Thank you ever so much for joining us today.

I'm going to tell you about next month's conference call and that's Tuesday, April 10, 2007, at 3 p.m. and the topic is "Come one, Come All, Encouraging Resident Participation in Neighborhood Networks Activities.' I'd like to remind you of the resources that are available to you through the Neighborhood Networks Initiative. Aside from the Neighborhood Networks information line which is 888-312-2743, you will find numerous resources and information on the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.neighborhoodnetworks.org.

I have two great events to remind you about with Neighborhood Networks. This year, we'll host the national training conference in Washington D.C. and that's from August 8h through 10 and of course, there's Neighborhood Networks week from June 25—30. Speaking of Neighborhood Networks week, we're asking center users to share their stories and participate in the Neighborhood Networks essay contest. The deadline for entries is April 13. You'll need to answer the question, "How has my Neighborhood Networks center connected me to opportunities?" Please visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site, at www.neighborhoodnetworks.org for complete instructions. If you have any questions about the special events, you can ring the Neighborhood Networks information line at 888-312-2743 and the folks there can set you right.

Once again, I want to thank Mary Johnson, Craig Knudsvig, Penny Olson, Melyssa Harrison, Edricka Grayton, Tamika Vaughn, Holly Burts, Mandy Carlson, Brian Franke, thank you so much for being with us. Thank you all for joining us today. Take good care. We'll talk to you next time.

Operator: Once again, ladies and gentlemen, that will conclude today's conference and we thank you for your participation. You may disconnect.

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