

NNewsline



Delivering Technology Access to America's Communities

Coordinators Celebrate a Decade of Neighborhood Networks

In 1995, the median household income in the United States was \$34,076. The San Francisco 49ers were Superbowl champions, and the term *computer center* was rarely discussed outside of academic circles. It was at this midpoint of the 1990s that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), through its Office of Multifamily Housing Programs, launched the Neighborhood Networks (NN) initiative. Its vision was to encourage property owners to establish multiservice community learning centers in HUD insured and assisted properties to promote self-sufficiency and provide computer access to low-income housing communities. Now, 10 years later, we celebrate the initiative's success in putting the power of technology in the hands of people and providing opportunities for America's families.

Among the many individuals who work tirelessly to assist residents of HUD's Multifamily Housing properties are NN Coordinators. They are on the frontline working with owners and managers of these properties to open and maintain Neighborhood Networks centers. Denise Williams, NN Coordinator, Sacramento, California, office; Thomas "Buck" Adams, NN coordinator, Knoxville, Tennessee, office; and Vernon Butler, NN Coordinator, Fort Worth, Texas, office are three coordinators who have been with the initiative since its inception. And as we approach the 10th anniversary of the initiative, they celebrate with HUD a decade of Neighborhood Networks.

The Early Years—Initial Reaction and Vision

When HUD launched its new initiative in 1995, there was excitement and anticipation about what it could achieve. "Oh my gosh!

CONNECTING
COMMUNITIES.
CREATING
OPPORTUNITIES.

Join Neighborhood Networks in celebrating a decade of success! Plan now to attend the National Training Conference in Lake Buena Vista, Florida, June 29–July 1, 2005. Preconference sessions will start on Monday, June 27, 2005.

To learn more, visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org or call toll-free (888) 312–2743.

2005 Issue 1



U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Office of Multifamily Housing Programs
www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org





What residents of these properties needed were services in addition to education.

*—Denise Williams
NN Coordinator, Sacramento*

This is fabulous!’ was my initial reaction to the Neighborhood Networks initiative,” says Williams. “I’d always been involved in community building. My parents were adamant about social issues, and they ingrained that in me. So when I was asked to become involved with the initiative as an NN Coordinator, I felt I had found the perfect position. We had individuals who needed help, and now we had a great tool to assist them. It was a win-win situation,” she says.

Williams’ initial vision was for centers to offer programs for employment services and development, life-skills training, and afterschool programs, particularly in youth leadership and enrichment. “I already knew from my experience in community building that if you address residents’ needs, this would increase their participation in center programs. What residents of these properties needed were services in addition to education,” says Williams.

According to Adams, “In the early years of the initiative—1995 to 1997—computer technology was fairly new, not many households owned a computer, particularly those in low-income neighborhoods, and so offering a place to teach computer skills was appealing to property owners and managers. It made the initiative easier to promote. Initially, my vision was more youth oriented. I wanted centers to give children a head start in learning computers and in learning in general. I wanted them to have a structured afterschool learning environment where they could flourish and that would give them a positive outlet to occupy their time,” he says.

When Butler first heard about Neighborhood Networks, he thought it was “excellent to focus more on social needs, which are just as important as bricks and mortar. I knew it would help a lot of individuals,” he says.

CONTENTS

- Coordinators Celebrate a Decade of Neighborhood Networks1**
- New Center Promotes Children and Adult Programs4**
- Technology Program Empowers Residents . . .7**
- Celebrating a Decade of Providing Opportunities for America’s Families . .9**
- Neighborhood Networks 10th Anniversary National Training Conference . .11**

The Initiative’s Evolution

Having been involved with the initiative since its inception, these three coordinators have witnessed its positive evolution. “In the beginning, we didn’t have a center model or a blueprint to follow, so that was a challenge for us,” says Adams. Another major challenge coordinators faced was computer cost.

“Computers were much more expensive then. However, the cost of technology has decreased tremendously since 1995, and centers are acquiring more modern computers and Internet access, which enables them to offer more computer-based programs,” he continues.

Adams has seen Neighborhood Networks evolve in other areas. There is more imagination used to develop center programs. “It’s



now not just technology-based. There are more educational, workforce development, soft-skills training, and microenterprise development programs,” says Adams.

Echoing Adam’s sentiment, Williams says, “I’ve seen us evolve in the area of the programs we offer, with more focus on services for residents.”

Butler has seen centers evolve into one-stop shops for residents’ needs. “Not only do they offer instruction in computer technology and other educational programs, they have become recreational gathering places and a place for life-skills training and social services,” says Butler, who has seen his role evolve with the initiative. “Initially, as a coordinator, I was a numbers person, making sure properties were starting centers. Now I make sure that they are applying for 501(c)(3) status so that they are nonprofits eligible for tax deductible contributions and that they are developing and expanding partnerships with companies. I’m also happy that HUD is now expanding the education of its coordinators such as offering coordinator workshops.”

Impact on Low-Income Communities

“Positive, so positive, is my opinion of the impact the initiative has had on its target communities,” says Williams. “This is an initiative that really works. I know of center English as a Second Language programs that have helped residents complete high school and earn their GED (general equivalency diploma). I’ve known individuals who lacked basic literacy skills to complete job applications, which was a barrier for many of them seeking employment. Now they can complete basic job applications, and some, who have never been employed, have gained employment. I’ve seen caring center staff monitor such individuals through the employment process—from reviewing their job applications to helping provide transportation to and obtain clothing for their interviews,” Williams adds.

“Also, I know of properties that have experienced a reduction in crime, drug use, and incidences of graffiti that have attributed this to the presence of a Neighborhood Networks center. Single mothers are finding jobs with skills developed through participating in center programs. Also, their children have a safe place after school to study and do their homework,” she continues.

Butler describes Neighborhood Networks as a worthwhile initiative in which he has seen a lot of success stories. “I’ve heard single parents testify how before their involvement in Neighborhood Networks programs, they were embarrassed because they could not help their

I make sure [properties] are applying for 501(c)(3) status . . . and are developing and expanding partnerships with companies.

*—Vernon Butler
NN Coordinator, Fort Worth*

Nationally, we know that properties with centers claim less problems with vandalism and crime.

*—Thomas “Buck” Adams
NN Coordinator, Knoxville*

children with their homework, read the newspaper, or even read promotional flyers that were distributed in their development. But after participating in center programs, they can now help their children with homework assignments and read a story to them, which has restored their pride. They can now read the newspaper and newsletters, which keeps them informed about current local events.”

Adams also believes the initiative has had a positive impact on communities. “There are many success stories that describe how participating in center programs has helped residents develop and enhance much-needed employment skills, parenting skills, computer skills, and life skills. I know of a resident who found a long-lost relative just by performing a search on the Internet. Nationally, we know that properties with centers claim less problems with vandalism and crime.”

The Future Looks Bright

As we celebrate a decade of Neighborhood Networks, we congratulate these and other HUD Coordinators and staff for their passion and commitment to promoting, opening, and helping to maintain centers. In 1995, the time was right to launch Neighborhood Networks; its nationwide success and impact are a testimony to that fact, and its future holds even greater promise for individuals and communities. ♦



*Elaine Lazard, Center Director
Lazard Education Center
Lafayette, Louisiana*

New Center Promotes Children and Adult Programs

The Lazard Education Center in Lafayette, Louisiana, opened its doors in September 2004, approximately 9 years after HUD launched the Neighborhood Networks initiative. Already it is putting the power of technology in the hands of individuals and meeting residents’ needs.

Center Director Elaine Lazard has a passion for education and provides learning opportunities for adults and children in her community. Because of her commitment, this Neighborhood Networks center has, in a short time, become a venue for education, training, and life enrichment.

“At the center, we provide afterschool tutoring and enrichment activities, counseling, computer-based educational programs for children and youth K–12, and computer literacy courses and soft-skills training for adults,” says Lazard. “In our afterschool



programs, which we offer from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m., we help the children with their homework, offer enrichment activities such as arts and crafts, and even invite guest speakers that discuss topics relating to various professions. We also provide cultural field trips, mainly on the first and third Saturdays of the month and weekly during the summer,” she continues. “Students who maintain good academic standing, are respectful and well-behaved, and have an excellent attendance record will visit ISIT Records. They will get a tour of the studio and its production operations and will be allowed to record a song or record poetry to music,” says Lazard.

Computer-Based Educational Programs

“At the Lazard Education Center, we use computers to enhance and develop our children’s technology and academic skills,” says Lazard. “They are given instruction in basic computer use, including identifying different parts of the computer and how they work and learning how to use the Internet and software applications such as Microsoft Word.”

At the center, Lazard uses various Internet programs to instruct children in mathematics and English. In addition, she uses the Fast Forward Reading Program, a computer-based program offered by the Louisiana State Department of Education that teaches reading skills. “With this program, I can teach children grades K–3 the alphabet and phonics skills such as how to pronounce and spell words,” says Lazard. The program also includes an audio component that allows children to listen to a story and read along with the narrator.

In addition to the reading skills program, the center offers a Mathland program for children grades K–4. “This program has activities and tests that strengthen and improve students’ mathematics skills,” says Lazard, who conducts skills assessments for participants in each program. “If a student masters his or her assigned level, they can move to the next level,” she continues.

Lazard helps children to prepare for the Iowa and Louisiana Education Assessment Program (LEAP). “Children in Louisiana must pass the fourth-grade LEAP test to be promoted to fifth grade, and the eighth-grade LEAP test to be promoted to ninth grade. It’s a mandatory requirement,” she says.

Counseling Program

Lazard is concerned about the well-being of the children in her care, particularly those with behavioral issues. “I have a certified social worker/counselor meet with any child with behavioral problems,”



says Lazard. This individual is also available to other children and parents for confidential and personal counseling. "Sometimes the children just need to talk to someone, or a parent may request that their child speak to someone professional about their personal issues. We make sure that they have that outlet," says Lazard.

Adult Computer Literacy and Soft-Skills Training

"We try to accommodate our adults with any problems they may have," says Lazard. "We help them confront their fear of technology and help them develop computer skills." Adults are taught basic computer skills such as how to turn the computer on, use the keyboard and monitor, and navigate a particular program. "For some adults, learning to use the computer is complicated, and we have to repeat some steps several times, but that's okay," say Lazard. "I'm patient with them."

Lazard also assists adult residents with soft-skills training. "I help them to develop and, in many cases, improve their interviewing skills," she says. "We use role playing. I act as the interviewer and ask participants questions a potential employer may ask." Lazard also shows participants how to complete employment applications and advises them on how to dress for success.

In addition to computer and soft-skills training, Lazard also instructs adults and families with the TV 411 Family Learning Kit, which includes components such as health, nutrition, mathematics, reading, writing, and civics. "Adults come twice a month for this program," says Lazard, who also instructs adults in public speaking.

For more information on programs for adults and children at the Lazard Education Center, contact:

Elaine Lazard
1512 Louisiana Avenue #314
Lafayette, LA 70501
Phone: (337) 344-5477
Fax: (337) 261-0161
E-mail: elazard@cox-internet.com ♦

Technology Program Empowers Residents

When Operation P.E.A.C.E. opened its doors on November 5, 1995, in Atlanta, Georgia, it signaled that the Neighborhood Networks initiative, launched only 2 months earlier through HUD's Office of Multifamily Housing Programs, had gained support from yet another property owner and manager of a HUD insured and assisted property. The word was out that Neighborhood Networks was a new and innovative program that would help address residents' needs and put the power of technology in the hands of low-income housing residents. Operation P.E.A.C.E. embraced this opportunity, and now, almost 10 years later, it joins all Neighborhood Networks centers in celebrating a decade of success.

Like most centers, Operation P.E.A.C.E.'s initial focus was providing computer technology programs. But since those early years, it has expanded its programs to include workforce development, adult and youth education, social services, and healthcare programs. However, its technology program is still empowering residents.

Computer Training for Adults

"Our computer training program for adults is designed to encourage them to pursue careers in technology, math, and science," says Ingrid Gibbs, program director and instructor. "There are three courses, taught in 16-week sessions, that adults can enroll in, depending on their level of computer literacy," adds Gibbs.

First, there is the Personal Computer (PC) Basics course, an entry-level course that helps novice computer users learn the fundamentals of operating a computer.

Second, there is the Microsoft Office User Specialist (MOUS) certification program, an intermediate computer course that teaches fundamentals of Microsoft Office applications such as Microsoft Word and PowerPoint.

The third course offered is the A+ certification course in which participants learn to build computers from scratch and install and repair various components.

"All of these classes are instructor led," explains Gibbs.

Our computer training program for adults is designed to encourage them to pursue careers in technology, math, and science.

*—Ingrid Gibbs
Program director and instructor
Operation P.E.A.C.E.*

We . . . encourage [children] to be producers instead of consumers and to become more knowledgeable in math, science, and technology.

*—Ingrid Gibbs
Program director and instructor
Operation P.E.A.C.E.*

Mentoring Program for Children

The center's technology program also focuses on children ages 8–11. "Why wait until they are 18 years old to teach them about careers in technology?" asks Gibbs. "We try to acclimate them to the applications of math, science, and technology now while they are exploring recreational interests."

Children are taught fundamentals of software development and mechanical engineering by building a robot from scratch using Lego pieces with attached electronic components. "They build their robots to move, walk, and pick up items," says Gibbs. "We use this method to encourage them to be producers instead of consumers and to become more knowledgeable in math, science, and technology. They use the theories and principles of math and science to formulate specifications on how the robot will look and move. For the robot to move, everything has to be calculated, which involves math. They also use various electronic components for different robot capabilities," explains Gibbs.

Personal Fulfillment

"It's fulfilling and rewarding to be a part of this program, especially when you realize that participants walk away learning more, and participation in your programs has given them a different perspective on their career options," says Gibbs.

In addition to adult training and mentoring programs for youth, residents also use the technology center for workforce development activities, including developing résumés, skills assessments, online employment services, and career development purposes such as exploration, education, and planning. "The idea of career development revolutionizes their outlook on employment," says Gibbs. "They want more than a job. They want a career. Most of our clients have not attended college, and just this change in their mindset, they want to define their own career path is revolutionary," Gibbs continues.

For additional information about the Operation P.E.A.C.E. center's technology program, contact:

Ingrid Gibbs
425 Peace Avenue
Atlanta, GA 30308
Phone: (404) 892-0026
Fax: (404) 892-4941
E-mail: opeace@bellsouth.net
Web site: www.operationpeace.org

Celebrating a Decade of Providing Opportunities for America's Families

*By Delores A. Pruden
Director of HUD's Neighborhood Networks,
an Initiative of the Office of Multifamily
Housing Programs*

Ten years ago, HUD envisioned an energized network of community technology centers that could connect families to the endless opportunities of the digital age. Today, Neighborhood Networks centers are bringing technology access to hundreds of families in cities and rural towns across America, helping children, adults, and seniors to take advantage of a wide range of opportunities that computers and the Internet allow.



Neighborhood Networks centers are computer centers established by property owners and managers to provide residents the opportunity to become computer literate. Centers expand opportunities for people and families who seek jobs and want to learn how to read, do better in school, and gain 21st-century skills. The Neighborhood Networks initiative was and continues to be a connection to self-sufficiency, enterprise, and community development.

Congratulations Everyone

In this our 10th year, I want to congratulate all the Neighborhood Networks stakeholders for their continuous commitment to the Neighborhood Networks initiative and for providing opportunities for America's families. Their efforts have inspired hope and instilled pride and a sense of purpose for users of Neighborhood Networks centers.

In particular, I would like to thank:

Owners and managers of Multifamily Housing properties for making the decision to commit space and resources to create and sustain community learning centers.

Center directors and staff for creating programs that support residents' needs and interests. Their passion and commitment have been integral to the success of Neighborhood Networks centers.

The Neighborhood Networks initiative was and continues to be a connection to self-sufficiency, enterprise, and community development.



Partners for providing valuable resources, including volunteers, in-kind donations, and products and services to help meet center needs.

Residents for seizing the opportunity to improve their quality of life.

HUD Coordinators for their tireless efforts working with property owners and managers to establish new centers and maintain existing ones while seeking out partnerships and resources to assist centers. Most of all, I thank them for being a source of constant support.

Other HUD staff who continue to be a tower of support and whom I respect and rely on for advice, guidance, and resources.

A Time of Study, Reflection, and Acknowledgment

From June 29 to July 1, 2005, in Lake Buena Vista, Florida, Neighborhood Networks will hold its 10th Anniversary National Training Conference. Our theme is “Connecting Communities. Creating Opportunities.” This will be a time of study, reflection, and acknowledgment as we honor those who have contributed so much to the initiative’s success. It will also be a time of study as we conduct informative breakout and plenary sessions that address topics such as the Strategic Tracking And Reporting Tool (START), partnership and consortia development, and senior, youth, and adult programs—from workforce development to financial literacy. In addition, we will offer a preconference grantwriting workshop and a Welcome-to-the-Neighborhood seminar for new centers. The exhibit hall will house up to 25 exhibitors. Neighborhood Networks centers are welcome to showcase products from their microenterprise programs. Moreover, we have planned an offsite visit with one of our long-time partners, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), on Friday, July 1. The conference will be an exciting and informative event, and I hope to see you there.

Looking Forward

The success and impact that Neighborhood Networks has had since its inception in 1995 testifies to the need that Neighborhood Networks centers fill. Although these past 10 years have been years of extraordinary growth and accomplishment, the future holds even greater promise for individuals and communities. Initially, there were only a handful of Neighborhood Networks centers, and they focused mainly on providing training in computer applications. Now, 10 years later, numerous centers nationwide provide a variety of technology, education, and life enrichment

The success and impact that Neighborhood Networks has had since its inception in 1995 testifies to the need that Neighborhood Networks centers fill.



programs in addition to providing social and healthcare services that address the needs of the communities they serve. As the Neighborhood Networks initiative grows, residents will continue to benefit in innumerable ways. Perhaps most importantly, their career choices will be expanded, providing real opportunities to improve their quality of life.

Neighborhood Networks sees a future where families climb the economic ladder to success. Where Neighborhood Networks centers serve as anchors in their communities for growth and enrichment. Where youth are inspired to achieve greatness. Where adults get jobs, improve their incomes, and take advantage of homeownership opportunities.

I hope you will join me in forging a future for Neighborhood Networks that fills communities across America with promise, adults with renewed hope and possibility, and children with the tools to fulfill their dreams. ♦

Neighborhood Networks 10th Anniversary National Training Conference

HUD's Neighborhood Networks is celebrating a decade of providing opportunities for America's families. To commemorate this important milestone, the initiative will hold its 10th Anniversary National Training Conference from June 29 to July 1, 2005, at the Hilton Hotel in Lake Buena Vista, Florida. The conference theme is "Connecting Communities. Creating Opportunities."

Preconference Session

The conference kicks off on Tuesday, June 28, with preconference sessions, highlighted by the much-anticipated grantwriting workshop and the Welcome-to-the-Neighborhood seminar.

The all-day grantwriting workshop will provide novice, intermediate, and advanced grant writers hands-on, interactive experiences on how to write grants. There will also be followup sessions in grantwriting for participants of the preconference workshop.

The Welcome-to-the-Neighborhood seminar will introduce new centers to Neighborhood Networks and include such information as how to operate a center and increase resident participation, available resources, HUD's role, and the Strategic Tracking And Reporting Tool (START).



Back by Popular Demand

From Wednesday, June 29, to Friday, July 1, more than 25 breakout sessions focus on issues important to Neighborhood Networks stakeholders, including START, partnership and consortia development, senior and youth programs, and adult programs such as employment opportunities.

Microenterprise Zone

The exhibit hall will house up to 25 exhibitors, including national partners, nonprofits, and corporations, provide resources and information to conference participants, and serve as a gathering place and networking area. In addition, Neighborhood Networks centers are welcome to showcase products from their microenterprise programs.

Recognition Ceremony

Neighborhood Networks has faced some challenges but has experienced even more successes during the past 10 years. Much of this success can be attributed to the hard work and faithfulness of our stakeholders (including property owners and managers, partners, center directors and staff) and HUD staff who commit space and resources to start, operate, and maintain centers; help identify residents' needs; provide valuable resources and services to sustain centers; assist with center programs; and offer direction and support for the initiative. On Thursday, June 30, the stakeholders and the residents they serve will be honored at a recognition ceremony.

Come Join Us

The 10th Anniversary National Training Conference will be exciting and informative and a time to reflect on and celebrate the success of Neighborhood Networks. Do not miss this opportunity to celebrate 10 years of "Connecting Communities. Creating Opportunities." ♦

NNewsline

NNewsline is published electronically by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Office of Multifamily Housing Programs. Additional copies may be downloaded at www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org. For more information about Neighborhood Networks, contact the Information Center toll-free at (888) 312-2743.