



Section 5:
***Special Audiences Require
Customized Programs***

Highlights of Section 5: Special Audiences Require Customized Programs

<input type="checkbox"/> One Mission, Several Audiences	93
<input type="checkbox"/> Creating Programs For and With Seniors	93
<input type="checkbox"/> Do-It-Yourself Financing for Senior Programs	95
<input type="checkbox"/> Starting an Intergenerational Program	97
<input type="checkbox"/> Helping Youth Achieve Success	98
<input type="checkbox"/> Offer Independent Learning Opportunities	101
<input type="checkbox"/> Participate in Special Learning Opportunities	102
<input type="checkbox"/> Provide Free Time and Special Events	102
<input type="checkbox"/> Recruit Staff and Volunteers	102
<input type="checkbox"/> Build Community Partnerships	103
<input type="checkbox"/> Meeting the Needs of Adult Literacy Students	107
<input type="checkbox"/> Develop a Work Plan	109
<input type="checkbox"/> Some Tools of the Trade	109
<input type="checkbox"/> Combining Methods and Technology to Develop Skills	112
<input type="checkbox"/> Resources for Adult Literacy Learners	112
<input type="checkbox"/> Developing Programs for Rural Centers	114
<input type="checkbox"/> Linking Residents to Healthcare Resources	115

Special Audiences Require Customized Programs

One Mission, Several Audiences

While all Neighborhood Networks centers share the same mission—moving residents toward self-sufficiency—the audiences they serve and how they work to achieve this goal are very different. For example, the programs offered by centers located on senior properties may be very different from the programs offered by centers located on properties serving families and residents focused on securing employment. The program offerings at centers that serve senior residents may include presentations on health issues, free health screenings, or computer training that teaches residents how to use the Internet to obtain health information, as well as connect with families and friends all over the world. Centers with a target population focused on securing employment and raising families may offer workforce development, academic enhancement, literacy, and afterschool programs. And still other centers may determine that their most needed programs are those that help residents in rural communities overcome challenges in achieving self-sufficiency.

With hundreds of Neighborhood Networks centers across the nation—in cities, suburbs, and small towns—no two centers are the same. For a center to be successful, it must assess the specific needs of residents, and then develop and deliver programs that meet these needs.

The following section focuses on how Neighborhood Networks centers can meet the needs of five special audiences:

- Seniors.
- Youth.
- Adult literacy students.

- Residents of rural communities.
- Residents in need of healthcare information, support, and resources.

Creating Programs For and With Seniors

According to the Population Division of the United Nations, 1 of every 10 people is now 60 years old or older—by 2050, 1 of every 5 people will be 60 years old or older. This translates to thousands of potential participants for center programs. But the role of senior residents at Neighborhood Networks centers should not solely be viewed as a recipient of services. Seniors can also contribute to center programs by tutoring and mentoring young residents and bridging the generational divide.

Delivering Services That Seniors Need

Senior services work best when they combine a number of different approaches to improving the quality of life for seniors and helping them live independently. Neighborhood Networks centers can provide a variety of programs and services, including:

- **Social services.** Social service programs for seniors are especially necessary in low-income housing communities, and HUD's Neighborhood Networks Initiative can help fill this need. Senior programs at Neighborhood Networks centers can include production of resident newsletters, computer literacy classes, health and nutrition programs, community gardening, cultural outings, and mentoring projects with local schoolchildren.
- **Healthcare services.** Thanks to technological advances in medicine, Americans are living longer, healthier lives. Many seniors, however, must manage multiple health conditions that may

impede their ability to continue living independently. Some Neighborhood Networks centers offer onsite healthcare screenings for seniors, while others ensure that seniors have the latest information about access to healthcare and prescription drugs benefits. The Kraus Computer Learning Center in Brooklyn, New York, organized a registration drive to help seniors enroll in the first cycle of the Medicare Prescription Drug Plan. Many seniors heard that the plan could save them a considerable sum of money, but were intimidated about signing up because they also heard that navigating the Medicare Web site was complicated and knowing which plan to select was difficult. More than 15 seniors participated in the center's Medicare Prescription Drug Plan sign-up support program. As a result of the seniors' participation in the sign-up program, center staff members estimate that these seniors saved a total of more than \$25,000.

- **Computer training.** For many seniors, family and friends no longer live nearby, leaving them with a sense of isolation. To help seniors overcome this, centers may offer programs that introduce seniors to basic computing or improve their existing computer skills. Seniors often prefer to learn about computers in classes made up of other seniors. Offering a "seniors only" session may spark interest in the center and make seniors more likely to return. Some centers choose to offer senior programming during the day, when children attend school and most adults work. Computer classes and activities may include games, such as online chess or backgammon; e-mail communications with family and friends; electronic travel exploration via the Internet or CD-ROM programs; financial planning; and family tree programs and genealogical research. Another popular activity is to put learned computer skills to use in the creation of a community newsletter. The newsletter could highlight resident meetings, trips, activities, and news about the property and community. By participating in newsletter production, seniors learn new technology skills, increase interaction with other seniors, and develop a recognizable product. If a computer lab is going to be used

largely by senior residents, center directors may consider modifying the lab to meet senior needs. For example, computer tables may be elevated to accommodate wheelchairs, computer keyboards could be outfitted with large-letter stickers, and a magnifying apparatus could be attached to monitors to assist the visually impaired.

Neighborhood Networks centers can also help senior residents obtain important healthcare information by providing Internet access and helping them navigate the Web to find the information they need. Using the Internet, seniors can research the safety of new medicines, join online support groups, investigate alternative therapies, and learn about health insurance benefits. Online scientific journals provide a wealth of information about the latest research and advancements in medicine. The Internet allows seniors to research medical conditions and make informed decisions regarding their health. Some useful Web sites include:

- Administration on Aging, www.aoa.gov
- American Heart Association, www.americanheart.org
- American Lung Association, www.lungusa.org
- American Diabetes Association, www.diabetes.org
- American Cancer Society, www.cancer.org
- Alzheimer's Association, www.alz.org
- Arthritis Foundation, www.arthritis.org
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov
- Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA), the agency that administers Medicaid (www.cms.hhs.gov/home/medicaid.asp) and Medicare (www.medicare.gov)
- Mayo Clinic, www.mayohealth.org
- National Institutes of Health Age Pages, www.niapublications.org
- SeniorNet, www.seniornet.org

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which produces fact sheets about a variety of health issues, www.healthfinder.gov
- Miscellaneous health sites, including www.webmd.com, www.HealthCentral.com, and www.intelihealth.com

When accessing information from the Internet, users should always exercise caution because not all information is reliable. Major healthcare decisions should be made in concert with a physician.

- **Recreational activities.** Aging populations have increased leisure time and sometimes require social interaction and activities to fill this void. Neighborhood Networks centers also act as venues for senior recreational events and offer activities such as game nights, birthday celebrations, social outings, and seasonal gatherings. Creating a community garden is another way to engage seniors. Gardening increases exercise opportunities, provides inexpensive meal supplements, and contributes to the overall nutritional health of the seniors and their neighbors. Resident garden committees work with the property management to adopt garden use rules at each site. The committees also raise funds as needed for tools and supplies. (See Section 8 for more information about creating a community garden.)

Do-It-Yourself Financing for Senior Programs

To help finance senior programs and allow senior residents to contribute to their community, centers may want to enlist the help of seniors to raise funds. For example, at Kirkland Union Manor in Portland, Oregon, senior residents participate in a range of fundraising activities. These activities have included coordinating a community-wide rummage sale at the property. All proceeds of the sale were donated to the resident council to be used for senior activities as needed.

Senior residents have also sponsored activities that benefit the greater community. These activities have included providing clothing for children, food boxes, and other household items to families in need during the holiday season. Residents have also collected eyeglasses for local nonprofit agencies and aluminum flip tops from soft drink cans to support the Ronald McDonald House.

Resources for Developing Senior Programs

A number of organizations can help Neighborhood Networks centers develop and expand their programs for seniors. These organizations can provide information, technical assistance, and financial resources.

Information and Technical Assistance

American Association of Retired Persons (AARP),
www.aarp.org

AARP is a national membership organization for people 50 years of age or older. Its primary functions

Nation's Top Grant-Making Organizations for Senior Programs

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
www.rwjf.org

Pew Charitable Trusts
www.pewtrusts.org

The Commonwealth Fund
www.cmwf.org

Surdna Foundation
www.surdna.org

American Federation for Aging Research
www.afar.org

These organizations offer hundreds of grants annually, totaling as much as \$180 million. Visit their Web sites for additional information about grant application requirements and deadlines.

are legislative advocacy, research, information, and community services. AARP has a wealth of publications and audio-visual materials that can be ordered from its publication catalog. Local AARP offices also may provide program ideas and materials. Visit the AARP Web site or contact AARP at 601 E Street, NW, Washington, DC 20049; (888) 687-2277.

Generations United, *www.gu.org*

Generations United is a national coalition that helps bridge generation gaps through online intergenerational resources and programs. The organization works with Generations United coalitions across the country to link individuals of different generations with the organizations that represent them. Visit their Web site or contact Generations United at 1331 H Street, NW, Suite 900, Washington, DC 20005; (202) 289-3979.

Green Thumb, Inc.

www.workforceallianceonline.org/grthumb

Since 1965, Green Thumb, Inc. has provided training and employment opportunities to more than half a million people nationwide. Green Thumb has helped low-income seniors achieve self-sufficiency by providing highly effective, customer-focused employment and training programs. Visit their Web site or contact Green Thumb at P.O. Box 1475, Beaverton, OR 97075; (503) 649-0941.

National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, *www.n4a.org*

The organization provides communications, training, and technical assistance to educate and advocate about aging issues. The Web site links to local Area Agencies on Aging offices that can provide technical assistance and funding. Visit their Web site or contact the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging at 1730 Rhode Island Avenue, NW, Suite 1200, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 872-0888.

National Council on Aging (NCOA), *www.ncoa.org*

NCOA is a membership organization of community-based groups committed to aging issues. The organization provides educational programs on aging, participates in legislative advocacy, provides information about funding sources, and conducts research on aging issues. Visit their Web site or contact the NCOA at 1901 L Street, NW, Fourth Floor, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 479-1200.

Financial Information

Administration on Aging (AoA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *www.aoa.gov*

This government organization provides funding to and information about senior programs. The office has a resource directory for seniors that contains contact data on organizations providing information and other resources regarding the needs of older people. Visit the AoA Web site or contact the organization at One Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20001; (202) 619-0724.

The Commonwealth Fund, *www.commonwealthfund.org*

The Commonwealth Fund's primary goal is to help Americans live healthy, productive lives and to assist targeted groups with serious or neglected problems. Its priorities include advancing the well-being of the elderly. Visit The Commonwealth Fund's Web site or contact the organization at One East 75th Street, New York, NY 10021-2692; (212) 606-3800.

The Pew Charitable Trusts, *www.pewtrusts.org*

Pew makes funds available to nonprofit organizations for programs that encourage individual achievement, cross-disciplinary problem solving, and innovative approaches to meeting changing needs. The Trusts' Health and Human Services program is designed to promote the health and well-being of Americans and to strengthen disadvantaged communities. Visit Pew's Web site or contact the foundation at 2005 Market Street, Suite 1700, Philadelphia, PA 19103-7077; (215) 575-9050.

Intergenerational Programs: Linking Youth with Past Cultures and Traditions

Neighborhood Networks centers provide an ideal setting to bring young and old together through programs and activities designed to share knowledge between both groups. Programs designed to help seniors can focus on specific needs, but also provide an opportunity to bridge a generational divide.

Intergenerational programs offer residents an opportunity to share their experiences and help young children and adults understand their own history. These lifelong learning programs keep seniors engaged in the community and provide opportunities for older persons to share their knowledge and experience with other generations. Intergenerational activities provide a forum to establish a link between young children and past cultures and traditions.

Starting an Intergenerational Program

Steps to develop an intergenerational program for seniors will vary depending on local goals and resources. Effective planning and ongoing communication between the two groups, as well as teachers and center staff members, are staples of any program. Generations United, a national coalition working to promote intergenerational policy, programs, and issues, recommends the following steps to start an intergenerational program for seniors:

- **Conduct a needs assessment or survey of seniors.** The assessment can be formal or informal. A center director may learn of senior interests and needs through daily interactions with residents. Other centers may need a more formal tool, such as a survey or questionnaire to identify interest areas and to indicate willingness to participate in requested activities. The Strategic Tracking and Reporting Tool (START) provides guidance on conducting a needs assessment.
- **Build a partnership with area schools and youth organizations.** Work with one or two organizations, such as the local Parent Teacher Association (visit the national PTA Web site at *www.pta.org* for more information).

Contact local schools, childcare agencies, youth centers, or youth organizations, such as the Boy Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, etc. Identify one or two teachers or youth center leaders to coordinate the program and serve as a liaison with parents.

- **Establish measurable goals and objectives.** In order to have a successful program, the goals and objectives of the senior center and the youth program should be similar. For example, one goal could be for program participants to remain active in the program for the entire school year. *Section 2: Starting a Neighborhood Networks Center* offers a detailed description of establishing goals and objectives.
- **Develop a monitoring and evaluation plan.** Continuous oversight and periodic review of the program help to identify what parts of the program are working and what parts need to be revised. The evaluation should assess whether goals and objectives are met. For example, if one goal is for participants to remain in the program for the entire school year, the evaluation plan would measure the length of time that participants attended planned events. START provides guidance on monitoring and evaluating programs.
- **Begin with a clear and realistic program design and budget.** Advance planning of activities and early identification of available resources avoid problematic last-minute attempts to establish and run a program. Start early to obtain parental permission, achieve senior consensus, and find funds for events. Find a consistent place and time for activities to help encourage regular attendance by seniors and students.
- **Ensure that transportation is available.** Students and seniors participating in the program may require transportation to attend activities. Existing modes of transportation, such as a school bus or resident van, can help increase the level of participation. Centers without vehicles may consider a partnership with a public transportation company, local community center, or faith-based organization to provide transportation.

- **Recruit, select, and match participants.** Centers can try various methods for recruiting participants, including describing the program during the monthly resident council meeting, advertising the program in community newsletters, posting a signup sheet in common areas of the apartment complex, holding a potential participant introduction meeting, and discussing the program with teachers and having them provide information to students.
- **Prepare and train staff and participants.** Preparation and training will ensure that staff and participants achieve lifelong learning goals. Generations United has online intergenerational resources and programs to help prepare staff and participants. Visit the Generations United Web site at www.gu.org.
- **Coordinate and supervise activities.** Intergenerational program coordinators should work closely with one another to facilitate activities.
- **Recognize and support participants.** Periodic activities that recognize volunteer efforts encourage participants to continue in the program. For example, one center held a winter holiday dinner and musical to express appreciation for the senior participants. In turn, seniors hosted an end-of-the-school year barbecue for the students. Both activities celebrated the time and effort that the students and seniors invested in the program.

Appendix F includes detailed descriptions of senior programs operating at four Neighborhood Networks centers.

Helping Youth Achieve Success

Youth education programs are a major focus for Neighborhood Networks centers serving HUD FHA-insured and -assisted apartment properties with a large proportion of families. Many of these centers are using technology to help children achieve academic success, expand career horizons, and promote critical thinking skills.

The following section strives to help Neighborhood Networks center staff members and partners create effective programs for young people under the age of 18.

Key Challenges of Youth Programming

Neighborhood Networks centers face five key challenges in developing effective youth programs:

- **Articulating a clear guiding purpose.** Youth activities will vary depending on each center's overall mission and program goals. Whatever the specific mix, however, youth programming should help young people master technology. The idea is to reinforce children's basic technology skills and enable them to handle with confidence whatever technology they may later encounter.
- **Determining the focus of youth programs.** Some Neighborhood Networks center programs help young people with homework and tie technology use to school-related projects. Others focus on offering non-school-related activities and structured projects. Most centers allow for free time or games after homework is completed. Some programs use an open lab approach. Others use the computer lab as an adjunct to other afterschool activities, such as arts and crafts, scouting, or a broader enrichment or personal empowerment program. Neighborhood Networks centers sometimes include programs for preschoolers, and some have intergenerational activities.

What is the best approach? The one that best fits the needs and goals of residents. Ideally, centers will provide school support programs, but these will be just the beginning. Whatever the mix,

staff, children, and parents should all help determine the scope and limits of the center's youth activities.

- **Paying attention to developmental stages.** Devising a learning environment and activities that are appropriate for different age groups is a critical challenge in youth programming. Activities will need to accommodate children's varying developmental and social skills. The space itself, for example, should be adaptable for small, as well as full-sized people and arranged for ease of supervision. Scheduling must take into account children's attention spans and enthusiasm. Center staff members need special information about younger users, including parental permissions and telephone numbers.

Software choices should include carefully selected programs. Software that requires fine motor control of the mouse and an understanding of relatively advanced facts or complex concepts will be inappropriate for younger children. Software stressing simplicity and repetition will bore older children. Although the center should always be staffed, younger children need more structure and supervision, while older ones need more flexibility and independence. Younger users probably will need some assistance in focusing their attention and energy in the lab. This need not be intrusive control; asking them to sign in and designate a preferred activity may be sufficient.

Ideally, different age groups will be scheduled to be in the center at separate times, although there may be some open family time. The center may need different rules about which equipment can be used. For example, while eight-year-olds may confidently use a "paint" program independently, use of scanners and photo imaging software might be restricted to older children or require direct staff supervision. Neighborhood Networks centers offering Internet access also must give attention to special issues of safety for their younger users and be prepared to work with parents in setting boundaries for children's activities.

- **Designing learning experiences that use technology as a tool.** The prime time for youth programs is late afternoon when centers offer afterschool activities. Some centers may seek to respond to the needs of working parents by providing general childcare and entertainment. But Neighborhood Networks centers and center youth programs can, and should, be much more. To make best use of the investment in technology, it is important for the center to develop an active and clearly defined educational program that complements recreation programs and socializing with friends. The center is a place to learn by doing. When staff create that expectation, children respect it, and the center can be both manageable and enjoyable. In creating a safe and comfortable activity space, the center can teach the key lesson that learning is fun.
- **Securing resources to maintain an effective learning environment.** Money is essential for all Neighborhood Networks centers, but it is only part of the equation for the best youth-oriented centers. Equally important are thoughtful, creative, and flexible staff members, both paid and volunteers. Developing effective working relationships with other community organizations, especially education agencies, is also a key program component. Good partnerships not only attract varied resources to the center, they also create a sense for residents of being connected to the greater community.

Effective Strategies for Youth Programming

Support School Success

Neighborhood Networks centers can support academic success by helping with homework and school projects, providing information for children and parents about working effectively with the schools, and offering opportunities for participation in special programs and events to strengthen academic skills. In developing effective school support programs, Neighborhood Networks centers should:

- **Learn about residents' schools.** Centers should make a special effort to reach out to the schools

their resident users attend. Center staff should ask school principals and technology coordinators about the computer technology used at school and the school's expectations about computer access at students' homes. Teachers and school officials will be glad to learn about the Neighborhood Networks center offerings, and many will be eager to help center staff provide a smooth connection between school and home. It may also be possible to develop relationships with particular teachers. Among the topics to discuss are: What kind of computers and software are the schools using for different age groups? At what age and for what types of projects are children expected to use the Internet for research? What policies do the schools have for Internet use? Are there curriculum frameworks and standards for technology skills? Will the schools provide free or low-cost copies (including manuals and teachers' guides) of educational software currently in use? Will the schools provide training or other resources for center staff? How can your center benefit from a community service requirement?

- **Provide an appropriate working space.** If the Neighborhood Networks center will serve as a homework center, it needs work tables and materials, as well as computers and related equipment. Some centers may be able to find additional space (and staff or volunteer supervisors) for homework activities. Very small centers may be precluded from offering general homework supervision but may be able to help children use computers to work on specific projects.
- **Use appropriate equipment and software.** The most versatile software programs are the standard office packages that can be used for writing, math, and organizing stories and reports, supplemented by reference programs on CD-ROMs and the Internet. Because younger children may find a full-fledged word processor overwhelming, centers with very young participants may want to use a simplified "Works" program. Matching the center's word processing software to school software is advisable. Other core software might include a

Web Sites that Offer Software Reviews

Children's Technology Review

www.childrenssoftware.com/

This site complements the *Children's Technology Review*, a print magazine with news about the Internet and software, feature articles, and book reviews. The site's most popular feature is the searchable database, the Children's Software Finder™, that includes thousands of software reviews. Access to search the site's database requires having a subscription to the *Children's Technology Review*. *Children's Technology Review* is published by Active Learning Associates.

Superkids Educational Software Review

www.superkids.com

This site includes software reviews by children, parents, and teachers. There is also a set of forms for contributing reviews.

Learning Village

www.learningvillage.com

Learning Village is an independent review and advisory center for parents and teachers who are looking for credible information on the best in educational software. Reviews are organized by learning area.

Review Corner

<http://school.discovery.com/parents/reviewcorner>

This Web site rates educational software on a five-star system. The site looks for products that are thoughtfully designed and produced and that offer positive, encouraging, and socially responsible experiences to the children who use them.

children's drawing program, publishing program, typing program, and Web page editor.

There is an ever-growing supply of software labeled "educational" available in the marketplace, but some of it is not very educational at all. Useful academic software for young users are varying levels of math, grammar, and language reviews, and SAT preparation software. Often, such software uses music, graphics, and games designed to make the work more fun. In choosing software, the most important questions are:

- Will it actively engage users in learning rather than just mouse-clicking drills?
- Do games and other features support or detract from learning?
- Will the software help users do something new or better?
- Is it easy to use and support in your center?
- Is the software, especially its games, consistent with the values of your program?

Center staff should ask children for their software wish list before purchasing programs. The center may be able to get a review copy and have the children test it. Center staff may also want to consult a software review site on the Web or software reviews in various publications.

- **Provide adequate and appropriate supervision.** Many children will need help developing good homework habits, in addition to assistance with understanding specific assignments and tasks. Neighborhood Networks centers may need to recruit parents, grandparents, older youth, or other volunteers to check homework, offer encouragement, and monitor the children's progress. All supervisors should understand how to help students without taking over. Some schools provide a call-in telephone line or television program for homework help, and some teachers now arrange for e-mail help. Online homework resources are also available.

Offer Independent Learning Opportunities

Neighborhood Networks centers can provide a wide range of learning experiences for young users to develop creativity, intellectual independence, and critical thinking. The center can encourage children to learn in a more relaxed environment, without the structure and pressure of tests and grades. Staff can work with children to identify their interests and devise appropriate projects. Activities can range from simple drawing or illustrating stories with clip art to more complex projects like creating Web pages or

Web Sites that Offer Homework Help

Ask Dr. Math

www.mathforum.org/dr.math/

Learners of all ages can ask math questions at this site, which also features archives of answers and other information about math problems and topics.

Discovery's Homework Help

http://school.discoveryeducation.com/homeworkhelp/homework_help_home.html

This site contains hundreds of links to reference works and other resources that are appropriate for students of all ages.

MadSci Network

www.madsci.org

There is interesting and fun scientific information on this site. Centers may find it especially useful for homework help. Professional scientists answer questions from students of all ages. The site includes an archive of previous questions and answers.

learning to write a new game program with audio and video effects.

Activities can readily be geared to different ages and computer skill levels. A group of 12-year-olds, for example, might help plan a community garden and, in the process, learn to use a variety of computer programs, including drawing programs, word processing to write a survey identifying residents' plant preferences, and the Internet or a CD-ROM program to research growing cycles. Another group might write a cookbook of residents' favorite recipes, or prepare a community newsletter with photographs taken with a digital camera. Younger children might use a paint program to outline pictures for place-mats, which they could then color with crayons and laminate. Or they could use word processing and clip art to write and illustrate a joke book. Older children might participate in a college or job preparation project in which they use computers to research job opportunities and prepare résumés and applications. Such activities may be organized into larger projects or clubs.

Participate in Special Learning Opportunities

Neighborhood Networks centers may be able to participate in special projects and competitions designed primarily, but not exclusively, for school classes. These include programs such as ThinkQuest, an international competition in which students ages 9 to 19 and teachers are challenged to create the best educational Web sites, and the International Education and Resource Network's (iEARN) communications and writing projects. Centers might also create joint projects with other Neighborhood Networks centers, community technology centers, or nearby schools. Such activities may demand a different kind of staff involvement beyond coaching children in computer programs or helping with homework. Community or industry volunteers are excellent resources.

Provide Free Time and Special Events

A center that targets homework support ideally also will provide free time or open lab time. Most children are motivated by the chance to pursue their own projects. Older youth may be independent enough to participate in adult open lab time and appreciate being considered an adult for that purpose. Younger children may need separate time set aside as part of the afterschool program or as family time, when they bring an older sibling or adult to the center. Inter-generational activities can contribute significantly to the quality of life in a housing development. Possible projects might include working together on a residents' newsletter or designing decorations for a community room.

Most centers will develop a core program that fills the daily schedule and weekly calendar. But time can still be set aside for special programs. It is especially important to provide opportunities for parents to learn about the center and their children's activities. A Neighborhood Networks center can give parents a safe, comfortable place to raise questions about technology issues, even if they are not participating in other center programs. In addition to "show and tell" sessions where the children display their new skills for their parents, centers might offer special events like student-parent sessions on using the Internet to explore college options or a discussion on Internet safety issues such as participating in chat rooms and dealing with inappropriate materials on the World Wide Web. Public school and library staff may be available to participate in such programs.

Recruit Staff and Volunteers

Computers are no substitute for good coaches and teachers. The most effective Neighborhood Networks center youth programs feature a strong center director, funding for additional youth staff, and volunteers to complement center staff. Centers use a variety of staffing arrangements, including part-time and contract employees. A few centers have a full-time youth education coordinator. Increasingly, centers are training residents to help staff youth programs. Even the strongest centers rarely have all the paid staff they

need for their youth programs. Therefore, centers should think of volunteer staffing as a strategy, with a plan for recruiting, training, and recognizing the volunteers.

National programs, such as AmeriCorps VISTA: Volunteers in Service To America, can be an excellent source of volunteers for Neighborhood Networks centers. These volunteers are recruited for year-long, full-time positions in local public agencies or private nonprofit organizations. For more information about the VISTA program, visit the AmeriCorps Web site (www.americorps.org).

Churches and other private organizations also have volunteer programs, as do a growing number of colleges and high schools that now have community service requirements. Centers may be able to interest individual college and graduate/education students or employees from a nearby business in volunteering. Residents who have graduated from adult programs at Neighborhood Networks centers can be trained to help with youth programs. Such volunteer work may be structured as part of a path leading to paid employment. Many centers use volunteers to

supervise children, but often volunteers can play a more significant role.

The best programs invite volunteers to add to the knowledge and skills available at the center and expose young people to a larger group of successful adults and mentors. See Section 6 for additional information on recruiting volunteers.

Build Community Partnerships

Successful youth programs draw heavily on partnerships with public and private agencies to support their youth education activities. Schools and community colleges are key places to seek partners and such relationships can be extremely beneficial for the center and its users. Successful partnerships take real effort to establish and sustain. Schools operate in a more structured and formal system than Neighborhood Networks centers and some officials may be slow to see centers as educational peers. It can be helpful to cultivate one person in the school as a “champion” to help develop a good working relationship.

Federal Education Initiatives

21st Century Community Learning Centers is a federal program that funds school-based afterschool learning activities. Each project must establish a working partnership with community partners, such as Ys or Boys & Girls Clubs. In some communities, Neighborhood Networks centers may be able to become partners or provide services. For more information, visit their Web site at www.ed.gov/21stCCLC.

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) was designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. GEAR UP provides six-year grants to states and partnerships to provide services at high-poverty middle and high schools. GEAR UP grantees serve an entire cohort of students beginning no later than the seventh grade and follow the cohort through high school. GEAR UP funds are also used to provide college scholarships to low-income students. For more information, visit <http://www.ed.gov/programs/gearup/index.html>.

Neighborhood Networks centers should reach out to their local school system to learn about participating. In some cases, a center representative may be asked to serve on a local coordinating committee—which can open doors for other resources. Materials developed for these programs will be available, usually at no cost, for use in center programs. For more information, call (800) USA-LEARN.

Good communications skills also are necessary for establishing and maintaining strong school partnerships. Both schools and Neighborhood Networks centers share a mutual interest in helping children learn. Focusing on specific projects—creating successes in the partnership—can provide a basis for more far-reaching activities.

Federally funded education programs now stress the importance of community collaborations. A strong relationship with education agencies may open up opportunities for acquiring equipment and materials, volunteers, or even participating as a community partner in a large-scale grant or other program not otherwise open to Neighborhood Networks centers. See Section 6 for additional information on building partnerships.

Helpful Resources

Neighborhood Networks centers can turn to a wealth of resources to support their youth program planning and activities. First among these are community partners.

The nearest public library is a good place to start to find a partner for a Neighborhood Networks center youth education program. Many libraries have received grants from government or technology companies to expand computer access, and many now provide free public Internet access. Library staff can help develop or share teaching materials. Libraries also have print resources that may be useful, and they may be willing to acquire materials, such as computer magazines, books, software, and CD-ROMs, that a center budget cannot support.

Library staff often have developed training on using Web search engines and other research techniques and will be eager to help residents learn to use their online catalogues. Again, the best partnerships will offer mutual benefits. While the library may be able to provide supplementary resources, center staff and advanced users, including youth, may be able to assist the library in presenting and marketing special events on the Internet, for example.

Nearby businesses and labor groups may also be interested in partnering with Neighborhood Networks centers. A bank, for example, might provide funds, volunteers, surplus furniture, office supplies, or equipment, and/or help develop and present projects related to banking and credit for older children. Other nearby employers and unions also may be interested in providing information about career possibilities, as well as volunteer opportunities for their staff, both in person and online.

Other e-mail lists and Internet news groups dealing with technology education may provide opportunities to discuss questions ranging from educational theory to installing computer memory. Most states have an organization serving school teachers using technology, and these may provide center staff with useful contacts, program ideas, and even discounts on software. A contact list for these groups can be found at www.iste.org/resources/. This list includes a wide variety of resources providing curriculum and activity ideas, as well as other useful information for technology-based youth education programs. The universe of such resources online is growing rapidly, and includes:

- **American Library Association** (www.ala.org). In addition to comprehensive resources about public libraries, this site includes a page of references for children and their caregivers, including suggestions for books, as well as online links, and *The Librarian's Guide to Great Web Sites for Kids*, which covers a range of topics and issues about using the Internet safely and effectively.
- **Blue Web'n** (www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/bluewebn). Blue Web'n is a searchable database of outstanding Internet learning sites categorized by subject area, audience, and type (lessons, activities, projects, resources, references, and tools). It can be especially useful for planning classes and activities for all age groups, and includes online activities for learners. The Blue Web'n Weekly Update is an e-mail notice of the week's new hot picks.

- **College Board** (www.collegeboard.com). College Board is a national, nonprofit membership association dedicated to preparing, inspiring, and connecting students to college and opportunity. Founded in 1990, the association is composed of several thousands of schools, colleges, universities, and other educational organizations. Each year, the College Board serves millions of students and their parents and several thousands of high schools and colleges through major programs and services in college admission, guidance, assessment, financial aid, enrollment, and teaching and learning. Among its best-known programs are the SAT®, the PSAT/NMSQT®, and the Advanced Placement Program® (AP).
- **Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)** (www.eric.ed.gov) (1-800-LET-ERIC). This federally funded information system provides services and products on a broad range of education issues. Offerings include practical and theoretical information on teaching and learning, such as digests of journal articles, lesson plans, and links to other Web sites. The ERIC clearinghouses have a variety of brochures, guides, and tip sheets for teachers and parents, including *Getting On Line: A Friendly Guide for Teachers, Students, and Parents*, and others on topics from teaching children about the environment to helping children with their homework, assessing teacher qualifications, and evaluating the appropriateness of school curriculum and instruction. Many of the most useful and accessible subsites are pulled together as the National Parent Information Network (www.npin.org).
- **The Educator's Reference Desk** (www.eduref.org). This site provides high-quality resources and services to the education community. The Educator's Reference Desk offers thousands of lesson plans; more than 3,000 links to online education information; and more than 200 question archive responses.
- **Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)** (www.fns.usda.gov/fsp). This program administers the nutrition assistance programs of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The mission of FNS is to provide children and needy families better access to food and a more healthful diet through its food assistance programs and comprehensive nutrition education efforts. FNS has elevated nutrition and nutrition education to a top priority in all its programs. In addition to providing access to nutritious foods, FNS also works to empower program participants with knowledge of the link between diet and health.
- **Healthfinder** (www.healthfinder.gov). This U.S. Department of Health and Human Services gateway site links to a wide variety of information and resources on health, including medical dictionaries, support groups, hotlines, clinical reports, medical journals, and other resources accessible to the general public. You can also call the National Health Information Center.
- **iEARN (International Education and Resource Network)** (www.iearn.org). iEARN is a nonprofit organization made up of thousands of schools in more than 125 countries. iEARN empowers teachers and young people to work together online using the Internet and other new communications technologies. Millions of students each day are engaged in collaborative project work worldwide.
- **Internet Public Library** (www.ipl.org). This site aims to organize the Internet for all ages. It includes separate KidSpace and TeenSpace sections, with age-appropriate activities and links. The KidSpace page includes reference materials; information on a variety of subjects, including history, health, art, science, reading, and sports; and even a games section. The TeenSpace page offers help with homework, creative outlets, and information on a variety of topics, including health, technology, money, and sports.
- **MaMa Media** (www.mamamedia.com). This is a free online community for younger children geared to creative and fun activities and exchange, separate from homework or school projects.
- **NASA Quest** (www.quest.arc.nasa.gov). NASA Quest is a rich resource for educators, youth, and space enthusiasts who are interested in meeting and learning about NASA people and the national

space program. NASA Quest allows the public to share the excitement of NASA's authentic scientific and engineering pursuits like flying in the Shuttle and the International Space Station, exploring distant planets with amazing spacecraft, and building the aircraft of the future. The site provides profiles of NASA experts and stories about their work days, live interactions with NASA experts, audio/video programs over the Internet, lesson plans and student activities, collaborative activities for youth, background information and photo sections, a place where teachers can meet one another, a searchable question-and-answer section with thousands of previously asked questions, and an e-mail service in which individual questions get answered.

- **National Geographic Online** (www.nationalgeographic.com). The site contains feature articles from National Geographic magazine, as well as educational features for adults and children. A special section, National Geographic Kids, provides educational games, interesting stories, and activities and experiments. The Educators page offers ideas for educators, as well as networking opportunities and resources.
- **National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST)** (www.niost.org). The Institute's mission is to ensure that all children, youth, and families have access to high-quality programs, activities, and opportunities during non-school hours. It concentrates on research, education and training, consultation, and program development.
- **PBS Online** (www.pbs.org). This is the home of comprehensive companion Web sites for more than 1,000 PBS television programs and specials, as well as original Web content and real-time learning adventures. Major programs have extensive supplemental materials, including audio and video files, on the Web site. PBS also covers a variety of subjects, ranging from news to history and the arts to science.
- **Science Junction** (www.ncsu.edu/sciencejunction). This site contains information for teachers and

students about a wide variety of science topics, with links to scientific journals, museums, and other resources. Its Student Station includes games and experiments to try at home and demonstrations and information on Internet-based science projects.

- **ThinkQuest** (www.thinkquest.org). ThinkQuest is an international competition in which students ages 9 to 19 and teachers are challenged to create the best educational Web sites. Youth team with adult coaches to develop educational Web sites on topics of their choosing. These sites then are hosted on the "library" section of the ThinkQuest site and can be used for center program activities.
- **U.S. Department of Education Publications and Products** (www.ed.gov or 800-USA-LEARN). The Education Department's Web site provides access to education policies, statistics, resource directories, and catalogues, as well as newsletters, journals, and a wealth of accessible publications for teachers, parents, and older students. Many of these can be downloaded directly from the site or ordered for little or no cost. Some are published in Spanish, as well as English. Materials include tip sheets and project ideas originally designed for K through 12 school activities, which can be used in Neighborhood Networks centers. The Department publishes the *Helping Your Child* series (learn to read, learn math, do homework, etc.). Archived publications that provide useful information include *Summer Home Learning Recipes*, *Think College? Me? Now?*, and *Funding Education Beyond High School: The Guide to Federal Student Aid* from the U.S. Department of Education explains student financial aid programs the U.S. Department of Education's Federal Student Aid (FSA) office administers (http://www.ed.gov/Family/agbts_old/agbts98/red.html).
- **Regional Technology in Education Consortia** may have resources on using technology for education of different age groups and related professional development opportunities. The consortia's national Web site (www.rtec.org) contains links to the regional offices.

- **Federal Resources for Educational Excellence (FREE)** (www.free.ed.gov). This is a subsite that links to scores of educational information and activities at other federal agencies. Many, but not all, use computers and the Web. Information links are organized by major topics (e.g., art, social studies, educational technology) and then by agency. A search engine is also available. This gateway can lead to project ideas, resources, and research for youth of all ages. The links include virtual tours to the National Parks and the National Gallery of Art, information about the FBI, a project on making money at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, and other items. There is also access to many collections of art, music, and historical documents. Older youth may find this a useful research route. For younger children, staff may need to help find age-appropriate pages and adapt some activities.
- **Global SchoolNet** (www.globalschoolnet.org). Global SchoolNet provides information and discussion about educational technology. It includes a variety of articles and forums of interest to community-based organizations, as well as K through 12 teachers, including links to project and resource Web sites.
- **Yahoo! Kids** (<http://kids.yahoo.com>). Yahoo! Kids is the children's version of the Yahoo! search site. It is designed to make Web searching easier for children, and helps them find sites appropriate for their use. Topics include music, movies, jokes, sports, TV, study zone, and science.
- **Yucky** (<http://yucky.discovery.com>). Yucky describes its focus as science entertainment. It provides information and activities for children ages 6 through 15 about the natural world, with special focus on worms, bugs, and the human body. It also includes a Web page with games.

Appendix G includes examples of successful youth education programs being conducted at Neighborhood Networks centers across the nation.

Meeting the Needs of Adult Literacy Students

A lack of basic reading, writing, information, and computer technology skills can inhibit people from reaching their personal and career goals, making financial self-sufficiency almost impossible. Fortunately, there are tools and methods that can successfully help adults gain these basic skills.

Teaching adults is different from teaching children. The learning process must consider issues specific to adult learners, including:

- **Time.** Family responsibilities and work obligations limit the time adults have to spend on educational pursuits. Engaging adult learners in activities in which they can see visible gains in their skills will encourage continued participation.
- **Motivation.** Adults engage in learning experiences that they perceive are important, such as those that will help them become better parents or find better jobs. Adult learning facilitators must determine what factors motivate each adult to seek learning and design a work plan with him/her around those motivations. The more learning is linked to life goals, the more willing the adult will be to commit to long-term participation.
- **Self-esteem.** Adults can feel vulnerable in unfamiliar learning environments. Some have had negative classroom experiences that make them especially cautious about entering a learning setting. The facilitator can reduce an adult learner's anxiety by using an informal but respectful teaching approach. Assure all adult learners that asking questions is encouraged and introduce them ahead of time to the facilitators and other staff who will work with them.
- **Life experiences.** Adults bring their life experiences into new learning situations. A successful facilitator will capitalize on this experience, helping adults recognize what they already know or do well and connecting those skills to the ones they will learn. This will help adult learners

integrate and remember new skills and ideas. For example, when teaching adult learners how to use a word processor, be sure to ask them what they know about the typewriter keyboard. Extend that knowledge by showing them several new functions on the computer keyboard. Likewise, when discussing a database, ask the learners how they keep their own addresses organized. If they say they frequently lose addresses, discuss creating a database as a solution. Remember to talk about a database all adults recognize: the telephone directory.

- **Practice.** Adults need time to practice their new skills. Creating an environment that supports learning includes respecting a learner's need to move at his/her own pace. Some adults may need to practice more than others to gain proficiency before moving on to the next skill.
- **Involvement.** Adults direct their energies toward the things that are most important to them. Therefore, their involvement may fluctuate. Sometimes, they may not seem interested or involved in an activity that is important to someone else. Do not force them. The facilitator's responsibility is to help adults learn what is important to them.
- **Confidentiality.** This is essential in forging a respectful relationship with adults who need to work on their reading and writing skills. Adult learners must know that staff will respect their need for privacy.

Engaging Adults in Literacy Programs

Adults may need special assurances to participate in a center literacy program. They may perceive their lack of basic skills as an insurmountable obstacle to using technology and may be hesitant to enter an environment that is almost certain to reveal their deficiencies. Using community volunteers who are trusted and respected to recruit potential literacy program participants can help reduce adult students' anxiety. In addition, these volunteers can act as liaisons between students and center staff, helping to identify problems and encourage learning.

Hosting special community events is another way of attracting potential literacy participants to the center. For example, if the center invites a representative from a local daycare facility to discuss childcare issues, give an informal presentation about the center and its adult literacy programs at the end of the discussion and invite the audience to tour the center and "test" the computers.

Developing a Literacy Program

It is important to assure adult students that any information regarding their reading and writing levels will be kept confidential, that they will still be able to use the computer technology successfully, and that the facilitator will work with them to set up a comfortable program that meets their special needs and goals and be available to respond to their questions.

Assess Students' Ability

Once students are put at ease, the next step is to assess their skill level. An informal assessment will help the facilitator develop a work plan and a starting point for each adult student. The assessment should be done in a one-on-one interview, asking questions to identify the student's reading and writing level, goals and needs, interests, and skills.

A skills checklist is a useful tool for assessing reading and writing levels. Reading and writing skills checklists (Appendix H) are designed to determine appropriate levels based on an informal discussion. The facilitator, however, can vary the questions depending on the student. In any event, the questioning should not be lengthy or overwhelming.

During the discussion, the facilitator should determine if the adult has vision problems. If so, a larger font size can make a big difference in their learning experience. In fact, adjusting the font size may be the first feature instructors should teach adult learners. It will reinforce the claim that technology is a wonderful tool that will make their learning easier and fun.

Allow for time at the end of the assessment to give prospective participants a brief overview of the center's technology and a tour of the facility. Moreover, give them a chance to type their name and address using a word processor and print it out. This last important step will show learners that they can use computers successfully even without keyboarding skills.

Develop a Work Plan

After completing the informal assessment, the facilitator and adult learners can design meaningful work plans together that reflect their individual goals and needs and make the best use of their time. The skills checklist in Appendix H also suggests activities to begin each reading and writing level. Work plans will vary among centers and individuals.

For example, a one-hour work plan for beginning readers might include:

- Fifteen minutes devoted to developing mouse skills using a game such as solitaire.
- Forty-five minutes devoted to typing and finishing a language experience story (see sidebar).

A 90-minute work plan for an adult learner at a higher basic reading level might contain:

- Forty-five minutes using a word-processed writing sample to copy and paste text and pictures into a desktop publishing program that allows users to illustrate the stories they write.
- Fifteen minutes spent practicing typing to increase speed and productivity. Adults will value this practice time because tracking their speed offers a visible measure of improvement.
- Thirty minutes spent playing a computer game for relaxation while developing mouse or problem-solving skills, using a desktop publishing program to make a birthday card, adding a new name and address to a database, or participating in a center discussion on how children and youth can use the Internet safely.

The work plan should offer adults a routine with which they can become familiar and thus take charge of their own learning. In addition, it should develop concrete milestones or short-term goals so learners can track their accomplishments.

The first milestones may include learning how to open and close programs, save and print documents, or indent paragraphs when writing a letter. When goals are broken down this way, adults can experience achievements in almost every lesson.

Monitor as much of the hands-on activity as possible, invite questions, and make suggestions. These actions create opportunities to steer the adults toward new levels of understanding. Prompts can lead adult learners to discover a relevant answer or solution to their work, raising their confidence levels. Some adults may feel self-conscious if their writing is visible to others. Seat these students at computers with monitors that face a wall or are hidden from the direct view of others.

Some Tools of the Trade

When it comes to helping adult learners develop and enhance their reading and writing skills, facilitators and program planners have an abundance of tools at their fingertips, including:

- **The keyboard.** Although adult learners do not require keyboarding skills to compose text, many adults will want to learn how to type or improve their typing skills because such skills are marketable. Learning the keyboard can be a significant accomplishment. If an adult student expresses an interest in learning or enhancing his/her skills, be sure to build practice time on a typing program into the adult learner's work plan from the start.
- **Word processor.** Each adult's work plan should include working with a word processor. Because of its similarity to the typewriter, most adult learner programs begin with having students learn this tool because it is less intimidating for students to make the transition from the typewriter to the word processor. As adult learners use the

word processor, be sure to instill the terminology into the lesson plan. Instead of saying “Click up here,” your instructions might be to “Click on that dialog box” or “Find it on the toolbar.” By doing this, adults become familiar with the terminology they will need to use in office settings.

- **Productivity tools.** Productivity tools, such as desktop publishing, spreadsheet, database, and multimedia software that is used in combination with a word processor, play a vital role in day-to-day office activities. Some tools, however, are easier to use than others. For example, office software such as Microsoft Word can overwhelm the new reader with all of its drop-down lists and

features. Facilitators and center staff may want to select a less complex program, such as a home office suite. This all-in-one productivity software is easier to learn because the word processor, database, spreadsheet, and drawing tool share the same simple commands and procedures, and menu and toolbars are less cluttered and provide fewer options. These programs offer the same basic functions and are organized in the same fashion as the more popular, high-powered office software. Adult students can begin with the more simple programs and then transfer to the more complex office tools as their skills and confidence levels increase. Resources for helping adult

Creating a Language Experience Story

Facilitators can help adult students create a language experience story by following the steps below:

- Take time to learn what interests the student. Language experiences can be launched from any discussion about goals, concerns, family stories, or news events.
- Have a brief discussion in which the adult learner does most of the talking, then have the student summarize the discussion.
- Using an easy-to-read font, type the summary using the student’s exact words and language patterns.
- After selecting and enlarging the font size for easy reading, point to each word while reading the text. Then, let the student practice reading the text until he/she can read it without assistance.
- Encourage adult students to read for meaning. If they find it difficult to read a certain word, encourage them to read ahead to the end of the sentence and then go back and try to identify the word.
- Ask the student to select one or two words to remember from the text. Using the word processor’s select and underline functions, highlight these words.
- If several adults are working together, engage them in an activity in which they must help each other and then copy the text onto their own disks for further reference.
- Once they have saved the text on their own disks, encourage them to reread it. Have them add sentences to the text or use the selected vocabulary words in new sentences.
- Remember, always use the adult student’s exact words. Spell them correctly, but do not change the words or their order.

Source: Adapted from an updated version of *The Language Experience Approach: A Tool for Reading Instruction* by Karen Griswold, Literacy Assistance Center, New York.

students use productivity tools can be found on the Web. Create a bibliography that lists publications containing concrete activities for teaching specific computer skills.

- **Multimedia educational software.** Educational software continues to improve. CD-ROM programs that combine sound, graphics, and animation to create a stimulating multimedia learning experience allow adults to practice at their own rate to achieve proficiency.

When choosing packaged software, consider how much CD-ROM technology can do to make learning more enjoyable. Avoid software that is no more than a workbook on a screen. For example, English as a Second Language (ESL) software should offer multimedia learning aids that include video dialogues, graphic illustrations of common words, phrases and cultural icons, or buttons that provide native pronunciations of core sounds. The content should be grouped in small segments with different vocabulary and pronunciation activities.

With the latest ESL software, the user can listen to native speakers pronouncing words in dialogue scripts. Other features include recording options so learners can compare their diction to the teaching software and speech recognition technology that evaluates responses and provides feedback. When previewing software, check to see if the software adjusts to the user's skill level, provides flexible options for users to work at their own pace, and allows learners to easily check their progress.

Adults with some reading skills can use tools such as multimedia encyclopedias. These programs can stimulate the imagination and help these adults develop basic information finding and research skills. They also will help adults learn how to navigate in a nonlinear electronic environment. This important skill will be especially useful when they start using the Internet. Try to show learners the possibilities for interactivity without focusing on the text. For example, CD-ROM encyclopedias offer photographs, sounds, film clips, and anima-

tions. Ask adult students to find a sound clip, picture, or film clip of an important event to listen to, look at, or watch, and then encourage them to write a description. For example, ask learners to write down a topic of interest, such as gardening. Show them how to find the index text box in the encyclopedia program and let them type in the topic themselves. Ask them to find and listen to a speech or article using the CD-ROM audio program and then write about their experience. An atlas program can also be very useful. Most atlas programs offer charts, graphs, and demographics. Several adults working together on a simple project can easily access this information, comparing populations or literacy rates on a spreadsheet. In so doing, they begin to learn about alphabetizing information, reading information in charts, and the difference between political and topographical maps. In addition, they can learn how to use the scroll bar, pop-up menus, and dialog boxes.

Before a program is chosen, make sure adult learners preview and evaluate it along with center decisionmakers. Examine its interactivity. Does it offer learners opportunities to practice and get feedback? Is it fun and absorbing? Note how the information is organized. It should be easy for learners to navigate without help—especially to move backward and forward through the program and to exit. Check the pop-up menus and click on the icons to make sure they work. Packaged educational software should never be used to the exclusion of productivity tools and the Internet.

- **Games and adventure software.** Many new adult learners have the preconceived idea that learning is difficult. They need to discover that learning can be fun. Adults can develop problem-solving and thinking skills while playing games. For example, solitaire offers a great way for new computer users to develop mouse skills. Most adults will readily recognize this game. Spending time during those first sessions learning how to use the computer mouse while playing this game will provide the adult learner with the confidence to tackle the next task.

Combining Methods and Technology to Develop Skills

Selecting the appropriate methods and technology will help students gain confidence, find their own learning approaches, and become more self-reliant. As students become more confident using technology, they will require less assistance from the facilitator and center staff.

Some methods and technology that will help students develop their reading and writing skills include:

- **Using a word processor.** Begin by introducing adult learners to the function keys that they will need, such as the Enter/Return, Shift, and Backspace keys, as well as the space bar. Ensure that they know where to locate certain punctuation marks, such as the period and question mark, and briefly explain the word-wrap feature so they do not use the Enter key at the end of each line. Initially teach skills such as starting a new document, saving and printing a document, opening a document, and opening/closing an application. This also encourages new readers to recognize words such as file, save, print, print preview, edit, cut, copy, paste, insert, and format. As they learn to write, they are also reading. For this reason, you may want to teach them to find and click on these words in the menu before you show them the shortcuts on the tool bar.
- **Writing.** Explain to adult learners that writing is a process, typically beginning with brainstorming ideas, followed by focusing those ideas and developing an introductory statement and supporting points, and finally creating a first draft, revising and editing, and proofreading the final copy. Remind them that everyone, not just adult new readers, struggles with evolving texts. However, with features such as the Backspace key, cut and paste, spell check, and track changes, adult learners can learn ways to facilitate the writing process by deleting unwanted text, moving text around without tedious rewriting or retyping, identifying and correcting spelling errors, and comparing versions of their drafts.
- **Identifying topics of interest.** Adult learners should write about topics that are meaningful and interesting to them, such as family or personal goals. The facilitator can help them identify topics of interests through brief discussions about their personal goals, their children, and other family members. If they are immigrants, the facilitator might inspire them by asking why they chose to immigrate to the United States or what their life was like in their native country.
- **Creating group projects.** Adults can enhance their learning experience and develop teamwork skills by participating in a joint project. In the process, they can develop their reading, writing, information, and technology skills. For example, adults can create and publish their own anthologies around popular themes, including their families and autobiographical narratives. Recipe books or neighborhood guides are also fun to write. Compiling a database of various books for the home, videos to watch, family TV programs; and designing holiday cards or educational brochures are useful projects.
- **Using the Internet.** Although the Web is a very print-driven medium, it can be made manageable for people with weak reading skills. Try to find Internet sites that offer audio, photographs, or maps so that learners are not overwhelmed with print. Adults have a good incentive for learning how to use the Internet—their children. Focusing lessons around issues of parenting and monitoring use of the Internet will be of high value for adults. Show adults how to keep track of the Web sites their children visit, and help them discover ways to discuss with their children what they are learning on the Internet. E-mail and “e-pals”—an online tool similar to the pre-digital concept of pen pals—are great ways for adults to develop their writing skills into a vital communication tool.

Resources for Adult Literacy Learners

When it comes to finding resources to use in developing an adult literacy program, there is no shortage. There are various resource lists, Web sites, and

organizations that can offer Neighborhood Networks centers the resources and information they need to set up their literacy program.

Resource Lists

The Literacy List at <http://alri.org/literacylist.html> provides a comprehensive, updated list of adult literacy, ESL, and family literacy Web sites.

Organizations

A range of national and regional agencies offer adult literacy resources at their Web sites and links to other useful sites. These include the following:

- **Adult Literacy Media Alliance (ALMA)** (www.tv411.org/about_alma) helps adults gain basic reading, writing, and math skills. ALMA creates innovative, educationally sound, and entertaining television-based teaching materials and cultivates community networks to support ALMA learners.
- **Literacy.org** (<http://literacy.org>) offers various literacy resources that can be accessed by country/region, topic/theme, or by doing a site search.
- **National Center for Family Literacy** (www.famlit.org) is a nonprofit organization supporting family literacy across America through programming, training, research, and information dissemination.
- **National Institute for Literacy (NIFL)** (www.nifl.gov) has a goal of ensuring that all Americans have access to services that can help them gain the basic literacy skills necessary to succeed. Activities include offering LINCS, an Internet gateway to national and international literary resources; improving services to adults with learning disabilities through *Learning to Achieve*, a training program; promoting adult literacy system reform through Equipped for the Future, a long-term initiative that developed content standards to ensure that every adult can gain the knowledge and skills needed to fulfill responsibilities as workers, parents, and citizens; America's Literacy Directory, an easy-to-use online searchable database; and Partnership for Reading, a collaborative effort

among NIFL, the U.S. Department of Education, and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

- **System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES)** (www.sabes.org) is a Massachusetts-based training and technical assistance initiative for ABE practitioners and programs. Its Web site offers useful information and links to other important educational resources.
- **International Society for Technology in Education** (www.iste.org) offers lists of current Web sites, books, and periodicals that relate to educational technology, including topics such as curriculum development, assessment, funding, and professional development.

Curriculum, Projects, and Lesson Plans

The following resources offer support for developing curriculum, projects, and lesson plans:

- **Public Broadcasting Service's LiteracyLink** (<http://litlink.ket.org>) is funded by the U.S. Department of Education Star Schools Project. LiteracyLink combines instructional video, Internet, and print materials to help adult learners advance their General Educational Development (GED) and workplace skills. The Web site offers professional training and development resources.
- **Literacy Assistance Center** (www.lacnyc.org) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting and promoting the expansion of quality literacy services in New York. It provides Web-based lesson plans and curriculums that use various teaching techniques.

Publications and Books

The following publications and books are useful resources for developing and operating an adult literacy program:

- *Learning and Leading with Technology*, published by the International Society for Technology in Education, features articles by educators and for educators, including classroom teachers, lab teachers, technology coordinators, and teacher

educators. It emphasizes practical ideas about technology and how to use technology in K through 12 curriculums, especially when it can make a difference in helping students develop, practice, or play with difficult concepts or creative processes.

- *Surfing for Substance: A Professional Development Guide to Integrating the World Wide Web Into Adult Literacy Instruction* by Emily Hacker is an easy-to-use book packed with ideas to help teachers and facilitators learn how to construct meaningful Web-based instructional activities. It was developed by the Literacy Assistance Center with support from NetTech. To request a copy, call (212) 803-3300 or visit their Web site at <http://tech.worlded.org/docs/surfing> to download a copy.

Educational Software: Information and Publishers

New educational software and Web sites are constantly being developed. Several popular computer magazines offer excellent reviews on the best Web sites and CD-ROM software, including:

- **Broderbund** (www.broderbund.com) offers a variety of educational, gaming, and productivity software for Mac and PC platforms.

Web Sites

A comprehensive list of virtual museums is available at www.icom.org/vlmp/world.html. Click on audio symbols and listen to news reports at major news network Web sites such as www.cnn.com. Cut and paste maps from www.mapblast.com into a word processing program using the right mouse button.

Developing Programs for Rural Centers

Although the gap has narrowed in recent years, Americans living in rural areas still lag slightly behind the national average in computer and Internet access. In addition, rural residents also face challenges in moving to self-sufficiency because of a lack of

available transportation, education, healthcare, and childcare choices. Neighborhood Networks centers located in rural communities can help alleviate these problems by identifying needs and providing services specific to rural residents' situation.

Providing Access to Healthcare

Small populations in rural areas have difficulty supporting hospitals and retaining qualified doctors, which limits residents' access to healthcare. Lack of resources and transportation further compound the problem. By providing health services at Neighborhood Networks centers, including health education, healthy living courses, and blood pressure and cholesterol screenings, centers can contribute to the well-being of rural communities. Potential partners include local hospitals, doctors, health departments, and other healthcare professionals. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Rural Health Policy (www.ruralhealth.hrsa.gov) and the Rural Information Center Health Services (www.nal.usda.gov/ric) offer more information and ideas on improving rural healthcare.

Developing Youth Programs

Neighborhood Networks centers can develop the potential of rural youth by providing afterschool tutoring and other educational programs. Activities such as microenterprise programs (discussed in Section 4), which help youth apply their energies to develop small business enterprises, offer youth an opportunity to gather, socialize, and learn. Centers can give youth opportunities to contribute to their community and to others and can help connect struggling teens with adult mentors for support and guidance. In partnership with other community organizations, centers can open their doors to various community activities (such as health fairs, violence prevention programs, and cultural events) designed to bring together parents, youth, and community residents. Information on establishing afterschool programs and educational activities in rural areas is available at (www.afterschool.gov).

Overcoming Transportation Problems

Rural residents face unique circumstances that affect their ability to achieve economic self-sufficiency. Compared with urban and suburban settings, rural communities often have fewer public transportation options. As a result, individuals without reliable transportation may face difficulties traveling to and from work, appointments, and childcare. Neighborhood Networks centers can work with local agencies and organizations to develop and provide public and private transportation solutions to community members, such as organizing a van service to help those enrolled in workforce development training to reach jobs.

Assisting with Childcare

Rural families have fewer childcare options than those individuals living in urban and suburban areas. Center-based care, increasingly popular among American families, is less available to rural children. In many areas, small and scattered populations and high transportation costs make childcare centers impractical. Neighborhood Networks centers may consider several approaches to meeting the rural childcare challenge:

- **Think broadly about partners.** Centers may want to look beyond the traditional childcare community. Partnerships may be possible with organizations working in areas such as economic development, transportation, and workforce development.
- **Create a coalition of small employers.** Although small employers may have limited resources to invest in childcare individually, their pooled resources can make a difference. They may be able to help support a childcare center or expand a network of family providers.
- **Look to resource and referral agencies to engage business partners.** In many states, resource and referral agencies are educating and offering services to businesses to promote family-friendly practices. See if these agencies can help identify family-friendly businesses in the community.

Resources for Rural Centers

For more information about programs and resources that can benefit rural communities, visit the following Web sites:

**Community and Rural Development Institute,
Cornell University**
www.cardi.cornell.edu

National Rural Development Partnership
www.rurdev.usda.gov/nrdp

Rural Community Empowerment Program
www.ezec.gov

Rural Information Center
www.nal.usda.gov/ric

Linking Residents to Healthcare Resources

Many low-income individuals and families lack access to preventive and primary healthcare, often relying on emergency room visits in a crisis. Yet, families need to maintain good health so parents can work and children can succeed in school. Elderly or disabled residents often have chronic conditions that require regular treatment if they are to enjoy the best possible quality of life.

Neighborhood Networks centers can help residents obtain the health information and services they need in a variety of ways. These may include providing Internet access that makes it possible for residents to go online to get up-to-date information about specific diseases, eligibility for health insurance, drug discount programs, and other health matters. Centers also can distribute health information, sponsor health fairs, or inform residents about government health insurance programs for which they qualify. In addition, in partnership with local hospitals, agencies, or nonprofit groups, Neighborhood Networks centers may participate in ongoing health programs or sponsor periodic health screenings, vaccinations

for children, exercise or smoking cessation classes, and a variety of other activities.

Identify Residents' Needs

As with any program offered by a Neighborhood Networks center, the first step is to identify residents' needs. This enables you to develop and offer a program that will provide residents with the information and services they need. Some questions to consider include:

- What health programs do residents need and want?
- How many people might show up for a high blood pressure or cholesterol screening, to get a flu shot, or to find out about new prescription discount programs?

For answers to these questions, demographic data compiled by property managers can provide a basic count of children and adults in a development, but the best approach is to ask residents directly and to talk to people who know and work with them. To get an indication of the level of interest, place a sign-up sheet in the center or flyers under unit doors. If a formal survey of resident needs is planned, be sure to include questions on healthcare. When talking with people who work with residents, such as property managers, leaders of resident organizations, center staff members, HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinators, staff at local clinics or emergency rooms, teachers at local schools, and staff at nearby churches and religious institutions, ask:

- What do you see as the most significant health problems for residents?
- Roughly what proportion of eligible residents would you estimate are actually signed up for Medicaid, Medicare, or the children's health insurance program in the state?
- Do you see healthcare problems as a barrier to parents working or training?
- Do families moving from welfare to work have difficulties obtaining health insurance?

- Do residents have access to dental services or other specialized care?

You should also talk about the causes of problems. Can residents afford care? Do they face transportation or language barriers? Are residents discouraged by the complexity of health programs? Do they know where to seek help?

Take notes and summarize the information in writing, both to better understand resident healthcare needs and to explain these needs to potential community partners. Once you have identified residents' needs, you can begin identifying what resources exist in the community to help meet these needs.

Identify Community Resources

Most health-related activities involve bringing resources to the center, such as public health services, government health insurance coverage, local health facilities, and community groups. National organizations and their local affiliates may provide information and other assistance online or over the telephone. To identify community resources:

- **Take a community survey of health resources.** Brainstorm with the resident service council, property managers, Neighborhood Networks staff, HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinators, community leaders, school system health workers, elected officials, and others to determine available resources. Check local phone books and online search engines. Make a list of resources, including local hospitals and clinics; city or county health agencies; local chapters of national medical and health service organizations; charities interested in health and nutrition issues; and local gyms, fitness programs, food retailers, or weight-loss programs. These resources might be willing to take part in a project to benefit community residents.
- **Help residents with healthcare costs.** Many state and federal programs exist to provide health insurance to low-income people and lower the cost of prescription drugs, especially for the elderly. These programs include:

- Medicaid, a federal health insurance program, pays for medical assistance for certain individuals and families with low incomes (www.cms.hhs.gov/MedicaidGenInfo/).
- Medicare, a federal health insurance program, pays for hospital and medical expenses for elderly people (age 65 and older) or for people with certain disabilities or conditions (www.medicare.gov).
- State Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), a set of state-operated programs, provides health insurance for children, up to age 19, who are not otherwise insured (www.cms.hhs.gov/home/schip.asp).
- Head Start, a federal early childhood education program, also provides health screenings, evaluation, and service coordination for low-income children (www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs).
- BenefitsCheckup, an online screening service operated by the National Council on Aging, helps people age 55 and older find out if they are eligible for various programs that help with some costs of prescription drugs, healthcare, utilities, and other essential items or services (www.benefitscheckup.org).
- BenefitsCheckupRx, an online screening service, helps people decide among various prescription discounts such as the Medicare-approved drug card, state pharmacy programs, and other prescription assistance programs (https://SSL2.benefitscheckup.org/before_you_start.cfm?subset_id=39).

Market to and Develop Partners

For health-related programs, community partners can provide visits by skilled staff or mobile diagnostic equipment, expertise, information, volunteers, or donations of supplies. Neighborhood Networks centers bring to the partnership access to an underserved community, a reliable point of contact, and a potential space to hold health activities.

Approach potential partners with a variety of ideas, solid information about community needs, and a willingness to learn about what they could provide.

Establish a Program

Structure health projects or programs to respond to local needs and available resources by:

- Defining how the program will be organized and implemented, specifying the roles of resident service council members, property managers, and other in-house stakeholders.
- Establishing goals with measurable outcomes such as the number of potential partners to approach, volunteers to involve, residents to serve, dates for visits by diagnostic vans, and progress milestones.
- Identifying where to obtain necessary resources, such as staffing, equipment, and supplies.
- Clearly explaining how the program will deal with accessibility and security issues.
- Establishing a mechanism to deal with unexpected problems.
- Following up with thank-you letters to all community partners after the project.

Market Programs to Residents

To promote your health event and ensure high levels of participation, market program offerings to residents through announcements in the property management office, the Neighborhood Networks center, and places where residents visit. You may also distribute flyers to units by mail or by going door to door.

Publicity aimed at the wider community will provide additional avenues for reaching residents. Mail flyers to school principals, clergy, elected officials, heads of local nonprofit organizations, and other community leaders. Send out a press release to local radio, television, newspapers, and "shoppers" newspapers. Community partners may have media expertise or contacts, and may be willing to share in the publicity work.

Assess Outcomes and Revise Programs As Needed

At the completion of a health project, prepare a written summary report, including:

- **Project or event:** Date(s), purpose of event, number of people served.
- **Internal information:** Who did what and what roles the resident council, Neighborhood Networks center, and property manager played. Note names and contact information of key people.
- **Partnership information:** Names of partner organizations with contact information of key people.
- **Successes:** State if the project met or exceeded the measurable goals set.
- **Problems:** Note problems that emerged and what challenges should be considered for future events.

Consider how to share evaluation findings with residents, staff members, partners, and other stakeholders. To help assess and track their health programs, centers can use HUD's START. Using this online tool, Neighborhood Networks centers can complete annual assessments of their health programs and other activities based on the center's business plan projections. A large health program may call for a formal evaluation. Local colleges may supply student volunteers to plan and carry out an evaluation under faculty supervision.

Online Resources

Using the Internet, residents can learn about diseases and how they are treated, clinical trials for new medicines and treatments, health insurance benefits, and alternative therapies. Residents can also join online support groups for families and contact local affiliates and support groups. Note: Exercise caution when using the Internet to research health options, gather information, or take part in online forums. Not all information is reliable. Healthcare decisions should be made in consultation and conjunction with a physician.

The following are valuable sources of general health information:

Healthfinder®
National Health Information Center
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
www.healthfinder.gov

Healthfinder® Kids
www.healthfinder.gov/kids/

National Institute on Aging—Age Pages
www.niapublications.org

Aetna IntelliHealth
www.intelihealth.com

Dr. Koop
www.drkoop.com

WebMD
www.webmd.com

For information on specific diseases, visit the following Web sites:

Alzheimer's Association
www.alz.org

Arthritis Foundation
www.arthritis.org

American Cancer Society
www.cancer.org

American Heart Association
www.americanheart.org

American Lung Association
www.lungusa.org

American Diabetes Association
www.diabetes.org

National Institute of Mental Health
www.nimh.nih.gov/health/index.shtml

For information on medical research, visit:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov

Mayo Clinic
www.mayoclinic.com

National Institutes of Health
<http://health.nih.gov>

Successful Health Programs at Neighborhood Networks Centers

Houston Neighborhood Networks, Inc., a nonprofit consortium of Houston centers, developed a partnership with Preventive Healthcare Outreach, Inc., and St. Joseph's Hospital in 2003 to provide onsite comprehensive medical services to families and senior citizens at five Neighborhood Networks centers. In 2004, Preventive Healthcare Outreach continued to provide onsite health fairs offering preventive healthcare services to residents through Neighborhood Networks centers and at other HUD-subsidized multifamily complexes.

