



A Neighborhood Networks

Success Story



Housing Authority of the County of San Bernardino: Making Sure Good News Travels Fast

San Bernardino, CA — Managing an effective Neighborhood Networks center is not an easy job. Countless hours are spent helping residents, guiding staff, securing funding, building partnerships, securing more funding, recruiting volunteers, resolving technology glitches, securing even more funding, and taking care of anything and everything that needs to be done so that residents can have the resources they need and want. When all of these tasks are completed — or at least momentarily under control, there is very little time left over to toot one's own horn.

However, the Housing Authority of the County of San Bernardino's (HACSB) community development staff have learned that *self-promotion* often leads to *center preservation*. Together, the staff have worked hard to get the word out about HACSB's Neighborhood Networks centers and the vital role the centers play in the communities served — and their efforts are paying off.

A Little Bit About HACSB and Neighborhood Networks

Organized in 1941, HACSB is the largest provider of affordable housing in San Bernardino County. Owning and/or managing more than 10,000 public housing units and vouchers, HACSB serves approximately 30,000 individuals throughout the county. HACSB's mission is to empower all individuals and families in need to achieve an enriched quality of life by providing housing opportunities and resources throughout San Bernardino County.

To accomplish this mission, HACSB operates six Neighborhood Network centers located in various housing communities throughout San Bernardino County, specifically in Barstow, Chino, Colton, Redlands, and San Bernardino. Each center is equipped with 10 PCs and five Macs (except for the center in Chino, which is equipped with three PCs), and staffed by a full-time computer lab technician who is or will be a certified Microsoft Office Professional and a part-time computer lab assistant (except for Chino, which is staffed with a part-time computer lab assistant). All of the services and Internet access available at each HACSB center are offered free of charge to residents and community members. To make sure all community members know about these resources, community development staff are constantly spreading the word and reaching out to local organizations to form partnerships.

A Partnership with a Big Payoff

One such partnership that came about from the staff's community outreach efforts was with the Career Institute (CI). Founded in 1994, CI is a career development, job training, and job placement organization functioning primarily in the low-income areas of San Bernardino County. CI has served thousands of individuals in this region over the years in an effort to help them develop work readiness skills and satisfying career paths that lead to greater levels of self-sufficiency.

HACSB staff was first approached by CI in the summer of 2010 to see if the organization would be interested in administering a summer on-the-job-training (OJT) program for the San Bernardino County Transitional Assistance Department (TAD) via Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). CI's goal was to recruit and place qualifying individuals into summer employment opportunities in a subsidized work environment. Through this effort, many housing authority residents were eventually able to move into unsubsidized employment, and begin to break the cycle of dependency.

Building on a Good Thing

In September 2010, HACSB's Board of Commissioners approved for staff to continue to build on the partnership with CI. Having just been awarded a three-year, \$1.2 million Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) grant, HACSB was in a position to enhance services and resources at its Neighborhood Networks centers. BTOP grants were awarded by the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provided the NTIA \$4.7 billion to support the deployment of broadband infrastructure, enhance and expand public computer centers, encourage sustainable adoption of broadband service, and develop and maintain a nationwide public map of broadband service capability and availability.

"We were one of the first housing authorities to receive a BTOP grant in the first round of funding," said Marcia Waggoner, HACSB's Director for Community Development Initiatives. "The timing could not have been better for us. We started the centers with a ROSS [Resident Opportunities and Self-Sufficiency] Neighborhood Networks grant that was awarded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Those funding streams have gone away, and we were looking for a new funding opportunity."



Residents gain access to technology at one of the Neighborhood Networks centers operated by the HACSB.

With CI's support, HACSB offers a comprehensive curriculum of career development and work readiness in the form of workshops and one-on-one weekly mentoring sessions. The curriculum emphasizes the importance of having a long-term career plan, as well as provides short-term work readiness skills training.

"For the long-term career development component, CI assigns mentors to residents," said Waggoner. "The mentor discusses with the resident his or her career goals. The mentor may conduct a career interest or aptitude assessment to determine what types

of professions would be well-suited for the resident. Using this information, the mentor then creates a customized training plan for the resident that will help him or her establish a long-term career. The training plan may take up to 12 weeks, depending on the resident's current skill level."

The short-term work readiness curriculum includes a variety of training opportunities aimed at helping residents meet their immediate needs to find work as they work toward their larger goals. Short-term work readiness sessions include resume building, online job search techniques, online applications, non-conventional job search methods, interview techniques, and discussions of the attributes of successful people. The sessions are offered in 30-minute increments via one-on-one private counseling or through one-hour group workshops.

A Few of HACSB's Successes

Since October 2010, the HACSB's Neighborhood Networks centers have recorded more than 15,000 user visits. While the staff believe all of the individuals who took the time and initiative to tap into the resources offered at the HACSB's Neighborhood Networks centers are successes, there are a few they would like to spotlight:

- Arielle is a student at Crafton Hills College. When she visited her local Neighborhood Networks center, she was taking general education courses and looking for a part-time job. Arielle was assigned a mentor to help her find a job. Arielle's mentor helped her build a strong resume and referred her to a position in the nutrition department with the San Bernardino County School District. Arielle was offered the job at the interview and is able to continue her education.
- Candice is a full-time student at San Bernardino Valley College. She has worked many temporary jobs, but needed a permanent position. Candice visited her local Neighborhood Networks center, where she was assigned a career mentor. With the help of her mentor, Candice created a strong resume, conducted job searches, and learned how to land a job. Prior to their meeting, Candice had a job as a waitress at a local restaurant. According to Candice, the job was "okay," but it did not offer enough hours. Candice continued to work with her mentor every week and continued to look for work. Because Candice is a certified medical assistant, her mentor encouraged her to focus on employment opportunities that matched her education. As a result, Candice is now a full-time medical assistant.
- Elias had been unemployed since November 2010 when his company downsized. Elias, who lives with his elderly mother who needs financial and physical help, conducted an extensive job search for months. He eventually turned to his local Neighborhood Networks center for help and was assigned a career mentor. Together, Elias and his mentor created a professional resume and completed online applications. Elias' mentor also encouraged him to visit the places he wanted to work and leave a copy of his resume. After meeting seven times, Elias obtained an interview at a popular restaurant and secured a position as a prep chef. Elias hopes to someday return to school, but right now, he is happy he is able to provide for his family.



HACSB staff have recorded more than 15,000 user visits since October.

Success Brings More Opportunities

HACSB staff efforts are enhanced by the positive comments made and results attained by individuals who have taken advantage of the resources available at the centers. With more than 15,000 user visits since October, word gets around. And this buzz has led to even more partnership opportunities for the centers.

"We were recently approached by the Community Hospital of San Bernardino to participate in an e-health technology project," said Waggoner. "The project would make it easier for low-income individuals to receive healthcare advice via e-mail. Individuals would visit our centers and write an e-mail describing their symptoms and issues and submit it for advice. A doctor or nurse

will respond to the resident. We should hear any day now if the Community Hospital of San Bernardino was selected as one of just six hospitals in California to offer this service. We were asked to be a part of it because the hospital heard about us from our other grant and because we are becoming more known in the community as a great access point to residents. Local businesses and organizations are seeing that we have a great deal to offer and they're starting to tap into our resources, which is beneficial to us too. Everyone wins."

For More Information

For more information on the Housing Authority of the County of San Bernardino's Neighborhood Networks centers, contact:

Janice B. Simmons-Rogers
Resident Services Coordinator
Housing Authority of the County of San Bernardino

715 E. Brier Drive
San Bernardino, CA 92408
(909) 890-0644 ext. 2215
jsimmons@hacsb.com

For more information on Neighborhood Networks centers in California, contact:

May Miso
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development - Los Angeles Field Office
AT&T Center
611 West 6th Street, Suite 800
Los Angeles, CA 90017
(213) 534-2613
Mayfelisa.Miso@hud.gov

Tanya Rangel
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development - Los Angeles Field Office
AT&T Center
611 West 6th Street, Suite 800
Los Angeles, CA 90017
(213) 534-2678
Tanya.R.Rangel@hud.gov

Sandra B. Augustus
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development - San Francisco Regional Office
600 Harrison Street, 3rd Floor
San Francisco, CA 94107
(415) 489-6448
Sandra.B.Augustus@hud.gov