



# North Lawndale Employment Network

creating a community that works

## Greener Pathways to Economic Sustainability 2008 Annual Report



**The mission of the North Lawndale Employment Network is to improve the earnings potential of North Lawndale residents through innovative employment initiatives that lead to economic advancement and an improved quality of life.**

## **NLEN Staff**

Brenda Palms Barber, Chief Executive Officer  
Ron Tonn, Chief Operating Officer  
Elaine Austin, Workforce Coach  
Holley Blackwell, Sweet Beginnings General Manager  
Victoria Cammon, Operations Manager  
Colzette Hoy, Financial Coach  
Clabe Johnson, Public Allies Fellow  
Ameryn Kreiner, Princeton 55 University of Chicago Fellow  
Cleophus Lee, Building Beyond Program Manager  
Julian Macklin, Business Service Manager  
Yalonda Neff, Workforce Coach  
Aletra Nicholson, Director of Workforce Development Programs  
Coretta Rivers, Workforce Coach  
Pauline Sylvain, AmeriCorps Volunteer  
Pamela Smith Thomas, Director of Business Services  
Timothy Turner, Workforce Coach  
Jose Wilson, Workforce Training Specialist

### **NLEN Consultants**

Pat Cosentino, Chief Financial Officer  
Redessa Harris, Event Planning  
Net Intelligence, IT Support  
Noah Temaner Jenkins, Professional Writing Services

## **NLEN Board of Directors**

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Carole Robertson Center  
Richard Kordesh, Vice President and Co-Chair of Program Design Committee  
University of Illinois at Chicago  
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Chicago Metropolis 2020  
Nathaniel Cash Jr., Treasurer  
JPMorganChase Bank, NA  
Steven Casey, Chair of Finance Committee  
The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation  
Dennis Deer, Co-Chair of Program Design Committee  
Deer Rehabilitation Services  
Michael Kramer, Chair of Governance Committee  
The Boeing Company  
Daniel Cantrell  
U. S. Representative Danny K. Davis Office  
Margaret Davis  
Healthcare Consortium of Illinois  
Susan Kaplan  
Community Economic Development Law Project  
Brenda Palms Barber  
North Lawndale Employment Network  
Colby Smith  
Collectors Training Institute, Inc.  
Ron Tonn  
North Lawndale Employment Network  
Debra Wesley-Freeman  
Sinai Community Institute  
Bob Wordlaw  
Chicago Jobs Council

**“What I like most about being an NLEN director is the fact that I can witness daily the good works of the organization.”**

*Bob Wordlaw, Chicago Jobs Council*

## **NLEN Green Collar Advisory Committee**

Patrick Brown  
OAI, Inc.  
Victoria Cooper  
Wright College  
Naomi Davis  
Blacks in Green  
Dennis Deer  
Deer Rehabilitation Services  
Jeff Dennis  
Breaking Ground  
Revin Fellows  
Blacks in Green  
Sadhu Johnston  
Chief Environmental Officer, Mayor's Office (honorary member)  
Marvelle Manga  
Blacks in Green  
Angela Mason  
Chicago Botanic Garden  
Kelly Smith  
Lawndale Christian Development Corporation/NCP  
Eric Strickland  
Lawndale Business and Local Development Corporation  
Tracie Worthy  
Lawndale Christian Development Corporation

## **Sweet Beginnings Board of Managers**

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Strategic Decisions, LLC  
John Hansen  
Professional Beekeeper  
Richard Kordesh  
University of Illinois at Chicago  
Faye Sinnott  
Solution Navigations, Inc.  
**Special Advisor**  
Richard Morey, DLA Piper

## A WORD FROM THE CEO

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

Nonprofits nationwide are urgently seeking innovative approaches to the persistent social problems, such as inadequate housing, lack of employment, incarceration and reintegration, lack of health and mental health care, debt, and substance abuse, that deeply affect our neighborhoods, families, and quality of life. As the North Lawndale Employment Network enjoys its ninth year of service, we remain committed to and focused on achieving our mission.

Our strategies have shifted over the years to ensure that we have the desired impact on the lives of the people whom we are here to serve. One new strategy is our social enterprise and transitional jobs program, Sweet Beginnings, launched in 2004. This initiative introduced us to the “green” movement and green collar jobs, which can lift people out of poverty and reduce harm to our planet.

We are especially looking forward to the introduction of our new green-engineered Building Beyond: *Green Pathways to Success Program*, where we will train and certify young adults for jobs in energy savings and efficiency techniques. Our new program strategies will position those who walk through our doors to leave better equipped to improve their earnings potential and their quality of life.

As our country develops better ways to care for our environment, NLEN is thinking about how the related economic changes can spur job growth. NLEN assembled a team of “green” experts to identify the best local opportunities and to plan for other green-thinking strategies.

We have grown tremendously in the last several years, both in terms of programs and improved processes. To manage this growth, the NLEN Board of Directors restructured its committees and its membership, adding executives from the corporate world. These changes strengthen our management and lead to more effective services.

Here at NLEN, we are helping North Lawndale to discover green pathways to economic sustainability.

Sincerely,



Brenda Palms Barber



“Over the seven years of our partnership with NLEN I have had the honor of witnessing NLEN’s amazing progress that has led to systems change and tangible, positive results in the lives of countless former offenders.”

Deborah Harrington, Woods Fund of Chicago

“Probably the most valuable experience for me has been hearing personal stories and journeys... how their dedication, perseverance, and partnership with NLEN have helped them overcome obstacles, to turn their lives around to become productive members of the community.”

Mike Kramer, The Boeing Company

“I will always reflect on the original visioning meetings that were held in the community that led to the creation of NLEN. A conversation... to an idea...to the NLEN.”

Debra Wesley-Freeman, Sinai Community Institute

1 in 100 adults is behind bars  
in the United States

FACT

# PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

NLEN offers a coordinated set of programs and services to address the income and employment challenges of North Lawndale residents experiencing unemployment and underemployment.

## The U-Turn Permitted Program

U-Turn Permitted provides reintegration and employment services to formerly incarcerated persons. This four-week cognitive-based training helps participants develop the skills they need to get and keep a job. Experiential classroom exercises and field trips help participants develop important interpersonal skills in conflict resolution, work ethic, time management, communication, and overall acclimation to the workplace. Participants also learn how to develop their own résumés and job search techniques, and learn and practice competitive interviewing skills. Those who do not find employment on their own receive placement assistance from NLEN's Business Services Department. In Fiscal Year 2008, 160 men and women completed U-Turn Permitted. Of these, 72% entered employment and 72% of those who got jobs retained them for 30 days or more.

## Transitional Jobs Program

NLEN offers people with significant barriers to employment placement in transitional jobs. Formerly incarcerated persons, Chicago Housing Authority residents, and others with limited work experience can work for 30 to 90 days in a subsidized position with NLEN's subsidiary, Sweet Beginnings, LLC, or another one of NLEN's business partners. These transitional jobs can lead to permanent, unsubsidized placements with the transitional employer or provide the work experience that allows many to transition to market jobs. In Fiscal Year 2008, NLEN placed 68 in subsidized, transitional employment. Of these, 49 completed the subsidized term of employment, and 84% entered unsubsidized employment.

## Sweet Beginnings Social Enterprise, LLC

This wholly owned subsidiary of NLEN offers full-time transitional jobs in a green industry – the production and sales of natural, handmade skin care products featuring its own urban honey. Piloted in 2004 as an urban honey business selling mainly at local farmers markets, Sweet Beginnings incorporated in 2006 and sells a honey-based product line called beeline®, including lip balm, body polisher, body cream, lotion, and shower gel, along with its trademark honey. These are sold at seven Chicago Whole Foods Markets, online, and at other boutique outlets locally and in Texas, Connecticut, and Michigan.

Sweet Beginnings workers care for the bees and hives, harvest honey, make personal care products, package and ship products, track inventory, fill product orders, and sell at retail outlets and special events. This



U-Turn Permitted participants gain work experience as volunteers at the Chicago Food Depository.



Sweet Beginnings workers tend the beehives in NLEN's backyard.

Visit the beeline® Web site for more product information and online purchases.

[www.beelinestore.com](http://www.beelinestore.com)



experience transfers to market positions in manufacturing, food service, distribution, hospitality, and customer service. Since it started, Sweet Beginnings has employed 74 people. The recidivism rate for these employees is only 2%.

## Building Beyond: Green Pathways to Success

NLEN designed Building Beyond to help young people address their barriers to employment before they become entrenched, and to provide at-risk youth with an alternative to criminal activity. In Fiscal Year 2008, Building Beyond helped 22 young adults define and pursue their goals. Of these, five obtained an educational credential and 15 secured employment.

NLEN has recently redesigned this program to focus on specific skills training. *Green Pathways to Success* will train participants for Green Collar jobs in green roof installation and landscaping, green construction, and solar thermal and photovoltaic installation and maintenance. The Building Beyond training is eight weeks of classroom and hands-on instruction that includes basic communication skills, life and soft skills training, environmental literacy, OSHA Safety and HAZWOPR Training Certification, and vocational skills training and certifications relevant to these green collar workforce opportunities.

NLEN's Green Collar Advisory Committee developed a definition for the term:

Green Collar jobs have a positive influence on the environment and provide workers with a family sustaining income or a pathway to it, including training and upward mobility and multiple entry points on the pathway. They are accessible for individuals with significant barriers to employment, but not limited to them. They include local jobs in alternative energy, alternative transportation, energy and water conservation and efficiency, green building, materials reuse, sustainable local food systems, and recycling, among others.

## Sweet Beginnings Mission

The Sweet Beginnings, LLC Social Enterprise offers transitional jobs for formerly incarcerated men and women and others with significant barriers to employment. It is a Limited Liability Corporation and a wholly-owned subsidiary of NLEN that is guided by a triple bottom line mission. This mission is:

**Social:** To provide people facing significant barriers to employment — primarily those with histories of criminal convictions — with viable opportunities to establish a work history, learn productive work habits, and become productive members of society.

**Economic:** To contribute to the economic revitalization of the North Lawndale neighborhood through a social enterprise that is sustainable for the long-term and generates jobs.

**Product:** To produce and sell high-quality honey and honey-based personal care and relaxation products.

Black men are unemployed at twice the rate of white men

FACT

## Workforce Coaching

Every NLEN client receives workforce coaching from entry into any of the NLEN programs through job placement, and for at least a full year post-placement. By checking in frequently with their clients, Workforce Coaches help clients identify and address problems that are keeping them from getting a job or, once employed, problems that may lead to job loss. Sometimes clients simply need moral support or help resolving immediate problems on the job; while others need help with transportation, child care, housing, or other supportive services. NLEN has found that this one-on-one attention is essential to helping people with multiple barriers to employment balance work and life responsibilities, so they can get and keep jobs.

## Business Services Department

NLEN encourages program participants to find their own jobs to equip them with job search skills for a lifetime. NLEN provides resources, such as computers, a photocopier, fax machine, job listings, and free voicemail, to help them do this. Program staff help them to develop job search strategies and interviewing techniques. In addition, NLEN provides job placement assistance to those who need it. The Business Services Department develops relationships with employers willing to place NLEN clients and matches the skills and interests of NLEN clients to those positions. Although our goal is to employ North Lawndale residents, the focus of this department is serving the business client — as long as we meet their needs for prepared and qualified workers, they will continue to hire NLEN clients.

## Financial Literacy Coaching

As a Center for Working Families, NLEN provides financial literacy workshops and one-on-one counseling to program participants and other unemployed and underemployed North Lawndale residents. Group workshops cover budgeting, saving, and credit counseling. One-on-one counseling addresses more complex issues, including credit repair, paying down debt, and making plans to meet long-term financial goals. In Fiscal Year 2008, 295 people took advantage of NLEN's financial literacy workshops and one-on-one financial coaching. Of these, 72 resolved at least one credit report issue and 57 began using a bank or credit union — two-and-a-half times the program goal of 20.



Financial Coach Colzette Hoy and Workforce Coach Elaine Austin work together to make sure NLEN clients receive the support they need.



A Sweet Beginnings worker practices interviewing techniques with Director of Business Services Pamela Smith Thomas.

**“We’ve always gotten quality referrals from North Lawndale, which is why we continue to use them.”**

Doug Johnson, Able Electropolishing

FACT

2,319,258 adult inmates in the United States today

# FINANCIAL AND FUNDING SUMMARY

## Summary of Financial Statements Fiscal Year 2008

Period Ending June 30, 2008

### BALANCE SHEET

<b>ASSETS</b>	<b>\$858,096</b>
Liabilities	\$20,372
Net Assets	\$837,723
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$858,096</b>

### STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS

<b>REVENUE</b>	
Corporate/Foundations	\$907,433
Government	\$631,066
Fundraising	\$126,541
Other	\$119,516
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$1,785,556</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>	
Program Services	\$1,366,560
Supporting Services	\$112,971
<b>Total Operating Expense</b>	<b>\$858,096</b>
<b>CHANGE IN NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$306,025</b>

Unaudited

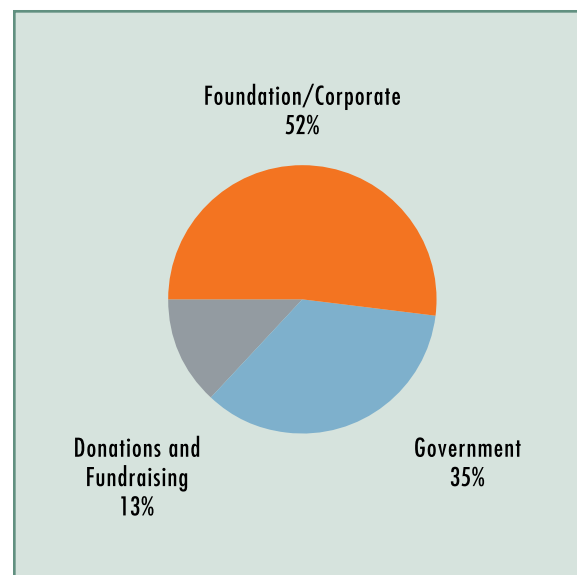
## Funders

Alphawood Foundation  
Behavioral Interventions  
The Boeing Company  
Career Advancement Network  
Chicago Community Trust  
Chicago Community Trust / Searle  
City of Chicago  
Emergency Fund  
Foundation for the Carolinas  
Fry Foundation  
JPMorgan Chase  
LaSalle Bank  
Local Initiatives Support Corporation  
Jim and Kay Mabie  
McCormick Foundation  
Partnership for New Communities  
Polk Bros. Foundation  
Pritzker Pucker Family Foundation  
Public Allies  
Seabury Foundation  
Shaker Family Foundation  
Steans Family Foundation  
Windy City Harvest

## Sweet Beginnings Tea Sponsors

Pritzker Pucker Family Foundation  
Pritzker Traubert Family Foundation  
Heather, Jennifer, and Robin Steans  
The Steans Family Foundation  
The Boeing Company  
Chase Bank  
Jim and Kay Mabie  
Paula Wolff  
Richard H. Driehaus Foundation  
Sinai Community Institute  
Steven Casey  
Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream Company  
Chicago Botanic Garden  
National City Bank

## Funding Sources

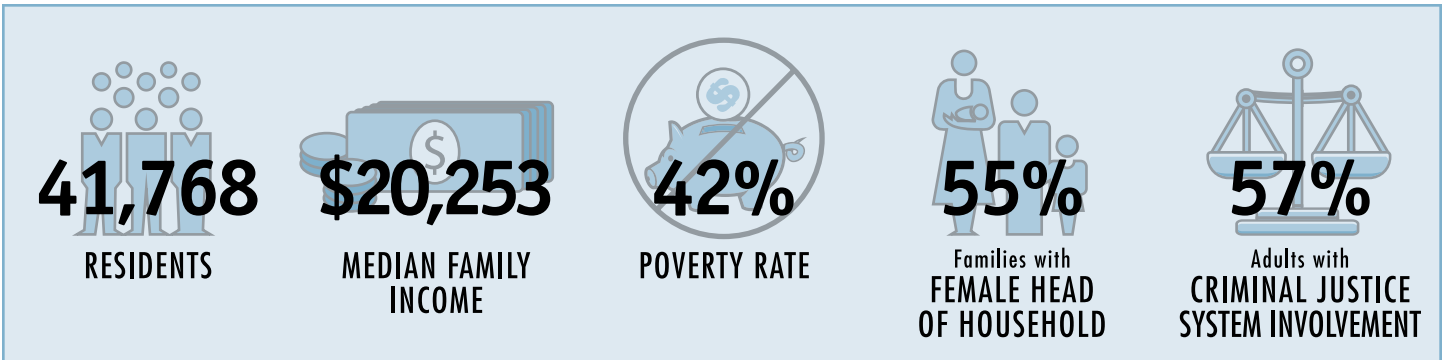


FACT

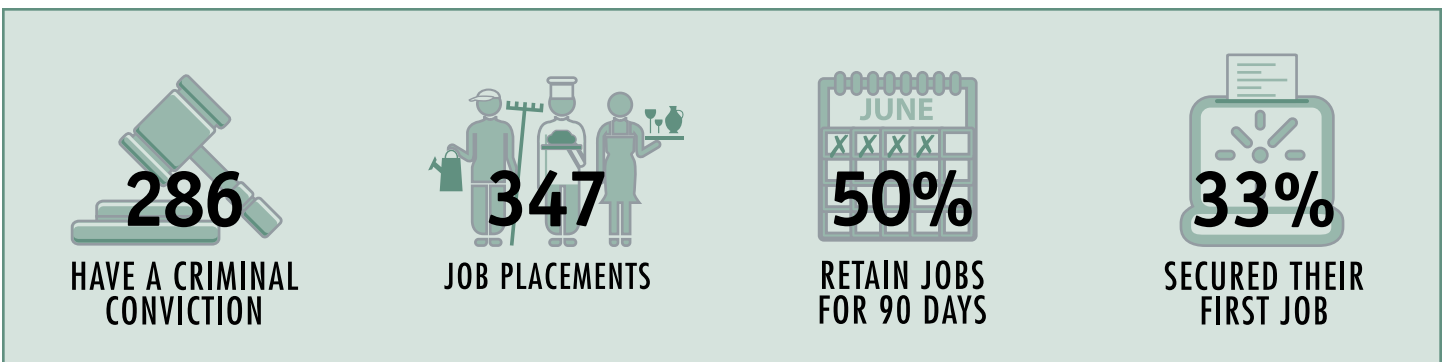
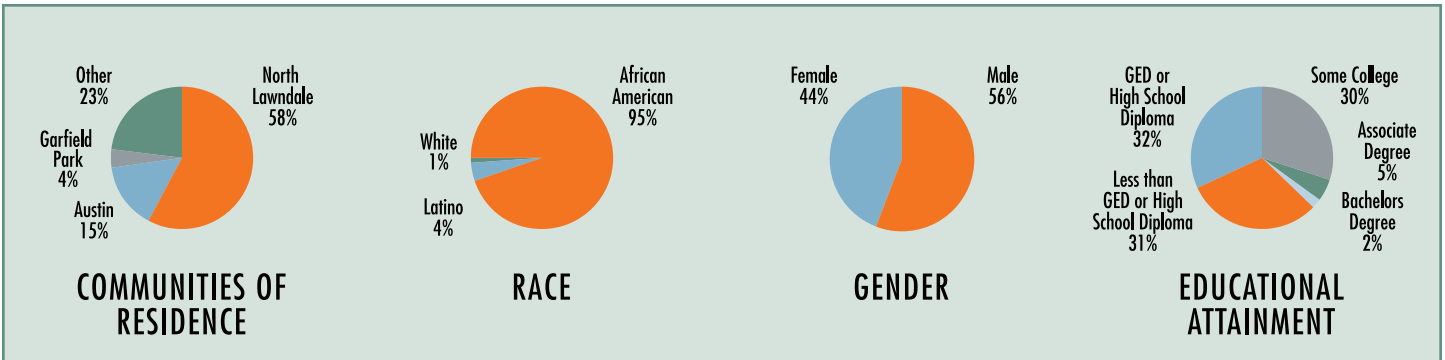
It costs Illinois \$21,622 to  
incarcerate one adult for one year

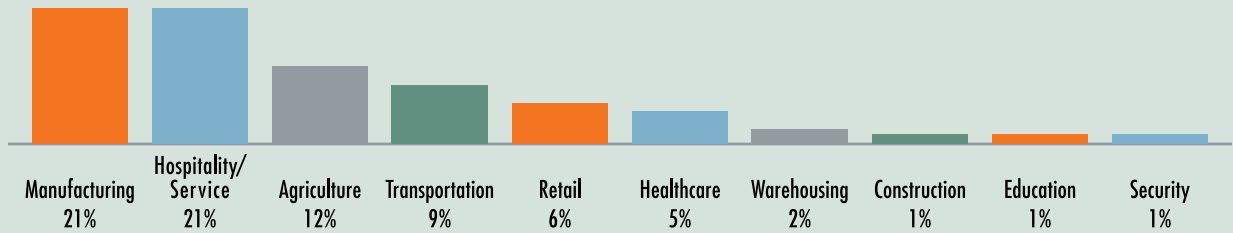
# NLEN COMMUNITY IMPACT

## North Lawndale Snapshot



## NLEN Participants





**HIRING INDUSTRIES**

**Sweet Beginnings, LLC**



ANNUAL SALES



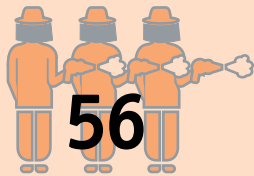
HONEY: TOP SELLING PRODUCT



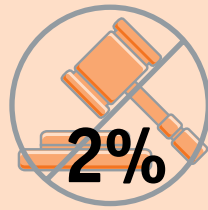
JARS OF HONEY SOLD



TUBES OF LIP BALM SOLD



EMPLOYEES



RECIDIVISM RATE



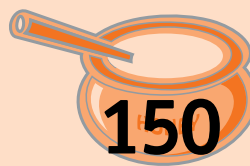
WHOLE FOODS MARKETS SELL BEELINE



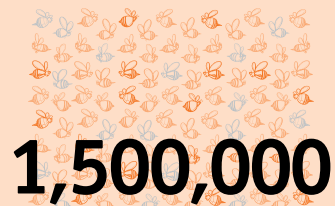
BOUTIQUES SELL BEELINE



HIVES



POUNDS OF HONEY PER HIVE



BEES IN NLEN APIARIES

## PATHWAY TO SWEET SUCCESS

While most Sweet Beginnings workers transition to market jobs after 30, 60, or 90 days, a few are promoted within the company and stay on for another six months to a year.

These Team Leaders continue to work in all areas of the company — working with the bees, making products, selling at retail outlets, filling orders, and tracking inventory — but they also supervise a small team in a specialized area, making sure they meet the company goals for their areas and that workers know how to do their jobs.

Both Don and Arturo came to Sweet Beginnings after months of fruitlessly searching for jobs. After years of incarceration, both wanted new lives but found their criminal histories and lack of experience kept them from moving forward. Both found Sweet Beginnings through referrals from their parole officers and trained with Workforce Coach Coretta Rivers before interviewing with Sweet Beginnings. Don started in September 2007 and Arturo in January 2008. After 90 days each as employees, both are now Team Leaders.

Incarcerated at age 17, Don focused on his future while serving his time. “I looked for a different path while I was in there. Everybody else wants to lift weights and gang bang. I went to school, took some college courses, and became a teacher’s aide.” His girlfriend provided moral support to help him stay the path.

The teacher’s aide experience prepared Don to be a supervisor. He has also found he has a knack for numbers. He explains that while in prison, “I found out I’m pretty smart and I actually do like school. I reconnected with something. In school I never paid attention.” At Sweet Beginnings he has learned how to use a computer and applies his skills with numbers to his position overseeing shipping and receiving.

Now 25, Don is still focused on his future. He explains, “Working is good enough for me right now,” but he aspires to greater academic achievement and a career as a housing developer.

Seven months into his job with Sweet Beginnings, no one would guess that when Arturo started here, he “didn’t know how to deal with people.” He explains, “It was hard to be around normal people because my self esteem was down — I was ashamed. I couldn’t get a job and I really felt that I was going back to the streets, where I felt at home with other people who felt bad, too.” At 35, Arturo had never had a steady job and had never even interviewed for one. He had worked here and there, but most of his income was from the street. He was incarcerated four separate times.

Today Arturo spends his weekends doing product demonstrations at Whole Foods Markets and supervises a small team of workers during the week. He’s been offered jobs elsewhere, but he believes in Sweet Beginnings: “Everything about it I support — the social, economic, and product missions. The social mission is my favorite because it helps people like me who have job barriers or no experience get in society and start dealing with it.”

Both of them are committed to their new lives. These two have certainly found their sweet beginning.



Team Leader Don Campbell



Arturo helps a South Loop Whole Foods customer sample beeline® lotion.

# PROVEN PATHWAYS TO ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

U-Turn Permitted graduates have discovered many different pathways to economic opportunity. They work in manufacturing, construction, food service, healthcare, hospitality, retail, banking, agriculture, and other industries. Some become entrepreneurs. This June, nearly 70 graduates gathered at United Baptist Church, U-Turn Permitted's site partner, to celebrate their successes and share their stories. Here are just two of the many amazing stories of how lives can be changed.



**Lakeshia Rhone** has travelled a winding path. Once a successful call center manager with a home in the suburbs, Lakeshia was convicted of a crime she had committed years before and had nearly forgotten. When she was arrested she already knew, "I'm not even this person anymore."

Two years in federal prison left her jobless and friendless in a small-town Illinois halfway house. Released after three months there, "My first day out I knew I needed some help. I had no idea how to get a job when I got back to Chicago. I went to the library and found NLEN online. I begged for 50 cents at the gas station to call. I was crying because I didn't know what I was going to do, but when I talked to Elaine, she told me, 'Come to NLEN and it's going to be okay.'" Lakeshia followed this new pathway back to Chicago and enrolled in U-Turn Permitted.

"The first day of the program was intimidating. We had testing and in the room was mostly men. I hadn't been around men in years and wasn't sure if I could even sit in the room with them. But they were nice to me and I was able to stay." In the program she found the support of people who were facing the same problems transitioning home. "People would think that you'd be happy to be home, but you're really not. You get home and you realize you have nothing and you have to start all over again. It's really hard."

It was also hard to find a job. Overqualified for most jobs that she applied for, employers questioned her interest. She quickly realized that NLEN could really help her "provide a buffer between me and the employer — it made it easier to be truthful about my background."

She graduated from U-Turn Permitted in March 2007 and now works for Able Electropolishing. She says "It's a great job" because she has a steady schedule and benefits, and the CEO is interested in employees' ideas about work processes. Mostly, she is happy to be working.

She's good for the company, too. Company Controller Doug Johnson explains, "We feel lucky to have her. We've always gotten quality referrals from North Lawndale, which is why we continue to use them. Lakeshia is a fine example. She's intelligent, committed, and very positive; just the type of person that makes a company successful."

Lakeshia is also pursuing a Bachelor's degree. She is earning credits at Malcolm X Community College and plans to transfer to DePaul University to complete her degree. She is still seeking her true pathway to sustainability: "I have no idea what I can do to help people, but I know that's where I want to be. I love my job, but I really want to help people."



U-Turn Permitted alumni share a meal at United Baptist Church at the 2008 reunion.

**1 in 9 black men ages 20 to 34 is behind bars in the U.S.**

**FACT**

She told NLEN CEO Brenda Palms Barber that she would like to run an agency like NLEN, and she spends some of her free time speaking at U-Turn Permitted orientations. Brenda says, “We appreciate the time she spends speaking to the new classes. It is important for those people just beginning to turn their lives around to meet someone who has already done it. Lakeshia has demonstrated that although the journey can be hard, u-turns are possible and you can create a new pathway.”



**Clarence Little** built his successful landscaping business, Personal Touch Services, on little more than his desire to work and his love of North Lawndale.

Clarence graduated from U-Turn Permitted in 2004 and was interested in starting a business that was his own. NLEN referred him to a skills training partner, Greencorps Chicago, for a landscaping training course. Soon he began to cut lawns. He explains how he started: “I just asked customers to pay me what they thought it was worth.” NLEN had taught him to network, so he took that advice to heart and asked NLEN for a contract to maintain the NLEN yard. NLEN staff living in North Lawndale also gave him landscaping work at their homes.

Business boomed from there. Personal Touch Services now has more than 15 contracts with local businesses, single-family homes, and apartment buildings. He employs three people and hires temporary help from NLEN when he has large jobs. He frequently visits NLEN to learn new skills, most recently for financial coaching. He explains, “I don’t know everything about business so I surround myself with people who know more than I do.”

Clarence is committed to North Lawndale, where he lives in the house where he was born 40 years ago. “North Lawndale is becoming a nice place to be. We need landscaping here.” He adds, “I call my business Personal Touch because it is personal to me. At NLEN, Brenda said, ‘Welcome home,’ and here I am.” Clarence has literally found a greener pathway — as an entrepreneur.



Left: Lakeshia Rhone inspires other U-Turn Permitted alumni with her story at the 2008 reunion.

Middle: A recent U-Turn Permitted graduating class show off their certificates of completion.

Right: Clarence Little is a U-Turn Permitted graduate and owner of Personal Touch Services.

**FACT**

**NLEN’s U-Turn Permitted has served 2,117 formerly incarcerated persons since 2000**

# NLEN VOLUNTEERS

**Delores Wright** is the first person many NLEN clients meet when they walk in the door, and she always helps them find what they need. She joined NLEN two years ago, when an Easter Seals program for people 55 and older placed her at NLEN as an office aid. In addition to greeting clients and helping them in the Resource Center, she is responsible for file management, data entry, and outreach assistance for the U-Turn Permitted program. She is happy to gain new work experience and hopes to eventually provide assistance at a counseling agency. To this end, she is starting business and sociology classes at Malcolm X College in the fall. She would like to someday be a mentor herself, so she can “let people know there is hope and they can do it.”



Delores Wright

**Faye Sinnott**, a management consultant with her own firm, Solution Navigators, Inc., believes “too few funders for the nonprofit world truly understand the need to invest in agency infrastructure — people and facilities — to get the program results they seek,” so she contributes her own expertise. Faye drew on her early career experience in production line and plant management to help Sweet Beginnings design basic batch and inventory control and labor documentation, adopt a stock keeping unit based inventory set-up, and outline basic document flow. These procedures ensure that the ongoing business expansion is orderly and manageable. Faye is inspired by the workers: “Everyone has a story, everyone has challenges, everyone has the capability to summon up the strength that lies within to contribute, to grow, and to overcome.”

**Richard Morey**, a partner in the franchise group at DLA Piper US LLP, advises companies on structuring their distribution networks, mergers and acquisitions, and corporate law issues. Rick and his team at DLA Piper, especially Nicole Chaudhari, provide Sweet Beginnings with similar legal advice. Rick explained why he volunteers with NLEN: “I tend to be more politically conservative, at least compared to many others who work with NLEN. But NLEN’s goals — helping former offenders get a second chance to turn their lives around — appeals to everyone. There’s nothing more rewarding than hearing their stories of successfully entering the workforce and seeing their pride in doing so, while knowing that I played even a very small part in giving them the opportunity.”



Richard Morey

**Sylvia and Phil Adams**, partners in PS&A Communications, provide NLEN and Sweet Beginnings with marketing, branding, and communication counseling. They explain their commitment to NLEN: “The core objective of training and integrating those on the margin back into society is a mission we totally believe in. Besides, Sweet Beginnings has great products and fabulous urban honey.”



Sylvia and Phil Adams

## More Volunteers

Mary Barlow, Administrative Support, Community Resident

Carolyn Bennett Administrative Support, Community Resident

Jennifer Henderson, Sweet Beginnings Board of Managers, Strategic Decisions, LLC

Sylvia Hodges, Support and Evaluation for U-Turn Permitted, VISTA Volunteer

# AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS

The CBS Evening News with Katie Couric profiled NLEN, July 28, 2007

The *Chicago Tribune* four-part front page series on Sweet Beginnings, October 28 – 31, 2007

Chicago Urban League NextONE for entrepreneur development, 2008

Presented at the Congressional Black Caucus at the invitation of Congressman Danny Davis, 2007

*Crain's Chicago Business*, July 14, 2008

Fatherhood Initiative Award for Leadership in Helping Fathers Connect with their Children, 2007

Harvard Business School University Strategic Perspectives in Nonprofit Management Executive Education Program and full scholarship, 2008

Illinois Academy of Criminology Annual Award, 2008

John D. and the Catherine T. MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions, 2006

National Transitional Jobs Network Newsletter features Sweet Beginnings, July 2008

NBC Leading the Way Campaign Recognizing Nonprofits in Chicago commercial, April and May 2008

Northwestern University Kellogg School of Neighborhood Business Initiative Award, 2007

Shorebank Community Impact Award, 2007

Social Venture Network Imagine What's Next Award, 2007

Steans Family Foundation and Chicago Community Trust annual reports feature NLEN, 2008

University of Chicago Graduate School of Business and Mayor's Office of Workforce Development \$200,000 Capacity-Building Grant, 2007

FACT

52% of ex-offenders recidivate within three years

FACT

North Lawndale has the second highest rate of return for all Illinois communities



NLEN staff, board members, and friends at the Sweet Beginnings Tea in February 2008.

## NLEN Creative Writing

### Bluebird by D'Angelo Percy (in response to Bluebird by Charles Bukowski)

There's a bluebird in my heart that  
Wants to get out  
But I'm too tough for him.  
I say, stay in there. I'm not going  
To let anybody see  
You.

So, stop beating on my chest  
You show up at the wrong times,  
Which makes me feel weakness and sorrow  
I don't want to show my bluebird  
So coming out of me is hard to  
Swallow.

It's always about bluebird this  
And bluebird that, but if I let  
My bluebird free, will you  
Still think I'm all that?

I think everybody has a bluebird  
Which all may come and go, but  
The reality of my bluebird is  
One I just can't let go.

So keep the strength and keep  
The faith,  
'cause one day my bluebird  
Will escape.

### Dreams by Felix Hollimon

I have dreams of some day being  
able to live free, free as the wind  
blowing through the leaves of a  
fully blossomed tree standing all alone  
in the middle of the forest. I wish I were that tree in a world of my own,  
standing in my space without being distracted, disturbed, or even shown.

My dream is to be in a place where there is beauty and peace, where there  
is no stress, no pain, and no lease. I will be free, while the roots from my  
branches will bloom from the rays on the sun. That is what I see when I  
have dreams.

### A Neighborhood Memory by Anthony Reese

I used to stay in a housing community.  
It was located at 29th and State  
Street. I remember in the winter of  
1967 we had a snowstorm. The snow  
was so high we could not leave the building. From my bedroom window I  
could only see images of the street and the el tracks. From my hall window  
the park was a blanket of snow, along with a white-covered school building  
and the makings of trees. School was cancelled, but when the snow stopped  
we went out to play. It was suggested that we play in the building, but  
being a child, how could I resist going out to play in the snow? I remember  
going up to the second floor, climbing out the window to the lower roof to  
jump in the snow. Oh what a memory.



The Community Writing Project at the University of Illinois at Chicago hosts writing workshops for people who ordinarily do not consider themselves to be writers, and publishes their reflections on everyday life in Real Conditions. The September 2006 issue featured writings from NLEN clients. During two summer sessions, participants met twice a week for three weeks to share their stories and work on their writing.



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