



Creating a community that works

North Lawndale Employment Network

NLEN News

Volume 2, Issue 1

Spring/Summer 2002

NLEN Goals:

- Identify priority employment needs and promising employment opportunities for Lawndale residents
- Strengthen relationships between employers and employment & training organizations
- Provide technical assistance to build the capacity of North Lawndale E & T providers to meet the employment needs of Lawndale residents and area employers
- Build relationships among E & T providers, social service agencies and community groups to provide the full range of support services needed to help residents secure good jobs and advance to better ones

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NLEN and CJC Co-host AECF Conference: *Taking the Initiative on Jobs and Race: A Jobs Initiative Conference*

This past month, NLEN co-hosted a conference with the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Chicago Jobs Council that convened employers, workforce development practitioners, researchers, representatives of non-profit advocacy and policy organizations working on social change issues, and funders, to learn about how issues of race, ethnicity and culture affect labor market outcomes among low-wage workers. Through the conference, we aimed to engage organizations committed to improving labor market outcomes among low-wage workers by sharing effective, cultur-

ally competent strategies.

The Casey Foundation initiated the Jobs Initiative, a workforce development investment whose mission is to help low-income young adults secure family-supporting, living-wage jobs with benefits and advancement opportunities. The Jobs Initiative invests in five cities and seeks to stimulate regional economies and labor markets to work for low-income job seekers living in isolated communities.

Taking the Initiative on Jobs and Race: A Jobs Initiative Conference was designed to provide an opportunity for members of the workforce development field to gather infor-

mation to consider whether any common interests emerge for improving labor market outcomes by addressing issues of race, ethnicity and culture. During the meeting, the conveners (1) raised awareness regarding the relevance of these issues, (2) featured practical examples and tools to strengthen practice in the field, and (3) provided opportunities for expanding networks and collaborating on projects. If you would like more information about the conference, please visit the Annie E. Casey Foundation website at www.aecf.org!

Farewell Lea...Welcome Aletra!

NLEN is saddened to say goodbye to our Associate Director, **Lea Weems**. Lea has been with the network almost from its inception, coming on just months after Brenda Palms Barber started here. Lea has proven to be a wonderful asset to NLEN and we

miss her dearly. At the same time, we are excited to wish her the best of luck as she travels to Boston, MA to start law school in the fall at HARVARD University.

NLEN would like to extend a gracious wel-

come to **Aletra Nicholson**, who has accepted the position as Associate Director. Aletra joins the network with a wealth of experience in the workforce development field and is excited to meet and work with our partners! Read more about Aletra in our fall issue!

Letter from the Executive Director, Brenda Palms Barber

Greetings:

Good Things are happening in North Lawndale all the time. I want to express my sincere appreciation to all of our members and friends who attended both our Winter and Spring Quarterly Membership meetings. Our winter meeting centered on an open dialogue addressing the impact September 11th had on our workforce development community. Robert Wordlaw, Executive Director of the Chicago Jobs Council and NLEN board member, facilitated this lively discussion that left us all in a healthier state of mind and an improved and optimistic perspective about our work. Some key points made:

- Stay engaged in maintaining meaningful relationships with employers - the economy will turn around
- Be realistic and clear about matching skills and job opportunities with clients
- We must strongly encourage Foundations to continue to fund social services, considering the significant cutbacks on resources from the state and federal levels
- This is the best time (during a recession) to advocate long term skills training—to create a safety net for individuals
- Encourage public service jobs

Our featured member organization of the Winter quarter was the Chicago Christian Industrial League. Felix Matlock, Associate Director, shared with us the history, purpose, and programs cur-

rently offered at CCIL. As you may know, they are in the midst of planning their relocation to North Lawndale, which will be at Roosevelt and California. They have been successfully serving the needs of the homeless population for 100 years. If you have additional questions, contact LeKeeta Charley, Director of Training at (312) 491-2061.

Our Spring Quarterly meeting, held in April, featured a discussion with Patricia O'Brien, Assistant Professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago on the important and often neglected topic of how women return to the "free-world" after single or multiple experiences of incarceration. She shared with us an in-depth, personalized description of the many challenges women face in their struggle to re-enter their communities, families and the workplace. We are honored to receive her gift to us, a copy of her book, titled *Making It in the "Free World"*, Women in Transition from Prison. But the greatest gift Patricia left us with was her time and insight to an overlooked but growing societal challenge. We have been moved to action and are exploring different avenues to incorporate gender specific support to women who are transitioning from prison, such as developing a curriculum designed and written by a woman who was incarcerated, instituting a rites of passage ceremony as well as several other ideas.

In addition, NLEN featured our

new member, the Neighborhood Technology Resource Center (NTRC) at the meeting where Nicol Turner-Lee is the Executive Director. The NTRC is new to North Lawndale and has much to offer in aiding our members and clients become better connected to technology and other services. Located in the new Homan Square Community Center, NTRC is a valuable resource to the North Lawndale community by bringing a computer lab and classes to this neighborhood.

Finally, we look forward to your participation at our third **Annual Business Meeting**, which will take place **Wednesday September 11, 2002, from 9:00 to 11:30 a.m.**, at Sinai Community Institute, 2653 West Ogden Ave in Townhall A. We are very pleased to present to you this year's keynote speaker, Robert Lerman, Center Director for the Labor and Social Policy Center, at the Urban Institute.

If you have not already become a member and/or if you need to renew your annual membership with us, please do so before the September meeting by contacting Michele McGee at 773-542-2000 extension 3305.

Take care and see you in September!

Note: If you would like EESN flyers for your organization, please contact Walter Boyd for copies at (773) 542-2000 x 5588 or e-mail him at boyw@sinai.org.

Raising Awareness in the Health Care Sector

NLEN's health care committee seeks to influence and facilitate the development of education, training and support systems, resources, and partnerships needed to ensure that North Lawndale residents have access to jobs in the healthcare sector that pay or lead to living wages and careers.

Over the past year, our committee developed a brochure to promote health care careers among North Lawndale residents. To date, we have distributed over 4,800 brochures through our member organizations and presentations at community meetings, churches, and schools. We have also placed ads in the *North Lawndale Community News*. These efforts have resulted in over 116 calls to the health career hotline, a number residents call for further information on training programs and financial aid as well as support

navigating the system of education and career advancement in the health care sector.

With the volume of calls to the health career hotline increasing, our committee recognized that we are at a new stage of development.

For this reason, on February 27, 2002, we hosted a brainstorming session to begin planning for the next phase. Sixteen people representing 12 organizations attended the luncheon, which was hosted by Advocate Bethany Hospital. We discussed the future of the health career hotline; how to expand our outreach efforts for the career awareness campaign, and how to sustain the project through various fundraising strategies and continued involve-

"...[our] efforts have resulted in over 116 calls to the health career hotline..."

ment of committee members.

From this meeting, we hope to develop clearer strategies for enhancing the health career hotline services through fundraising for the project and new partnerships with some of our members. Anyone interested in joining NLEN's health care committee or finding out more about our health care sector projects should contact Aletra

Nicholson, Associate Director, at (773) 542-2000 x 6006 or Pamela Thomas, AmeriCorps volunteer, at (773) 542-2000 x 4879.

Thanks to all who attended and provided their knowledge and insight to this collaborative process. Our committees are vital to the development of NLEN!

Employer Profile: Jakacki Bag and Barrel, Inc.

The Jakacki family has owned and operated Jakacki Bag & Barrel in the North Lawndale community for over 40 years. Started by Frank Jakacki in 1960, Jakacki Bag & Barrel has been a staple in North Lawndale, providing entry-level job opportunities to community residents. Jakacki Bag & Barrel is a manufacturing company that cleans and restores steel drums for other manufacturers. Frank's son, Paul, runs the business, which currently employs 16 individuals. I had the opportunity to sit down and discuss the company's role in the community with Debbie Jakacki, daughter of Paul and Operations Manager at Jakacki Bag & Barrel.

Q. What is the role of Jakacki in the North Lawndale community?

A. The majority of our employees are North Lawndale residents. We provide jobs and assist our employees with problems that they may not be able to handle by pointing them in the right direction. We give them a stable life by providing employment. They have pride and some ownership in work.

Q. What are some of the innovative retention strategies that Jakacki has implemented?

A. Jackaki is currently banking with Community Bank of Lawndale and would like to work with them to see if the guys can get checking accounts. That would save them money because currency exchanges have fees for money orders. We offer a Christmas Club where they can

start saving a little bit per check, and around Thanksgiving they can withdraw that money for Christmas presents or whatever they need. One employee is going to walk away with \$2,000 this year.

Q. You recently hired your first NLEN graduate. Why did you decide to work with NLEN?

A. By working with NLEN we felt that we would hire someone with training, who understands the importance of coming to work everyday, being on time and working...That's what we're looking for – someone who will be a more responsible employee and value his employment.

This interview was conducted by Kristen Roberts, Employer Liaison.

IMPORTANT! NLEN July Membership Meeting WILL NOT BE HELD

After great deliberation, NLEN has decided to call off our Summer Membership Meeting. We have big plans in store for our **3rd Annual Business Meeting** that require a great deal of our attention. NLEN has already confirmed Dr. Robert Lerman, of the Urban Institute in Washington, D.C. as a keynote speaker. We hope to see you all here at Sinai Community Institute on September 11, 2002!

Collaborate with us...

JOIN NLEN TODAY!

Your membership dues (\$100 each year, per organization or individual) enable NLEN to continue providing much needed services and programs to the North Lawndale residents, service providers, and employers.

Membership benefits for Employers:

- Access to a work-ready supply of workers through NLEN member training providers
- Seamless invisible support systems for workers from North Lawndale
- Variety of retention-driven products and services
- Networking opportunities
- Information about and access to numerous tax incentives and subsidies
- Increased presence in the community
- Reduced recruitment and hiring costs

Membership benefits for Service Providers

- Access to comprehensive system of services for your clients through all NLEN members
- Strong collaborative funding strategies and proposals
- Links to committed good employers with good jobs
- Networking opportunities
- Shared web-based data collection and referral process
- Exchange of employment and best practices
- Support and technical assistance

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON NLEN MEMBERSHIP, CONTACT MICHELE McGEE AT (773) 542-2000 X 3305

EX-OFFENDER EMPLOYMENT SERVICE NETWORK (EESN)

UNITED BAPTIST CHURCH, 4220 WEST ROOSEVELT RD
10:00 A.M.— 2:00 P.M., 1st and 3rd FRIDAYS of EVERY MONTH

Anyone interested in joining the network of employment and support services offered by the EESN should attend this orientation to the program. Contact Walter Boyd at (773) 542-2000 x 5588 for details or to make a referral.

SAVE UP! IDA PROGRAM

BASIC BUDGETING CLASSES

- June: Every Tuesday (4th, 11th, 18th, 25th) from 6-9 p.m. at Neighborhood Housing Services, NHS, located at 3555 West Ogden Ave

Save Up! is a special matched savings account program that helps North Lawndale residents build assets. These Basic Budgeting classes are free and required to enter the program. For more information, contact Anne Bracken at (773) 277-2724, ext 2.

NLEN REGULAR MEETING SCHEDULE

- **Quarterly Membership Meetings**
2nd Wednesdays in September, January, April and July, 9:30-11:30 a.m. at Sinai Community Institute.

REMEMBER: JULY SUMMER MEMBERSHIP MEETING CANCELLED!

- **Ex-offender Advisory Committee Meetings**
3rd Wednesday of the month, 12:00-2:00 p.m., United Baptist Church, 4220 West Roosevelt Rd; lunch is served.
- **Health Care Committee Meetings**
3rd Wednesday of the month, 9:30-11:30 a.m., Sinai Community Institute, 2653 West Ogden Ave.
- **Manufacturing Committee Meetings**
Contact Kristen Roberts if you are interested in attending at (773) 542-2000 ext 4881.

NLEN Uses RFP Process to Choose Partner to Offer Expanded EESN Services

NLEN constantly strives to enhance the services offered through our various programs and collaborations, guiding us toward our vision of promoting the economic self-sufficiency of North Lawndale residents. One method for enhancement is the request for proposal (RFP) process – a system that we believe will assist NLEN in ensuring objectivity, accountability and reliability in our contractual endeavors. In February, NLEN achieved a critical milestone by releasing our first RFP. The RFP was sent to fifteen member employment and training providers, to provide career assessment, career planning, interview skills and job search training to participants in the Ex-offender Employment Service Network (EESN).

NLEN received proposals from four valued network members. NLEN gathered a review panel consisting of staff members, community residents and EESN Advisory Committee members. The panel reviewed and evaluated each proposal using NLEN's point-based evaluation form. After four grueling hours of reading, writing and discussion, the panel recommended **Family Focus** as the recipient of the EESN interview skills training contract.

In partnership with the **Neighborhood Technology Resource Center (NTRC)**, **Family Focus** provides a job skills and job search training program centered around not only improving EESN clients ability to market themselves

to employers, but also helping them develop their technological capacity. NLEN congratulates Family Focus and NTRC on such an outstanding and creative proposal.

With this RFP process, NLEN was able to solicit unique proposals from high quality organizations and, subsequently, choose the most appropriate training for the EESN. Implementing this new RFP process moves us in the right direction of standardizing our process of selecting contractual partners for existing and future NLEN programs and services. Ultimately, these efforts will contribute to our goal of providing North Lawndale residents with the essential tools to achieve economic self-sufficiency.

Employer Liaison Position Opens

Staff here are disappointed to say farewell to **Kristen Roberts, Employer Liaison** here at NLEN. Since Kristen joined the network in September she has done a great job of building relationships with employers in the community and connecting our

EESN clients to jobs. Kristen will start her new position as Program Manager at Government Assistance Program at DePaul University in mid-July.

NLEN is currently accepting applications for the position of Employer Liaison. We are asking our

partners spread the word about the position! If you would like to know more about the position or are interested in applying, please contact Michele McGee, Office Manager at (773) 542-2000 x 6006 or e-mail mcgmi@sinai.org.

EESN Increases Services Offered to Clients

The experience of a client enrolled in the Ex-Offender Employment Service Network (EESN) today is very different from what it was a year ago. Over the past year, NLEN has conducted evaluations of the EESN (both self-assessments and objective assessments completed by consultants) to ensure that we are providing quality services to our clients. Despite the challenges associated with integrating new services into an existing program, NLEN

continues to think creatively around how to overcome these difficulties.

Currently, the EESN helps clients obtain proper identification and conducts comprehensive assessments to determine supportive service needs. The EESN has been able to refer clients to other agencies for assistance with food, clothing, shelter, and substance abuse treatment. Recently, however, NLEN has expanded the supportive services offered to our clients with a

new agreement with the **Institute for Clinical Social Work (ICSW)**. Now, upon entry into the program, all clients receive clinically delivered mental health and medical assessments. Subsequently, they are able to access therapeutic services and address family reunification issues.

With the addition of this component to the program, NLEN is one step closer to our goal of comprehensively meeting the needs of ex-offenders.

NORTH LAWDALE EMPLOYMENT NETWORK

2653 West Ogden
Chicago, IL 60608

Phone: (773) 542-2000 x 3305
Fax: (773) 257-6644



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**NOTICE! JULY
SUMMER
MEMBERSHIP
MEETING WILL
NOT BE HELD!!!
(see page 4 for more
information)**

Please contact Alona Lerman at (773) 542-2000 x 3635 if you would like anything included in future newsletters!

NLEN Awarded 2 Grants to Continue to Serve Out-of-School Youth!

NLEN BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Debra Wesley-Freeman, Sinai Community Institute
(Chair)

Robert Wordlaw, Chicago Jobs Council (Vice Chair)

Brenda Mitchell, Advocate/Bethany Hospital (Secretary)

Donna Ducharme, The Delta Institute (Treasurer)

Sylvia Benson, STRIVE Chicago Employment Service,
Inc.

Greg Darnieder, Steans Family Foundation

Margaret Davis, Healthcare Consortium of Illinois

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Davis Jenkins, UIC Great Cities Institute

Val Jordan, APL Plastics and Teaching Factory

Gail Nelson, Carole Robertson Center for Learning

*Kevin McCauley, Illinois Department of Human Services

*denotes ex-officio status

NLEN STAFF

Brenda Palms Barber, Executive Director

Aletra Nicholson, Associate Director

Kristen Roberts, Employer Liaison

Walter Boyd, Ex-offender Program Manager

Alona Lerman, Program Associate

Victoria Cammon, AmeriCorps Coordinator

Pamela Thomas, Client Services Coordinator

Michele McGee, Office Manager

NLEN is excited to announce that we have been awarded two grants to support our work around serving the needs of out-of-school youth. NLEN will work in collaboration with the Neighborhood Technology Resource Center and Family Focus Lawndale to provide job readiness training and occupational skills training to youth in North Lawndale. The program, called *Building Beyond!*, will prepare young adults for careers in IT and Telecommunications. NLEN currently receives funds from the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development (MOWD) under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) to provide occupational skills training to out-of-school youth. We were recently notified that we were refunded to continue to provide these services next year. In addition, NLEN was awarded an Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community grant to offer similar services. If you or your agency works with youth who are out-of-school and between the ages of 17-25 years old or if you are interested in receiving a flyer about the program, please contact Alona Lerman at (773) 542-2000 x 3635 for more information.

In the next issue, you can look forward to reading more about NLEN's efforts to serve youth in the community and the revitalization of the North Lawndale Youth Committee!