



Creating a community that works

NLEN News

North Lawndale Employment Network

Summer 2005

NLEN's Annual Business and Membership

Meeting on Wednesday, September 14th

9:30 AM-11:30AM

At Sinai Community
Institute

Special Release of
CEP Study

*Money Management by
Low-income Households;
Earnings, Spending, Sav-
ings and accessing Finan-
cial Services*

By David Marzahl,
Lisa McKean and
Marianne Bertrand

(See page 5 for bios)

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A U-Turn Story: Ashanti Parks

Ashanti Parks is a graduate of the U-Turn Permitted program. She has been out of prison for a little over two years and currently has a job as a Home Care Provider. She loves her job because it is something that she has always envisioned herself doing. Her journey to this point has been a little rough and has required some change on her part which she is grateful for.

Ashanti was raised by her grandmother since she was a baby. When Ashanti was 12 years old a friend introduced her to marijuana which she continued smoking for many years following. Ashanti became pregnant with her first child when she was 14 years old. She was able to stay in school until she became pregnant again when she was 17 and had to drop out of high school. She got pregnant again at the age of 18.

At this time Ashanti moved from North Lawndale to the Southside of Chicago where



U-Turn graduate, Ashanti Parks

she was influenced by some "wild people," as she describes them. She got married when she was 19 and had three more children with her husband, making a total of six children. This period of her life was tough for Ashanti because her husband was domineering and
(continued on page 3 see Ashanti)

North Lawndale: An Economic Perspective

The financial circumstances of the residents of North Lawndale are in dire need of change. When compared with the larger population of Chicagoans the percentage of North Lawndale residents who earn less than \$15,000 a year is twice that of Chicago residents. Forty percent of North Lawndale households maintain incomes of less than \$15,000, while 20% of Chicago households earn the same wage. When looking at the higher income bracket the percentages are reversed, and 42% of Chicago households, compared with 21% of North Lawndale households make \$50,000 or more (see chart 2 on page 3). In addition to low incomes, residents of North Lawndale also have a lower percentage of households that have bank accounts, credit cards, student and car loans (see chart 1 on page 3)*. As a result of not having bank accounts North

Lawndale residents are forced to use money orders and fringe institutions to receive the services usually supplied by mainstream banking. The methods that are available as alternatives to traditional banking are costly and require that those with already low incomes forfeit part of their salaries to pay for services, such as check cashing, which are available for free for those who have bank accounts.

These statistics only scratch the surface of the financial barriers facing the North Lawndale community. As a member of the Center for Working Families, part of the role of the North Lawndale Employment Network (NLEN) is to provide long-term financial counseling for all of its clients. In partnership with the Center for Economic Progress (CEP), NLEN is able to provide

*ShoreBank Advisory Services-Metro Edge

(Continued on page 3 see Finances)

Brenda's Corner

You are cordially invited to attend, The North Lawndale Employment Network's 6th Annual Membership Breakfast and Business meeting, at Sinai Community Institute, 2653 W. Ogden Ave. Wednesday, September 14, 2005, from 9:30 – 11:30.

At our September NLEN Membership meeting, you will be the first to learn of a very exciting and informative study: *Money Management by Low-income Households; Earnings, Spending, Savings and accessing Financial Services*, commissioned by the Center for Economic Progress, in partnership with the Center for Impact Research, and the University of Chicago. David Martzal, Marianne Bertrand and Lisa McKeene and will be our special guest, in presenting the findings of this groundbreaking study.

As the first Chicago-based, Center for Working Families (CWF) site, NLEN is pleased to be part of the LISC and AECF funded pilot, in partnership with Project Match, The Center for Economic Progress and Shorebank Advisory Services, together, we are focused on integrating employment and financial services. Being a Center for Working Families is aligned with our mission of *improving the earnings potential of the North Lawndale com-*

munity through innovative employment initiatives that lead to economic advancement and improved quality of life for residents. We work to accomplish our mission by providing good entry-level and long-term employment, soft-skills training and retention services, providing access to public supports through *RealBenefits*, and financial literacy training and resources, for residents of our community.

I am honored that our long time friend and community partner, Center for Economic Progress chose to launch the release of their study, *Money Management by Low-income Households; Earnings, Spending, Savings and accessing Financial Services*, with friends and members of the North Lawndale Employment Network.

Finally, I must admit that I often get so wrapped up in advocating for addressing the employment and training needs and restoring the rights of the formerly incarcerated, that I often do not pause long enough to think about the *victims* of crime, especially violent crimes, and the impact these acts have on the families. At this mem



Chief Executive Officer, Brenda Palms-Barber

bership meeting, you will hear from another long time friend and Board member, on the impact of incarceration, from the victim perspective. Brenda Mitchell, a foundering member of the NLEN, will share with us her very touching personal experience on a recent random and senseless act of violence, resulting in the loss of her young son - he was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time.

In the spirit of tradition, we will be presenting our annual members and volunteer recognition awards, *Creating a Community That Works*, awards. Please plan to join us. We look forward to seeing you!

P.S. Yes! You will be able to purchase some delicious *Beeline* honey, straight from the North Lawndale Employment Network's Fillmore Apiary, at the September meeting!

NLEN Staff Introductions: ElShadey Bekele

NLEN welcomes ElShadey, a new fellow from the Chicago Public Interest Program. She recently graduated from the University of Chicago, majoring in both Anthropology and Biology. She is premed and is currently in the process of applying to medical school. What is she doing with NLEN you may ask, well here is an explanation.

ElShadey has a holistic approach to medicine, meaning the whole patient should be treated and not simply the physical disease that ails a patient. She believes that medicine can be discussed as a social science. In order for a treatment to work, the social factors that influence a patient's ability to make the treatment successful need to be taken into consideration. A diabetic who lacks housing might consider housing a higher priority than his blood sugar, or the only food that s/he can get their hands on

might not adhere to the prescribed diet. A patient's social circumstances are important to consider, especially when working with underserved communities, which is what ElShadey intends to do.

From this point of view ElShadey sees NLEN as a great opportunity to do some direct service and to learn from the inside out, how a community based organization functions. Since ElShadey would like to work in a community such as North Lawndale, in a healthcare capacity in the future, she views this fellowship as a great opportunity. She loves interacting with the clients at NLEN and greatly enjoys hearing their personal stories. She welcomes new chances and views NLEN as an eye opening experience. She is grateful for the knowledge that she has already started gaining through conversations with staff and clients, as well as through trainings.



CPIP Fellow, ElShadey Bekele

ElShadey greatly enjoys traveling and did a study abroad program in India as an undergraduate. She has also visited Ethiopia a couple times to visit family. She welcomes any chance to travel and plans to do a lot more in the future. She also enjoys photography and ceramics and plans on trying martial arts class.

ElShadey would like to extend a thank you to all the staff at NLEN who have made her transition to the network very smooth and comfortable.

NLEN Staff Introductions: Ron Tonn

NLEN welcomes Ron Tonn as Chief of Operations after 28 years of work with formerly incarcerated clients. Ron grew up in Michigan City, Indiana and graduated from Purdue University with a major in Sociology/Psychology. After graduating and working as a manager for a national chain Ron realized that he wanted to be involved in a more socially conscience field, so he quit his position. He didn't quite know what field he wanted to become a part of so he and a friend started a small film production company. During this time he began volunteering with the Safer Foundation, mentoring and tutoring ex-offenders. This is when he started to learn about the educational difficulties facing ex-offenders. Through his volunteer work Ron gained an interest in the issues facing ex-offenders returning to their communities. He pursued this interest by starting a position with the Safer Foundation where he developed an innovative instructional methodology tuned to the unique learning needs of

former offenders. Since then Ron has advanced through the Safer Foundation and has had a range of positions, most recently as the Associate Vice President.

Ron became acquainted with NLEN when he, the Safer Foundation and other agencies, were partnering to start the Going Home program. He became interested in how the interaction between clients and staff was so open and productive for NLEN's programs. Soon afterwards he was hired as the Chief Operating Officer.

One of the programs that has been given to Ron is the transitional jobs program called Sweet Beginnings/Beeline. With Ron's vast experience in the realm of programs management Beeline, Going Home and the Trinity Advocate Partnership will be able to continue to develop as strong programs. One of the benefits for the clients involved in the Sweet Beginnings project is that they are able to experience a variety of different roles



Chief Operating Officer, Ron Tonn

ranging from marketing to warehouse to hands on work in the apiaries.

Two of Ron's hobbies are cycling and jazz music. Ron believes that a parallel can be drawn between a jazz artist and his own work. A jazz artist knows the basics about music. He knows the chords, the scales and he knows how they fit together. When he performs he improvises, using his foundation of knowledge to create a fresh piece of music that has never been heard before. Ron believes that with his work he is able to use his basic knowledge but each situation needs to

(Continued on page 5, see Ron)

Policy Matters: Ex-Offenders and Mental Health Legislature

On July 12th the Governor of Illinois signed two mental health bills. These two bills (Public Act HB808 and SB559) bring to the foreground the importance of considering the effects of mental health on the re-entry population. These bills for the transfer of information between the Department of Mental Health and "prisons operated by the Department of Corrections, mental health facilities operated by a county" and not just with jails. This change highlights the need for continuity of care when offenders are released from prison.

The second modification states that police officers can transport people to mental health hospitals without personally witnessing behavior that can be classified as a reason for commitment. The police officer must have reasonable ground for committing a person to a mental institution and the person cannot be held at the hospital against their will unless someone fills out a petition.

A study conducted by Patricia O'Brien from the UIC Jane Adams

School of School work called, "Putting Reentry in Context: Attributes of Women's Reentry from Incarceration Over Time" discusses the connection between mental disorders and drug use. She draws attention to the fact that with treatment, drug use decreases. This example once again demonstrates the need for mental status to be disclosed to treatment centers and prisons.

The difficulties of providing services for re-entry clients with mental health problems can be observed with one of our Going Home cases. James* has been coming to NLEN for about nine months. He is manic depressive and has substance abuse problems. He has been voluntarily checked into the Hay Market treatment clinic several times but he has repeatedly left without completing treatment. Within the last month alone, he has left the clinic five times. James usually returns to NLEN because he views it as a safe haven and is comforted by the staff that have repeatedly shown concern for his well being.

Contact with James' parole officer has been attempted many times with no response due to a heavy case load. His case is not receiving the attention it needs in order to ensure that James gets his treatment.

The issue of the care ex-offenders with mental health problems should be a high priority for whoever is working in the reentry sector of workforce development. The two health bills enacted in July are a step in the right direction and may be very useful if actually reinforced. The transfer of information between prisons and treatment facilities is crucial to providing treatment and aiding in the successful placement of former offenders into treatment clinics. Another aspect that the health bills highlight, as well as James' case, is that communication between all involved parties is necessary to provide complete treatment, and preventing individuals from falling between the cracks.

(Ashanti, continued from page 1)

physically abusive. He didn't allow her to associate with her friends, go back to school or generally have a life of her own. As a result Ashanti felt like she was in a black hole and her self esteem was very low. During this period at the age of 22, Ashanti sought out her father, with the help of her mother. When she found him, he was dying of leukemia but welcomed her with open arms and wanted to make up for lost time. This was an opportunity that Ashanti has always been grateful for. During this difficult period Ashanti continued to smoke marijuana because it provided her with a sense of comfort because of its familiarity.

In 1992 Ashanti took her children and left her husband. She fled to Wisconsin where she had a niece and lived in a shelter. While in Wisconsin, Ashanti got involved with people who were trafficking drugs and began to spend a lot of time around them. At this point Ashanti's children went back to Chicago to live with their father. Then in 1996 Ashanti was arrested under trafficking charges. She received a ten year sentence.

For the first two months of prison Ashanti fasted with only one cup of juice every week. The purpose of the fast was for Ashanti to get in touch

with God and learn how to deal with being in prison. The fast was also the beginning of her journey to learn how to change her attitude and outlook on life. While in prison Ashanti was transferred to several prisons in Wisconsin, West Virginia, Chicago, and California. There were many programs that she took advantage of such as drug use and abuse related counseling.

When Ashanti was released from prison she came out with a different attitude. She was able to communicate better, and wasn't as angry or argumentative and she now had ambitions. Ashanti lived in a half way house and got a job as an Outreach Assistant with the Salvation Army. Ashanti quit this job because of a conflict with one of the other employees. She preferred to quit because after being in prison she didn't know how to respond to conflict.

While living in the half way house, Ashanti met Elaine Austin who was working at the North Lawndale Employment Network. Elaine encouraged Ashanti to attend the U-Turn Permitted program. After some resistance Ashanti went through the program and completely absorbed the lessons of the classes. She practiced the techniques she learned in U-Turn through temp agencies. As she was able to find jobs, she realized she was able to use the

skills from U-Turn and gained confidence in her abilities and herself.

Now, over a year since she has graduated from U-Turn, Ashanti is working as a Home Care Provider and has recently applied for a position as a Clerk with the Salvation Army, which she is confident that she will get. Ashanti is also currently pursuing a GED since her mind is now receptive to education whereas before her mind was burdened with the stress of her abusive relationship. At the end of July, Ashanti filed for divorce and is now awaiting a court date. Her relationship with her children is progressively getting stronger. One of her son's is at school at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign, two others are in high school. One is incarcerated and will be released soon. Another has a one year old child. One of her daughters is having a little more trouble with her anger toward her mother, so Ashanti only had the chance to see her recently for the first time since she's been out of prison. Ashanti is committed to improving her relationships with her children although she recognizes that it might be difficult.

Ashanti discusses her life as a journey that has brought her to a place

(Continued on page 5 see Ashanti)

(Finances, continued from page 1)

financial services and advice in aiding clients to obtain bank accounts and knowledge on how to manage money. A new component of the Project Match system will aid NLEN in its effort to improve its client's

Chart 1

Financial Services	North Lawndale (%)	Chicago (%)
Unbanked Households	31	17
Households with Bank Loans	5	11
Households with Credit Cards	36	61
Households with Money Orders	62	45

financial circumstances by tracking the financial outcomes in the Project

Match database.

As one of the first Chicago-based, ISC/AECF funded Center for Working Families (CWF) sites which are all committed the goals of a CWF. These goals include to providing employment training and retention services, aiding clients to gain access to public benefits, financial literacy training. We also provide resources for residents of our community and with LISC serving as our intermediary, NLEN has built and strengthened partnerships with Project Match, lead by Toby Herr, as our data collection and case management tool, simplifying NLEN's capacity to aggregate client data and generate performance reports. While our partnership with the Center for Economic Progress delivers on-site, high-quality, individualized

Chart 2

Median Household Income		North Lawndale	Chicago
Less than \$15,000	6,786	40%	20%
\$15,000-\$25,000	2,374	14%	11%
\$25,000-35,000	2,080	12%	12%
\$35,000-\$50,000	2,114	13%	15%
\$50,000 and over	3,489	21%	4%

financial literacy training and customized budgeting workshops - i.e., personal budgeting and credit repair, assisting and educating the unbanked, of the benefits and savings available through traditional banking, rather than costly predatory lending and check cashing businesses, so prevalent in our community. Low income families have a desire and a need for low cost banking services. What is now necessary, is a banking provider that meets the needs of low income households.

Center for Economic Progress Study Presenters

David Marzahl is the Executive Director of the Center for Economic Progress in Chicago, Illinois. The Center is a statewide and national advocacy and service organization that seeks to increase economic opportunities for low-income families, children and individuals by improving access to public, private and non-profit programs and services. The Center operates the Tax Counseling Project, the nation's largest free, community-based tax preparation program. The Center also provides a range of other programs and services including financial education, legal assistance, technical assistance and advocacy. In addition it hosts the National Community Tax Coalition – a coalition of more than 500 affiliate organizations seeing to advance economic opportunities through the tax code.

Prior to joining the Center in 1998, David was the founding director of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant & Refugee Rights, a statewide coalition of organizations promoting the rights of immigrants and refugees. He has worked in the Chicago non-profit community since 1981, as a community organizer, outreach worker and activist seeking to advance opportunities for economically and politically disadvantaged persons. David has a Master's

Degree in Political Economy from Northwestern University.

Lisa McKean is Deputy Director of CIR. Dr. McKean is the director of the Income Support Access Project, the Alternatives to Incarceration Project, and the First Accounts Study. She received her Ph.D. in Social Anthropology from the University of Sydney, M.A. from the University of Hawaii'i, and B.A. from the University of Chicago. Her book, *Divine Enterprise: Gurus and the Hindu Nationalist Movement* is based on her research in India and published by the University of Chicago Press.

Marianne Bertrand is a professor of economics at the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business. Besides her work on corporate finance, her research interests include racial bias in the US, the impact of affirmative action for disadvantaged castes in India, and corruption and red tape in India.

(Ashanti continued from page 3)

where she can be happy and is able to take advantage of opportunities that help her to improve her life. She accredits a lot of where she is to NLEN, stating that "this is my foundation that I can build on". She recognizes the passion that the NLEN staff put into their work and that some aspect of NLEN distinguishes it from other programs that she has been involved in. Ashanti is grateful that she has had been able to emerge from prison with the ability to accept a variety of cultures and deal with the changes the world has gone through since the beginning of her incarceration.

(Ron, continued from page 2)

be played by ear. NLEN welcomes Ron Tonn, and his finely tuned ear with excitement for the innovations and new ideas he will bring. We are sure that NLEN will reap the benefits of his experience for the Sweet Beginnings program as well as for NLEN as a whole.

Sweet Beginnings Update

With a new head of operations for the Sweet Beginnings project, Ron Tonn, there has already been some new activity. Recently The Taste of North Lawndale occurred during the last weekend in July at Homan Square. NLEN was pleased to participate in the Taste of North Lawndale. It was a wonderful event and a great opportunity to promote our Beeline honey and body products. Sweet Beginnings Transitional Jobs Initiative, thanks to the financial support of the Mayors Office of Workforce Development and Alderman Chandler, is off to a great 2nd, season! Currently, we have hired five formerly incarcerated men and women. Two of the participants earn eight dollars an hour and three earn ten dollars an hour. Sweet Beginnings plans to hire three more ex-offenders within the next month, the height of the honey season.

The program has been a success and during 2005 has produced 1000 pounds of honey and generated an income of \$19,600. We have scaled up to 70 hives and are selling the honey and beauty products at the Green City and Oak Park Farmers Markets, and planning to expand to two additional markets before the end of the season.



Sweet Beginnings Apiary

MARKET SCHEDULE

Green City Market

Wednesdays & Saturdays

7AM-1:30PM

Oak Park Market

Saturdays

7AM-1PM

BEELINE PRICE LIST

1 lb jar.....	\$8
12 oz jar.....	\$6
1 case of 6oz.....	\$4
Lip Balm.....	\$3
Body Scrub.....	\$18
Body Lotion Bar..	\$8



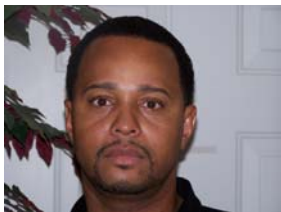
Aletra Nicholson
 Director of Workforce Program Services
 773-638-1820

Victoria Cammon
 Operations Manager
 773-265-7947



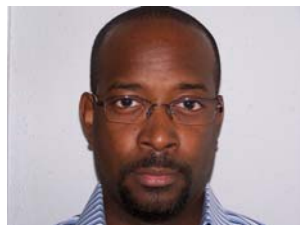
Darrin Evans
 U-Turn Permitted Client Services Manager
 773-265-7941
 UTP-Orientations-1st and 3rd Fridays 10 AM
 United Baptist Church 4220 W Rossevelt Rd

Julian Macklin
 Manager of Employment Services
 773-265-7945



Anthony Elliott
 Retention Client Services Manager
 773-638-1806

Cleophus J. Lee
 Building Beyond Program Manager
 773-638-1814



Elaine Austin
 Resource Center Client Services Manager
 773-265-7940
 3726 W Flournoy St
 9-5pm Appointments available after 5pm

Community Announcements

Child Welfare meeting Rescheduled

9:00 AM October 3, 2005

3333 W Arthington

2nd Floor Conference Room

Contact Rosie for more information at

773-542-8634

Lutheran Social Services of Illinois

Open House

1:00PM-5:30PM September 9, 2005

2907 S Wabash Ave, Suite 100

Enjoy opportunities to network, tour our new facility and meet our dedicated staff. See and hear about Re-Connections' and Family Connections' in-prison and after-care work with women, children and caregivers involved with the justice system.

Sankofa Safe Child Initiative

Grandparent Appreciation Day Luncheon

United Baptist Church 4220 W Roosevelt Rd

Wednesday August 31, 2005 9AM-3PM

Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Inc, 35th Annual Legislative Conference

Wednesday Saturday Sept 21- 24, 2005

Theme: "How Are the Children? Education the Key to Success"- Washington DC

7th Congressional District

Town Hall Meeting Malcolm X College

Saturday September 9, 2005

Contact Tumia Romero for more Informa-
 tion 773-533-7520

Reminder

Did you intend to register for the **Building Prosperity for Working Families Conference**, hosted by the National Community Tax Coalition?

Please visit the website to return to the registration process and complete it. **Be sure to click the "finish" button!**

To Register visit website for the Center for Economic Progress.



North Lawndale Employment Network

Creating a Community That Works

Date of Application: _____

Yes! I want to become a member or renew my membership with the North Lawndale Employment Network!

I have enclosed a **\$100** check payable to the North Lawndale Employment Network for dues.

Please complete the following information to update our records

Name _____ Title _____

Organization Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Name of other agency representatives. Please include their titles.

Name	Title
------	-------

1. _____

2. _____

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Ronnie Allen, IT Consultant

Please contact EIShadey Bekele at (773) 265-7942 if you would like anything included in future newsletters!

NORTH LAWNSDALE EMPLOYMENT NETWORK

Creating a community that works



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