



Engaged Colleges are Central to Strong Communities

## Oral History Chronicles Neighborhood Pride

**F**rom the 1940s to the early 1970s, Macedonia—a neighborhood in High Point, North Carolina—was an integrated neighborhood whose residents worked in the furniture and textile factories nearby. When the factories relocated in the early 1970s, the neighborhood began to decline. An innovative oral history project, developed by the University of North Carolina-Greensboro (UNC-G) COPC, is helping to revitalize and build community capacity in Macedonia.

The oral history project grew out of a discussion about Macedonia's revitalization among COPC advisory committee members—affiliates from the neighborhood association, city government, and the university. "We realized we had an opportunity to capture a piece of history and have insights into history that you don't usually read about," says Margaret Arbuckle, director of the Division of Children, Youth, Families, and Communities at the Center for the Study of Social Issues at UNC-G. "Residents of the neighborhood saw this as an opportunity to tell their story and to build some threads of continuity from their past into the neighborhood as it evolves."

The COPC hired an oral historian to guide the project design and the interview process. The historian trained community

## Capacity Building Efforts Empower Communities to Help Themselves

**T**he long-term success of campus-community partnerships usually depends on who asks the questions about how to improve a community's quality of life and who provides the answers to those questions.

When Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) approach community issues armed with both the questions and the answers, local residents usually aren't very receptive, according to *Building Higher Education-Community Development Corporation Partnerships*, a handbook published by HUD's Office of University Partnerships (OUP). In fact, residents may express strong resentment that their academic "partners" are merely using the neighborhood as a laboratory to test theories and educate students. Campus-community relations will improve slightly if community residents are invited to participate in identifying a neighborhood's problem areas. But once a community's unique challenges are identified, IHEs sometimes make the mistake of presenting themselves as the experts who always know the best way to meet those challenges.

This issue of *COPC Central* illustrates a third approach to community partnerships that has proven to be the most successful over the long term. Designed to build the capacity of local communities to solve their own problems, this approach gives both IHEs and their community partners an

equal opportunity to ask and answer questions about a neighborhood's pressing problems. As a result, community residents no longer find themselves passively receiving an IHE's assistance. Instead, they become "co-investigators, co-planners, and co-designers at each stage of the process," according to one COPC staff person.

As illustrated in the following pages, building the capacity of local neighborhoods can take many forms. Some COPCs provide extensive training for prospective neighborhood organizers and leaders so local residents can participate fully in planning and carrying out revitalization efforts. Others provide technical assistance to ensure that community-based organizations are strong enough to work effectively for neighborhood change. Capacity building efforts can also focus on helping individuals become self-sufficient or on reawakening community pride among a neighborhood's citizens.

No matter what form it takes, capacity building clearly has the potential to transform local communities and their residents. It is only through this transformation that effective university-community partnerships—and effective community change—are possible.

*Building Higher Education-Community Development Corporation Partnerships* is available at [www.oup.org/pubs/cdc.html](http://www.oup.org/pubs/cdc.html). ♦

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*COPC Central* is a free publication prepared by the University Partnerships Clearinghouse, the information service sponsored by HUD's Office of University Partnerships (OUP). *COPC Central* highlights the contributions of COPCs to local community efforts. You may contact the University Partnerships Clearinghouse at (800) 245-2691. See the Office of University Partnerships on the World Wide Web at <http://www.oup.org>.

### *Oral History, continued from page 1*

volunteers who suggested names of people to interview. Many residents had moved to other parts of High Point but were still available for interviews. Volunteers conducted 28 interviews, and the tapes they developed will be stored in the community museum where they will be available for researchers and residents.

Deep pride and a sense of community and commitment to Macedonia reverberate throughout the interviews. "People are proud of the fact that Macedonia was an integrated community at a time when that was not the norm," Arbuckle notes. "Everybody's life was similar and there was a shared commitment to working hard, providing for your family, caring for your children, and trying to provide better opportunities for your children than you had."

Arbuckle adds that the university is using information from the interviews as part of a wider curriculum that will be provided to middle and high school social studies teachers. "North Carolina has a course called Current Issues in North Carolina into which the Macedonia material will fit," she explains. "Because all eighth graders study state history, we see this as an opportunity for these interviews to be included in that curriculum too."

"There is a renewed sense of community in Macedonia because of the project," Arbuckle says. "This is a special place and people have great pride in it. This is true community capacity building."

For additional information, contact Margaret Arbuckle, Director, at (336) 256-1084. ♦

## Burlington Increases Citizen Participation

"Our partnership with the university and the COPC has been invaluable," explains Yiota Ahladas, Burlington's assistant director of community development. "By connecting university resources to the city and building partnerships, we've been able to tackle some long-term quality-of-life issues."

Burlington, Vermont's strong commitment to capacity building and civic engagement dates back to the 1980s when neighborhood planning assemblies provided valuable forums for citizen feedback to the government and for the government to present projects to citizens. With this history of municipal activism, the city works closely with the University of Vermont-Burlington (UVM) COPC to diversify and increase citizen involvement and its influence on city policies and programs.

Neighborhood Improvement Nights (NINs) are annual citywide events in which residents participate in priority setting and resource allocation. The first NIN focused on the Department of Public Works, which agreed to let Burlington residents set priorities for \$500,000 in street and sidewalk improvement dollars. The voices of 250 people clearly institutionalized city sidewalk and street priorities and policies. The second NIN, held in November 2002, focused on the planning and zoning department because its first comprehensive rewrite of the city zoning ordinance in 30 years will have a major impact on the future of Burlington.

"We provide childcare, food, and extensive outreach to bring residents to these meetings. It's been a successful model," Ahladas says. "Neighborhood people have a more significant role in influencing the use of city resources, and city departments are breaking down their fear of coming to the citizens. It's the start of a tradition I expect is going to live for a long time."

The COPC, the city of Burlington, and the Snelling Leadership Institute developed a 3-day collaborative leadership training to train community trainers. "We asked the

trainers to make a 3-year commitment to the community before training them," Ahladas explains. The four original trainers—a grassroots activist, two city employees, and a Snelling participant—are now training a mixture of city government employees, community activists, and Institute enrollees. Employees from the police, public works, parks, and fire departments, and 250 VISTA volunteers and related nonprofit staff have participated in the training. "We're developing a shared language of collaborative leadership and consensus building models," Ahladas adds.

"We're very creative with resources," says Ahladas. "One of our guiding principles is that we're not going to develop programs that will be a burden on the community in terms of how we continue to fund them. The train-the-trainer model has worked well for us."

"More and more we see our work is so much about relationship building here in Burlington. The change happens not on a mega scale, but on a person-to-person scale," continues Ahladas. "The folks involved with the COPC at the university have worked hard to really meet the needs and worked at the level and pace of the community participants. And through the COPC we've been able to look back, because of some of the research they've done, and begin to get a sense of how things really are changing over a long period of time."

For more information about Burlington's partnerships with the UVM COPC, contact Yiota Ahladas at (802) 865-7168 or UVM COPC Codirector Lynne Bond at (802) 656-1341. ♦

# Pittsburgh and Trinity Train Community Leaders

**I**ndependently recognizing the importance of capacity building at the neighborhood level, the University of Pittsburgh and Trinity College have developed programs that train prospective community organizers and leaders. Over time, their programs have matured, grown, and become institutionalized.

## Grassroots Leadership at Pitt

“The Catalyst for Community Building project evolved after the Million Man March to train African American individuals in community organizations,” explains Tracy Soska, the project’s principal investigator in the School of Social Work and codirector of the University of Pittsburgh’s COPC. “We were working with different neighborhoods, training community leadership, and linking them up with the masters’ students in our community organizing program to work together in the neighborhoods. Later we began to provide training for community grassroots leadership.”

Sixty people have taken the 20-week training since the certificate program began in 1996. Community builders come from a cross-section of the population—including residents’ councils, community health partnerships, neighborhood centers, family support centers, and faith-based organizations. Each training group is limited to 25 people.

There are five modules in the Catalyst for Community Building training, says Angela Devan, Catalyst project director. “Sometimes we alter the basic modules, depending on what the participants’ needs are. Topics we cover include leadership development, community assessment, organizing activities, planning, and technology.”

Participants learn about leadership development and the causes of burnout in addition to how to identify strengths and weaknesses in a neighborhood, develop an assessment tool, use it in the community, and analyze the data. They learn about different roles in community organizations and hear from practitioners in the field. The class also stresses the importance of effectively run meetings and participation in agenda building, as well as how computers, databases, and reports can improve communication and service delivery.

“As they progress and look at this as a career step, they’ll sometimes move beyond the community work,” Soska notes. “But a lot of them are trying to build their skills to be effective as a residents’ council president or head of a neighborhood faith-based group.”

Many graduates become members of the Regional Coalition of Community Builders, which brings together urban, suburban, and rural grassroots community builders in 11 counties in southwestern Pennsylvania. Graduates have also been invited to attend grant and proposal writing sessions sponsored by the COPC to develop the skills necessary to write successful proposals for funding.

“The program has changed over time,” Soska says, “but the COPC has really helped us in taking this program and focusing it into the neighborhoods and communities more effectively.” The University of Pittsburgh is completing its COPC grant and will be sustaining this training project beyond the grant period.



*Members of the Trinity College Director Training Class of 2002.*

## Trinity College Adds Director Training

“We’ve been working with communities since 1994,” says Alta Lash, director of the Trinity Center for Neighborhoods (TCN), the COPC at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. “Right from the very beginning, one of our capacity-building efforts has been training community organizers who are working for our community partners.”

TCN offers training for both new and experienced community organizers. “With the new organizers, we run through a basic 13-week curriculum that deals with the skills needed to do community organizing—everything from power analysis to developing an agenda and training leaders,” Lash explains.

“For experienced organizers it’s more of an enrichment curriculum with readings and discussions. We’ve had faculty and people from the human rights program at Trinity speak about their involvement in the civil rights movement, about the Puerto Rican migration to Hartford—issues that really affect the community organizer.”

In addition to training community organizers, TCN provides training on request to neighborhood leaders throughout Hartford on how the legislature works, how public policy occurs at the municipal and state levels, how to get media attention, as well as how to run a meeting. Much of the training is based on what leaders are experiencing and what will help them achieve the goals they have set for themselves.

TCN began offering a two-semester director training course in 1998, designed for people who are line staff in community organizations and aspire to move up to management and leadership. All participants must get written permission from their organizations to attend the classes, which are offered on Friday afternoons. Twenty-eight people have graduated from director training in the past 3 years.

Trinity faculty and staff are actively involved in the director training program:

- Professors from the writing center and rhetoric center cover oral and written presentations.

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- The controller of the college explains budgets and Excel spreadsheets.
- The human resources staff handles personnel issues.
- The public relations staff discusses marketing an organization.
- The media people handle press relations.

“We usually take only 10 people each year,” Lash says, “because we want this to be somewhat individualized. If we’re really going to meet their needs, we have to deal with people individually.”

Another COPC graduate, the TCN recently completed a 2-year New Directions grant from HUD. Its current activities are funded by a bridge grant from the college and the dean’s budget, and it has been included in college proposals to the Kellogg Foundation and other funding sources.

For additional information about the Trinity Center for Neighborhoods, contact Alta Lash, director, at (860) 297-5178. For information about the Catalyst for Community Building project, contact Tracy Soska, COPC codirector, at (412) 624-3711 or Angela Devan, project director, at (412) 624-6335. ♦

## Youngstown COPC Build Capacity for Rehabilitation

**R**ecognizing that the university only works if the city works, Ohio’s Youngstown State University COPC is working with the North Side Citizens Coalition (NSCC), a community development corporation that plans to revitalize the historic Wick Park neighborhood adjacent to the university campus.

NSCC was formed by residents in the late 1970s to advocate against trends they saw as detrimental to the area. In the past 2 years, NSCC, with the COPC’s assistance, has transformed itself from a volunteer neighborhood organization to a community development corporation with a new executive director. It is acquiring property and using grant monies to restore and build new housing in Wick Park. COPC staff helped the coalition develop a 3-year strategic plan to guide implementation of the housing rehab program.

Other than tax-credit housing, there has been virtually no rehabilitation in the core of the city for 25 years, according to Jim Shanahan, senior research associate at the Center for Urban and Regional Studies—the Youngstown University COPC.

“Youngstown is a city that does not have a tradition of community development corporations being responsible for the redevelopment of neighborhood areas, so we had to deal with a situation in which everyone had to move up the learning curve.

“We knew that the real hurdle was getting control of the properties,” Shanahan adds.

The university used GIS (Geographic Information System) and databases to do research on the ownership of tax-delinquent properties in Wick Park. The coalition has quit-claim deeds to 52 houses and vacant lots in Wick Park. Although most of these houses are vacant, getting clear title can be challenging.

Lead paint and asbestos abatement procedures are a necessary and expensive part of the restoration process. The restoration is being done according to Wick Park preservation standards—literally removing windows, doors, and woodwork; restoring them; and putting them back in place.

“We have a cooperative and willing partner in the city of Youngstown, but everything is a hurdle,” explains Shanahan. “The water commissioner is part of the redevelopment because of the outstanding water bills (All water bills in Youngstown are assessed against the property, not the owner, so many of the abandoned properties have outstanding water bills.). Parks and recreation are involved because of the large park in the center of Wick Park.”

The first NSCC restoration project—a 1,400-square-foot house—was completed in May, according to Talut Rasul, NSCC executive director. “We’ve invested about \$146,000 in this house, it will appraise at about \$77,000, and we hope to sell it at \$50,000,” he explains. “Our biggest challenge is getting this first house sold, because we’re working in an area where

there is no market. The most expensive house in the north side of Youngstown last year was \$26,000, and there were only 23 transactions. Our mission is not driven by how much money we make from the property but by the fact that we’re improving the quality of life.”

Far fewer students than expected live in the neighborhoods near the campus. Because long-term university enrollment will be linked to the ability to provide quality neighborhoods adjacent to the university, the COPC is working with NSCC, University Student Services, and a design group to coordinate development of student housing in a four-square-block area north of the university and south of Wick Park.

NSCC is currently working with architects to design 28 town homes consistent with the historic district in an almost empty block near the university. “We’re trying to develop properties based upon what makes sense for that particular area,” says Rasul. “We believe that mixed-use, mixed-income communities are good for the long term. We’d like to offer a product for people who choose to live in Youngstown and buy into this vision of revitalization.”

For additional information about the Youngstown State University COPC, contact Jim Shanahan, senior research associate, Center for Urban and Regional Studies, at (330) 941-4746, or Talut Rasul, NSCC executive director, at (330) 941-4722. ♦

## Parenting Education Makes a Difference

“We provide skills to help parents move from helpless and hopeless to ‘I can, it’s possible, I can make it happen,’” says Neldine Edwards, executive director of We Can Make a Difference (WCMD), a program that provides parenting education and training to adults in Berrien County, a community with a high incidence of child abuse and neglect. The WCMD office is located in Benton Harbor, Michigan.

“We work with parents who want to be better parents, parents whose children have been removed from the home, and parents whose children are involved with the court system to develop and improve their parenting skills,” Edwards explains.

Each class runs for 13 to 15 weeks, one 2.5-hour session a week with a maximum of 15 parents. Edwards lets parents know from the beginning that she has high expectations: Good attendance is mandatory, and all participants must arrive on time, do the homework, participate in class, and role play.

“When the parents’ children are at home, part of the homework is practicing the parenting skills with their kids and then coming back to class to share their successes

and failures, and receive encouragement and assistance from instructor and peers,” Edwards says. “For the parents who don’t have custody, it’s more difficult for them to practice those skills, so we do it through role playing. But it’s different from doing it with your child.”

Edwards is currently writing a grant proposal that would provide peer coaches—people who have graduated from the parenting class—who could help other parents use the skills the program teaches. “We’d like to provide eight coaching sessions,” she says. “Most of the noncustodial parents do have visitation for 1 hour each week. That hour could be used to help parents transfer the classroom knowledge to direct interaction with their children.”

Edwards began WCMD several years ago while still working at a local mental health facility. She independently provided training for 1.5 years before attending small business development training funded by the Center for Community Asset Building, the Western Michigan University COPC in Kalamazoo.

Sharon Anderson, director of the COPC, explains how they assisted Edwards: “She needed to be able to sustain herself and

understand the demands that would be made on her by different funding and contracting agencies. We helped her develop a business plan and a work plan, with sound business principles and management.

“That’s when a lot of the growth connected with We Can Make a Difference occurred,” Edwards states. “We incorporated and Sharon helped me to get the grant from the Kellogg Foundation to build the infrastructure of the company. That’s also when we got our 501(c)(3) status and were able to apply for grants on our own. Through the COPC program I was able to complete my certification, and now I’m an instructor who can certify other instructors. I can now train my own staff.”

Edwards continues: “My dream is to empower parents to move to the next level, help those parents empower other parents, and, most important, empower their children so that the children can break the cycle.”

For additional information, contact Neldine Edwards, WCMD director, at (269) 934-9470, ext. 109, and Sharon Anderson, COPC director, at (269) 387-8370. ♦

## Maryland COPC Builds Capacity in Baltimore Region

The University of Maryland’s Resource Mentoring Project (RMP) works to increase technical assistance and build capacity within its community partners in the Baltimore/Washington, DC, region. Sponsored by the university’s COPC—the Social Work Community Outreach Service—the 3-year pilot program is currently fieldtesting the assessment tool in the startup phase.

Ted Busch, RMP director, emphasizes that the RMP is helping to build organizational self-esteem and assisting with organization development: “Many grassroots organizations are concerned with everyday matters, such as paying utilities or rent. We help them take that step back to examine their problems and begin to develop a solution. We’ll eventually fade away as the organizations handle more and more of their own affairs.

“We have seven field tests ongoing now and are making midcourse corrections as needed,” explains Busch. “We’re currently interviewing student placements for summer and fall. We’ll start with three students, but will eventually have as many as 10 students working with an average of 30 clients.”

Busch credits Dick Cook, director of the Social Work Community Outreach Service, as the guiding force behind the development of the RMP. “He was concerned about the serious lack of capacity in many of COPC’s community partners and wanted to empower the organizations to become self-sustaining,” Busch says.

The COPC surveyed its community partners, technical assistance providers, funders, and University of Maryland faculty to explore capacity building and sustainability issues in grassroots community organizations. The survey found that:

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- Although many technical assistance providers can assist with capacity building, there is no single point of contact in the Baltimore/Washington, DC, region where a community organization can explore all the options available.
- Few resource providers perform in-depth assessments for community organizations.
- Many community organizations fail to deal with capacity issues until they are already in extreme difficulty.

The RMP will serve community organizations by:

- Developing a network of technical assistance providers in the Baltimore/Washington, DC, region that will include for-profits, not-for-profits, and corporate entities, as well as individual consultants and volunteer organizations.
- Facilitating a self-assessment process for community organizations to uncover their strengths and weaknesses that leads to a specific action plan to build capacity. “Three individuals within an organization do the assessment without consulting one another,” explains Busch, “then we all meet to share views, which can be interesting and illuminating. We work with the organization to help develop an action plan and put it into motion.”
- Mentoring community organizations and connecting them with the technical assistance providers that can best help them accomplish their goals. “We don’t make recommendations to the community groups as to what resource

provider they should use. Instead, we’ll bring two or three providers to meet with them so they can determine the one that will best serve their needs,” Busch notes.

Coppin State College School of Social Work and Associated Black Charities are working with the University of Maryland COPC to develop the Resource Mentoring Project. Coppin State College, a historically black college, recently received a grant to assist the project. The COPC also plans to work with the University of Baltimore Technology Department on the project.

Busch says that the project has received positive feedback from both resource providers and community organizations. “This is a win-win for everyone. The organizations that have worked with us and improved their capacity have a much better chance of success in the long run, which benefits the funders as well,” Busch says. “The resource providers became more comfortable with what the Resource Mentoring Project is trying to do once they realized that we weren’t going to be providing the services. We want to broker the services, not do them ourselves.”

For additional information about the Resource Mentoring Project, contact Ted Busch, director, at (410) 706-1881. ♦

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