Summer Programs Connect Kids With Institutions of Higher Learning

"We are working to develop lasting programs between the university and the community," says Patricia Pollak, director of the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership COPC. In the past, the divide between the community and the university seemed too large to cross, requiring a new approach to create a mutually beneficial relationship. "The Cornell Connection is one tool to build and strengthen that linkage." The Summerbridge Dayton program at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, is also building capacity within neighborhoods and enriching the learning experience by offering intensive 6-week summer academic sessions for promising but at-risk area students. These summer programs are two examples of the work COPCs are undertaking to connect area children with institutions of higher learning and encourage continuing education.

The Cornell Connection, a summer day program at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, works with three local community centers to bring area children to the campus to experience, learn, and enjoy what the university has to offer. "Many of the children and the parents and other community members who chaperone

COPCs Reach Out to At-Risk Young People

America's children should have the opportunity to grow up in safe and healthy homes.

—HUD Secretary Mel Martinez

Because they face many challenges and, at the same time, have so much potential, the nation's young people have been the focus of public attention in recent years. Falling test scores have illustrated a lack of academic achievement among young students, especially those living in inner-city neighborhoods. The national teenage pregnancy rate for 2000 (94 pregnancies per 1,000 girls ages 15 to 19) is the highest in the Western industrialized world, according to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. A 2000 National Institute on Drug Abuse study found that 12 percent of 8th graders and 25 percent of 12th graders recently had used illicit drugs. Finally, the nationwide high school dropout rate of 11 percent in 1999 (according to the American Center for Education Statistics) has raised questions about the future employability of some 3.8 million teenagers.

Among these many statistics, the poverty rate stands out. According to the *2001 KIDS COUNT Data Book,* published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 20 percent of American children lived in poverty in 1998. Such a high percentage is significant, the report suggests, because childhood poverty is closely linked to other problems that affect a young person's health, educational attainment, future earning power, and emotional well-being. In 1999, the foundation reports, one-fifth of 16- to 19-year-olds living in neighborhoods with a 20-percent poverty rate were high school dropouts. These dropouts were about three times as likely to slip into poverty from one year to the next as those who finished high school, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Evidence suggests that out-of-school learning and enrichment activities have been highly successful in helping young people succeed both in and out of school.

Fortunately, the news is not all bad. According to the National Institute on Out of School Time at Wellesley College, children who participate in high-quality enrichment programs have better peer relations, conflict resolution skills, grades, and conduct in school than their nonparticipating peers. In addition, students who spend 1 to 4 hours per week in extracurricular activities are 49 percent less likely to
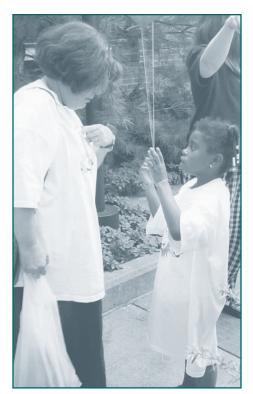
use drugs and 37 percent less likely to become teen parents than those who do not participate.

This issue of *COPC Central* focuses on initiatives that colleges and universities have undertaken to help young people improve their prospects for self-sufficiency, employability, and economic self-reliance. The COPC programs profiled in the following pages represent various approaches to youth programming. Some COPCs, like the one at Kean University in New Jersey, are working with local business owners to teach young people the skills they need to get and keep jobs. Others, like those located at Cornell University in New York and the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, are making sure that young people spend their out-of-school hours productively. Finally, a number of COPCs, like the one

administered by the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, are using their computer-training resources to bridge the digital divide that often locks low-income young people out of technology-dependent jobs.

In taking on these projects, COPCs are following the tradition of other HUD-supported programs that have worked for years to tap the unlimited potential of young people. For example, HUD's YouthBuild program helps high-risk young adults learn housing construction job skills while completing their high school educations. The Communities in Schools program, established in 1994, provides comprehensive services to troubled youths and their families. Since 1995, the Neighborhood Networks program has established more than 800 multi-service community centers that bring

technology-related learning opportunities to residents of HUD housing, including young people. Through a partnership with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), HUD is working to increase the number of young public housing residents who participate in the NCAA's National Youth Sports Program (NYSP). NYSP uses sports-related activities to focus the attention of young participants on substance abuse prevention, career education, nutrition, and proper health practices.

Whatever their particular focus may be, successful youth programs start by creating caring environments, complete with credible role models that let young people know that they are vitally important to their communities. Once that caring environment is in place, these programs can help young people deal constructively with their own personal challenges, which run the gamut from low income and lack of adequate housing to poor academic performance and inadequate nutrition.

In reaching out to youth, COPCs and other HUD programs fulfill a twofold purpose. First, they empower young people to improve themselves and their prospects in life. They also give young people the confidence they need to eventually revitalize their communities. ◆

them have never been on campus," Pollak says. Throughout the summer, children attending the neighborhood community centers' summer programs come to the campus to participate in activities, enjoy the facilities, interact with faculty and staff through presentations, and learn through hands-on experience.

Diann Sams, who coordinates the Cornell Connection and other community-building activities at the Cornell-Ithaca Partnership, started the program with one participating neighborhood community center in summer 2000. "The program was so successful that in the summer of 2001, it expanded to include the children from three centers," Sams says. In 2001, more than 150 children ages 6 to 15 came to the campus to participate in various activities. "Both children and adult chaperones gained new experiences and a new familiarity with the campus," Pollak says.

According to Sams, "We schedule activities for different age groups and direct them to activities that are appropriate for their age and interests." Activities include presentations in a robotics lab, tours of the dairy production facility, digging in the dirt at the student-run organic farm, and climbing the university bell tower for a special concert by the chimes masters. The children learned about everything from gems and minerals to brains and bugs. They ate in a marketplace dining hall, twirled in a dance studio, and scrambled up the climbing wall. "The children and adults really seem to enjoy the experiences and are a wonderful addition to campus," Pollak adds.

The Summerbridge Dayton program is "not only preparing students for high school but also helping young adults experience what teaching is like," says Dawayne Kirkman, program director at Wright State University. The high school and college students who teach in the program have the opportunity to plan a curriculum and take a leadership role in a classroom of six middle school students following a week of intensive training. Working with the program director and mentor teachers, who are selected through a national application process coordinated by the Summerbridge National program, the student teachers conduct enrichment activities, hold special events, and mentor students. The program receives funding from the Dayton Community Outreach Partnership.

The Summerbridge Dayton program is modeled after the Summerbridge National program that began in 1978. The program's goal is to empower exceptional middle school students to do well in high school and provide a solid foundation for college. "The program also strives to encourage talented high school and college students to experience the challenges, exhilaration, and realities of teaching," adds Kirkman.

The program, which lasts 6 weeks during the summer months, is offered free of charge. The program will be expanded from 44 students in 2001 to 70 students in 2002. "Selected students attend the program 2 years in a row preceding eighth and ninth grade," Kirkman says. During the school year, these students receive tutorial sessions as followup reinforcement. The program pays for transportation to the university, breakfast and lunch, and academic materials. The summer 2001 program served two inner-city middle schools. "We were able to reach out to students of both MacFarlane Middle School and Wilbur Wright Middle School," Kirkman states. The two schools were selected out of the city's five middle schools because they serve the areas of highest poverty and segregation, Kirkman says, adding that "helping students bridge educational, spatial, and cultural barriers is a major goal of the program."

Although some children spend their summer days playing baseball or at the beach, students who are fortunate enough to participate in the Cornell Connection and Summerbridge Dayton instead build skills, enrich their lives, and create a lasting link between institutions of higher learning and the communities in which they reside.

For more information, contact Patricia Baron Pollak, Director, Cornell-Ithaca Partnership COPC, (607) 216–0510, PBP3@ Cornell.edu; Dawayne Kirkman, Project Director, Summerbridge Dayton, (937) 775–2174, dawayne.kirkman@wright.edu. ◆

Pennsylvania School Helps Local Community Gain Technological Edge

To increase community technological access and knowledge in West Philadelphia, the University of Pennsylvania (UPenn) created the AmeriCorps Program to Bridge the Digital Divide. This program, begun in January 2001, partners the university with local schools, community centers, and faith-based organizations in a multilayered effort to provide computer access and training to West Philadelphia residents who cannot afford their own computers.

According to the project's coordinator, Paul Vinelli, the program is funded by SeedCo, an organization that provides financial backing for anchor institutions to create programs from which the local community can learn and benefit. UPenn's COPC grant provides funds to hire and train program staff, such as himself and co-coordinator David Parks, to help the community remain current with today's constantly advancing technology.

UPenn students volunteer their computer and teaching skills through the program office, which UPenn established as part of its Center for Community Partnerships. Currently, 30 to 35 students are involved. Several students have participated since the program's inception. "There's no time limit," explains Vinelli, "so most [of the students] stick with the program" until they graduate.

Any interested community organization may participate by presenting a written proposal that details how many computers it needs and how it plans to use the donated systems. A community advisory board composed of community center representatives from West Philadelphia also suggests organizations that might benefit from the services.

Student volunteers refurbish older but still usable computers that UPenn has replaced with more modern systems. Through January 2002, UPenn has donated more than 200 computers to the program. The university also accepts donated computers from local businesses and individuals.

The students install the refurbished hardware onsite at the community organizations, but their involvement does not end once the equipment has been installed. For example, volunteers who installed systems at Calvin Presbyterian Church now assist the church's afterschool program in creating interactive computer training for preschool and elementary school children.

UPenn students also provide technical assistance to organizations that already have equipment but have limited or no access to training. According to Vinelli, "Sometimes [the program] will place students where there are already fully functional systems." In such instances, the student volunteers train the existing teaching staff and also create or support already existing computer classes. At Lea Elementary School, UPenn students provided upgrades to preexisting hardware, then created projects to train not only the teachers but also the entire school staff on using the computers to their fullest potential. UPenn volunteers at West Philadelphia High School teach classes on how to diagnose and repair systems, how to create Web sites, and how to create print and video media such as public service announcements.

The students also lead computer literacy classes for adults. At both the First African Presbyterian Church and Taylor Tabernacle Church, UPenn students help adults who cannot afford their own computers develop skills they need for job placement and advancement. In a new program initiated this year, students joined with Wharton

MBA candidate Dr. Safia Rizvi in leading an "E-Lit" class at UPenn. The goal of this class is to provide adequate computer training to women living in area shelters.

While the students do not receive course credits for their work, Vinelli explains that they are paid through the Federal work-study program. At the end of their service, they also receive AmeriCorps education awards. These awards, contingent upon how many hours the students agree to volunteer during the calendar year, provide a monetary supplement to their work-study stipends. Students can sign agreements with AmeriCorps for three different volunteer levels—300, 900, or 1,700 hours—and can receive between $800 and $4,700 in scholarship funds for their efforts. UPenn also has future aspirations for a supporting study plan. "We would love to come up with a long-term curriculum that focuses on the work being done," says Vinelli.

The Digital Divide Program has been so successful that UPenn has expanded it to include up to 12 locations for the 2001–02 school year.

For more information, contact Paul Vinelli, Project Coordinator, AmeriCorps Program to Bridge the Digital Divide, University of Pennsylvania, (215) 898–8324, paul76@ sas.upenn.edu. ◆

Building Partnerships, Building Futures

Learn more about HUD's Office of University Partnerships with the CD-ROM *Building Partnerships, Building Futures,* available for $5 from HUD USER. To order, call (800) 245–2691 or visit the Web site at www.huduser.org.

Mentoring Programs Prepare Youth for the Future

Two COPC programs, one in Tennessee and the other in New Jersey, are finding that the best way to help young people to cope with life's challenges is to introduce them to adults who have overcome difficulties and now lead successful lives. By taking advantage of the knowledge offered by mentors and other role models, COPCs at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (UTC) and Kean University in Union, New Jersey, are helping at-risk young people succeed in school and in the job market.

At UTC, 12 local boys participating in a COPC-supported reading club recently met Ruben "Hurricane" Carter after reading about how the famous boxer rebuilt his life after spending 19 years in prison for a crime he did not commit. After the students finish their current reading assignment, *Circle of Fire* by Evelyn Coleman, they will meet the author and discuss the civil rights movement with individuals who actually participated in it.

The reading program, open to boys ages 7 to 13, is a collaboration among the UTC COPC, Chattanooga's Martin Luther King Neighborhood Association, and the Invest in the Children Foundation. In addition to interacting with, and learning about the lives of, valuable role models, club members also work with UTC undergraduate education majors to improve their reading skills. Both activities are aimed at changing the boys' attitudes about themselves and the world around them, says Project Coordinator Beverly Scott. "The reading program helps these young boys gain a strong sense of what they can do and the importance of personal achievement."

A different type of personal achievement, gained through hands-on work experience, has been the hallmark of the UTC summer youth development program, which also includes an academic enrichment component. During summer 2001, young participants worked alongside local residents to pick up trash, provide assistance with lawn care, and remove graffiti during a neighborhood beautification project. This experience "helped the children gain a new sense of pride in their neighborhood, increased their respect for others, and developed a commitment to keep the community clean," Scott says. UTC is currently working to establish a partnership with its local public library so the reading club can continue. It is also seeking external funds and expanding its local partnerships to support a comprehensive youth initiative in Chattanooga. Many of the COPC-supported youth programs are already being incorporated into an ongoing youth training and development program administered by the Martin Luther King Neighborhood Association.

Meanwhile, at Kean University's Gateway Institute (KU-GI), 15 teenagers are learning similar lessons from the COPC's local business partners. Students participating in the COPC Elizabeth Youth Apprenticeship Program have "the opportunity to discover how meaningful employment can improve their quality of life," says Program Manager Art Lersch. By working side-by-side with neighborhood business owners, the teens (ages 14 to 18), get their first real job experience and learn basic life skills at the same time.

The program, led by COPC Director Dr. Susan Lederman, also has provided young trainees with hope for successful futures. Of the 13 participants who graduated from the program's first pre-apprenticeship training, 6 found employment with local businesses. One was hired by COPC to manage a teen business at the Elizabeth YMCA, four were placed in the Jersey Garden Mall, and one was placed in a midtown Elizabeth business. One year later, three of the students still hold those jobs while the remaining students have left their positions to focus on continuing their education.

KU-GI plans to continue the youth apprenticeship program and increase the number of teen and business participants. It also is working to make the program manager's position a permanent one at the university so that the position's future does not depend on the availability of grant funds. Using its COPC grant, Kean University also has devised a curriculum for youth entrepreneurship courses. The courses, 8 weeks in length, include tours of the New York Stock Exchange, Schering Plough, and Kean University. Four sessions have been taught; a fifth began on January 14.

While they take different approaches, the youth programs instituted by KU-GI and UTC have many things in common. They both strive to help young people in distressed neighborhoods make the transition from school to the workforce or higher education. They both take advantage of the expertise offered by local and national role models. And, finally, they both have been so successful that their sponsoring COPCs are working to ensure that the programs continue after grant funds are depleted.

For more information, contact Beverly Scott, Project Coordinator, the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, (423) 266–5729, Beverly-Scott@utc.edu; Art Lersch, Manager, Gateway Institute at Kean University COPC, (908) 282–5398, alersch@kean.edu. ◆

Make plans to attend the COPC National Conference today!

April 25–27, 2002
Westin Convention Center
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Hotel Reservations: (800) 367–8478

Please reference "HUD's COPC Conference" to receive the group rate of $79/night (plus 14 percent tax).

For conference registration, please visit our Web site at www.oup.org.