

NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORKS

Moderator: Michele Higgs
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3:00 p.m. EDT

Operator: Good day, everyone. Welcome to the Neighborhood Networks Monthly conference call. As a reminder, this call is being recorded. At this time, I'd like to turn the call over to Ms. Michele Higgs. Michele, please go ahead.

Michele Higgs: Thank you, Cindy. Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the Neighborhood Networks December conference call. The topic for today's call is, "Are You Ahead of the Class? Center Assessments and Classification." My name, as you've heard, is Michele Higgs, and today I'm joined by Dana Gumbs, and we represent the team of technical assistance coordinators working with you to address the technical assistance needs of the Neighborhood Networks centers around the country.

Dana has coordinated a very informative call for today and hopefully, you will take away an understanding of the center classification process as well as a little fervor for making your center the best, a model.

Our speakers for this afternoon are more than prepared to help you with this topic, but before we introduce them, I want to remind all the multifamily Neighborhood Networks centers that the Strategic Tracking and Reporting Tool, also known as the START Business Plan, contains resource materials that help you look at the capacity of your center and provide the foundation

upon which you can organize your activities. It will help you survey your resident's interests, examine your center's operations and help you make your center grow. START is also key in crafting the partnerships that are so helpful in strengthening a center's program offerings.

If you have questions about the START Business Plan, resident surveys, or general questions pertaining to Neighborhood Networks, please call the toll-free Neighborhood Networks information line at (888) 312-2743. You can also visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org. Again, toll-free call (888) 312-2743, or visit the Web at www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org. I also want to remind listeners that an audio and verbatim transcript of this call will be made available on the Neighborhood Networks Web site in about two weeks.

Now this afternoon, our intent is to help you get a handle on the center classification process. We introduced this process to you a few months ago, but as with any new concept, repetition brings about understanding, and understanding brings about successful centers.

Speaking of successful centers, I encourage you to visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site, and I'll remind you, that address is www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org where you can review a number of success stories that will acquaint you with how successful Neighborhood Networks centers work.

We have three new centers to welcome into the Neighborhood Networks community today and they're: Creekwood Village Apartments Neighborhood Networks Center in South Carolina, Housing with a Heart Community Center in California, and Sycamore Terrace Learning Center also in California. We offer a hearty "welcome to neighborhood," to all of you.

Now, today we have seasoned professionals who will address the topic of center classification and the use of START as an assessment tool. Dana Gumbs, Senior Technical Assistance

Coordinator, has put a lot of effort into making this a useful experience for you and has assembled a panel to speak with you not only about the process, but also about the reality of the process.

Dana, would you like to introduce our speakers for today?

Dana Gumbs: Sure. Thank you, Michele.

As Michele said, my name is Dana Gumbs, and I'm a Senior Technical Assistance Coordinator with Neighborhood Networks. We are excited to have several center classification experts speaking to you today. Joining us are Vickie Schachter, Program Development Manager and Steve McLaine, Project Manager here at Neighborhood Networks. We also have an additional speaker who later will give you her perspective as she advances through the center classification process. Becky Foy is the center director for the CWA Cayce Community Learning Center in Nashville, Tennessee and has achieved center-certified level two center classification status. We congratulate you, Becky, in your efforts and we'll later find out what this process has been like for you.

As I stated, Vickie Schachter and Steve McLaine are both here to provide more information on the center classification process and hopefully by the end of this call, you will have the information needed to strive to become a model center. Vickie, Steve?

Vickie Schachter: Thanks, Dana. This is Vickie Schachter and it's a delight to be speaking to all of you today. I have the distinct pleasure of being able to share with all of you who are tuned in, the six Neighborhood Networks centers that have achieved Level 2 Certified classification in our movement. And what I'm going to do is say the name of the center, the city and state and the person or sponsor who led their center to this advanced level of classification.

Beginning with number one, CWA Cayce Community Learning Center, Nashville, TN; sponsor, Becky Foy, who will be one of our speakers today. Number two, Dauphin Gate Neighborhood Networks Center, Mobile, AL; sponsor, Dee Edwards. Number three, Creekwood Village in Tuscaloosa, AL; sponsor, Clarence Sutton, Sr. Number four, Cliffside Community Center, Prestonburg, KY; sponsor, Carol Rice. Number five, Wildwood House Center, Beckley, WV; sponsor, Tag Williams. And number six, Valley Garden Activity Center, Huntsville, AL; sponsor, Carolyn Harris.

To all of you, I want to wish you a hearty congratulations for your significant efforts in moving your center towards achieving advanced classification.

To me it means that Neighborhood Networks has arrived at a point in the organizational maturity business designed a classification system. This system was not created overnight; it was four-and-a-half years in the making with multiple discussions. HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinators participated along with Neighborhood Networks staff and HUD Headquarters staff in designing and developing the system that you see today.

Having a system of classification is significant for us because there's a mass of centers that exhibit enough variation between and amongst themselves to allow for differentiation of one type from the other. And it's sort of like when you go to a tag sale and you have items that are tagged good, better or best at different price points. It doesn't mean that any single item is a bad item. It just means that some items have more features than other items. And so we have three points of classifications, three benchmarks: designated, certified and model.

That this movement has been able to do this is indicative of a sense of self-consciousness and social consciousness and the way centers and their HUD sponsors and property owners and managers that support centers, view themselves both internally and how they perceive the world sees them.

So as we move forward with this plan that has been implemented in classification, we're noticing that there is an increasing number of people who want to move from Designated Level 1 status to the next level, which is Level 2 Certified status. All centers are starting this year in the designated category. But one of the questions that I get asked frequently is, what do I need to do to move forward to get a higher level classification. And as Michele alluded to in terms of adult education and the need to repeat things more than once, I will tell you this three times while I'm speaking. Here is the first time I will tell you this, you must have an approved START Electronic Business Plan in order to move forward with center classification. Let me talk a little bit about the different levels. Our next speaker, Steve McLaine, will go into far greater detail with that.

Designated Level 1 centers have very minimum achievable standards. These standards mean that a center has the basic tools that potentially could lead to effectiveness in creating programs and services to support the self-sufficiency of the residents and the sustainability of the center. A designated center has to have a HUD Approved Business Plan, it can be a paper business plan, but we would prefer that everybody use the Strategic Tracking and Reporting Tool known as START. A designated center must be operational, it cannot be still "in planning" to be called designated. And a designated center must have at least one computer with Internet access.

Certified, or Level 2 centers, require that the center be operational for 12 consecutive months, that the center receives HUD acceptance and approval for the assessment section of the START online business tool. Now that was the second time I told you that, but I said it a little obscurely, you must have a START Approved Business Plan. In order to move to Level 2, you must have a START Approved Business Plan. That's the third time. And you must complete the assessment section of the START tool, and you must submit that section to your HUD Coordinator for acceptance.

Certified centers, by their nature, have achieved and exceeded designated Level 1 status centers because they, number one, must use START for their business plan, and they actively operate programs designed to support resident self-sufficiency.

Our final and highest level of classification is Model or Level 3 Center Classification. And that classification is based on a combination of achievements of both Designated Level 1 and Certified Level 2 standards. This is a developmental process. You can't skip any of these classification levels. You have to go 1, 2 or 3 to get to Model. In addition, model standards achieve mandatory—a set of mandatory standards. There are nine model standards, seven of them are mandatory, two of them are optional. And the model standards have been developed specifically for the Neighborhood Networks Initiative.

These standards are available to START business plan users, [and] they can read them in their START business plan. They will need to, when you apply for Model standard—when you apply for Model classification, you need to check off on the list in your START Business Plan, a “yes” or “no” to each of the standards. And below each standard, there will be a statement that indicates what types of documents you must forward to the contractor, which is the Neighborhood Networks staff for review. That's called the “Show Proof System” and it does require that certain practices and policies have been documented over a period of time.

Model Neighborhood Networks Centers will serve out their centers of excellence through this initiative. They'll be like islands that we swim towards.

I'd like to very quickly go over what some of the Model standards are. As I said earlier, there are nine model standards, seven are required to achieve Level 3 Model status and two are optional. So let me go over these really quickly. If I talk too fast, you can call me.

Standard 1 requires that the center be operational for three years. Standard 2, that the center conducts resident surveys at least once every three years, and that the survey results are used to guide the choice of the program and services at the center. Standard 3 says training and other programs shall include written curricula or program guidelines. Standard 4 states that the center has a system that tracks, evaluates and reports the results of the center's program activities to improve program performance and outcomes and increase resident participation. Standard 5 says the center is actively engaged with a minimum of two partner entities. Standard 6 asks that the center engages in fund development—that's fund, not fun—fund development to increase financial sustainability. Standard 7 says that the center environment includes high-speed Internet access, up-to-date and marketing equipment and operating systems, accessible workspace and equipment, securities—and that security features have been implemented, and that the center has been operational for at least—pardon me, that the center is operational for at least 30 hours a week, and that the center itself is attractive and clean.

The two optional standards are as follows: the center has obtained 501(c)(3) status or in the line with the 501(c)(3) organization. And the last standard, which is also optional, a board of directors, or a similar body, provides a center of governance

So as you can see, each category has certain requirements. However, everyone is starting off on a level playing field, and everyone is starting off as Designated Level 1. Within the past two months, we've had six centers that have bravely come forward and taken that leap, and we're very proud of those six centers that I spoke of earlier. They will soon be receiving a lovely award that they can hang in their lobby. They can add this information to any of their materials. They have lots of bragging rights for public relations and publicity purposes. Their owners and property managers should feel very good about helping to support these centers, and they should also take great pride in being associated with such active entities.

At this point in time, I will turn this conference call over to Steve McLaine. Steve.

Steve McLaine: Thanks, Vickie. I also would like to join Vickie and everyone else in congratulating those centers that have reached the Certified status. We understand that this is still a new process and so we are very appreciative of those centers that have begun to place trust in the process and have realized the importance of participating. And we will continue to support other centers that wish to do so as well. I just want to add a couple of notes regarding the different levels to provide a little bit more information and to make you aware of a special window of opportunity that is closing very soon.

With the Designated Level 1 that was initially sort of grandfathered to all centers when the process was first initialized back in June. Now, new centers that are opening must meet the requirement that Vickie mentioned in terms of the HUD Approved Business Plan being in operation and having one computer with Internet access to be granted Designated status. Now those requirements were formulated to closely mirror the requirements to actually open the center. So, that should be very easy for new opening centers to meet those requirements.

Now in terms of Certified Level 2, once the center completes the START Business Plan and has it approved and completes the assessment portion of START and has that approved by their coordinator, they are automatically certified as Level 2. There isn't an actual application process that occurs for that level. The actual application process occurs for Level 3, in which the center that wishes to advance to Level 3 status is obviously a center that already has Certified status would have to provide documentation indicating that they meet the mandatory model standards that Vickie mentioned earlier.

Now, the window of opportunity that I mentioned previously, which is closing rapidly, is a special opportunity for Certified centers to immediately apply for Level 3 status, and that window will be closing at the end of this year, Dec. 31. What that means is, during this particular period, a certified center will have had to have been operational for three years, and obviously would have

had to have the HUD-approved Business Plan and the assessment for which it would have vaulted them into Certified status.

After December 31, on January 1, 2006, a center will have had to have been Certified for two years before applying for Model status. So as you can see, if you are interested in applying for Model status, now is the time to do that, and there is assistance available through the information center, but if you are sort of "on the fence" in trying to decide whether or not you're interested, it's really a good time throughout this month to take advantage of this opportunity. Otherwise, you will have some time to really think about your decision, because you will have to be certified for two years before applying for Model Level 3 status.

To help you with that decision, I will also talk about some of the reasons behind implementing the classification process and some of the benefits that centers can receive for participating. I'm sure many of you may be wondering is it worth it to participate after hearing about the different standards and the different dates and windows and things of that nature. We want you to know that we believe very strongly in the classification process, not just for you as individual centers, but for Neighborhood Networks as a whole, the entire initiative. And this is based on HUD's direction as well as working with, as Vickie mentioned, HUD Coordinators, and center directors, and property owners and other Neighborhood Networks stakeholders.

First, the standards that we are using to designate the different levels are not created in a vacuum. They're based on successful operations from centers throughout the years. As many of you know, we recently celebrated our 10th anniversary as an initiative and we utilized 10 years of success in developing the standards. We pulled from different successful centers and talked to other stakeholders about what made them successful, and we formulated those standards based on those. So by following the guidelines and following the standards that are provided, the centers will be much more likely to have success in their individual goals and meeting their individual missions, as well as contributing to the Initiative as a whole. Also, the center will

certainly play a role in increasing the market value of the property where the center is located. And certainly that will be of great value to the property owners and managers that are listening.

We also wanted to be able to reward the centers for the work that you do. We know how hard that you work, and we know the challenges that you're facing. We're very proud of the effort that you continuously display working with residents. So, by recognizing you, it's our way of sort of showing appreciation for what you've done, and hopefully encouraging you to aspire to reach even greater heights.

In addition to the rewards in terms of what Vickie mentioned is a plaque, there's also different incentives that are available for the different levels of centers. We wanted to make sure that each level received the appropriate amount of reward without excluding any center from key areas of the assistance.

So some of the incentives that are available include special recognition during national events, the opportunity to host events, receiving access to special partnerships that only certain levels of centers would be able to operate, and working in terms of linking centers to the Web site and being featured in publications as well. We also hope that you will use these designations in your own public relations and marketing examples.

It's a great opportunity for you to mention that you have received a certain level of achievement within the Neighborhood Networks Initiative and it's certainly much more appealing re- outreach towards potential partners or in seeking grants or working with—gathering volunteers and any other external stakeholders that you might wish to include into your operation.

In addition to your individual effort, again, it's very effective in working with Neighborhood Networks as an entire initiative. It sends a message that Neighborhood Networks is interested in reaching heights, new heights, and that we are interested in expecting the best out of ourselves in

providing the best for our residents. And the external partners on a national level have been very excited and are much more likely to work with us on a national and local level when we mention the idea of the classification process, and that we take this very seriously, and that we are serious about recognizing our centers for all the work that they do and the great success that they've had.

And finally, we wanted to recognize you not just for what you've done, but also to serve as examples for other centers. I think Vickie's tag example was a great visualization of how we see the process. And we want other centers to aspire to reach the heights of the Certified and the Model centers, to make sure that they understand that it can be done and that they understand why it should be done. And so these centers exist as examples that centers can reference, and speak to, and get ideas from and advice from, and be sure to understand that it is possible in that these centers are in existence and are successful for a reason, and that, hopefully, these standards have helped capture that.

So with that, I will turn it back over to Michele, and we can actually hear from one of the centers that has gone through the process and has been very instrumental in helping us bring this to life.

Michele?

Michele Higgs: Thanks, Steve, and thanks, Vickie. I got a lot out of that, so I'm hoping that our centers and our listeners were able to get a lot of information out of that as well. This sounds like it's, not to editorialize, but it goes a long way towards validating the work that we do, not just in and around the community, but it allows us to stick out our collective chests and be proud of what we're doing, you know, with Neighborhood Networks.

Now, I want to, with no further comment from me, bring Becky Foy before the mic to talk with us about the experience on the inside, what it's actually like to go through this process. Becky, as you've heard, is center director for the CWA Cayce Community Learning Center in Nashville,

Tennessee, and she's one of those six centers that we're so proud to recognize today, and I think she has a bit of a cold. So, Becky, are you doing OK?

Becky Foy: I am. You'll have to excuse me for sounding like a frog.

Michele Higgs: Thank you, much.

Dana Gumbs: Hi, Becky, it's Dana Gumbs. In your experience with Neighborhood Networks and just the classification process in general, what motivated you to want to achieve advanced classification?

Becky Foy: During the National Conference in Orlando, the Neighborhood Networks staff made a good case as to why it was important for us as community centers to move through this classification process. It's always nice to have benchmarks so we can strive toward and also a system of accountability. All of the centers are different and I would imagine it's very hard to compare two centers. So this allows us to be able to compare one another with one another, our programs and our efforts, and see how we measure up to other centers across the country.

Dana Gumbs: Yes, absolutely. And there's a lot of amazing centers out there. I've worked with some myself. You know, and it really allows them to kind of stand out say, this is what we're doing, this is what we're about, you know, and really get that recognition that, you know, a lot of centers need.

Becky Foy: Absolutely.

Michele Higgs: Now, about the process itself, Becky, how did you find it? Was it difficult, or time consuming, or particularly tough for you?

Becky Foy: The process wasn't difficult. It is a time consuming process depending how much you've already entered into the START system. We started from scratch, so that took us a little while to get that information entered. And a lot has to do with our longevity. We've been around almost 10 years now, so there was a lot of information to go back and collect. But once it's in there, it really was not a difficult process. I attended the START training at the Orlando Conference and I think I did it at the Regional Conference in Memphis the year before as well, so that was very helpful. And having the technical assistance available to ask crazy questions was always valuable to me. I'd get halfway through something and just kind of hit a brain freeze for a minute, and usually a quick phone call to you guys made that process a lot easier.

Michele Higgs: It's good to know that information line helps. What would you say that you learned from the process? What did you take away from it that you would tell your fellow centers, if you will?

Becky Foy: I learned that Neighborhood Networks is more than making sure that we have a computer lab set up on a property. I know in the beginning that technology was a real push, but this very simply lays out the fact that Neighborhood Networks is more about affecting lives, the lives of our residents, and making sure that the programs are efficient and that they're effective and we're meeting the needs of our community.

Michele Higgs: So it's a very important job we do.

Becky Foy: Absolutely.

Dana Gumbs: Now, Becky, how do you plan to use your Certified Level 2 status?

Becky Foy: I never really thought of Level 2 as our goal. It was just kind of a means to get to Level 3 for us. I knew that we had everything that we needed to be Level 3, so Level 2 was really what we wanted to accomplish in order to get to that Model status. But generally speaking, it's a great

way for funders to look at us and see that we're not operating alone, but we're operating as a greater whole in a national initiative with standards and processes to take us through that.

Dana Gumbs: Yes, absolutely. And given your experience with this whole process, what would you tell other centers? Do you have any words of advice? I think you touched them on a little bit, but do you have anything else that you would tell other centers out there who are maybe "on the fence," thinking about advancing to Level 2 and then Level 3?

Becky Foy: Like I said before, it's time consuming, but I wouldn't let that stop you. I think as more centers become involved in the classification process, the more competitive it's going to become and the more that it's going to mean for everybody that's involved. And the more that Neighborhood Networks gets the word out about this initiative, like I said, the more the levels will mean to the greater, the whole, to the nation.

Dana Gumbs: Absolutely.

Michele Higgs: This is good. This has been helpful. I have just another question because I'm thinking with regard to the upcoming deadline, December 31st. It looms large and I don't have a center to deal with right now. Would you sort of go through that one more time, Steve, about what folks need to do, what's approaching, what they need to look for?

Steve McLaine: Sure. It's primarily designed to facilitate the application for Model status. So centers would have to, as Becky mentioned, first would have to achieve Level 2 Certified status and that would include completing a START Business Plan, and completing a center assessment through START as well. So START is the foundation and sort of the key to the entire process.

Now the window, particularly, impacts the application for Model 3, and that would allow a center that receives Certified status to immediately apply for Model status. And that window is open until

the end of the year. Now, on January 1st, a center will have had to have been Certified for two years before applying for Model status. So, it's really a matter of opening a window and allowing a center to skirt pass that two-year period of being Certified. And really, a center can move very quickly from Level 1 to Level 3 and to receive that—achieve that lofty goal by the end of the month and really get ahead of the curve. So again, it's---the window's been open since we implemented the process in June, but it's getting cold out and we have to close the window. So we hope that you will take advantage of that while you still can and there's still time. And we, again, are available via the information line to provide assistance with that process.

Vickie Schachter: And if I could add something, this is Vickie again. If you don't make it to the window before it closes and you're shut in during the winter, I hope you won't despair. I think it's important to achieve Level 2 certification, and if you need to have the two-year waiting period to become a Model center, that allows you two years to really develop your processes, your programs, your systems to a higher level. You don't need to rush to create documents, you'll have those documents and you can have a kind of planned attack for achieving your Model Level 3 standard. So we don't want you to just, you know, shrug your shoulders and walk away from us on December 31st if you haven't accomplished it.

I think that for some folks, it was possible, and for others, it may not be a possibility. But we want to encourage you to move up towards level two as quickly as possible, and then we'll help you develop your processes and procedures during the two-year interim period so that when you are able to apply for Model standards—for Model classification, you'll be well equipped to do so.

Steve McLaine: Right, and Vickie raises a great point. In addition to that, because we are operating a window, that also does not mean that we will review the model applications with any less scrutiny. It's of no use for centers to try to rush and apply for Level 3 if they don't meet the standards. The window is not designed to lessen the standards. It's just designed to provide an opportunity for

those centers who are already meeting those standards. If you do not, there's no sense in rushing to apply if you can't meet the Model Standards.

We are taking this very seriously. We want the Model designation to mean something, we will make sure that that center receiving that status is very much deserving.

Michele Higgs: I think these are all points well taken. Becky, did you have anything to add?

Becky Foy: No, I think that pretty much sums it up.

Michele Higgs: OK, this sounds good. Cindy, Michele here. I wanted to know if we have anyone on queue.

Operator: Certainly, I would like to check at this point. If you do have a question today, please press star/one on your touch-tone telephone. Also, please make sure that your mute function is turned off to allow your signal to reach our equipment. Once again, if you'd like to ask a question today, please press star/one at this time.

We'll take our first question from Lakeisha Jackson.

Michele Higgs: Hi, Lakeisha, how are you?

Lakeisha Jackson: How are you?

Michele Higgs: Good.

Lakeisha Jackson: I wanted to ask, can you name the six Model Classification 3 centers again?

Michele Higgs: Oh, you wanted to know the three centers again—I mean, the six centers.

Vickie Schachter: We do not have six Model centers. We have six Level 2 Certified centers, Lakeisha. I'd be glad to give you the names of those centers. CWA Cayce Community Learning Center in Nashville, TN.

Lakeisha Jackson: OK.

Vickie Schachter: Dauphin Gate Neighborhood Networks Center in Mobile, AL.

Lakeisha Jackson: OK.

Vickie Schachter: Creekwood Village in Tuscaloosa, AL.

Lakeisha Jackson: OK.

Vickie Schachter: Cliffside Community Center in Prestonburg, KY.

Lakeisha Jackson: OK.

Vickie Schachter: Wildwood House Center in Beckley, WV.

Lakeisha Jackson: All right.

Vickie Schachter: And Valley Garden Activity Center in Huntsville, AL.

Lakeisha Jackson: All right, thank you very much.

Vickie Schachter: You're most welcome, Lakeisha.

Michele Higgs: Thanks for your call. Cindy, do we have anyone else?

Operator: We certainly do. I'd like to take our next question from Nellie Johnson.

Michele Higgs: Hi, Nellie.

Nellie Johnson: Hi. How are you?

Michele Higgs: Very well.

Nellie Johnson: My question is on the senior centers that are Neighborhood Networks centers. Could you explain how the training—what is the training curriculum requirement there?

Vickie Schachter: Are you asking about the Model Standards?

Nellie Johnson: Yes, you have seven requirements that have to be met in order to . . .

Vickie Schachter: Right.

Nellie Johnson: . . . become Model, and one of them was training.

Vickie Schachter: Right. The standard asks that training and other programs that are provided by the center, should have either a written curriculum or a written program guideline that guides the training so that the instructor, for example, if you had formal programs or services, if the instructor was not there, someone else could come in and pick up that curriculum or program guideline and teach the program that day.

Nellie Johnson: And if you're not doing training that way, you're not able to become a Model?

Vickie Schachter: No, but . . .

Steve McLaine: I think that the training isn't the requirement. The idea is to make sure there is training or other programs, the idea is to make sure that whatever programs you're operating, that they are guided by, as Vickie mentioned, either a curriculum or written guidelines.

Vickie Schachter: In other words, the programs and services are not entirely based in someone's head and that they're not person-specific, and it isn't just the good personality of the instructor that creates the program. That there's a book or a curriculum or an outline that guides how the program or services are delivered to the resident.

Michele Higgs: You know, if the individual moves on, then the program can stay in place because it's duplicated, it's on paper, it's something that someone else can pick up. Does that help?

Nellie Johnson: Well, in senior buildings, I think it's a different type of programming that you're offering, that the centers there are 24/7 centers where individuals have open access to the computers, and the services that are being provided are more individual referral services to the community.

Vickie Schachter: Well, then there's nothing that says you can't have your procedures written that say, you know, things are person-centered, that services are person-centered, that computers are left open and every, you know, people are given a password and, you know, the procedure—the process.

Nellie Johnson: OK, so it's not the curriculum part. It's more of a process.

Vickie Schachter: If you don't have curriculum-based programs and services, at the very minimum, everything else ought to be institutionalized in writing.

Nellie Johnson: OK.

Vickie Schachter: So, you could do that, and that would be acceptable.

Nellie Johnson: And then I've been in START a number of times and our business plans were approved back in 1999 and 2001, and I can't—the START program is difficult to use if you've been an existing center without redoing the business plans, which ...

Vickie Schachter: Yes, they need to be updated regularly. That's the whole point of having an electronic business plan is that they can be updated regularly.

Nellie Johnson: So, you go back and you put your original one in?

Vickie Schachter: No, you don't put your original one in. You want to do an updated one that reflects today.

Nellie Johnson: OK.

Vickie Schachter: And we'd be glad to help you with that. Just call our toll-free number and we'd be glad to help you with that.

Nellie Johnson: OK.

Dana Gumbs: And our toll-free number is 888-312-2743,

Michele Higgs: And you will get the help you need. Is that good?

Nellie Johnson: OK.

Michele Higgs: All right, great. We'll repeat that number before we close, so if you didn't get it, don't worry. Cindy, have we anyone else on the line?

Operator: Yes, we'll now move to Marco Gomez.

Michele Higgs: Hi, Marco.

Marco Gomez: Hi, how are you doing?

Michele Higgs: Real good.

Marco Gomez: I'm calling because I'm the program director for our center and we have tried to obtain a rent increase to sustain the mortgage payments, but we were denied. Everything I read in the HUD Handbook tells me that we would've been enabled to get a rent increase. I wanted to know if someone came across this incident and how they were able to overcome it.

Michele Higgs: I think that—well, this is a bit off the topic that we're going into right now, which is the Center Classification. That might be something that you'd need to take up with your HUD Coordinator in your state. Do you—of course right now I'd probably wouldn't be able to tell you, but that would be something you could call us on the 888 number to get the information for what state you're in, what HUD Coordinator would be to help you with that. But that's a bit off the topic that we're discussing today. So, if I can ask you to hold on and listen for the toll-free number, you can give us a buzz and we can give you further information there. How's that?

Marco Gomez: Sounds good.

Michele Higgs: OK, thanks. Cindy?

Operator: Yes. We'll now move on to Carol Lee.

Carol Lee: Yes, I am fairly new resident coordinator and I just go the paperwork for the START program because I believe we're a Level 1. You know, this is all new to me and I got the package and the lady that I spoke to, she was really nice and helpful. And I noticed that all the questions on here are really in-depth. Now, how much wording, or are there any type of buzz words or anything, because I really don't know, and can you change a mission statement? I know for Level 1 that I read the mission statement that was when they first applied for Level 1. And in there, you know, a part of it didn't make sense to me. Can your mission statement change? And I'll probably call the 888 number and I'll be the one that will probably give you headaches because I really don't know exactly what I'm doing.

Michele Higgs: Thanks for the forewarning. But, I'm going to turn that question over to Vickie.

Vickie Schachter: Hi, Carol.

Carol Lee: Hi.

Vickie Schachter: If you have a board of directors or an advisory board, you would want to get their buy-in on any changes to the mission statement. If you're working fairly independently, however, but need to get the buy-in from the owners or the property managers, you may also want to run another mission statement by them to make your mission statement hang together better.

In terms of the details for filling out the START Business Plan, we really just think that you should use simple, straightforward language. You know, I think with START, simple, straightforward language is good language. You need not – one of the – one of the beauties of START is that it's not like a written business plan where you're being judged by your literary ability. And we really look for—a lot of the input is really more data or single monosyllabic response, "yes, no, maybe," than literature. So I would say, keep it simple, keep it easy to read and readable. At least every three years, you're going to want to update your business plans anyway because that's a good practice.

Carol Lee: OK, thank you.

Vickie Schachter: So, feel free to call us at any time. You can call us daily if you want.

Steve McLaine: Not a problem.

Michele Higgs: Even twice daily.

Carol Lee: OK.

Vickie Schachter: We have people who have called us three to five times a day, so you could be one of those if you'd like.

Carol Lee: OK, you might just open up yourselves to a can of worms.

Michele Higgs: Thanks, Carol.

Carol Lee: You're welcome.

Michele Higgs: Cindy, have we anyone else on the line?

Operator: Not at this time. But I would like to remind our audience, if you would like to ask a question today, please press star/one on your touch-tone telephone at this time. And we do have a question from Teresa Dewilde

Michele Higgs: Hi, Teresa, how are you?

Teresa Dewilde: Good, how are you?

Michele Higgs: Real good.

Teresa Dewilde: Good. The question I have is, you know, I called in last month, and basically I'm new to this property, new to the whole Neighborhood Networks, and how it works, and what we need to do. I guess more than anything, other than just checking out the Web site, are there other resources for help with making sure that your mission statement that was initially set is being hit?

We had—part of our mission statement was, of course, dealing with computers and we got a lot of help after the conference last time to hook up and maybe get some other computers since ours had been stolen. But once we get those computers in place and get the Internet back hooked up, I guess, I'm just curious if you know of someone that can help with, or a department or an area that can help with, making sure that the goals that were set are attained in terms of, you know, teaching people how to do resumes. Is that something that they would require us to help them with, or is that just setting up something on the computer so that they can use that software for it? Sorry, that was a really long-winded question.

Vickie Schachter: Is there a question in there?

Teresa Dewilde: I think the words “help . . .”

Michele Higgs: With a lot of exclamation points.

Vickie Schachter: You know, I hope you’ll give us a call on the toll-free line. There are several of us who would be glad to speak with you. We can talk to you about your mission statement, we can talk to you about what you know, what you think your center should realistically be doing versus what your center should not be realistically doing necessarily, and what your goals and objectives might be, could be, or should be.

Teresa Dewilde: Would you be able to tell me what Model we are, because quite frankly, I don’t even know what Model we are?

Vickie Schachter: What’s the name of your center?

Teresa Dewilde: Fort Vancouver Terrace.

Vickie Schachter: OK, you have a completed START Business Plan, and you are a designated Level 1 center because you have not applied for Certified status.

Teresa Dewilde: So, we want to be Level 2 then.

Vickie Schachter: OK. So what you want to do is go into your START Business Plan, on the left navigation bar, scroll down, there will be a section called “classification” or “assessment,” I beg your pardon, there will be a section called “assessment”, click on that, answer the questions, save it and submit it to your HUD Coordinator. That’s all you have to do.

Teresa Dewilde: And this is—what’s the deadline?

Vickie Schachter: No, there's no deadline for this.

Teresa Dewilde: OK. That was just for Model 3?

Steve McLaine: Yes, that was for Level 3.

Vickie Schachter: Yes. You can submit this at any time. If you want to give us a call, give one of us a call later today or tomorrow on the toll-free line, we could actually walk you through this.

Teresa Dewilde: OK.

Vickie Schachter: So—but this is an automated process, go to your HUD Coordinator. Your HUD Coordinator, it's not even an "approve" or "disapprove" process. It's marked as "complete" or "not complete."

Teresa Dewilde: Got it.

Vickie Schachter: If it's marked as "complete," it shows up that it has been marked as "complete." We have an agent inside the computer, that's not a little man in a trench coat, it's a computer agent, that runs around at night and when it finds these marks that say "complete", it moves you to Level 2, and it will show up in a very special place on your START Business Plan as Level 2.

Teresa Dewilde: OK, great.

Vickie Schachter: You will also get an e-mail telling you this.

Teresa Dewilde: Wonderful.

Vickie Schachter: So, if you want help doing the assessment, give us a call. If you want help revising your mission statement, give us a call. Give us a call if you're not sure what you need. If you need help, we'll work it through with you.

Teresa Dewilde: That's great.

Michele Higgs: So, if you just want to chat, give us a call.

Teresa Dewilde: I might be like some of the other people over there. You will be hearing from me very soon . . .

Vickie Schachter: That's OK, I need some new friends.

Michele Higgs: Thanks.

Teresa Dewilde: Good. Thank you.

Steve McLaine: In addition to calling the TA line for information, you can also request technical assistance where we have onsite consultants that come on-site to actually work with you and I know that they do a lot of work with helping to ensure that the center mission approximates what their goals of the residents and the center staff are. You mentioned dealing with the residents, and that's the most important aspect of it. A lot of missions fail because they are designed without input from the people that they're designed to serve. So there are a number of ways in which we can provide you with assistance. We'd be happy to do that.

Teresa Dewilde: Thank you very much.

Michele Higgs: OK. Thanks so much. Cindy, have we anyone else on the line?

Operator: Yes, our next question will come from Marcelo Barron.

Michele Higgs: Hi, Marcelo.

Chad Chadwick: OK—this is Chad Chadwick, I'm with Marcelo here. It may sound like a dumb question, but throughout the discussion today, there's only been one mention of any kind of a time frame a center must be operational on daily or monthly basis to be considered operational. Now, if I want to go out and put in a computer, pay \$9.95 to get access, and then hang a shingle, am I a Neighborhood Networks?

Michele Higgs: That is determined by what serves your residents, what serves your people. If you have just one computer or two computers and a few elderly residents who come down a couple of hours a day, that's operational. If you have tons of kids who come in in the afternoon and use your center and use your computer for four or five hours a day, that's operational. That's a definition that is determined by your residents.

Steve McLaine: Well, it's definitely not a dumb question. I think this is a very good question. And, again, obviously as you said, setting up a computer with access and having it available one hour a week probably wouldn't constitute an open Neighborhood Networks center.

The idea is, as Michele said, is to make sure that you're addressing the needs of the residents, and that would involve having a center open for adequate hours whether it's at an afterschool or evening program, during the weekends or even during the day for those individuals that are at home during the day. Because all centers are different and because all properties are different, we try not to set strict guidelines in terms of open hours of operations, because we want to give you the flexibility that you need to serve your residents as well as to accomplish the other goals of

your property. But they are described in terms of a stricter policy for the Model center. We do want to make sure that for a Model center, that there is a certain amount of hours of operation that are required. But in terms of for the designated or certified, we are giving the centers the flexibility and sort of their own—based on their own honor code, so to speak, the idea of being open to serve the needs of the residents.

Chad Chadwick: OK, thank you.

Steve McLaine: Sure.

Michele Higgs: Thank you for calling. We have one more remark on our end . . . Dana?

Dana Gumbs: We just want to let everybody know, Friday, December 16th, if you're interested in receiving on-site technical assistance, as Steve mentioned previously, December 16th, which is this Friday, is our cutoff line, so if you are interested in receiving again onsite technical assistance, where one of our TA coordinators will come onsite starting in the spring to work with you to develop programs, services, develop partnerships, update your business plan in START, and hopefully help you to move to level Level 2 or Level 3. Please give us a call on our toll-free line, which is 888-312-2743. And again, that's 888-312-2743.

Michele Higgs: That's another good point in response to the gentlemen who just called. Do we have any other calls, Cindy?

Operator: Yes, we have one question from Joseph Mayerhoff.

Joseph Mayerhoff: Hi, good afternoon.

Michele Higgs: Hi.

Joseph Mayerhoff: I went and did my assessment online and actually messed up. I got down to the last question, which was about the resident's self-sufficiency program, and by accident I clicked "no," when I should've clicked "yes," of course. Now this is a requirement to get to Level 2, right?

Vickie Schachter: Right.

Steve McLaine: Right.

Joseph Mayerhoff: OK, my question for you is, how loosely can you define resident self-sufficiency program for the purposes of the assessment?

Vickie Schachter: I got a better thing I can offer you, Joseph.

Joseph Mayerhoff: OK.

Vickie Schachter: How about we just delete what you did and you just do it again?

Joseph Mayerhoff: I already changed it, but I couldn't—I had already submitted it.

Vickie Schachter: That's OK. I think we can delete it, or you could have Bill Miceuna, your HUD Coordinator, say it's incomplete and send it back to you.

Joseph Mayerhoff: Already did that.

Vickie Schachter: And . . .

Joseph Mayerhoff: So the fix is already in.

Vickie Schachter: OK, but your actual question is, what is meant by a self-sufficiency program?

Joseph Mayerhoff: Well, no—what is meant by it. But, really how loosely can it be defined for the purposes of the assessment?

Vickie Schachter: I haven't given it much thought. I think it can be defined quite loosely. I think anything that allows any resident a greater freedom of will, whether that means access to the outside world via technology, or to learn about employment, or to learn how to read, or to learn how to get along with others better, I think anything that increases independence or interdependence, that it improves the person's life, could be considered as a self-sufficiency program or service.

Joseph Mayerhoff: OK, thank you.

Vickie Schachter: You're welcome.

Michele Higgs: Thank you. Cindy, have we other calls?

Operator: We have no further questions at this time.

Michele Higgs: OK—well, it sounds like we're at the end of our road. We just have a couple of minutes left, so if there are no more questions, first, I'd like to give a "shout out"—and for those of you who aren't as hip as I am, that means an acknowledgement—for those center directors and HUD Coordinators that have been consistent in joining us for these monthly calls. I know everybody's extremely busy and to take an hour out of an afternoon sometimes is very tough.

But among the HUD Coordinators are Eric Amundson of South Dakota, who has been present for about nine out of 12 of our calls; Mary Frances Byrd in Texas, who has been with us most of the calls; Perry Casper in Oregon; Laura Cole who covers Washington State and Alaska; Mari Adams in Massachusetts, Faith Ballenger in Montana; Renee Kiel in Oklahoma; Bill Miecuna in New York; Rita Nunweiler in Minnesota; Jennie Chambers-Jones of Mississippi; Cathy Coney-Sanders in Florida; and Sandra Devlin in Wisconsin; who have joined us very frequently during the year of 2005.

We know how wildly busy you are, so I thank all of you for joining us.

And not be out done, the following centers have been consistent in taking advantage of this opportunity to gather information for their centers.

We have Deb Lang in Nebraska, Karen Heppler in Washington State, Karen Voiss in Oregon, Andrea Almos in Arizona, and Emeri Ndukwe in Ohio.

I want to thank Vickie Schachter and Steve McLaine from the Neighborhood Networks staff, and Becky Foy of CWA Cayce Community Learning Center for sharing their experience with us today. Finally, I'd like to thank my colleague, Dana Gumbs, for all the work she did in putting this call together, from selecting the topic to inviting the speakers. Thank you, Dana.

Also, I want to remind you of the resources that are available to you through the Neighborhood Networks Initiative. Now, Vickie's already volunteered to be on this line at 888-312-2743, but there are a lot of us that you can reach there at the Neighborhood Networks Information Line, and you'll find a wealth of resources and information at the Neighborhood Networks Web site, www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org.

On the Web site, you'll be able to toot your own horn with success stories. You'll find a lot of information about what's going on within the network.

I thank you so much for joining us for this conversation today, and I remind you that when next we speak, it will be a new year. Our first monthly conference call for 2006 will take place on Tuesday, January 17 at 3:00 p.m. The topic at that time will be "Keeping a Captive Audience, Maintaining Adult Participation".

Thank you for joining us today. Take good care. Happy New Year.

Operator: That concludes today's conference. We will like to thank you all again for your participation and wish you a great day.

END