

NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORKS

**Moderator: Michele Higgs
September 19, 2006
3:00 p.m. EDT**

Operator: Good day everyone and welcome to the "Hear Any Good Stories Lately? Neighborhood Networks Success Stories" conference call. This call is being recorded.

At this time, I'd like to turn the call over to Ms. Michele Higgs. Please go ahead.

Michele Higgs: Thank you, Amy. Good afternoon everyone and welcome to the Neighborhood Networks September conference call.

The topic for today's call, as you heard, is "Heard Any Good Stories Lately? Neighborhood Networks Success Stories."

My name is Michele Higgs, and today I'm joined by fellow technical assistant coordinators, Marisa Connaughton and Brian Franke. We represent the team that works with you to address the needs of the various Neighborhood Networks centers around the country. Marisa and Brian developed the plan for this call.

Before I introduce our speakers for this afternoon, I want to remind the multifamily Neighborhood Networks centers that the strategic tracking and reporting tool, also known as the START business plan, contains resource materials that can help you survey your resident's interests and

monitor the partnerships that are so key to strengthening your center's profile among your stakeholders and in your community. The care and feeding of these relationships is vital when assisting residents in the attainment of their goals. They are also key to the development of a "success story."

If you have any questions about the START business plan, resident surveys, success stories, 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. I also want to remind listeners that a verbatim transcript of this call will be made available on the Neighborhood Networks Web site in about two weeks.

Now, before we move on, we have a number of new centers to welcome to the neighborhood. There's Gotham Apartments Computer Center in Missouri, Madison/Solberg Senior Campus Computer Center in Michigan, Casa de Paz Sahuaro in Arizona, Pinebrook Manor Neighborhood Networks Center in Michigan, Penelope 35 Apartments in Minnesota, COGIC Highview Apartments Neighborhood Networks Center in Virginia, Hack Shack Neighborhood Networks Center at The Bridge in Oregon, Providence Elizabeth House Neighborhood Networks Center in Washington, Providence Gamelin House Neighborhood Networks Center in Washington, Las Lomas Apartments Computer Center – Learning Center—sorry, in Puerto Rico, and Genesis @ Battery Heights Neighborhood Networks Center in Tennessee. And we give all of you a hearty welcome to the neighborhood!

This afternoon, we want to help you learn about a tool called the success story, and how it can be of help to your Neighborhood Networks center. If your center has ever held a good event, received a grant for a program, received assistance or special recognition from a major partner in your community -- you have had a success story. Success stories can be a tool to market your center in your community as well as highlight its accomplishments. Our speakers will help you to learn what to look for in a success story, and what to do when you find one. You can find

success stories by going to the Neighborhood Networks Web site, which is www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org, and looking at the directory on the left of the page, click on success stories, and there you are!

But just to give you a taste, I'll share a bit from two recent success stories that can be found on the Web site . . . and I remind you, that Web site is www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org. This one is entitled, "At North Carolina Center, Options Hold the Key to Success," it's filed from Greensboro, North Carolina. It starts off, "Forty-nine minutes, thirty-four seconds. Not nearly enough time for Maria Chadmon, center director of the Westview Valley Apartments Neighborhood Networks Center, to highlight the many programs, services, and successes the center offers. Even so, Chadmon manages to cover a lot of ground in the time that she has between calling the monthly adult bingo game and preparing for the arrival of students for the afterschool program.

A Little of This, A Little of That-and a Whole Lot of Fun: When planning the programs and activities for the Westview Valley Apartments Neighborhood Networks Center, Chadmon and her team strive for balance. By offering a well-rounded program that mixes educational opportunities with support programs and community-building activities, Chadmon hopes to attract as many residents to the center as possible.

In quote, "Getting residents to come to the center and try, or learn, something new is our biggest challenge," said Chadmon. "By offering so many different programs, we hope we are able to offer something for everyone," end quote.

And A Class of Their Own: They offer classes in GED (General Equivalency Diploma) preparation, college resources, job-readiness instruction, and there's a homebuyer's class, which they say, using the expertise and resources provided by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development staff members, the center offers a homebuyer's class. So there's one success story right there!

And she closes off by saying, "The management company takes seriously their philosophy of investing in residents, they know it's an investment they are sure to get a return on, and I should know, I'm a former resident who now works for the company, and I own my own home." And once again, that piece was from the success story Web site there, and it's from Greensboro, North Carolina, and the last quote there was from Maria Chadmon, who's the Center Director of the Westview Valley Apartments.

Then, another brief one is filed from Grand Forks, North Dakota, and it's called, "When Life Hands You Lemons . . . Visit Your Neighborhood Networks Center."

"It only takes a brief conversation with Mandy Carlson to realize that this single mother is someone who does not let life's challenges hold her back. Her reaction is *action*. Carlson's road to self-sufficiency began after she was diagnosed with three herniated disks in her lower back, and doctors told her that a career in daycare was over. But upon hearing the news, rather than count the dots on her hospital room's ceiling, she picked up the telephone and began doing what the doctors recommended, finding a new career.

One of Carlson's first phone calls was to the office of Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS), a program that is operated by the Grand Forks Housing Authority. Participants in the FSS Program set goals, seek employment, and ultimately, gain employment adequate enough to allow them to leave the welfare system. It was also the FSS Program coordinator who referred Carlson to the LaGrave Learning Center's TechForce Program.

The TechForce Program provides training to individuals in Microsoft business software applications. Students are tested before, during and after they complete the course, and this allows staff members at the LaGrave Learning Center to not only evaluate students' skill levels, but also measure the effectiveness of the training.

"I was amazed at how much I learned," said Carlson. "And every time I'd leave the center, I wonder why there weren't more people there taking advantage of this great resource."

With the help of the FSS Program, Carlson was able to find a place that she and her son could call home. She says, "It's wonderful having our own place. We have a yard with a fence and a dog, and no mortgage. It's like a – like a fairy tale.

There's no way I could've been able to get my job without the LaGrave Learning Center. I use everything I learned at the center every day in my job. The center allowed me to find the perfect job at the perfect time."

Now there's a success story if I've ever heard one.

Today, we have three folks who are going to help you with the process of recognizing and developing success stories, and making them work for the benefit of your center. We will have Linda Daley, who is one of our own. She is communications manager with Neighborhood Networks, and key to transforming your good news into a success story. We have Thom Mahoney from The Grove Neighborhood Networks in Island Grove Village Apartments in Greeley, Colorado. He has been a guest of ours before.

And we'll hear from Anita H. Plotinsky, who's director of the Washington, D.C., office of the Foundation Center. I'm going to stop talking and let our speakers speak – Brian, would you like to introduce our speakers?

Brian Franke: Sure, thank you very much, Michele, and good afternoon to you, everyone. My name is Brian Franke, and I'm a technical assistance coordinator with the Neighborhood Networks Initiative. Today we have three excellent speakers that Michele noted on the conference call, and

I would like to introduce them a little more and explain what each of them will be discussing today. Linda Daley is currently communications manager for the Neighborhood Networks Initiative, and she has 18 years of experience in the fields of communications, marketing and public relations. She is responsible for the writing and production of a variety of our communications and marketing materials, and a key component of Linda's work is researching, writing, and posting center success stories on our Neighborhood Networks Web site.

And today, Linda will be talking about the function of success stories in the Neighborhood Networks Initiative, and provide information on how we document these success stories and post them on our Web site.

Our second speaker will be Thom Mahoney, who currently is the technical online services coordinator at The Grove Neighborhood Networks in Greeley, Colorado. He has been there for 10 years, and this center is the first Neighborhood Networks center in Colorado, and it has received numerous awards since its opening in 1997, including HUD's John J. Gunther Blue Ribbon Best Practices Award.

And last – I'm sorry – and Thom today will be talking about how a Neighborhood Networks Center can use its success stories for such things as promoting its programs, marketing itself in the community, and developing partnerships. And he will use his experience as examples.

And last but not least, we have Anita H. Plotinsky, who is the director of the Washington, D.C., Foundation Center office. The Foundation Center is a national nonprofit service organization dedicated to strengthening the nonprofit sector by advancing knowledge about U.S. philanthropy. And prior to directing the Foundation Center, she served as executive director of the Association for Research on Non-Profit Organizations and Voluntary Action, otherwise known as ARNOVA. She has also worked at the Indiana University Center on Philanthropy, and served as associated

faculty member in the university's graduate program in nonprofit management and philanthropic studies.

Today, Anita will provide a funding perspective on success stories, and in particular, she will discuss how to use success stories to approach funders, and gain the interest in funding your center.

Michele Higgs: Sounds great, thank you, Brian. Linda, would you like to lead us off?

Linda Daley: Sure, thanks, Michele, thanks, Brian. I love talking about success stories, because I'm always amazed at how something so small—really when you think about it, it's maybe two and a half pages, double-spaced, 700 to 900 words—can have such an impact on the Neighborhood Networks Initiative. The purpose of success stories, there's two purposes I think, two primary purposes, one is to showcase what a center is doing to boost the morale of that center, and have a community building spirit for Neighborhood Networks, these – they are posted to the Web site, so other centers can see. It really – it brings the centers together as a community, and it's a nice feature story to recognize people's successes and their victories and their accomplishments.

The success stories can then be taken and used by the centers to submit them to local media outlets, submit them to your papers, to newsletters around town, and get – use them for promotional materials, they give you a lot of mileage, they become unpaid advertising. If you had to – if you get two columns of print in your local newspaper for your success story, that's two columns of advertising space, which can be expensive, so it's – they're great for media tools, they're great for marketing tools, they're great for morale, community building, and they're also great for technical assistance tools. We have a technical assistance team, this is what they do, they're great at it. But, centers are each others' technical assistance specialists also, you are your own best TA specialist, you're in the trenches everyday, you're dealing with challenges that other centers around the country are dealing with, and a success story also presents a unique

way that a center maybe got – developed a partnership, or secured funding. So, success stories actually help grow the technical assistance team exponentially because now, instead of having a set amount of technical assistance specialists, we just added 1,250, each representative from each center.

So something as small as a two-and-a-half-page write-up really has an impact on a Neighborhood Networks Centers' efforts, and they're quite easy to do, you know, every center has its success. A lot of times centers will – I'll talk to them and say, you know, I'm focusing on some of your successes, and they'll say well, gee, I don't know if we've had any. And just opening your door every morning is a success, helping people get on the computer, helping them with e-mail, teaching them how to use Microsoft Word, you know, brushing up their skills so they can go after better jobs. Helping people keep in touch with their family and friends through e-mail, helping them apply for a job, these are successes. They don't have to be—gee, I had a resident buy a house, well, I'd love to hear that, and I'd love to write about it, but success – there's varying degrees of success, and every center should be proud of what they accomplish every day, and every center should have a success story.

Success stories, like I said, are typically two, two-and-a-half pages, they're short, they're about 700 to 900 words, and they captured the success of your – of – whatever success of your center. And, they're basically feature stories with a lesson.

When we put together a success story, we get tips from the TA staff, we get tips from HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinators, or we happen to be talking to the centers ourselves, and they inadvertently tell us something that's going on, and that piques our curiosity, and that's a success. For example, I recently called Thom Mahoney to get some updated information for a big technical assistance publication that's in the works and getting ready to be put out, and Thom very casually mentioned he's working on getting some funding for an afterschool program, or a summer program—that's a success. I have that noted to call Thom back and hear about how it

went, how'd it go, how'd you do it? Did you use a little trick to get more funding? How did you build your partnerships?

We – so we typically call when someone tells us that a certain center has a success, or they've been successful, or they're having high resident participation rates, or whatever. We call the centers, and we interview the center directors, or center staff members, or resident services coordinators, or whoever is the appropriate person, and we get the story. And we write it up, and then we send it back to the center director to have them look it over to make sure they're comfortable with it, to make sure it presents their center in the way they want it presented, and it says what they want it to say. Because, we want to give you a tool that you can take to the media, or put in marketing materials, or get printed out, or point partners to the Web site, and say: check out our success story on the HUD Neighborhood Networks Web site.

And let's see, I'm just trying to see what other points I had, and I have a note why we want to hear about them. Basically, we want to hear about them so we can help you market it – market your successes, market your accomplishments, build your capacity, build a better community, and so you can share ideas, exchange ideas, share best practices with each other. A success story may be, you know, another center director across the country may read your success story and say gee, I had no idea that that's a good way to get a partnership is to do such and such. So there just – something so small, something two pages or so has such an impact, and can help centers in so many ways, and we'd love to hear any success story, anything that you think is important, or is important to you, we'd love to hear about it, and love to post it on the site and feature it.

Michele Higgs: Thanks, Linda. I have one quick question. I know you mentioned that you would call – that you or we would call the center, and talk to the appropriate person, or something like that. Will there ever be an appropriate time for a center to write up something and send it to you?

Linda Daley: Absolutely.

Michele Higgs: OK. And who would they direct – would they direct it to us as the technical assistance coordinators, or would they direct it to someone specific in publications?

Linda Daley: You know, I – the best thing – it – we'll take it, any channel that it comes to us. We have had centers write up their own success stories, we typically still follow-up and interview just so we get the whole picture, and we can, you know, add to it, enhance it, maybe present another angle that they weren't thinking of. And you can send it to a technical assistance team member, you could send it to the general Neighborhood Networks mailbox. We'll – any way you want to get it to us. A lot of times we get them from the HUD coordinators, the HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinators.

We're very fortunate that our TA staff has their ear to the ground a lot, and they don't miss much, so they're always – you know, I'm always getting e-mails from technical assistance team members telling me that this center did this, and you might want to follow-up with them. So, we follow-up on every lead, and we'll track them down.

Michele Higgs: OK, got you. Brian, did you have a question?

Female: ((inaudible))

Michele Higgs: OK. In that case, I'd like to open up the lines just to get some questions for you. Amy, can we check and see if there's anyone on the line?

Operator: Yes, ma'am. The question-and-answer session will be conducted electronically. If you would like to ask a question, please press star, one on your telephone keypad. If you are using a speakerphone, please release your mute function or pick up your handset in order for your signal

to reach our equipment. We will take questions in the order that you signal us, and we'll take as many questions as time permits. Once again, that is star, one.

And we'll hear from Saabir Carter.

Michele Higgs: Thank you.

Saabir Carter: Hi. I'm the new Neighborhood Networks facilitator at Greenway PresbyHomes in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Michele Higgs: OK.

Saabir Carter: And I had a quick question. ((inaudible)) pretty much you ((inaudible)). But is – there's – a computer certification that I would love to, you know, teach the residents here, or even some of the staff members. And I wanted to go about doing that, because it was really a big hit in the city when the Mayor's office in the City of Philadelphia, you know, conducted the pilot. And I wanted to know, how could I, you know, go about getting the funding and the different ways of trying to implement that here in this Neighborhood Networks center?

Michele Higgs: I think you're going down a different track. What we are trying to do is find out about how we would – had you had that program in place . . .

Saabir Carter: OK.

Michele Higgs: . . . how you would go about publicizing it?

Saabir Carter: OK.

Michele Higgs: What we can try to do is perhaps contact you separately about how you might go about getting some help in getting that program going.

Saabir Carter: OK.

Michele Higgs: I would also suggest to you looking on our Web site, there are opportunities for funding that are posted there that might be appropriate for you, but I think it might be better if we talked with you a little bit about this in a different forum. For this call, we're basically trying to help centers who are already using their – using their facility to help them to publicize the good stuff that they're doing.

Saabir Carter: OK.

Female: But, it sounds like what you're planning is something that would qualify for that once everything gets off the ground, but for now you're just trying to get that going. Am I understanding you correctly?

Saabir Carter: Exactly.

Michele Higgs: OK. Well, we'll have information – I'll get your contact information, and try to touch base with you, and help you to get to the source that you need. OK?

Saabir Carter: Thank you.

Michele Higgs: All righty.

Operator: Now we'll hear from Joseph Mayerhoff.

Michele Higgs: Thank you.

Joseph Mayerhoff: Hi, good afternoon.

Michele Higgs: Hello there.

Joseph Mayerhoff: How are you?

Michele Higgs: Very well. How about you?

Joseph Mayerhoff: OK, thank you. I'm wondering if you're putting down success stories from consortia as well as from individual centers. Because there's been such a push among the Neighborhood Networks movement to graduate individual centers, especially in terms of funding, to regional consortia, that there are many I'm sure that are just at an early starting out stage, like ours in New York. And I think that reading about how other consortia were able to approach funders and reach funders and do it more on the consortium level would be very helpful to other consortia, just like the way the success stories are helpful to individual centers.

Linda Daley: Right. And I do believe that there are – I thought they were – I don't know the exact numbers, Joseph, because that's not my station, kind of, but I think the – there are consortia success stories, I believe there's – I want to say there's four written a year that focus on consortia, but I can't confirm this, but I can drop you a line. But, they do have success stories for consortia. I believe they do. Which you bring up an excellent point, because there's a lot to be learned by the – there's a lot to – that goes into forming a consortia, and you know, applying for nonprofit status, and other consortia could really benefit from what other consortia are going through. But, I do believe there are consortia success stories out there, and I can drop you an e-mail and let you know for sure.

Joseph Mayerhoff: OK. It might even be a good idea to do it in a separate page, or a separate part of the Web site.

Linda Daley: OK. I'll check into it, and I will – I got your e-mail address, because I just have been recently speaking with you via e-mail for some photos. And, I will let you know where they are on the Web site, and confirm it for you.

Joseph Mayerhoff: Very good.

Linda Daley: Sure.

Joseph Mayerhoff: Thank you.

Michele Higgs: Sounds good, thanks. Amy, anyone else on the line?

Operator: Yes, ma'am, Michelle Timmons.

Michele Higgs: OK, thank you.

Michelle Timmons: Hi, yes, this is Michelle Timmons. I was just interested in reference to when you're talking in reference to the success stories, we just had a community day, and we also have a partner that comes in and actually provides jobs. So, would it have to be just one specific event, or, would it be OK to kind of wrap-up a couple events all together?

Linda Daley: No, we can – we can combine them, in fact the example that Michele read in the beginning of the call with Maria Chadmon in North Carolina, I believe, she had so much going on that if I wrote them separately, it would have taken 30 success stories. And, so there – we can package it, and you know, maybe that's the whole theme of the success story, that you got a lot going on,

and check it all out. So we can – we'll package them together, you know, and we'll – we can do that.

Michelle Timmons: OK, you stated in reference to submitting them, all that is needed to be done, because it shows where it can be submitted online, just as long as it's the two pages and not more of the 700, just send it to that e-mail address, and that's fine, and that's . . .

Linda Daley: Yes.

Michelle Timmons: . . . good enough for the submission? OK.

Linda Daley: Yes, it'll get to me, it just goes to that e-mail address. It does get to me. But, I can also follow-up with you, and speak with you, and interview you. If you don't have the time to put it together, I can sit down – you know, I can call you and we can spend 30 minutes or so on the phone, and I can take your story, and write it up, and zap it back to you.

Michelle Timmons: That would be great.

Linda Daley: OK?

Michelle Timmons: OK, thank you so much.

Linda Daley: Can I just get your name again?

Michelle Timmons: My name is Michelle Timmons.

Linda Daley: OK, great.

Operator: And now, we'll hear from Anna Lewis.

Anna Lewis: Hi. I need to know, I have a lot of strategic partners in the community, and we do things together, it's not necessarily onsite at my center. I need to know, is it just success stories onsite, or can it be something that's held out in the community that's involved that, you know, I've partnered – our centers partnered with other organizations to pull off?

Linda Daley: It – if it's anything that your center had anything to do with, or it benefited your residents, we will cover it, it doesn't have to be in the center. A lot of centers have community festivals, or they have, you know, block parties, anything that is – that shows a benefit to Neighborhood Networks, you know, residents in Neighborhood Networks, and furthering getting the Neighborhood Networks name out is a success, and we'll cover that.

Anna Lewis: Wow. All right, great, that's wonderful. I didn't know, that's good to know.

Linda Daley: Well no, and it's good because, if we're going to highlight partnerships, you know, a lot of centers like more, you know, information on how do you form partnerships, or sometimes the other centers have partnerships that didn't even cross the mind of other centers. So the more sharing, the more benefits.

Anna Lewis: I know that we have a flu clinic coming up, and we were going to have it onsite, but it would have been closed. And so, I partnered with our senior center next door, so it can be open, more people can come, so it'll be of benefit to our residents to get them out of their homes, because a lot of them are secluded, you know, next door to see what's in the senior center, and to get their health shots, because they all like to get their flu shots. And it helps the senior center, because they get their numbers, and the person, Maxim Healthcare, is sponsoring it, you know, it's just a – it's just a win-win situation, so I didn't know if that was considered a success story, because it wasn't necessarily held here at the plaza.

Linda Daley: It's a success – it's a successful partnership, and that serves a valuable purpose, so it's a success.

Anna Lewis: Oh, OK. All right, well, good.

Michele Higgs: Sounds like you guys have made a complete connection there, and folks should understand what success stories sound like and look like, they can be down the street, or they can be on the property. Linda, I'm going to – I'm going to stop here with you, because you're very popular, and I will ask everyone if you have additional questions for Linda, please hold onto them, and we will let our other two speakers speak, and if you want to ask Linda another question, we can catch up with you at the end of that session. Hang on just a moment. Thom, are you there?

Thom Mahoney: I'm here.

Michele Higgs: OK. Would you like to get started?

Thom Mahoney: Sure.

Michele Higgs: Thank you.

Thom Mahoney: Talking about successes causes a little bit of a dilemma with me, because my late Irish mother taught me not to brag. Like most things my mother taught me, I didn't listen, and when you work in the nonprofit world, you have to learn how to brag about everything. And, as Linda said, simply that you're an operation and that you open the doors is worth bragging about.

At The Grove Neighborhood Networks here, we have three definitions of what we call successes, or success stories. First, we feel that successes really aren't things that we make, as much as

they're the results of what we call "managed serendipity." And that's very simply that wherever we go, whatever we do, we talk up everything, we talk up what we need, we talk up what's working, we talk up what's broken, what we want to do. I carry in my Palm Pilot a wish list so that if anybody ever is dumb enough to stand still long enough, I can pull it out and tell them something that they can do to help us.

Let me give you an example. We had been open for a couple of years, and our GED software was outdated, and we wanted a better – a better brand. So, we began talking it up, and wherever I went, we talked about this software called PLATO, and we talked it up in every place I went, in the presentations I talked about how we wanted this player, and it moved its way up to the top of my Palm Pilot list.

I called around, I called the company, I begged the company, please give us a discount, they didn't give us a discount. We tried to get some of their grants, we didn't qualify because we were too big, too small, too new, too old, whatever. We went to all of our usual funding sources, and we were coming up dry. I happened to be at the local computer club meeting one month, and I was doing a presentation. I mentioned the fact that we wanted this computer software, and everybody ((inaudible)) thank you very much, I did my presentation, and I was done.

My boss, our property manager, was a member of the computer club, he was not there that month, but he ran into somebody that was at that meeting, and said, Thom's looking for that PLATO software. My boss didn't realize, because, my fault, I had never communicated it to him. So, he mentioned it when he got home, mentioned it to his wife, his wife taught – teaches at the local community college. She said, well you know, we use that software. So, she went to the – to someone in their learning lab at the community college, and said what would it take to get those PLATO licenses? Within two weeks, we got the PLATO licenses at one-third the price that we wanted, and then, of course, I bragged it up. So, then at the next meeting I went and talked about how we got the software.

So, that brings me to my second rule of success. It – at The Grove Neighborhood Networks, we consider everything a success. We have all the usual successes, we get a few grants, we have a couple of GEDs, sometimes we get some recognition from our community, we have – we have accomplishments at our programs, sometimes we get articles in the newspaper about us, so we get new partnerships. But, we consider everything a success.

So, let me give you an example. Let's say Raul gets his GED from us, there's this – as I described with the PLATO software, everything works in a small little circle that we call “managed serendipity.” So Raul gets his GED, we have had a few GEDs, we have graduation parties, Raul is happy, we're very happy for him. But, you know, when it really comes down to it, it's just a GED. So, Raul goes back to his employer, he says he got his GED, the employer thinks that we're just great, and – because we helped Raul get his GED. So, the employer happens to have some old hardware, or some old software, or better yet, some cash, and so they contact us and say, well you helped Raul, let us give you this. Well, we think this is wonderful.

Our board hears this, and our board says, boy, you guys are really doing a great job. They look in our computer lab, and see that we've got all these really old computers, and they say you've done such a great job, because we heard it from Raul's employer, we're going to buy you new computers. And this a true story, by the way. So. then the new computers come in, and we're very excited, and we realize that we can upgrade to a better GED program that we consider better than PLATO.

So, we begin talking up how we want this new software, and it's called WIN, Windows Interactive Network, I believe it stands for. So, we begin talking it up more and more, we go to a training session, and we're in the talking mode, and so it's on the top of our Palm Pilot list. And, we mention it to his man at the training session, and he says, well you know, I have dealings with them, before we know it, the company is giving us a grant to use their software for a year on our

brand new computers in the hopes that we will then use the software and be able to come up with a way to pay for it next year. So, we get to use this software – top-of-the-line software for a whole year.

Now that it works better on these new computers, our board's incredibly happy, and then as they begin to tell people, we have more clients who come in because they hear of this new software. And as more clients come in, we get more GEDs, and recently we had a GED graduate who used this software and went back to his employer and said, I got my GED, and I used this software at this place. And the employer contacted me, said hey, it's really great of you to help this person get their GED, what can we do to help you?

The third thing we do when dealing with what we call successes, our third rule, is that we do everything as small as we can because it's easier to hide our failures, and we've got a lot of them. I've been here for 10 years, and I'm not stupid enough to actually tell you my failures, because we hide them so well. So, instead I'll tell you about a mythical, imaginary computer lab in Colorado. And, this center coordinator was at a computer club meeting, much like the one that I went to. And, I was bragging about how we could do all these things for the computer lab.

They wanted to have a Visual Basic training session, this is before we got our new computers. And I – and so, this center director started bragging about how we could do it on these decrepit old computers, because he knew that if he could make the computers look happy, it would in the end help. Of course, he couldn't get the Visual Basic to work on the decrepit computers, he had a computer club set up to have Visual Basic training in the computer lab, couldn't get it to work. So, the computer lab coordinator spent the weekend tinkering with the software, making it networkable, which Visual Basic is not, so that then he could – he wouldn't let down the computer club, and he wouldn't have mud in his face.

Computer club people come in, several of the more astute ones immediately recognized the network, say, well why did you network it, we had enough licenses for everybody? And the computer club coordinator, you know, would never admit that he failed, he said that it was because he was enhancing the security of the programs so that the applications that they were building would be more secure on a server environment. The computer club people were very impressed, and they donated the Visual Basic to the computer lab so that then the Visual Basic had legal licenses for – you know, the computer lab had legal licenses for Visual Basic that then they could offer it to students who get their GEDs and want to come back and get some advanced learning.

So then, the computer lab coordinator mentioned it to the property manager. The property manager was excited about it, and mentioned it to the board, and the board said, well maybe we'll help you with that new GED software. It all kind of works in circles. There's a kid's book called, "If You Give a Moose a Muffin," and what happens in the book is a little boy goes and he gives the moose a muffin. And the muffin says – then the moose says, well I want some jam, and so the little boy goes and gets him some jam, and he – and the moose eats the muffin, and the muffin – the moose says these are really great, I want some more muffins. But, they have to go to the store to get some more muffins.

So, the little boy says he's going to the store, the moose says I want to go to the store with you, but I don't have a sweater. So, the little boy has to get the boy a sweater – has – the little boy has to get the moose a sweater. The little boy gets the moose a sweater, there's a button missing. The moose says, I need to replace this button. The little boy has to get him needle and thread. You get the idea. And, it goes around and around and around. And that's the way the success stories work. What is a success here, or what might be a failure, which we'd never admit to, over here we push over here, we talk up over here, we sell over there, and bit by bit our grassroots approach of not bragging creates an additional success so that they begin to happen in their own "managed serendipity" way.

Another thing my mother taught me, which goes back to what Mandy Carlson from Grand Forks said, my mother always said if life gives you lemonade – if life gives you lemons, make lemonade. I didn't listen to that either. And, I believe if life gives you lemons, or if your computer center has lemons, market them.

Michele Higgs: I love it. That sounds like a great plan, Thom.

Thom Mahoney: Well, it keeps us out of trouble.

Michele Higgs: Oh no, it doesn't. Oh no, it doesn't. This is fantastic, thank you so much for your presentation as well. I think the whole idea of making lemons out of – what is it, lemonade out of lemons, marketing them is much easier.

Thom Mahoney: It works with decrepit computers.

Michele Higgs: And you did a job with them, you did a job with them. Thank you so much. I'm going to ask Anita to speak, and then we're going to open up the lines to questions, is that going to be all right with you guys?

Thom Mahoney: Wonderful.

Michele Higgs: All right – Anita?

Anita H. Plotinsky: OK, thank you very much, Michele and good afternoon everyone. You know, when we think about storytelling, particularly in fundraising, what comes first to mind are those stories and the appeal letters that we've all received. There's a hungry barefoot child, maybe an orphan in a far away country, or maybe even in the United States, and we read in those letters that

because of help from people like us, that child will be able to go to school, or get an education, and have a future. That's one kind of story.

I'd like to talk about another kind of story today, and that is telling the story of our own organizations and centers. Here at the Foundation Center, we spend a lot of time teaching people how to write good proposals. And good proposals are important. But, we need to remember that foundations and corporations don't just fund proposals, they fund organizations. When people write proposals, they tend to focus on what they want to do, or why they want to do it, or how they're planning to do it. And all of that's important, a funder needs to know those things.

But in addition, the funder needs to know the story behind your center. There's a lot of competition for grant dollars these days, as you certainly know, and the foundation program officer needs to know why they should support your plan to feed hungry kids, or help victims of domestic abuse, or teach painting to lonely elders, rather than helping another center, or another organization to meet those needs. In other words, why does your center deserve support?

If your center is pretty well known, or pretty large, you may not have to spend a whole lot of time on this. But if you are new, or just new to the foundation, it will be worth your time, I think, to devote a couple of pages in your proposal to telling your story. The story of your center, of course, begins with your mission. Your mission statement answers the question "why do you exist?" And it should answer another question as well, which is "why should anyone give you money?"

Your story needs to include your center's history, your goals, and a summary of your key activities. It should also include your track record in delivering programs and services. So write about your successes, and here's where you can tell that other kind of story, the story about the 50 kids who, through your good work, have been able to go to college, or whatever. You should

also talk about your track record in receiving grants. Do mention any major grants you have received, including the names of the foundations who provided them, the purposes of the grants, and a summary of the outcomes?

And when you do that, that lets the funder know that you've successfully managed grants in the past, and that other foundations have had the confidence to invest in your work. Now, I said earlier that foundations don't just fund proposals, they fund organizations, and that's true. But in addition, they fund people. In a public forum in Washington, D.C., a couple of years ago, a foundation president said, and I'm going to quote, "We invest in executive directors." We invest in executive directors. So, that means that the chief executive of your organization needs to be a person in whom foundations can confidently invest a respected leader with significant knowledge and experience, with a reputation as a responsive partner and the ability to cultivate the kind of trust that grows over time.

And that means that you need to tell your staff story as well. Now you don't need to devote a whole lot of space to this, just provide enough information to demonstrate that your director has the knowledge and experience that it takes to carry out your program successfully, and that he or she has a demonstrated record of delivering results. You can save the details for an appendix where you can provide a one- or two-paragraph biographical summary of your chief executive and key staff members. And your story also needs to include your board of directors if you have one. A foundation officer will want to know who's on your board, and will be looking for some assurance that your board members are people who are known and respected in the community, and who are going to provide appropriate governance and oversight.

So, another appendix can include a list of your board members together with their professional affiliations. So, to sum up here, the story of your organization, or center, is going to include your mission, your history, your programs and services, and your people including your staff and board leaders. And how you tell the story is also going to make a difference, so be sure to use

language that conveys your pride in your center, and it – and its successes and accomplishments, and also your own passion for the cause, and your conviction that's supporting it, supporting your cause and your center is going to make a real difference in the life of the community and the people you serve.

Michele Higgs: Anita, thank you so much, that was very, very helpful. I hope folks are taking notes out there. What you've done is basically told us how these success stories can inform one of these proposals, particularly when you're talking about what the key activities have been, you know, at those centers.

Amy, what I'd like to do now is open up the lines, and see if there's anyone there with questions.

Operator: Yes, ma'am. Once again, if you do have a question, it is star, one on your telephone keypad. If you are using a speakerphone, please release your mute function in order for your signal to reach our equipment.

And we'll hear first from Prince Obiri-Mainoo.

Prince Obiri-Mainoo: Yes, I want to thank the last speaker, Anita, for her presentation. Like it was – I'm not sure who actually who spoke first, but I thought that I didn't have a success story to actually put on paper. But, from what has already been shared, and especially from Anita, what I've put down here seems to be more than even—I if I'm going to really put flesh into it, it's going to be more than the pages than I never expected I could write about my center. So, I just wanted Anita, and also the other two speakers, Thom and Linda, to know that today's presentation has really been very helpful to me in particular. Thank you very much.

Michele Higgs: Great, thank you so much for calling in.

Prince Obiri-Mainoo: Yes, thank you.

Michele Higgs: All right. Amy, is there anyone else on the line?

Operator: Not at this time. However, to give everyone another opportunity, it is star, one.

And it appears there are no further questions.

Michele Higgs: OK. I did have just one comment, I wanted to thank you, Thom, for your presentation, because I think what you were putting out there was the – how it actually works at the center. As you were talking, I don't know if there's anyone old enough to remember, but there used to be a commercial from, I think it was a hair care company, and all I recall is that there were multiple faces, and it goes "and so on, and so on, and so on." And I know I'm old enough remember, but what it – what you were talking about is how things spread, and how things just kind of go out basically in concentric circles, like throwing a rock in a pond. You know, things just spread as you, you know, as they become aware of your situation, and become interested in your situation, the larger community can contribute to what's going on at your center. Was I correct in understanding that?

Thom Mahoney: Yes, you were. And to add to that, I – I'm – was impressed with what Anita said, I said at the beginning of what I was talking about that my mother had told – taught me not to brag. And I've gotten more comfortable at it, but I had never thought about, quote bragging, unquote in grant applications, many of the things she mentions I do, but I have not provided lists of other grants, or other – or other things that we get, I mention awards in passing, but it never dawned on me that I would be showing my ability to handle a grant to a grantor by providing information about grants and the outcomes, and just never once thought about it. And that – what a wonderful piece of information, I scribbled that down.

Michele Higgs: Great. So we're all taking notes. I want to chime in on that, that was particularly helpful, Anita. And, just in terms of presenting a very concise way of looking at the whole grantwriting, or you know, grantmaking process, and as Thom says, you know, your comments really open – it opened my eyes too to some of the things that I hadn't thought about, particularly the importance of the executive director, you know, being not just the executive director, but somebody who can handle the responsibility of managing a grant, and being trustworthy, and true, and all that kind of thing. So, thanks very much for that.

Anita H. Plotinsky: You're welcome and if I may be allowed a little commercial. I'd like to let you know that there is a lot of free help on the Foundation Center's Web site, which is www.foundationcenter.org, it includes, for example, free tutorials in proposal writing in five different languages.

Michele Higgs: Wow.

Anita H. Plotinsky: And resource lists, and you know, all kinds of help. So, if you spend a little time on the Web site, I think you will find answers to all kinds of questions in the Frequently Asked Questions section, we offer sample proposals, sample documents of all kinds, so I would encourage you to explore it.

Michele Higgs: OK, thanks so much. No problem with the commercial, we love commercials.

Thom Mahoney: Michele, I'm already on the Foundation Center Web site.

Michele Higgs: You're so fast!

Thom Mahoney: I don't waste a lot of time.

Michele Higgs: I tell you're going for it, you're going for it.

Thom Mahoney: But, what Linda was saying is also true, is that what I might define as a – what I might just do, somebody else might define as a success. And, all the millions of little things that we do are successes, I don't want to be, you know, too touchy-feely, but the work that we do is what very few other people do, I mean, we basically have free computer labs. And, we have lots and lots of opportunities to affect people's lives, and while we may get jaded, or whatever we do about that, to other people, and that's very important that whether it's somebody getting their GED or somebody getting a better job, or even someone as – something simple which we see so often where someone comes in and gets on e-mail and they can talk to their son in Iraq, which is something that they hadn't been able to do, because there's not a lot of phone calls back and forth. And all those – all of those things that we do every day really are successes to many people, but we're used to it, so we don't think of it that way.

Michele Higgs: Well said, definitely well said. Thank you. Amy, I'm going to check with you again. Do we have anyone on the line?

Operator: And once again, if you do have a question, it is star, one. We'll hear from Mary Frances Byrd.

Mary Frances Byrd: Hi.

Michele Higgs: Hey, Mary.

Mary Frances Byrd: How you doing?

Michele Higgs: Good.

Mary Frances Byrd: I just think the staff at centers and others involved, they continually need encouragement, and these conference calls really do help.

Michele Higgs: Great.

Mary Frances Byrd: So, I just wanted to mention that.

Michele Higgs: Oh, well thank you so much, Mary Frances, glad we could help.

Mary Frances Byrd: OK, all righty.

Operator: And, now we'll hear from Joyce Mortimer.

Michele Higgs: Hi, Joyce.

Operator: Ms. Mortimer, your line is open.

Joyce Mortimer: Hello?

Michele Higgs: Yes, you're there.

Joyce Mortimer: . . . question. What is a methodical way, we're hearing so much good information, we were wondering about techniques for time-challenged center staff. What's a methodical way to gather information – to gather your success stories, how Linda, for example, or Thom, how do you organize snippets so that you can pull them out of the drawer if an opportunity presents itself, how do you organize these over a six-month period, for example, what techniques do you use?

Michele Higgs: Great question. I'll take that one.

Linda Daley: I'm – Joyce, what was that you said, how do you organize, did you say in “snippets,” or . . .

Michele Higgs: Yes, I think what she's trying to say is, for these folks at centers who are – where they're so busy they don't have – you know, do they jot these – in – these ideas . . .

Linda Daley: OK.

Michele Higgs: . . . down in a book, or . . .

Linda Daley: OK.

Michele Higgs: . . . what would you suggest?

Linda Daley: Yes, you know, jot them down in a book, and send off an e-mail real quickly. The key that I want to emphasize is you don't have to be organized, you don't have to be writer, don't think you have to provide the whole story all nicely packaged for us, we'll do that for you, we will – we'll interview you, we'll talk to you, we'll take whatever information you have, and we'll get to the bottom of the story. Don't feel like “gee, I don't even know what my success is, I don't know how I would package, I don't know how I would present it,” don't worry about it, that's what we do for a living. Just any tidbit of information you have, if you just said, “oh gee, someone got a GED,” well, I can work with that. We'll work with it, we'll get this story – we'll do the work for you, just don't be shy about, like Thom says, bragging, tooting your own horn, we will help you put together the story, we'll get it out there, don't think you have to give us a nicely, perfectly polished Pulitzer prize winning story.

Michele Higgs: Thanks – is that – Joyce, are you there?

Joyce Mortimer: Yes.

Michele Higgs: Oh, OK. Did that help?

Joyce Mortimer: Yes, it did – yes it did, thank you.

Thom Mahoney: Can I add my two cents?

Michele Higgs: Go ahead.

Thom Mahoney: OK.

Michele Higgs: I know you got more than two cents, Thom.

Thom Mahoney: I am not terribly organized, and I am time strapped, and I am literally standing in the closet, which is my office. So any kind of scribbling things down on a sheet of paper, it quickly gets lost with the yogurt containers and everything else. But, what I do have on my wall is a little – it's one of those mail basket kind of thingies, you know, that, you know, you put papers in, and mail comes in. And I don't put mail in it, but instead I put pieces of junk, or the snippets, as you call them, and I throw them up there, so that when something interesting happens, or when somebody tells me something, or I receive something, it gets tossed up there, because sooner or later somebody's going to call, like Linda, and say, do you have a success story? And so I can just kind of casually walk over, pull something out, and go, here we go.

But, then at a more formal level, I have something also in that one of the bins there holds our brochures to the lab, our brochures to the summer program, which is hoping to grow into our afterschool program, which is what we're trying to get money for right now. And, in addition, I

have something called – it's called "facts about", and I think the last time I checked I have made over the last 10 years about 200 different versions of it, because every time something happens, I update it, and throw – and throw the newest one in the basket, and the old one becomes recycled paper.

On the facts about The Grove Neighborhood Network, my computer lab, I have the total number of clients, I have them by 16 years and older and 15 years and younger. The total number of visits, the total number of GEDs, the total number of current GED clients we have, a list of the staff. I have our computer hardware, our major software programs, the most accessed software, our Internet connection, e-mail address and Web page. And, then at the bottom I have a list of our volunteers, how many volunteers we've had, how many hours they've worked, and hourly rate here in Colorado is \$5.15 an hour. So, I take the total number of hours, multiply it times \$5.15, and it shows that we've had \$159,305 donated in volunteer time. Anybody that walks in here and they need some information, and they don't want to listen to me, I can pull this out and hand it to them, and it – and I keep it updated, it gets updated about every two weeks, because about every two weeks I'm passing it out and need to correct it.

So that's always there for me, and everybody around here, if I'm not here, knows they can grab it, and give it to somebody. We have a visitor, we have a – someone wanders in, the mayor happens to drop in, we've got stuff for him, we always look for Parrod, as long as he doesn't look in my closet office.

Michele Higgs: Thanks, Thom. I hope that was very helpful for everybody, it sounded good to me, particularly the idea of just having a basket to toss things in when time doesn't permit you to sit down and write something out.

Linda Daley: Wait, can I just add to that, Michele?

Michele Higgs: Sure.

Linda Daley: And that's a fantastic idea, Thom. And I love it, and I wish other centers would do it. And – but the key step here is—don't wait for someone to call you for your success story, be proactive and pick up the phone and tell us, because we can't get to everyone, and we want to hear from you, we don't want to miss anyone, we don't want to exclude anyone, so don't be shy, pick up the phone, drop an e-mail, get us your information.

Michele Higgs: Thanks so much, Linda, we need to hear that, we need to hear that. And, we're coming close to the end of our call. Amy, I'm going to check with you one more time to see if we have anyone on the line.

Operator: We have one last question from Tina . . .

Michele Higgs: OK, we can make that a brief one, and that's from whom?

Operator: Tina Lysogorski.

Michele Higgs: OK, hi, Tina.

Tina Lysogorski: Hi. I just wanted to get a phone number, or some way I can get ahold of Linda.

Michele Higgs: Oh, that's – go ahead, Linda, if you would.

Linda Daley: You can – I – you know, let me try – let me find my e-mail address, I'm really bad about my work e-mail address.

Michele Higgs: OK.

Linda Daley: Michele, you don't happen to have it right there, do you?

Michele Higgs: Well, I tell you what, we can get that information to her . . .

Linda Daley: OK.

Michele Higgs: . . . don't have anything right away. You are also – you can also be contacted through the Web site, can you not? Or, through the Neighborhood Networks?

Linda Daley: Well, that's the general drop box, but let me give you my e-mail address, it's Linda period S as in Samantha period Daley, D-A-L-E-Y, at LMCO.com.

Tina Lysogorski: OK.

Linda Daley: And, whenever you want to – and anyone, drop me an e-mail, let me know, I will call you and get your story.

Tina Lysogorski: OK, thank you.

Linda Daley: Sure.

Michele Higgs: OK. I think we're going to draw this to a close right about now, we have put a lot of good information out there, and I think folks have gotten some good information from their questions. I want to thank you, Linda, Thom, Anita, this has been a fantastic call, thanks so much for sharing your experience with us. And thanks to Marissa. and to Brian for putting this call together, this is no mean feat.

I want to remind you of the resources that are available to you through the Neighborhood Networks Initiative, aside from the Neighborhood Networks information line, which is (888) 312-2743, you may find numerous resources and information on the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org. On that Web site, you'll be able to view success stories, and see how motivating and inspirational they are. And, after this call, you know that your center can have a success story too.

I thank you so much for joining us for this conversation today. And, as we are at the end of another fiscal year, I thank you for being a part of this process and participating in these conference calls all throughout the year. We appreciate your time, your attention, and your contribution. We'll be back in October with a whole new series of calls for you, so watch your e-mail boxes for notice of the upcoming call.

I thank you again for joining us. Now remember, don't be shy, raise the roof, raise your flag, toot the horn, share your success story with us. Take good care, and we'll talk to you next time.

Thom Mahoney: Thank you.

Michele Higgs: Bye-bye.

Female: Thank you.

Operator: That does conclude today's conference. We do thank you for your participation.

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