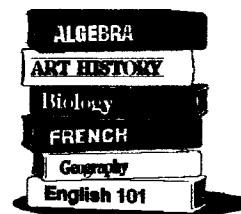


# A Literacy Initiative for the Camden Housing Authority Urban Revitalization Demonstration Plan



by  
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    - TUTOR Literacy Instruction Handbook
    - Basic Literacy Handout Packet
    - R.E.A.D. (Reading Evaluation-Adult Diagnosis)  
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  3. Tutor Training
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## **A. DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEM**

### **THE NEED**

Camden, New Jersey is strategically located on a large bend of the Delaware River just opposite the city of Philadelphia. It is the largest municipality in the county and in 1950, the city's population was 124,555. By 1990, the city's population was 87,492. Although Camden has decreased in population, tax base, and economic opportunity, it has a rich history. The home of the "Good Gray Poet" Walt Whitman, Camden had many thriving industries such as the Esterbrook Steel Pen Factory, the New York Shipbuilding Company and the RCA Victor Company. Camden had an airport, built the first drive-in theater in the US, and people nationwide recognized the Campbell Kids and hummed the tune "That's what Campbell's Soup is mmm, mmm, good!"

Camden's decline became more obvious in the 1960s when the suburban Cherry Hill Mall was built which took many of the stores and businesses out of the city. Lack of places to shop downtown created deserted and unsafe streets. Panic selling of homes was the beginning of the "flight" to the suburbs.

The Brookings Institute declared the city of Camden one of the ten most distressed urban centers in the US: 54.5% of the households are female-headed, only 50% of those over age 25 hold high school diplomas and according to the 1995 NJ Department of Labor Analysis report the city suffered from a 18.6% unemployment rate compared to the US rate of 7.3. Two-thirds of the population survives on income below the federal poverty line. The 1990 per capita income figure show \$7,276 in Camden as compared with \$14,420 in the US. The city's ethnic breakdown is 56% Black, 31% Hispanic, and 19% Caucasian and of Asian decent.

The United Way of Camden County states that of the 700,000 functionally illiterate adults living in NJ, 26,000 have been identified as Camden County residents. This includes the city of Camden with approximately 17,000 adults who are unable to read and write well enough to function in today's society. The exact number of illiterates can only be estimated because those with the hidden handicap do not step forward to be counted. They do not display this type of handicap on their auto tags. All ethnic groups are represented in the illiterate community.

The needs and problems of the illiterate community are overwhelming. Even if adults that have difficulty with basic reading and writing skills are fortunate enough to own or have access to a computer, they are still unable to surf the internet or take advantage of an Online job search. They are unable to fill out job applications if and when there is a job opening. People with low reading skills are under served in Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs because ABE does not provide instruction for those who do not read well enough to function in a classroom setting. Total nonreaders (zero reading level), and beginning readers (first to third grade reading level) need one to one instruction.

The reasons or root causes of adult illiteracy differ from person to person. Some did not profit from their school experience, some did not attend school regularly, and some have learning disabilities. Whatever the cause of the problem, most illiterate adults will benefit from one to one instruction.

### **BACKGROUND**

My year long CED Project is the introduction of a Literacy Initiative for the Camden Housing Authority's (CHA), Urban Revitalization Demonstration Plan (URD) for the McGuire Gardens Public Housing Development. Five years ago, the McGuire Gardens Public Housing Development was chosen as a revitalization/demonstration project to receive a \$42 million HUD grant. The goal of my CED project is to reduce the rate of adult illiteracy in McGuire Gardens by recruiting and training residents with strong reading skills to teach other residents how to read and write better. I was recommended, by a 1996 New Hampshire College CED program graduate, to enter into a literacy venture with the URD. The URD Family Services Division Director and the Community Organization Specialist expressed their commitment to support the literacy initiative introduced in the CED Project Contract.

At the start of the CED Project Contract year, the CHA was in the fifth year of their five year URD plan. In the Camden Housing Authority URD Executive Summary, it describes the plan as:

“Camden’s Urban Revitalization Demonstration Plan for McGuire Gardens represents a unique opportunity to demonstrate the livability of older inner cities, as well as the viability of public housing developments. Through a new ‘people-oriented’ approach and the active support and involvement of

all levels of government--federal, state, county and local--as well as the private-sector and community organizations, Camden's Revitalization Plan seeks to demonstrate that severely distressed public housing can be successfully restored as a viable and enjoyable place to live.

CHA chose McGuire Gardens for the site of its Revitalization Plan, a severely distressed public housing development with 367 units. Unemployment rates are a staggering 93% and the vast majority of households are very low income (69%). Single females constitute over 90% of all heads-of-households, and about three-quarters of households in McGuire Gardens are dependent upon A.F.D.C., S.S.I., or A.F.D.C. plus S.S.I. as their sole source of income. Only 19 of McGuire Gardens' 266 families are employed. The overall high school dropout rate for the city of Camden is 25.1% and fluctuates to a high of 56.4% and the average age of a resident at the time of childbirth is 16 years. McGuire Gardens is the most racially diverse public housing development in Camden, consisting of 50% Afro-American, 44% Hispanic, and 6% Caucasian.

The CHA Revitalization Plan is an integral part of a larger, extensive revitalization strategy proposed for the city of Camden by the Governor of the State of New Jersey, called 'Camden Initiatives.' The components of the Initiative includes public safety, industrial development, small business development, health, housing, education, and youth.

The URD established a new private, nonprofit resident-controlled corporation, 'Success Against All Odds (SAAO),' to manage and implement all aspects of the URD program. The Corporation is governed by a 19-member Board of Directors, of which 51% are McGuire Garden residents.

The URD will provide residents with a comprehensive range of on-site services which will be housed in a new multi purpose service center to be constructed on eight acres of vacant land adjacent to McGuire Gardens. Services and facilities to be provided include education, a library, family case management, health care, food cooperative, a laundry, day care and communications, job training and entrepreneurial development."

The URD's education component did not address the need for functional literacy programming. "For the adult population, the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic must be taught before additional training can be pursued. The need will be addressed by the development of an educational outreach program through radio and television. This program will be developed and designed by the youth of McGuire Gardens and the CHA as part of the community services component, the Success Communication Network." In addition, adult residents who do not have a basic high school education will be directed to

GED or high school equivalency programs offered throughout the Camden community. Transportation van pool services will be provided.

The McGuire Gardens Literacy Initiative introduced in the CED contract will address the needs of illiterate adults who are not at a level advanced enough to take advantage of the proposed radio and television literacy programming or the city wide adult continuing education programs.

### **LITERACY VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA/CAMDEN COUNTY (LVA/CC)**

Sponsored by the Camden County and the Camden Free Public Libraries, LVA/CC has run a successful literacy program since its inception in June, 1982. The goal of LVA/CC is to sponsor free, confidential tutoring services to functionally illiterate adult students within Camden County targeting the undereducated population of Camden City. All basic literacy instruction is performed by well-trained volunteers who tutor on a one to one basis or in a collaborative small group setting. In 1996, 272 tutors volunteered over 8,348 hours teaching the basic skills of reading, writing and conversational English to 461 adult students.

Library Services and Construction Act Title VI funds for literacy programs based in public libraries were stricken from the federal budget in September, 1996. Thus, LVA/CC lost all of its federal funding which was 80% of the total budget. For over one year, the LVA/CC Board of Directors tried unsuccessfully to raise funds to keep the program afloat. The LVA/CC-Camden City office site, the only literacy program available to Camden City residents, was forced to close its doors.

### **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

IF NO SOLUTION IS FOUND by December 31, 1996, 17,000 adult residents in Camden will be without available literacy services. The problem of adults not being able to read and write well enough to function in today's society will not magically disappear.
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**ASSUMPTIONS MADE**  
**When the Literacy Project Was Designed**

**LVA/CC**

When LVA/CC was forced to close its doors, adult Level One students (zero to fifth grade reading level) would have no place to receive literacy instruction.

One out of five (17,000) Camden City adults are illiterate.

For over a decade, LVA/CC-Camden had worked collaboratively with the Camden Adult Basic Education Program (ABE) referring all students whose evaluations documented they were too advanced for LVA's program (above fifth grade reading level). Thus, the Camden ABE Program, referred to LVA any Level One students unable to participate in a class room setting.

LVA/CC, a successful program with a fifteen year reputation for progress and good work, has a strong positive community image.

Since 1982 over 6000 students passed through the LVA/CC program.

For five consecutive years, LVA/CC won the "LVA/New Jersey (LVA/NJ) Outstanding Student of the Year Award" and it is a two time winner of the "LVA/NJ Outstanding Affiliate of the Year Award."

**CHA**

One out of five McGuire Gardens adults are illiterate.

For over a decade, LVA/CC tutors provided literacy instruction to some McGuire Gardens residents.

The CHA administrator, who suggested the McGuire Gardens Literacy Initiative, had (when working with another agency) referred adult students to LVA/CC-Camden. Thus, she had a professional relationship with the LVA/CC-Camden Director.

One of the four CHA social workers, had been a LVA volunteer tutor and she had referred students to the LVA/CC-Camden program. Thus, she had a professional relationship with the LVA/CC-Camden Director.

The CHA Family Services Division Director, a member of the Camden Free Public Library Board of Directors, was familiar with the Library's LVA/CC-Camden program and its anticipated closing. Thus, she realized the need of literacy services for McGuire Gardens residents.

When the three CHA administrators expressed their personal commitment to support the literacy venture, it was assumed they would do just that.

The CHA administrators were aware the (now unemployed) LVA/CC-Camden City Director was ready, willing, and able, as a CED student/practitioner, to provide the same high quality of literacy services.

Full cooperation and support were expected from the CHA staff.

## **B. PROJECT GOALS**

### **GOAL STATEMENT**

To reduce the rate of adult illiteracy in the McGuire Gardens Public Housing Development by recruiting and training residents with strong reading skills to teach other residents, who have low or no reading skills, how to read and write better. In order for all of the residents of McGuire Gardens to have an opportunity to pursue training for employment, business development, and adult basic education programs (provided by the URD project) there is a segment of the population whose basic literacy skills must be improved.

### **MINIMUM OBJECTIVES**

By December, 1997, this project should have provided an opportunity to determine if residents in McGuire Gardens Public Housing Development were willing to devote volunteer time to help a neighbor improve their basic literacy skills. This project should also provide an opportunity to study if the stigma and embarrassment of being labeled illiterate can be overcome if free instruction is provided in a convenient location and in a supportive environment. If by the end of 1997 some residents have brought into the "capacity building" concept and are tutoring other residents, this could be the start of something big. For every one adult who cannot read, there are four adults who can. If this project is successful, it can be duplicated throughout the city.

## **C. METHODS**

### **PROJECT PRODUCT**

This Literacy Initiative will provide the necessary training, support, and technical assistance needed for local residents to begin to teach their neighbors, friends or relatives how to read and write better. The concept of "each one teach one" is so simple that it



has in most cases, been overlooked. If the concept of “neighbor teaching neighbor” catches on and works effectively, an entire segment of the population (who are marginal participants in society) will come up on the curve and at least have an opportunity to take advantage of the basic education classes and job training programs offered. If workshop leaders who live in McGuire Gardens are recruited and trained, tutor training workshops can continue to be offered in the community.

### **STEPS TO ACCOMPLISH GOAL/OBJECTIVES**

#### **EXPECTED OUTPUTS**

A planning team of up to five individuals will meet in January to discuss the depth of the problem of illiteracy and the level of need for such a project. A strategy/plan will then be drafted and a time line will be agreed upon.

Meet the McGuire Garden’s team of Social Workers to utilize the results of surveys previously conducted and determine if there is a need to conduct an additional survey.

Expand the planning team to include resident community leaders and high school youth.

Identify similar projects of residents assisting other community residents elsewhere in the city, and examine the level of success or failure.

Invite McGuire Gardens residents to a Literacy Awareness Program presented by experienced LVA tutors and their students who have had success. Recruit prospective tutors.

Conduct tutor orientation for prospective tutors to define literacy, introduce teaching techniques, review expectations of the Basic Literacy (BL) Tutor Training Workshop participants and set training dates.

Recruit LVA certified BL Tutor Trainer/Workshop Leader to conduct training.

Conduct a 21-hour BL Tutor Training Workshop and match trainees with students.

Plan and conduct monthly tutor support group meetings.

Plan and conduct monthly student support group meetings.

Investigate the establishment of a high interest low reading level library materials collection for tutor and student use.

After tutoring for the required number of hours, recruit a prospective workshop leader to complete LVA certified Workshop Leader Training.

### **EXPECTED INPUTS**

Support and active participation of CHA administrative staff and social workers.

Data collection/information gathering on prospective tutors and prospective students.

Participation and involvement of McGuire Gardens community leaders and high school youth.

Support of McGuire Gardens Board of Directors.

Participation of LVA volunteer tutors and students.

Volunteer services of a LVA certified workshop leader/trainer.

Capital for a brochure and other promotional materials, refreshment supplies for trainings and tutor and student support group meetings. If more than one tutor training workshop is conducted, capital will be needed for additional training supplies.

Capital to establish a high interest low reading level library materials collection for tutor and student use.

### **D. RESULTS**

#### **EXPECTED OUTPUTS**

**A planning team of up to five individuals will meet in January to discuss the depth of the problem of illiteracy and the level of need for such a project. A strategy/plan will then be drafted and a time line will be agreed upon.**

*Steps taken:*

*Prior to January:*

*The first meeting, to discuss a literacy venture with the CHA, was held with Karen McEachern, CHA Administrator; and Maria Marquez, Director, Family Services Division. The McGuire Gardens URD Program was the public housing development suggested for my CED Literacy Initiative. I then met individually with Maria Marquez and Rosie Feliciano-Brown, Community Organization Specialist. All three administrators were very supportive of a McGuire Garden Literacy Initiative.*

*On January 14, 1997, a second meeting was held with Rosie Feliciano-Brown and the CED Project Contract/Implementation Plan was re-presented and reviewed in its entirety.*

*At a February 10th URD staff meeting, an overview was presented of the illiteracy problem in the City of Camden. Those attending were Maria Marquez, Rosie F. Brown, three social workers, and fifteen outreach workers. (To be a successful capacity building project, the Literacy Initiative was to be discussed with and approved by McGuire Gardens residents.) The level of interest was extremely encouraging and the highlight of the meeting was to discover that, of the fifteen outreach workers, six were residents of McGuire Gardens. The residents gave their stamp of approval and five staff members expressed an interest in becoming tutors.*

**Meet the McGuire Garden's team of Social Workers to utilize the results of surveys previously conducted and determine if there is a need to conduct an additional survey.**

*Steps taken:*

*It was decided it was not necessary to conduct an additional survey to identify those in need of a literacy program. I was assured this information had been documented on previous surveys.*

**Expand the planning team to include resident community leaders and high school youth.**

*Steps taken:*

*On February 24th, four people attended the planning meeting. They were R. F. Brown, Myrna Lewis, Outreach Worker/resident (OW); Tamisha Mays, Outreach Worker/resident; and Mary Farmer, CED Program. Past attendance and participation in various programs presently offered for McGuire Gardens residents were discussed. Prospective students and prospective tutors were suggested to participate in the literacy program. Ideas were shared to recruit high school youth to join the planning team and to become tutors. Several younger siblings and neighbors were to be contacted by the resident outreach workers. All agreed we must devise a recruitment plan to get residents to buy into the concept of being trained as volunteer tutors. A more important concern was the problem of prospective students who may be too embarrassed to be tutored in the neighborhood.*

*To increase resident involvement in the literacy project, I made several request to schedule additional planning meetings. A planning meeting was finally scheduled. Betsy Cruz, social worker; Myrna Lewis, OW; and two residents were to attend the meeting. On the same day of the meeting, the social worker canceled it.*

*To promote the literacy project and the tutor training Anita Perry, Woodrow Wilson High School Senior Class President, was contacted. She agreed to distribute fliers to all the high school students. A special invitation was extended to the National Honor Society students who may be seeking community service projects. Request were made for the names of youth who may be interested in joining the Literacy planning team. Ms. Perry reported although some were interested, they were unable to participate because of part time jobs and other commitments.*

**Identify similar projects of residents assisting other community residents elsewhere in the city and examine the level of success or failure.**

*Steps taken:*

*Rose Clark-CHA Senior Citizens Program Director explained, "In the past, college students had conducted a literacy project to assist school age children at the Westfield Acres Site. An English as a Second Language project was also conducted for seniors at the Kennedy Towers Senior Citizen Complex. Both projects were considered successful; however, neither was functioning at present." I interviewed Alba, the McGuire Gardens secretary, and she candidly informed me, "Of all the programs offered by CHA, participation is extremely poor. The AMER-I-CAN program, which was self-improvement and life skills training workshops, was a good program. Unfortunately, attendance was very low." There were no reported projects of residents assisting other residents.*

**Invite residents to a Literacy Awareness Program presented by experienced LVA tutors and their students who have had success. Recruit prospective tutors.**

*Steps taken:*

*On March 24th, a Literacy Awareness Program was presented at the beginning of a McGuire Gardens Resident Meeting held at Kennedy Towers Community Center. Experienced LVA tutors Julia Jones, and Connie Sheppard and their two students shared touching personal stories of what participation in the literacy program has meant to them. The twenty residents present applauded the two students for the courage to speak out in public about their literacy problems. Six additional people signed up to become tutors.*

**Conduct tutor orientation for prospective tutors to define literacy, introduce teaching techniques, review expectations of the Basic Literacy (BL) Tutor Training Workshop participants and set training dates.**

*Steps taken:*

*A prospective Tutor Training Orientation was to be held in April, on the day the new CHA/URD Success Learning Center was scheduled to open. NO ONE ATTENDED. It was later discovered, the CHA liaison had not informed the prospective tutors of the orientation. It was assumed the residents would already be present for the open house, and then attend the orientation. No one attended the open house. The residents stayed away in protest of not being invited to the pre open house which was held for political dignities, community leaders, and agency representatives.*

*The Tutor Orientation, then conducted at the first tutor training session, defined literacy, and provided an introduction to tutoring. An overview of the workshop included a tutor job description and the expectations of the tutor trainees.*

**Recruit LVA certified BL Tutor Trainer/Workshop Leader to conduct training.**

*Steps taken:*

*Three LVA certified Tutor Trainer/Workshop Leaders (WSL) were recruited to conduct the twenty-one hour training. A WSL planning meeting was held to "fine tune" the tutor*

*training specifically for the McGuire Gardens residents. The three WSLs defined their areas of responsibility and coordinated the training schedule.*

**Conduct a 21-hour BL Tutor Training Workshop and match trainees with students.**

*Steps taken:*

The BL Tutor Training Workshops for residents of McGuire were scheduled:

(Four) Saturdays-May 3, 10, 17, and 31, 1997

10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.

McGuire Gardens Community Center

Camden, New Jersey

*Due to other responsibilities, the CHA Literacy Liaison had very little time and energy to devote to the McGuire Literacy Project. Training details and the promotional brochure/flier were not approved or distributed in a timely fashion. Thus, to allow time to properly promote the training to McGuire residents, the Kennedy Towers Senior Citizens, the surrounding community, and to the media, the training had to be delayed at least one week.*

*Public Service Announcements were sent to nine television stations, eleven radio stations, two area churches, and to the Woodrow Wilson High School (WWHS) Senior Class President.*

*The WWHS Class President promoted the training to all the high school students, and a special invitation was extended to the National Honor Society students who may be seeking community service projects.*

*Follow up letters, restating responsibilities for the training, were sent to the WSLs and the CHA Literacy Liaison.*

***Tutor Training-Session I*** *The two WSLs reported, "Only two prospective tutors attended and the CHA Director of Family Services stopped in to show support. The weather did not cooperate; there was a major deluge." After waiting nearly one hour, the training was postponed. The WSLs reported, "Had more people attended, the community center would not have been large enough." (When I initially visited the community center, I realized the site was extremely small; thus, I requested the training be held at the Success Learning Center or at Kennedy Towers Community Center. I was informed those sites were not available.*

***Tutor Training Rescheduled***

*With the CHA liaison now on sick leave for six weeks, this provided the freedom to seek an alternative training sight, set new training dates, and use the additional time to expand community outreach.*

*The new training dates and location were:*

June 21, 28, July 12, and 19, 1997  
Kennedy Towers Community Center  
( Kennedy Towers is located across the street from McGuire Gardens)

*It took one month, two visits, and well over thirty telephone calls before the approval was given to conduct the training at Kennedy Towers.*

*I met with Myrna Lewis, OW, who was appointed interim Literacy Liaison. A new one page recruitment flier (in English and in Spanish) was designed by the OW and distributed door to door.*

*Suggestions were requested from the social workers and the OW on:*

*1. the best times to reschedule the training-weekdays or Saturdays, during the day or late afternoon to early evening, 2. helpful hints to encourage resident participation, and 3. a request was made again for the promised results of the surveys already conducted. These surveys would provide a list of prospective students in need of the literacy program.*

*As suggested by one social worker, the first five people to register for the tutor training were eligible for a door prize drawing.*

*To promote the literacy project and to recruit prospective tutors (after three cancellations by the OW) the two of us spent two afternoons conducting a door to door canvass. I was personally introduced to many of the residents.*

*The informal sidewalk gatherings, after the door to door canvassing, were very informative. A CHA maintenance employee, (who happened to be an old high school classmate) introduced me to the Who's Who in McGuire and gave the real deal why most residents choose not to get involved in CHA sponsored programs. "There is ongoing hostility between CHA staff and residents."*

### ***Tutor Training Results***

*Of the eight people who enrolled in the tutor training, three successfully completed it. A fourth trainee promised to make up the training sessions she missed; however, she never did. A Tutor Recognition Ceremony was held October 11, 1997 for the three tutors. Julia Jones, WSL and I presented to the new tutors LVA membership cards, pins, and calligraphically prepared certificates. Delectable refreshments were enjoyed by all. Although invited, no CHA administrators attended and the promised media was not present.*

### ***Additional steps taken to continue to recruit tutors:***

*\* The three tutor trainees agreed to attend a July 28th McGuire Gardens Resident Association Meeting to make a brief tutor recruitment presentation. They were to*

*encourage other residents to participate in an upcoming LVA/CC tutor training workshop scheduled in September at West Jersey Hospital, Camden. On the day of the Resident Association meeting I was informed, residents were picketing at McGuire Gardens. The residents had received notices that due to the continuing efforts to systematically refurbish their dwellings, they had thirty days to vacate their homes. Some had received notices; however, others had not. The Resident Association Meeting turned into a protest meeting. Tempers flared as heated discussions echoed throughout the meeting room. The residents were struggling to determine if in thirty days, they would have a place to lay their heads. Upset by the tone of the meeting, one of the tutors left early. I quickly decided this hostile environment was not the place to promote literacy or anything else. Reading and writing were the last things on anyone's mind.*

*\* CHA continues to be in chaos. As previously reported in a **Camden Courier Post** newspaper article, the new Camden Mayor suggested HUD not award CHA the URD funds. HUD had taken over CHA and is now its managing agent.*

*\* In January, 1997, 266 families resided in McGuire. In July, there were 131 families remaining. Some were permanently moved into Section 8 housing while others will return to McGuire after their homes have been refurbished. The relocation of the residents and employee job security have been the major concerns at CHA. During the summer, there had been shifts in employee responsibilities. The CHA literacy contact people were busy managing summer youth recreation programs, driving vans and the like. Thus, during August, telephone calls to set appointments to interview and evaluate prospective students went unanswered. Once again, literacy was not a priority item.*

*\* I met with the OW and submitted fliers to recruit additional prospective tutors to attend the September LVA/CC Tutor Training. Residents were to be encouraged to take advantage of the free training offered in another part of the city and then tutor in their own neighborhood.*

*\* Once again an appeal was made for the names of prospective students who were to be referred by the social workers. No names were ever submitted.*

*\* During a routine telephone call to check the status of the September tutor training promotion, I was informed by the OW that she was not permitted to distribute the fliers I had left last month, "If McGuire receives the awaited URD funding, they (McGuire) will be starting their own literacy program in 1998." She stated, "I can continue to assist you with your literacy plans in progress but I have been informed I am unable to recruit for your September tutor training." She continued, "I was informed if I recruit for "your" CED Literacy project now, they will have difficulty recruiting for "their" literacy project in January. I explained the CED project could lay a foundation for what they have planned for the future. I called immediately and made an appointment to meet with the Director of Family Services. The Director informed me, HUD had selected a literacy provider "of their own" and when funding is received they will enter into a \$56,000. contractual agreement. I explained I was not aware they were*

*seeking bids for a literacy program. She said she had no choice in the matter, they were told who the literacy provider would be. By the end of the meeting she relented and gave permission for the OW to continue to support the CED Literacy Initiative. She conceded, she would honor my CED contract until the end of the year. "A bird in hand is worth two in a bush." She said the OW could distribute the fliers for the September tutor training. With only three days left before the scheduled training, I was not very optimistic about accomplishing in such a short time what we had difficulty accomplishing in the past eight months.*

*\* Previous to the above incident, I had scheduled a meeting at the Westfield Acres CHA site to determine if the remaining six sites were interested in participating in the CED Literacy Initiative. From the beginning of the Literacy Initiative, the Director of the remaining six CHA sites and the Senior Citizens Director had been encouraged to promote the McGuire Gardens tutor training to their residents also. However, since I was encountering so many barriers at McGuire, this meeting was to make a personal appeal for the other sites to come on board. At the meeting the directors recommended one senior citizen and two Urban Rangers to attend the September tutor training. Telephone calls were made to the prospective recruits. I quickly discovered the telephone was not the best way to recruit. More time was needed to properly promote the tutor training.*

*\* If the newly proposed 1998 literacy program was exclusively for McGuire Gardens and did not include the other six CHA sites, I volunteered to devote the final three months of my CED contract to developing a literacy collaborative between the remaining CHA sites and LVA/CC. The LVA/CC Basic Literacy Coordinator (who had served as a volunteer tutor trainer for the McGuire Tutor Training Workshops) was supportive of such a collaborative. No one at CHA was certain if the proposed 1998 literacy contract was just for McGuire Gardens or for all of the CHA sites. Since the HUD take over, "There is no longer URD exclusively for McGuire, the plan now encompasses all of CHA." Information changed daily and employees were being relocated. All of the OWs and social workers have been moved from McGuire. No one from CHA expressed an interest in the proposed LVA/CC-CHA collaborative.*

*\* In an effort to promote the October 11th Tutor Recognition Ceremony, and to make another plea for the names of McGuire students for the new tutors to teach, a follow up letter was sent to the Community Organization Specialist. Copies of the letter were sent to the Director of Family Services and to the OW.*

*\* After receiving no response from anyone, I visited the McGuire Gardens office to ensure everything was in place for the October 11th ceremony.*

*\* A letter was sent to the CHA Administrator who initially linked me with McGuire Gardens. She had previously promised she would get media coverage when tutors completed the training.*



*\* The CHA Administrator's office phoned me and requested copies of photos I had taken of McGuire Garden tutors when they visited the Success Learning Center. The photos were to be used in a CHA newsletter.*

**Plan and conduct monthly tutor support group meetings.**

*Steps taken:*

*Of the three tutors who completed the training, one had a relative she planned to teach (after the relative has eye surgery). The other two tutors were ready, willing, and able to tutor but the social workers never referred students. Numerous request continued to be made for students. Five names of prospective students were promised by Maria Marguez, but no students were ever referred. Thus, there was only one tutor support meeting held. Those in attendance were Myrna Lewis, and Yvette David, tutors; Julia Jones, WSL; and Mary Farmer. Everyone present expressed concern about no students being referred to the program.*

**Plan and conduct monthly student support group meetings.**

*Steps taken:*

*No students were ever referred to the program, thus no student support group was formulated.*

**Investigate the establishment of a high interest low reading level library materials collection for tutor and student use.**

*Steps taken:*

*In April, the CHA/URD opened the McGuire Gardens' state of the art Success Learning Technology Center. The Success Learning Center's Comprehensive Competencies Program (CCP) introduces individualized, self-paced, competency-based instruction utilizing multimedia technologies. The CCP's academic component includes 48 courses covering K-12 skills. The literacy tutors, who visited the facility, were to have access to the Center. McGuire Gardens tutors and students would also have access to the high interest low reading level collection available at the Camden Free Public Library.*

**After tutoring for the required number of hours, recruit a prospective workshop leader to complete LVA certified Workshop Leader Training.**

*Steps taken:*

*No tutoring took place, thus no one qualified to take advantage of the free LVA/NJ WSL Training.*

**EXPECTED INPUTS**

**Support and active participation of CHA Administrative staff and social workers.**

*Steps taken:*

*There was a lack of cooperation and support from all CHA staff with one exception, the OW.*

**Data collection/information gathering on prospective tutors and prospective students.**

*Steps taken:*

*CHA social workers reported they had surveys previously taken which supplied the names of residents in need of literacy training. For months, the OW was promised the names of prospective students; however, no names or any other information were forwarded. Verbal and written request were made. Maria Marquez reported she had the names of five prospective students. I personally agreed to meet and evaluate each student. No names were ever submitted.*

**Participation and involvement of McGuire Gardens community leaders and high school youth.**

*Steps taken:*

*Of the three names of community leaders suggested, none wanted to interact with CHA staff. Interaction between CHA staff and residents is almost non-existent. Recruitment efforts for high school youth was undertaken by approaching Ms. Perry, WWHS Senior Class President. She designed a flier and distributed it all students and to the members of the National Honor Society. No one responded.*

**Support of McGuire Gardens Board of Directors.**

*Steps taken:*

*From the information I received, The McGuire Gardens/URD private, nonprofit resident-controlled corporation, "Success Against All Odds" was not operating. The corporation was to be governed by a 19 member Board of Directors, of which 51% were to be McGuire residents. I met with the President of the Board and she explained the Board is not functioning and when they met she was not invited!*

**Participation of LVA volunteer tutors and students.**

*Steps taken:*

*LVA volunteer tutors and students were extremely supportive of the Literacy Initiative. Two tutors and their students made presentations at the McGuire Gardens Literacy Awareness Program. Two of the tutors also served as WSLs. All three WSLs served as consultants to the Literacy Initiative.*

**Volunteer services of an LVA certified workshop leader/trainer.**

*Steps taken:*

*A LVA tutor training is normally conducted by two WSLs. Three WSLs were recruited and participated in the trainings.*

**Capital for a brochure and other promotional materials, refreshment supplies for trainings and tutor and student support group meetings. If more than one tutor training workshop is conducted, capital will be needed for additional training supplies.**

*Steps taken:*

*No capital was donated by CHA. I submitted a draft of a recruitment brochure which was then designed and produced by the Community Organization Specialist. Promotional fliers designed by Myrna Lewis and Mary Farmer were reproduced in*

*house. Refreshment supplies for the trainings were furnished by M. Farmer and receipts for reimbursement were submitted as suggested. Reimbursements were never received. Door prizes (donated by Julia Jones, WSL and Mary Farmer) were awarded at two tutor training workshops. A recognition luncheon was held in October for tutors who successfully completed the training. Lunch was furnished by M. Farmer.*

*One four session tutor training workshop was conducted. All training materials were furnished (free of charge by LVA/CC) via an agreement with LVA/CC and M. Farmer. Eight people received the LVA Tutor Handbook, the Read Evaluation Book and various other training materials. The cost to train each tutor was \$45.*

**Capital to establish a high interest low reading level library materials collection for tutor and student use.**

*Steps taken:*

*The CHA/URD opened the state of the art McGuire Gardens' Success Learning Technology Center. Thus, there was no funds or an urgent need to start a literacy library. The Success Learning Center's Comprehensive Competencies Program (CCP) introduces individualized, self-paced, competency-based instruction utilizing multimedia technologies. The CCP's academic component includes 48 courses covering K-12 skills. The literacy tutors, who visited the center during the tutor training, were to have access to the Center. McGuire Gardens tutors and students would also have access to the high interest low reading level collection available at the Camden Free Public Library.*

## **E. ANALYSIS/CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **WAS THE PROJECT SUCCESSFUL?**

To determine if the project was successful or not, depends on how you view the past year's activities. Is the glass half full or is the glass half empty? Using the glass half full analogy, the project was successful for the first six months. As listed in the CED Contract Implementation Plan, all tasks for the first six months (for the most part) were implemented as scheduled: the planning team convened, training dates were set, workshop leaders were recruited, a Literacy Awareness Program to recruit residents was conducted, recruitment materials were designed, and the 21 hour tutor training was conducted. After the summer McGuire Gardens training only yielded three tutors, an extended LVA/CC partnership was created. If additional tutors were recruited, they could attend the September LVA/CC tutor training offered at West Jersey Hospital, Camden.

Although support offered by CHA diminished during the first six months of the project, I had no idea the project would not experience *some* level of success. Up until

September, I felt residents were still going to be tutored, a McGuire Gardens workshop leader would be recruited, the foundation for a literacy program would have been laid, and the Literacy Initiative would continue for years to come.

On the other hand using the glass half empty analogy, "I planted a flag and called the project less than successful!" All of the steps taken and the assumptions made when designing the project have been listed above. I honestly felt I did everything I could to achieve (*at least*) some level of success. The project was not successful because it was not a good time to introduce **any** project to the CHA. I do not think anyone purposely set out to sabotage the literacy project. I do believe, when a working environment is so unstable that staff is constantly struggling to remain employed, there is little time for anything else. On the other hand; however, in spite of all the snafu at CHA, I am still baffled that professionals do not honor their commitments.

Whatever we seek to accomplish in life, we are consciously or unconsciously affected by past experiences. Since I am a professional with an administrative background, I may have been too locked into dealing with the CHA staff in the traditional professional manner. CHA did not respond in a traditional fashion. Professional courtesies such as responding to correspondences and telephone calls in a timely manner were null and void. With all of the turmoil within CHA, the administration prevented me from connecting with the residents of McGuire Gardens. How can you build (people) capacities if you are not interacting with the "people?" Once I aligned myself with the CHA administration, I believe I was viewed as "one of them." The interaction I had with some of the residents, revealed a level of distrust. Two of the residents I spoke with when I was attempting to recruit tutors said, "Outsiders coming into the community were there trying to get a piece of the \$42 million promised by HUD."

From the beginning of the Literacy Initiative Linda Gaines, Director of the remaining six CHA sites, and Rose Clark, Senior Citizens Director, had been encouraged to promote the McGuire Gardens tutor training to their sites also. Each Director submitted names to attend the McGuire tutor training, but their referrals did not attend. After encountering so many barriers at McGuire, I scheduled a September meeting at Westfield Acres to make a personal appeal for the other sites to come on

board. I volunteered to devote the final three months of my CED contract to developing a literacy collaborative between the remaining CHA sites and LVA/CC. The LVA/CC Basic Literacy Coordinator, Connie Sheppard, who had served as a volunteer tutor trainer for the McGuire Tutor Training Workshops, was supportive of such a collaborative. Andrea Aumaitre, the newly hired CHA Drug Elimination Program Director, said she could incorporate the literacy program into her Drug Elimination Program. I was invited to make a literacy presentation at an upcoming Drug Elimination Program meeting. In a continuing effort to build a collaborative between LVA/CC and CHA, I invited Connie Sheppard to participate in the presentation. Ms. Aumaitre was to contact me with “definites” about the literacy presentation. I sent letters and made several telephone calls. No response was ever received.

### **LESSONS LEARNED**

For those interested in undertaking a similar project, I suggest:

Select your project wisely.

Do not be in a hurry to commit to a project.

Know when to say when. When and if you know the project will not work on any level, do not be afraid to “pick up your bed and walk.”

If you decide to stick with the project until the very end, do not be defeated by unanticipated barriers.

### **CONCLUSION**

The unanticipated barrier that significantly affected my ability to complete the McGuire Gardens Literacy Initiative was the lack of support from CHA. I trusted the experience and judgment of the CHA administrators who recommended McGuire as “the one public housing development that would be open to a literacy initiative.” If I had this project to do over, I would go into McGuire Gardens through the back door, build a relationship with a few residents, win their trust, and get their support. I would then approach the CHA administrators with the proposed project.

## **PERSONAL INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED**

I interviewed five Literacy Initiative participants to get feedback on how this project could have achieved more success. I asked for complete honesty and I assured the participants it was not necessary to spare my feelings.

### **Questions asked:**

#### **Why do you think the Literacy Initiative was not successful?**

#### **Responses:**

Myrna (tutor): *"It was not a good time. There were too many problems at CHA."*

Yvette (tutor): *"Residents were moving out. A lot of them didn't know about the program."*

Connie (trainer): *"No support from CHA. A few years ago, Julia and I tried to introduce a Family Literacy Program in McGuire. I know from experience the residents are a hard sell."*

Julia (trainer): *"No support from CHA. The reception you receive from Camden City administrators, who are in a position to make a difference in the lives of the people, is disheartening. I worked in McGuire to introduce a Family Literacy Program a few years ago. McGuire is a hard nut to crack. Mary, you should not be surprised. You know the hassle I received from the Camden Human Services Director when I had everything in place to introduce a Family Literacy After School Program in Sumner School. I had the permission of the school principal and after one year, I still did not receive permission from the Camden Human Services Director to start the Family Literacy program."*

Bill (trainer): *"No support from CHA."*

#### **What would you have done differently?**

Myrna: *"More research on where to start the project rather than just selecting McGuire."*

Yvette: *"You did all you could. It was not a good time for me personally since I moved out in September."*

Connie: *"Nothing really. CHA was very disappointing."*

Julia: *"Nothing. The apathy in Camden can be a turn off."*

Bill: *"I would have had the tutor trainees sign a contract. The three who completed the training were committed and capable. Those who dropped out seemed more like literacy students. They drifted into the training extremely late. They needed help keeping their commitments."*