

THE HUMBOLDT-SWEETS COMMUNITY
INFORMATION & REFERRAL, CENTER, INC.
(A Community Economic Development Project)

FINAL REPORT ON PROJECT
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CED Practitioner

HUMBOLDT-SWEETS COMMUNITY INFORMATION &
REFERRAL CENTER, INC.

MISSION STATEMENT

Humboldt-Sweets Community Information & Referral Center, Inc., a non-profit community economic development project established to provide information and referral along with technical assistance to residents of the Humboldt-Sweets community.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this community economic development project is to develop and implement a structured information and referral program for Humboldt-Sweets residents. By residents having information and referral services centrally located in the neighborhood, it will help to improve the quality of life for residents in the community. Information is power and a crucial component to having residents become self-sufficient. This center will provide the residents with human development resources. This center will also provide technical assistance and enable residents of a very low-income community to take charge of their lives through dissemination of information and referral obtained in the neighborhood. By having such a center in the neighborhood, residents will not have to seek out necessary information outside the neighborhood, this usually results in transportation problems.

The personal gratification in the planning, development and implementation phases of this project enabled me to bring together all community resources possess and help a community that would truly benefit from referrals they will not have to leave the community obtain.

DEMOGRAPHICS & NEIGHBORHOOD COMPOSITION:

Neighborhood composition of the Humboldt-Sweets Community in 1967 was 85% white families with 15% African-American families. Twenty five years ago, Humboldt-Sweets area was an industrial and residential area situated in the North Ward of the City of Trenton.

Creation of many jobs for neighbors existed. Major resources have left the neighborhood that included a drug store, a cultural center for neighborhood children, a city-wide day care center. This facility was open on Saturday's to accomodate parents who worked on the weekend. A fresh chicken market existed on the block along with a large trailer company in the neighborhood that later housed a fuel oil company. The Trenton Water Works and Magic Marker company were included in thriving businesses in this neighborhood. Working families comprised the entire neighborhood up until the late '60's. The above businesses on longer exist in the neighborhood.

By 1972, the neighborhood encountered white flight where homeowners moved out and rented dwellings to blacks. These landlords were absentee landlords that collected rents monthly yet did not provide the necessary maintenance of the dwelling. Nor did absentee landlords invest any rents collected back into the community. Eventually, houses were taken over by the City of Trenton due to overdue taxes. The City, in turn, left housing vacant and would not consider rehabilitation of these dwellings. This resulted in a large number of vacant dilapidated homes in the Humboldt-Sweets community. These homes became an eyesore to the community and eventually were used for illegal activity.

The Humboldt-Sweets Community Information and Referral Center, Inc. evolved from the acceptance of funding and the participation in the first statewide neighborhood leadership initiative program. Grassroots community activists were brought together once a month

for nine months to learn, first-hand, the tools necessary to survive as a leader in the community. Candidates were selected from 84 applicants statewide and were promised \$5,000 each to develop and implement a neighborhood project upon completion of the training program. A resident of the Humboldt-Sweets community was a participant in the leadership program. Award monies were pooled together to make this innovative idea become reality. We agreed on an idea for a community project that would be on a small scale and have a lasting impact on the community. An idea to use the personal resources I've developed over the past 20 years. With readily available information flowing through the community, residents can become self-sufficient and well-formed to take charge of their own lives preparing them to participate in the current redevelopment of their community. Candidates were sponsored by statewide foundations. The Mercer Foundation of Trenton, New Jersey sponsored four candidates from the City. The training began in October 1991 and ended June 1992 where a proposal was submitted and approved for funding.

Upon research of the neighborhood, two community groups existed. One dealt with crime prevention and the other with housing redevelopment. The two groups did not cross paths. Each felt the others issue was more important for the neighborhood to tackle. There were also two groups among homeowners. Those that only cared about newly developed homes in the area and those who did not want to be a part of the newly developed area. The latter group felt that since they would never be able to afford one of the

new homes, they did not care about what went on around them. The co-founder of Humboldt-Sweets never shared this disagreement among the groups, neither were outsiders told of two separate groups. This fact was uncovered during initial research of the community. This realization was uncovered during door-to-door canvassing of the neighborhood. To bring the two groups together, plans were developed during a three-month period:

- * Door-to-door canvassing to inform residents that this center was not established for any one group but for the entire community of residents.
- * Leafleting was conducted at the local businesses, churches, organizations in the neighborhood where residents were asked on what they wanted to see change or be added in the neighborhood.
- * Questionnaires were distributed at all community meetings held to gain up-to-date feedback on problems and needs of the community.
- * Recruitment of volunteers for the center was made at every meeting.

To date, the organization has been successful in recruiting two volunteers to operate the phone lines at the center. The volunteers participate in a two-day on-site training program prior to placement in the center. The center does not provide crisis intervention due to the specialized training necessary for this type of service. The center does, however, refer the caller or visitor to the appropriate agency in the City.

PROJECT GOALS:

This project's intended outcome will be to respond to a minimum of 100 families in the Humboldt-Sweets community providing information and referral by the end of a 12 month period.

- * To maintain an up-to-date resource bank of city-wide programs and services at agencies that callers and walk-ins can be referred to for their specific resources area.
- * To research and develop 50 new referrals during a 12 month period.
- * To record and compile statistical data on incoming calls and walk-ins to the center.
- * To maintain statistical data for funding source and board review.

The maximum objective will be the establishment of a community-based information and referral center that will provide resources, counseling and supportive services. The minimum objective will be the outreach efforts provided by neighborhood volunteers disseminating flyers, and door-to-door contacts. Local businesses and clergy will be addressed at community meetings to be held. Residents will operate center after successfully completing crisis intervention training. Future training programs will be instituted at the center. Development of programs to meet the residents needs are being discussed. The center will offer human resources as well as community resources.

METHODOLOGY:

1. Create a survey for neighborhood awareness of center.
2. Conduct bi-monthly community meetings and assess resident concerns.
3. Interview local clergy, businesses, agencies and organizations in the community to provide linkages of available resources to avoid duplication.
4. Create a support system with local groups.
5. Provide crisis intervention and information and referral training to part-time staffers.
6. Conduct on-going meetings with clergy, businesses and organizations to announce available resources.
7. Gather necessary resources for the center through person-to-person networking and meetings.
8. Identify training programs and services for center.
9. Identify funding sources that target very low-income communities.

PLANNING:

Monthly meetings were conducted during the first four months with neighborhood residents who were interested in participating as board members of the Humboldt-Sweets Community Information Center, Inc. Four residents were listed on the Certificate of Incorporation filed and issued in May 1992. Each board member has an expertise in a specific area of community economic development:

MARY WOODALL, COMMUNITY ACTIVIST, CO-FOUNDER

EXPERTISE: COMMUNITY ORGANIZING, FINANCE

DARRYL JOHNSON, MSW

EXPERTISE: COMMUNITY ORIENTATION, SOCIAL WORK,
BUDGETING, DEVELOPMENT

LAURICE REYNOLDS, CED PRACTITIONER

EXPERTISE: COMMUNITY ORGANIZING, URBAN PLANNING,
NEIGHBORHOOD PARTICIPATION

FERN MCRAE, CED PRACTITIONER, COMMUNITY ORGANIZER, FOUNDER

EXPERTISE: COMMUNITY OUTREACH, CONTRACTS, URBAN PLANNING

The organization did not proceed in obtaining a federal identification number due to the length of time it would take to obtain it. For the organization to begin operations, a 501(c)3 agency was sought after for grant monies to be filtered through. This host agency handles all the bookkeeping aspects for the organization. It will also handle the draw down monies issued by the City of Trenton Community Development Block Grant funds. The Community Foundation of New Jersey issued a check for the entire \$6,000 to the Urban League of Metropolitan Trenton, Inc. Separate budgets were prepared for review by each funding source. Line items for monies received from the City of Trenton did not include consultants and special events. Several meetings were held with the Executive Director of the Urban League of Metropolitan Trenton, Inc. Board members found there was a need to include line items such as Special Events upon developing a fund raising plan for the organization. Meetings were held to discuss center operations, whereby the office would stay open five days per week, four hours per day, manned by two neighborhood residents.

OUTREACH:

Outreach to the community consisted of monthly meetings held with the neighborhood health center social service workers, urban women center executive director, local business owners, companies in the neighborhood and local clergy. Meetings were not well attended. There are ten churches in the neighborhood that all provide some form of social service to their parishioners. They all agree that the neighborhood is in need of a central permanent place for information and referral. These groups also agree to participate in the coordination of information that they current have on hand and provide referrals to the center. They will post bulletins in their establishments for informational purposes. The health center is overwhelmed by the lack of resource information they can provide to all of the residents and welcome the information and referral center to the neighborhood. Residents of the Humboldt-Sweets area consistently attend meetings and report on issues of personal interest i.e. new homeowners who seek information on who to contact for defects in their new homes. Other residents continue to seek information on drug and alcohol prevention and treatment and crime prevention for themselves or family members. Residents seek better lighting, availability of rental units as major concerns in the neighborhood.

DEVELOPMENT & IMPLEMENTATION:

During the nine-month training program, training was provided training in the areas of fundraising, budgeting, networking, how to

run a local meeting, how to work with residents and local officials, developing an organization, its board, how to write a press release, dealing with the media, etc. The center did not receive the original funding as specified by the group because the City of Trenton also awarded this organization funding. The center is located in the North Ward of the City of Trenton in the downtown district. This project sits in a predominately hispanic neighborhood, unlike what I originally envisioned for this endeavor. The Humboldt-Sweets community exists several blocks north of the center. The site that was sought after was directly in the neighborhood of the Humboldt-Sweets Community. However, upon spending several months locating a site directly in the neighborhood, many obstacles surfaced by local organizations, businesses and clergy. There was one clergy person who was excited about being a part of the development of this organization. Bi-weekly meetings were held for three months to discuss the funding level of the organization and how much rent the organization could pay. The organization drafted a budget based on the funds that were sought after by two funding sources i.e. City of Trenton at \$20,000 and the Community Foundation of New Jersey at \$10,000. The clergy organization agreed to a monthly rent of \$600 for use of their facility. Our organization had sought a host agency in the neighborhood and was offered space in their community center building that their church owned the neighborhood. However, when the original budget figures were cut in half from \$20,000 to \$10,000 from the City of Trenton and from \$10,000 to \$6,000 from

the Community Foundation of New Jersey, the clergy continued to seek the original rent of \$600 per month. He was adamant that his organization would not accept the rent of \$300 per month for use of their facility.

A system has been put in place that requires the volunteers to record on an intake form the data received from clients and compile a monthly statistical report on demographics of clients served. The categories include: age, sex, number of children, marital status, ethnic group and income level. These demographics are included in the monthly report submitted to the City of Trenton to receive quarterly payments. The process set-up for phone calls received and walk-in's is listed in the procedures manual developed for use by volunteers of the center.

The organization maintains its statistical data in a locked desk, complete with pendaflex folders. The information contained in these files are used by the administrator and fiscal person for review. The information is also reviewed by board members and funding sources upon appointment. The original contract included crisis intervention and information and referral training to part-time volunteers that included counseling services. The counseling service has not begun due to the specialized training that the volunteers would need, i.e. appropriate training conducted by a crisis intervention agency. the organization feels that this service can be too time-consuming for the volunteer. The organization also decided to not provide programs at the center. One linkage is at the Trenton Urban Women's Center where the center

currently provides the necessary programs for very low-income residents and will continue to take referrals from local organizations in need of their services.

Surveys were developed and disseminated on a bi-monthly basis starting August 1992. Since the center was not opened, responses were hard to track. Volunteers went door-to-door for responses that were recorded. Not many responses were recorded due to lack of interest by most residents in the neighborhood. Moreover, each time information was disseminated, responses were received by different residents, this gave the organization some idea of a small percentage of responses to the kind of information residents were seeking.

There was a lack of community meetings held during the development stages of the project. Many conflicts occurred with volunteer residents, local organizations, clergy, etc. However, resident concerns were assessed through the compilation of the data taken from the information given door-to-door. Interviews are continuing with local clergy, businesses, organizations and agencies in the community to avoid duplication of resource information being sought by residents.

The creation of a support system of local resources for this organization that has been accomplished through meetings held with local groups on the need for a central permanent place for community services and human service referrals. Resource information for the center was gathered from fifteen local agencies and organizations to be disseminated at the center.

COMMUNITY CONCERNS:

An analysis of one of the problems in this community was found to be the lack of information residents are receiving in relation to their specific needs. Through research, there were meetings with local clergy and local businesses who have stressed the need for a central permanent place for information to be collected and disseminated for all in the neighborhood. Each clergy and business representative stated that they provide a very limited amount of resources for their constituents. Clergy and businesses have been responsive in distributing literature on community activities to the parishioners. However, during the planning stage of the project, the organization I encountered a lack of communication from a catholic church in the neighborhood when a meeting was scheduled by the City and this community group on up-to-date redevelopment status of the neighborhood. The organization developed and distributed flyers in the neighborhood about meetings of the Humboldt-Sweets community center. At each meeting, three types of questionnaires are filled out:

- 1) Community Organization Survey
- 2) Organizing Survey
- 3) Recruitment/Community Survey

Refreshments were served at each meeting. At our first meeting, the church was locked. A neighborhood representative spoke to the pastor and told the group that the City cancelled the meeting. The pastor was familiar with the neighborhood group through prior meetings held there, but was not privy to the meeting

by the local residents. Coordination of information by representatives in the neighborhood did not occur. There were 15 attendees who showed up for the meeting and were turned away in the cold. Attendees were told of the agenda topics for the meeting that included the introduction of the center, recruitment of volunteers and distribution of questionnaires that would later reveal what kind of information the community was seeking. Another meeting was rescheduled for two days later where seven participants showed up. All attendees were from the new housing development.

There was a sense of territoriality that was displayed when our organization sought to introduce our center to similar resource organizations in the City. After stating the organization's main goal to others, we were questioned as to the reason for our organization's existence. When our organization sought resource information to compile lists for the center, we also sought resistance by local groups. We encountered organization's who did not want to share their information with. However, when our organization promised we would use their resource as a referral source in the organization, they were quite receptive.

PROJECT RESULTS:

This project's intended outcome is to respond to a minimum of 100 families in the Humboldt-Sweets Community by information and referral by the end of a 12 month period. To date, our organization has served approximately 15 families with resource information for a total of approximately 50 people. We have also

conducted supportive services such as screening of a single-parent females with children who were invited to a home for Thanksgiving dinner by a local vendor. It took the organization almost three weeks to screen families that were appropriate. Some of the problems our organization encountered were families with a large number of children, children that were older teens and parents that had emotional outbursts and could not be put in "a perfect setting" without having trouble coping. We managed to locate a woman with an 8 year old son who was sent to meet the invitee at work. Prior to accepting the invitation, they had lunch together and arranged for pick-up on Thanksgiving day. Our organization was later informed that our referral and the invitee had a wonderful time together on Thanksgiving day. The client was also invited to share X-Mas with the vendors family. There appears to be so many troubled people in the neighborhood that careful screening must occur for success stories to be made. A lot of energy was spent on screening of candidates, however, this is essential to help bring in potential funders to the organization.

RESOURCES:

An up-to-date resource bank is continuing to be compiled of city-wide programs and services in agencies and organizations that callers and walk-in's can be referred to for specific resources. We have gathered approximately 50 resources in addition to resources obtained from the Delaware Valley Human Services Directory. This resource book lists the most up-to-date resources

in the Mercer County area, mostly, the City of Trenton. However, the type of resources my clients will likely seek are in the area of local AIDS groups, local Alon-on meetings, drug treatment centers, step-by-step instructions on getting special education services for their child, list of food banks and all emergency shelter and emergency services in the City.

GOALS ACCOMPLISHED:

One of the goals accomplished was to research and develop 50 new referrals during a 12 month period. Since the center was opened in November 1992, 20 referrals were provided to residents. At least fifteen calls per week are made to the center for information on resource information of agencies not listed in the Human Services directory. Linkages were made with local businesses, clergy and agencies that provide information and\or services to my clients. Twenty phone calls per week are made to conduct outreach to existing agencies, organizations, clergy and businesses in the neighborhood. As part of the organization's fundraising efforts letters will be drafted to local unions to invite their members to seek resources from the center. Also included is a invitation for union members to become volunteers at the center. In turn, the organization will request a donation from the unions for the continuation of center operations.

FUTURE FUNDING:

Funding sources have been identified for the organization

through the creation of a fundraising plan tailored for this very low-income community. The plan includes actual activities that the community can conduct to raise funds for the continued operation of the center. Proposed funding limits are included in the plan. Monies have been set aside in a line item called special events to be used for activities for residents of the Humboldt-Sweets community. The board made this inclusion after the original budget was approved by the funding sources. The organization seeks future funding from the original funding sources i.e. Community Foundation of New Jersey and City of Trenton CDBG monies. The Foundation is committed to a minimum of the original funding level.

At a meeting conducted by the CDGB office in January 1993, hosted for participants who are currently being funded and will be refunded, it was revealed to all attendees that the City is seeking community outreach efforts "like those being conducted by the Humboldt-Sweets project." What a compliment to our organization! It appears that most organizations being funded have not conducted community outreach as outlined in their contract.

Four meetings were conducted with the Executive Director of the Urban League of Metropolitan Trenton, Inc. At the first meeting, we discussed the development of the project and the lack site availability after searching for four months in the neighborhood. At the second meeting, I was offered space in the Urban League's community center around the corner from their office. The tour encompassed the entire building. During the third meeting, we discussed the approval of the budget as it currently

existed. The line item for rent was accepted at a rate of \$300 per month for 12 months. At the fourth meeting, we discussed budget revisions to specific line items of both contracts to include a line item entitled special events. This line item was included so that funds would be available during the fundraising activities of the contract. The outcome of months of developing, planning and implementation brought together a community center sponsored by the local urban league in a donated building. I was given a choice of offices in this building. The center office is located on the first in the rear of the building. This building also houses the Girl Scouts, the NAACP and a psychological counseling agency for local youth. This type of partnership has never been undertaken in the City of Trenton. There is enough space for conferences, meetings and parties for the children. The goal to create an information and referral center in a blighted area of the City of Trenton was accomplished through cooperation and participation of every sector of the community. The board of directors of the Urban League of Metropolitan Trenton, Inc. was very receptive to include a community economic development project in their center. The public sector, overall, was receptive to the idea of an information and referral center centrally located in the City. The private sector has also been receptive to the project, namely United Jersey Bank, who provided a donation to the organization. Due to the location of the new site for the center the organization inherited a large hispanic population. The center is located approximately five city blocks from the Humboldt-Sweets area. It is, however, is

in walking distance for the Humboldt-Sweets residents. Hispanic volunteers have been recruited for training and center operation so that this population will not be left out of the services established for the center. The language barrier appears to be the most important obstacle to overcome. Meetings with hispanic community activists were informative in developing a strategy to provide the special information and referral this population also needs. Hispanic community organizers in the neighborhood of the center have provided the center with the resources they current have on hand. These resources have been incorporated in the listing at the center. To date, only one hispanic volunteer has worked at the center. The organization continues to recruit hispanic volunteers.

The following is a list of supporters of the project:

1. Urban League of Metropolitan Trenton, Inc.
2. Community Foundation of New Jersey
3. ISLES, Inc.
4. Capital City Redevelopment Corporation
5. Trenton Urban Women's Center
6. United Way of Central Jersey
7. Div. of Community Resources, Dept. of Community Affairs
8. Community Action Executive Directors Association
9. United Jersey Bank Central, N.A.
10. Latino Land Trust

ANALYSIS, RECOMMENDATIONS:

Getting the two groups (i.e. crime prevention, housing redevelopment) in the neighborhood together will be a challenge for the future. The only way that community development will be successful will be through inclusion of community participation by all residents, and:

- * continue to conduct meetings with all residents of the neighborhood
- * let them know that their ideas are important to the development of the community
- * inform residents of the financial resources available to them in the City

* bring residents information on success stories of neighboring city's

Since the hispanic population and the predominately black Humboldt-Sweets residents are in need of the same community resources, there will not be a need to change the function of the information and referral center. Events will be planned that will include both groups. Never will the groups be separated in planning events. They must work together to improve the conditions in each neighborhood. Lack of participation and board development has caused this project to not expand to the depths originally set in the objectives. Concentration on the development of the board to bring in new ideas of energy will be the focus in the coming months. Organizational capacity building is in slow motion. Efforts to increase the organization's numbers of permanent volunteers is being implemented. News articles and interviews were conducted on the project as a result of the Neighborhood Leadership Initiative training program. To date, this organization has followed the training of the current Fellows of this program. The organization was invited to speak about the success of the project at a monthly training session held in Trenton. The New York Times has taken an interest in the leadership training program and will be setting up an interview to discuss same. The center will be in the forefront of a multi-million dollar project called the Canal Banks. The organization hopes to be the central permanent organization for information disseminated to the community on community participation of this project. The most difficult

problem I found working on this project was the lack of time one has to devote to the many tasks that need to be performed in the short period of time. Moreover, timelines are a crucial component to the development of the project. Furthermore, through the emergence of new leaders in the community, this project can envision continued success. I have plans to recommend to the Community Foundation of New Jersey at least three participants annual to the Neighborhood Leadership Initiative Program to train residents.