

**Illinois Workforce Advantage:  
An Experiment in Place-Based  
Government/Community Partnerships**

**A Progress Report on the Implementation of  
Illinois Workforce Advantage in  
Three Chicago Communities:  
Humboldt Park, North Lawndale, Englewood**

**Prepared by the Policy Research Action Group (PRAG)**

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This report is available at [www.luc.edu/curl/prag](http://www.luc.edu/curl/prag) and at [www.iwa.ito.state.il.us/info.cfm](http://www.iwa.ito.state.il.us/info.cfm).

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# *Executive Summary*

## **Purpose and Methodology**

### *What is the Illinois Workforce Advantage Initiative About and How is it Doing?*

In 2000, the Illinois Governor's Office proposed a new initiative called the Illinois Workforce Advantage, hereafter referred to as IWA. The goal was to select a handful of distressed communities in the state and provide them with extraordinary resources to alter their situation, reduce their level of distress. Indicators of distress included health problems, high unemployment, high school dropout rates/low educational achievement levels, criminal activity resulting in high arrest rates. Taking into account geography and racial and ethnic mix, six communities were selected: Harvey, East St. Louis, Humboldt Park, North Lawndale, Englewood, and the southern seven counties. IWA is guided by a Steering Committee of 18 state agencies who meet with the IWA director bi-weekly. The IWA budget was \$3.5 million for 2001-2002.

What IWA is trying to accomplish is a paradigm shift from a problem-based orientation to a place-based orientation. To move from what one agency representative called a silo mentality to a multi-disciplinary, cross-departmental response to a community's assessment of its needs and priorities. To not just give grants but to engage in a planning and project development process with the communities.

Dr. Richard Kordesh became director of IWA in September 2001. In Chicago, Kordesh recruited the Policy Research Action Group (PRAG) to manage the 33 volunteers who would work in the three IWA neighborhoods. He also asked PRAG to conduct an evaluation to assess the progress of each of the IWA communities in Chicago in developing their network, accessing state agencies, defining a lead project, and utilizing their Americorps Volunteers. It was understood that since this investigation was taking place before the first year was even completed, there would be no attempt to measure local project outcomes.

### **Methodology**

Qualitative research methods were used to develop this progress report. Specifically, the goal was to create what is known as "thick description" to facilitate understanding of how relationships and networks have been evolving in the IWA communities in Chicago. Data was collected to create the thick description through numerous interviews – eighty in all. Geographically, the interviews took place as follows: 25 in Humboldt Park, 27 in North Lawndale, and 21 in Englewood. In addition, 7 state agency representatives were interviewed, including the IWA director.

## **Conclusions**

Briefly, each of the three communities has made progress in demonstrating some capacity for establishing a network that functions as a central resource, a hub of activity for the individuals and families that live there. However, if we think of such a network as an engine for change, they are not all equally revved up. Nor did they all start in the same place.

### *Social Networks*

Humboldt Park benefits from a 40 year history of community organizing and networking before it was called “networking,” and NNNN has been inventing itself for the last 16 years. Under Mr. Medina’s leadership it has maturity and savvy. It is poised to take advantage of a new paradigm at the state level.

North Lawndale has not shared an organizing experience comparable to Humboldt Park’s, but in recent years has reaped the rewards of having a benefactor in the form of the Steans Family Foundation that has planted the seeds and the funding for collaboration and resource development. IWA can be just the stimulus to bring a fledgling set of relationships into full bloom.

Englewood, by contrast, and by admission of its own leaders, has been the victim of what one interviewee called “balkanization.” The geographic division of one community into multiple wards, legislative and congressional districts has led to the formation of numerous rival camps. Battles over turf, assigning of credit and blame, has made it difficult to sustain long term leadership or encourage new leaders to come to the table. But the IWA initiative has given new hope to veterans like Josephine Robinson and a new table to sit at for relative newcomers like Vincent Barnes. Whether this new table will ever seat as many players as the banquet in Humboldt Park remains to be seen. But among a cadre of education activists at least there is a table.

### *State Access and the Place-based Paradigm*

First of all, on the most basic level, all three IWA communities are enjoying a new level of access to state resources just by being designated as an IWA community. To have a key member of the Governor’s staff come out to chat with community leaders in their own conference rooms is new and indicative of the notion that place matters. Some community leaders have had a similar opportunity with their state legislators, but never with the executive branch.

Secondly, the governor’s office is listening. Instead of the state, through its various agencies, telling the community that they have a set of grants and programs which the community must wiggle to fit into, they are being asked to set the agenda and write the proposal before the RFP comes out, so to speak. As a result, over a million dollars has flowed into these communities over the last 6 months to fund two major projects in each

community – a “lead project” receiving an award of \$200,000-300,000, and a second project, generally funded at the \$90,000 level.

Thirdly, there has been evidence of a new kind of more direct participation of state agencies that are joining in the community planning and project implementation process. Again, this differs from waiting for the responses to the RFP to arrive at the office and then choosing the winners. This new approach involves agency representatives in creating a winning scenario together.

The best evidence of this kind of activity, as has been alluded to in earlier sections of this report, is the working relationship that has evolved between NLEN and IDOC, to the point where they have written a joint proposal for federal funding to address the ex-offender issue in North Lawndale together. And AMPS reports a developing relationship with DCCA.

An emerging second example is the feasibility study process unfolding in Humboldt Park for the construction of a youth center. Representatives from IDHS, DCFS and IDFA have been attending community meetings as the study progresses. How each might participate at the implementation stage is not known. The possibility of defining this role as the center’s physical and program design emerges is a marked contrast to past practice.

This new state presence is not as clearly observed in Englewood. The education initiative seems primarily linked to IWA itself. On the other hand, the NEVCorp project may better lend itself to this new mode of operation.

Another state player that is becoming intertwined with these communities through IWA is the University of Illinois Chicago. UIC is the fiscal agent for at least one project in each community and is providing an array of technical assistance.

To date, most of the grant money that has been disbursed comes from IDHS as the fiscal agent for IWA. It is confusing to some community leaders as to whether IDHS is funding these programs with their own money, so to speak, or just passing through IWA’s money. When it becomes clearer that DCCA, DCFS, IDHS, etc., are making funding decisions and awards out of their own budgets, that will be a true confirmation that a new paradigm is firmly in place.

From the perspective of state agency reps, this day may not be immediately upon us. While many are convinced this is the way to go, not all can see their departments as a whole moving quickly to embrace this new approach. But all of those interviewed for this report believe IWA is definitely worth the effort. It is hoped that the next governor will recognize its merit and continue on.

### *The Status of Lead Projects*

While there was a general dissatisfaction with the pace of grant distribution, by the second half of the year, lead projects were up and running in each of the IWA

communities. Humboldt Park has distributed IWA dollars to nine schools for activities around the development of Community Learning Centers. By the last quarter of the year the youth center feasibility project had consultants, academics, and state agency people working with the NNNN Youth Action Team to move this initiative forward.

NLEN has already completed the start-up phase of their IWA funded employment program with ex-offenders and have worked with IDOC on a federal grant to expand resources for IDOC and the EESN to work together more closely. The AMPS project is getting a slower start as they work out a contract relationship with UIC.

The Education Subcommittee in Englewood has its list of program objectives for the coming year, with a great deal of emphasis being placed on parent education. NEVCorp is still at the early stages of implementation.

### Americorps

In a sense, Americorps is the icing on the cake that arrived before the cake did. As Dr. Kordesh suggested, it was an unanticipated bonus. In the early months of this program year, the AV were often **the only** IWA benefit that partner organizations and community residents could see. But before any new funds or access, this new human capital was very welcome. If IWA did nothing else, some said, this was a gift.

Englewood is probably the best example of engaging the AV directly in “IWA work” as they all were assigned to schools that were engaged in the IWA Education Subcommittee. But wherever they worked the AV were strengthening organizations that are of value to the community and increasing their capacity to become part of that social network that is a key component of the IWA strategy. Since the early days of the Peace Corps, the enthusiasm for the “Year of Service” concept and its impact on those who join a Corps has not waned. It is a win/win program that benefits the community and the individual. This message was affirmed by most of the IWA AV and their supervisors.

As always, it works better for some than for others. This applies to organizations as well as volunteers. There were some rough spots related to local coordination in getting things going, but most of those spots seem to have smoothed out. Next year will be even better.

### **Final Thoughts**

In conclusion, the Illinois Workforce Advantage, as it is being carried out in Chicago, is proving to be a very worthwhile venture from the point of view of the participating communities and representatives of state agencies that have been serving on the IWA Steering Committee. As IWA investment, financial and programmatic, has become a reality, and as the participating organizations have settled in with their Americorps Volunteers, there is a general sense of accomplishment and momentum around the lead projects, and an optimism that community transformation, in the context of a state partnership is fraught with possibilities.

There is also a level of concern that, just as things are falling into place, there will be a change of administration, and that what has had such a promising beginning could be shut down prematurely. It remains to be seen to what extent the social networks in each community will be able to use their emerging strength to protect their own interests in this regard.

### **Questions/Recommendations/Suggestions**

1. One comment that came up over and over pertained to the desire to get a better feel for all IWA-related activities at the local level and across all three communities. Are people asking for another meeting or two? Perhaps.
2. With all of the education activity the question arose: Where is ISBE? Is there some way they should be involved?
3. The role of the governor's office is key to keeping this initiative going. How can the principal players sell it to the next governor?
4. It was a suggestion of several interviewees that a directory of state agencies be created for the church pastor, school council president, chamber of commerce director, etc. to use to find out who does what and who to call.
5. It would be helpful to conduct another in depth review of the three IWA communities next spring, a year after most received their major IWA grants, to evaluate outcomes.
6. One of the Americorps coordinators suggested that another kind of report. It would illustrate the benefits of IWA and the AV program by putting together a collection of stories/anecdotes of specific accomplishments of individual AVs that illustrate the impact they had on the people or organizations they worked with and the impact of the experience on themselves. Photographs to illustrate this would enhance the report.

## **I. Purpose and Methodology**

### **A. What is the Illinois Workforce Advantage Initiative About and How is it Doing?**

What IWA is trying to accomplish is a paradigm shift from a problem-based orientation to a place-based orientation. To move from what one agency representative called a silo mentality to a multi-disciplinary, cross-departmental response to a community's assessment of its needs and priorities.

In 2000, the Illinois Governor's Office proposed a new initiative called the Illinois Workforce Advantage, hereafter referred to as IWA. The goal was to select a handful of distressed communities in the state and provide them with extraordinary resources to alter their situation, reduce their level of distress. Indicators of distress included health problems, high unemployment, high school dropout rates/low educational achievement levels, and criminal activity resulting in high arrest rates. Taking into account geography and racial and ethnic mix, six communities were selected: Harvey, East St. Louis, Humboldt Park, North Lawndale, Englewood, and the southern seven counties. IWA is guided by a Steering Committee of 18 state agencies who meet with the IWA director bi-weekly. The IWA budget was \$3.5 million for 2001-2002.

In September 2000, the governor called upon Dr. Richard Kordesh, a professor at the Department of Family Medicine, University of Illinois Chicago (UIC), to become the IWA director. Kordesh describes IWA as a transformation project designed not only to transform (change for the better) individual communities but also the state bureaucracy's way of assisting these communities. What IWA is trying to accomplish is a paradigm shift from a problem-based orientation to a place-based orientation. To move from what one agency representative called a silo mentality to a multi-disciplinary, cross-departmental response to a community's assessment of its needs and priorities. To not just give grants but to engage in a planning and project development process with the communities.

On the community level, IWA is looking for capacity to think and work collaboratively across multiple community institutions and state agencies to develop comprehensive plans and innovative projects. Such projects might be designed to upgrade educational outcomes through establishment of community learning centers at local schools, help people secure jobs with family support wages, improve residents' health by increasing immunization rates, revitalize a commercial area, or address whatever other issue the community defines as crucial. But it is Kordesh's belief, and an underlying premise of IWA, that such capacity resides in the formation of a network that functions as a virtual family resource center, not a building, but a set of relationships.

So, Kordesh set out in search of these social networks or the capacity to build one, and identified one or two lead organizations in each of the targeted communities. They were not guaranteed any funding at the outset but were promised access to appropriate state agencies and time to develop a lead project to present for funding after their network was up and running. As a bonus, Americorps agreed to provide a cadre of 11 volunteers for each of the IWA communities. In Chicago, Kordesh recruited the Policy Research Action Group (PRAG) to manage the 33 volunteers who would work in the three IWA neighborhoods. He also asked PRAG to conduct an evaluation to assess the progress of each of the IWA communities in Chicago in developing their network, accessing state agencies, defining a lead project, and utilizing their Americorps Volunteers. It was understood that since this investigation was taking place before the first year was even completed, there would be no attempt to measure local project outcomes.

## **B. Methodology**

Qualitative research methods were used to develop this progress report. Specifically, the goal was to create what is known as “thick description” to facilitate understanding of how relationships and networks have been evolving in the IWA communities in Chicago. Data was collected to create the thick description through numerous interviews – eighty in all.

Geographically, the interviews took place as follows: 25 in Humboldt Park, 27 in North Lawndale, and 21 in Englewood. In addition, 7 state agency representatives were interviewed, including the IWA director. In the neighborhoods the interviews were divided into three categories: lead organization staff, including executive directors; partner organization representatives, including Americorps supervisors; and Americorps Volunteers. A set of questions was developed for each of these categories, and the same questions for those categories were used in each of the three communities. (See appendix for questions used.) Graduate research assistants were employed by PRAG to conduct the interviews, with one student assigned to each community.

As interviews were completed notes were written up and submitted to the project director who is the PRAG Program Coordinator. At the end of the interview process, each interviewer was asked to write up a neighborhood profile and to apply the principles of social network analysis to the community they studied. The project director was then responsible for pulling together information gleaned from the interviews and reports to produce an overview of progress to date for each community and for IWA in Chicago in general.

## **C. Components of the Report**

Following this introduction concerning purpose and methodology are the three neighborhood profiles that introduce the lead organizations, assess their relationship with partner organizations, and describe the deployment of the Americorps Volunteers. Following the neighborhood profiles is an analysis that describes and compares the social networks emerging in each of the three communities, based on the 6 indicators of social

network development. The next section outlines the lead projects the communities have selected for IWA funding. Then the access to state agencies and their progress on making the paradigm shift is discussed. Finally, there is an analysis of the benefits and challenges associated with the Americorps program. General observations and recommendations make up the last section.

## II. IWA Community Profiles

### A. Humboldt Park

All of those with Americorps Volunteers were unanimous in identifying that resource as a clear IWA benefit. As small organizations they all welcomed the extra help in staffing their organizations.

#### 1. IWA Goals and the Lead Organization

The lead organization in Humboldt Park is the Near Northwest Neighborhood Network (NNNN), which was founded in 1986. In 1994, NNNN organized the Humboldt Park Empowerment Partnership (HPEP) for the purpose of putting together a community strategic plan and applying to be an Empowerment Zone. While the EZ designation was not forthcoming, the HPEP process laid the groundwork for the economic development, employment, and housing initiatives that remain on the community's and NNNN's agenda today. In addition, a number of community leaders that were engaged in the HPEP process continue to provide support and leadership for NNNN.

Today, NNNN is a broad-based, multi-issue umbrella organization with 118 member organizations. Members range in size and mission, from very large organizations like Association House and DePaul University, to churches, to block clubs and small business associations. It has a board of 15 and a staff of 11. In 1997, Eliud Medina became the Executive Director. Given the long-established and cohesive reputation of NNNN, it was selected as the lead organization.

A significant amount of NNNN's organizing efforts have been around community development. In 1999, parts of Humboldt Park were designated as a Redevelopment Area by the City of Chicago. The Redevelopment Area includes acquisition authority over 159 lots and \$3 million for land acquisition. In 2001, NNNN led efforts to create the Humboldt Park Tax Increment Financing District and the Division/ Homan Tax Increment Financing District. These TIFs are expected to generate \$69.5 million over their lifetime for commercial development, infrastructure improvements and affordable housing. NNNN works with local non-profit developers in order to implement projects.

Medina describes Humboldt Park as a "needy" or "distressed" community that merits this designation. He claims, and other community leaders concur, that state agency involvement has not been very visible. While state financial resources flowing into the

community have been substantial, according to the state, the community does not believe that the traditional flow of social service dollars is adequate to relieve the community's economic distress. While he endorses the goals of IWA as being similar to those of Humboldt Park, as they relate to improving education and parent involvement in local schools, the HPEP process has led NNNN to place equal or more importance on economic development and affordable housing. NNNN addresses these issue areas through what they call "action teams." There is one for education that includes 10 elementary schools, and Clemente High School. There is also one for economic development and one for housing. In 2001, the youth action team was added to promote youth leadership development.

Each Action Team is the responsibility of an NNNN staff member. The Humboldt Park Empowerment Partnership membership meets once a month. Each action team and NNNN staff give reports on their activities. Presentations are often made on new programs or issues affecting the community. Organizations and residents see this as a vehicle to learn more about what is going on in the community and build consensus. Medina also values the emphasis of IWA and Dr. Kordesh that is placed on the value of establishing and sustaining a "social learning network" and spends much of his time and energy maintaining relationships with NNNN's many organizational leaders. There is a definite focus on community empowerment and leadership development as well as providing community services.

As far as concrete projects taking shape in Humboldt Park, it is difficult to clearly identify what has come about or become a future goal as a direct result of the IWA "intervention", and what was already on the agenda. Projects that received mention throughout the evaluation process included:

- Working with the schools to establish community learning centers
- The opening of a new establishment on Division Street, in what has been designated for commercial revitalization as the Paseo Boricua. It is called the Café Urbano and is designed to draw college students for food and culture.
- Developing a new supermarket that is Latino-owned and oriented
- Conducting a feasibility study regarding the development of a youth center and reducing/preventing youth violence
- Coordinating the planning and development of new affordable housing through Bickerdike Redevelopment Corp., Hispanic Housing, and Chicago Mutual Housing Network and the city's Small Building Preservation Program.
- Doing a transportation analysis of Humboldt Park

As data was being collected for this report NNNN received a grant from IWA for \$300,000 for their schools network project. This grant is distributed among nine grammar schools for the creation or expansion of community learning centers. A second grant of \$90,000 for planning the development of a Youth Center was also forthcoming, with the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) in the role of fiscal agent and technical assistance provider.

## 2. *Partner Organizations/Key Players*

With 118 member organizations, it was not possible within the scope of this evaluation process to interview all of them. Moreover, all members do not participate in NNNN at the same level with equal impact or significance. So, guidelines for identifying and interviewing key players were as follows: 1) they were identified by Medina as key players; 2) they received an Americorps volunteer; 3) they were an active member of the NNNN Board; 4) they were mentioned by Dr. Kordesh; 5) they were mentioned by other community leaders. In the end, representatives from 12 partner organizations were interviewed, with 4 of them being Americorps sites.

These key players were indicative of the diversity in type of organization and program focus that represents the make-up and interests of NNNN. They also represented a range of familiarity with IWA from very familiar to only a vague awareness. For the most part, the ones who can speak to IWA goals and involvement in Humboldt Park are NNNN Board members and/or Americorps site supervisors; others are more vague in their understanding of how IWA fits.

Interviewees represented the following organizations: the **Egan Urban Center of DePaul University, Association House**, a 100 year old settlement house, NNNN's **Clergy Caucus** (St. Mark's Catholic Church, New Hope Bible Church), the **Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce, Humboldt Park Vocational Education Center, Humboldt Park Empowerment Partnership (HPEP), Puerto Rican Arts Alliance**. These were partner organizations without an Americorps volunteer.

Those selected as Americorps sites included: **United Blocks of West Humboldt Park (UBOWHP)** and the **Block Club Federation**, two grassroots neighborhood associations, **Centro Sin Fronteras**, an organization that focuses on immigrants' rights, and the **Division Street Business Development Association (DSBDA)**.

All of those with Americorps Volunteers were unanimous in identifying that resource as a clear IWA benefit. As small organizations they all welcomed the extra help in staffing their organizations. Other benefits were less clear in the spring of 2002. However, there were expectations.

Improvement in education, for both children and adults, was a goal several partner organizations indicated should be an IWA goal and a beneficiary of state resources. One identified the public schools network and school/community resource centers. Another mentioned a mentoring program at Clemente and Wells high schools. Others were more focused on adult education and job training.

The association with HPEP was mentioned by ten of twelve partners as their connection to NNNN, and along with it the importance of an economic development focus for IWA. DCCA's JTED program was identified as a source of state funding for job training at

Association House, but it was unclear whether that was an IWA benefit or the result of State Senator Miguel Del Valle's support. Several interviewees mentioned improved access to better jobs as an IWA outcome they would hope for.

Economic benefits are definitely envisioned through the development of the Paseo Boricua, the Division Street commercial revitalization project. The opening of the Café Urbano was mentioned as an early success story associated with IWA through the good work of the Americorps Volunteer assigned to the DSBDA. An additional IWA-related resource for the community and Paseo Boricua is a proposed transportation analysis of Humboldt Park, particularly as it pertains to parking for the Paseo Boricua. The DSBDA Executive Director, Enrique Salgado, heard about the opportunity to apply for a DCCA planning grant directly from IWA Director, Richard Kordesh. Prior to IWA, DSBDA received state funding as part of a member initiative of Senator Del Valle.

Further along on Division Street, Puerto Rican Arts Alliance worked first with HPEP on a proposal to develop the abandoned horse stables in Humboldt Park as a Puerto Rican Cultural Center. The director, Ed Maldonado, believes that this project is finally getting off the ground and has benefited from state assistance through DCCA in securing a 15-year lease on the stables from the Chicago Park District. He sees the center not only as a cultural benefit, but also as a generator of tourism and economic activity.

Barbara Watkins, at UBOWHP, expressed concerns regarding flow of resources from NNNN. They saw more support coming from Association House, where they are housed, than NNNN in their organizing activities. However, the AV has worked closely with the NNNN housing staff to coordinate workshops with the Cook County Tax Assessor's office, received assistance in its Senior Brunch and is working with NNNN to get a health bus for block parties.

The clergy (Rev. Mike Shanahan, St. Mark's Catholic Church, Rev. Gerald Smith, New Hope Bible Church) were concerned about curbing violence and working with youth. While NNNN's youth center feasibility study was not specifically named, that project could address concerns of the Clergy Caucus. Given NNNN's organization of a Clergy Caucus, it was clear that churches and their respective clergy are key players. Neither clergyman interviewed was particularly familiar with IWA but believed they needed more information on state resources, both for money and referrals for service.

Medina emphasized the importance of bringing resources to the network such as the schools, the youth service agencies and the non-profit developers. Most of the partner organizations indicated awareness of Eliud Medina's leadership and were in fairly regular communication with him as a central player.

Other organizations that were mentioned included: Greater West Town Project, Erie House, Youth Service Project, Chopin School, Casa Central, the Puerto Rican Agenda. Other churches mentioned included St. Sylvester's and Adalbert Methodist and Rev. Tomas Sanabria with Neighborhoods of Hope (Barrios con Esperanza). Most of the interviewees mentioned one or more of the 12 partner organizations interviewed.

### 3. *Deployment of Americorps Volunteers*

Since inception, NNNN has employed 12 Americorps Volunteers (AV), 7 Latinos, 3 African-Americans, and 2 Caucasians. Nine were women and three were men. Three withdrew before completing their year of service, but one of these was hired by another IWA organization (North Lawndale Employment Network) as their Americorps Coordinator. One was not hired until after the interview period; one was not available for interview. So, a total of 8 AV participated in the evaluation process. They included 6 women and 2 men, 6 Latinos, 1 African American and 1 Caucasian.

Four of the eight AV were placed with NNNN partner organizations, and four were deployed to work with NNNN Action Teams. As noted above, partner organizations receiving AV included Centro Sin Fronteras, United Blocks of West Humboldt Park (UBOWHP), the Block Club Federation, and the Division Street Business Development Association. So, one was assigned to work on immigrants' rights, two worked with grassroots community organizations, and one was working on the Paseo Boricua, economic development project of DSBDA. Of the 4 deployed at NNNN, two worked with the Education Action Team (EAT), one with Economic Development (EDAT), and one with Housing (HAT).

In its work with immigrants in the Humboldt Park community, **Centro Sin Fronteras** suffers from limited manpower, according to staff member and Americorps supervisor, Roberto Lopez. That is why the AV has been a welcome addition. He also sees the value of networking with other organizations through NNNN.

The AV at Centro Sin Fronteras, **Aimee Hernandez**, is a Latina who is assisting with intake for Centro's programs, such as legal services, citizenship classes, and energy assistance, and maintaining their database. She was a volunteer with Centro for one year prior to being offered the Americorps slot. Centro reports an expansion of services due to the additional staffing capacity the AV brings.

The AV intends to continue her education beyond some classes taken at Truman College. Due to her experience at Centro, she is now considering a degree in education or law and has a better sense of the importance of a college education. Her only complaint is the low AV stipend.

**UBOWHP** is a member of the Block Club Federation but has sought its own 501c3 and set up offices at Association House. Barbara Watkins, Vice-president of UBOWHP indicated that they are very grateful for their AV. She is described as "the lifeblood of the organization." She carries out tasks associated with grassroots organizing such as door-knocking, phone calls, and distributing flyers. Her target group is the seniors in the community, but she is also involved in starting a tutoring program. She works closely with her supervisor, the Vice-President of UBOWHP as well as attending meetings at NNNN.

UBOWHP's AV, Dorothy Tillmon, had been a volunteer with them prior to her signing on as an AV. She is a mature, African-American woman who has lived in Humboldt Park for 11 years. She remarked on her expanded awareness of organizing as a career as a result of her AV experience. She also noted the help she has received from DePaul University and Loyola University, especially Brian Banks, in doing her job.

**The Block Club Federation (BCF)** is part of HPEP, a founding member. Both Executive Director, Feliz Villafane, and its board president, are active on all three of NNNN's Action Teams. The BCF was started by the late Carlos Villafane, an organizer for Youth Service Project, and YSP initially served as its fiscal agent. It was organized around issues of neighborhood deterioration and lack of public services. Today it encompasses the area from Augusta to Armitage and Kedzie to Cicero, a total of 95 blocks. The only IWA benefit BCF is aware of is the Americorps program. BCF has received resources through DCCA, but through Senator Del Valle, not IWA.

BCF has employed a young Latina, Michelle Garcia, as their AV. She heard about the Americorps opportunity with NNNN in the process of seeking employment assistance at the local Illinois Employment Training Center (IETC). NNNN then assigned her to the BCF. She is assisting with computer classes that BCF offers the community, as well as getting involved with neighborhood organizing. She was able to help residents get a crossing guard assigned at a dangerous intersection. In the course of securing this victory, she experienced the frustration of how long it takes to get things done and she felt empowered through the opportunity to meet and get results from the Alderman and police commander. She hopes to attend college and pursue a career in nursing or medicine.

As a one-man operation for many years, the executive director of the **Division Street Business Development Association (DSBDA)**, **Enrique Delgado**, has been thrilled to have an extra pair of hands in the form of an Americorps Volunteer. He identifies economic opportunity as a major issue for Humboldt Park. The DSBDA has promoted the idea of the Paseo Boricua to facilitate tourism and commercial development along Division Street since the early 90's and the idea was a cornerstone of the HPEP EZ proposal. With the advent of IWA, there are new resources to address this project. They were invited to apply to DCCA for a planning grant to hire a consultant for the transportation study mentioned above. Their Americorps member has helped with the layout and design of pamphlets and brochures, but has probably contributed most to development of the Paseo by facilitating the opening of a new business there in the form of the Café Urbano. The café idea was the result of a market analysis done by DePaul University that indicated the need for a business that would draw Puerto Rican and other Latino college students to the area and the AV's interest in a Latino culture/arts venue for people his age. The DSBDA would like to keep their AV on after his year of service. Currently, Café Urbano is a non-profit project of the Division Street Business Development Association and the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, but there are hopes that it will be successful enough to become independent.

DSBDA's AV is a 21-year-old Latino, Michael Reyes, who applied to become an AV in Humboldt Park so that he could learn more about his own culture and about economic development. For example, while he understands and reads some Spanish, he is not fluent. Hearing it every day is improving his skill and cultural connections. While living in Michigan, he heard about the AV opportunity in Humboldt Park from a friend and contacted NNNN directly. They in turn placed him at DSBDA. He has learned that business attraction and business development is a slow process, but has appreciated the hands-on opportunity. He is pleased with what he has been able to accomplish with the opening of Café Urbano. He hopes to continue his studies as well as writing and performing poetry.

**The Housing Action Team (HAT) of NNNN** was given an AV and assigned a staff person, Teofilo Lopez, as supervisor. The HAT functions at two levels. First it brings together the housing development organizations that are doing or planning projects in Humboldt Park. This includes Bickerdike Redevelopment Corp., Hispanic Housing, and the Chicago Mutual Housing Network as well as community leaders concerned about housing affordability in Humboldt Park. Gentrification and rising property taxes are the emerging issues. The AV assists the staff in contacting HAT members for meetings, organizing community-housing fairs to disseminate information on housing resources, and has been doing research on abandoned properties that might be eligible for acquisition, rehab, and resale at an affordable price through the city's Small Buildings Preservation Program. NNNN is about to acquire its first property through this program.

The young woman working as the AV with the HAT, Kara Olsen, is a graduate of Wheaton College. While serving as an intern at the Resurrection Project in Pilsen, she heard about HPEP from an NNNN board member who worked there. She was interested in learning more about community development, especially in the area of affordable housing. She contacted Mr. Medina and Ms. Roman who offered her an AV slot with HAT. Along with Mr. Medina, Kara has met with IHDA to discuss increasing affordable housing in Humboldt Park. She says that her AV experience has changed her ideas about graduate school so that she is now considering the possibility of studying outside the US and focusing on developing countries.

A second AV was assigned to the **NNNN Economic Development Action Team (EDAT)** with Roberto Nieves as supervisor. Roberto sees the additional help provided by the AV as allowing the work of the EDAT to expand and move forward. The projects they are focused on include development of a supermarket on Division Street, attraction of a new bank to Humboldt Park, a youth center, and the horse stables/art center project. He mentioned improved relationships with state agencies including DCCA and the State Treasurer's office.

The AV assigned to EDAT, Orlando Sanchez, heard about Americorps when he was enrolled in a program at Youth Service Project. For the beginning of his term, Orlando Sanchez served at Youth Service Project, assisting in the GED program. He tutored and helped prepare students for the test. The class graduated in December 2001. At NNNN, he has been assigned to do research on vacant lots and to make phone calls to remind

people of meetings. He valued his AV experience as an opportunity to meet community leaders and develop his own abilities. He would like to go to college in Puerto Rico and some day open his own business, a traditional café, in Humboldt Park. Nevertheless, Mr. Sanchez did not complete his year of service and withdrew in June 2002. As a result, Kara Olsen, the AV who was working with the Housing Action Team, was asked to begin working with EDAT as well.

The **Education Action Team of NNNN entitled “Project TEAM”** has been the beneficiary of two AVs. Laura Lassiter is their supervisor. She has been on the staff at NNNN for 9 months, but prior to being hired, worked at NNNN as a student intern and then a VISTA volunteer after college. Her job at NNNN is to work with the 10 elementary schools in the NNNN schools network (Burr, Pulaski, Pritzker, Moos, Casals, Lowell, Stowe, Chopin, Lafayette, Von Humboldt). The goal is engaging parents to get more involved in their children’s education and to develop their own skills. This may include their own personal educational development at school learning centers open to parents and/or honing their leadership skills through the Local School Councils and other parent meetings. This NNNN Schools Network has its origins in and Annenberg Challenge grant three years ago that got some schools working together. She is also expected to work with a Youth Action Team of high school students and with those students involved in Quantum, a youth mentorship program serving out of school and out of work youth. Her work with youth also involves her in the youth center planning project. She is also in communication with the Humboldt Park Vocational Education Center of City Colleges.

Since her work with schools was continually expanding, becoming more than she could handle alone, Medina decided to assign two AVs to help. As is often the case, extra help also means extra work. Laura admits to having no previous supervisory experience and feeling somewhat awkward in supervising older adults. She would have liked to receive some training or orientation in the area of supervision. Nevertheless, Laura sees a marked improvement in parent participation since the AVs have been working with her.

In her work with the Youth Center project she has observed the participation of several state agencies: DCFS, DHS, and Finance.

Lynn Santoyo is a full time education student at UIC and plans to become a teacher. She saw the Americorps opportunity on the Internet, called NNNN, and was hired by Gabriela Roman. Her AV experience is making her more aware of the educational process in the community. She works with five elementary schools in the NNNN Schools Network, Burr, Pritzker, Chopin, Lafayette, and Pulaski, recruiting parents to join the Local School Council (LSC). She is aware that each school received a grant of \$30,000 to help each school get their parent teams together. She also works with the Youth Action Team, Clemente High School and the Youth Center project. She attends NNNN Steering Committee and staff meetings and AV meetings at NNNN and with Brian Banks. The EAT meets once a month at Association House.

Lynn noted the challenge in balancing the demands of school and her AV assignment. She feels could use more help/supervision in organizing her numerous tasks. Mr. Medina noted that based on the work that Lynn has done with the schools, that she will be an excellent teacher.

Trinidad Alamo is a mature and long time resident of Humboldt Park. She has had computer training in the SER Technical School based at Association House and heard about the Americorps opportunity at NNNN from the SER staff. She is enthusiastic about school learning centers as vehicles for parents to become more skilled. She believes an increase in their knowledge, self-esteem, and skills will make them better parents, more able to help their children with school, and more committed to the importance of education. As their education increases they have more earning power and provide better for their families. Economic stability is a foundation for educational progress, and so the circle goes round.

Trinidad works directly with the parents at three schools: Casals, Moos, and Stowe. She has built relationships with the school principals and attends LSC meetings. She conducted a survey of parents to determine what they would like to learn. She participates in the Parent-to-Parent program at Erie House and has linked with the HPVEC. She is anxious to have parents take advantage of opportunities to learn computer skills.

Her AV experience has given her a chance to work in the area she loves: education. She has appreciated the meetings with Brian Banks, which she believes have raised her level of awareness of community issues.

The Humboldt Park Americorps coordinator, Gabriela Roman, is pleased with the first group of Americorps Volunteers through the IWA program. She feels that the AVs have contributed to the agencies where they were placed and the community as a whole. She also mentioned that the IWA has helped NNNN develop valuable **relationships** with the Governor's Office and Loyola University. This would not have happened without the IWA program.

## **B. North Lawndale**

**Steeve Kidd indicates that the IWA connection has helped AMPS connect with several state agencies, including IDHS, DCCA, and the state Budget Office. While Kidd acknowledges the need for increased funding for more staff, he argues that the strengthening of state relationships is equally important.**

### *1. IWA Goals and the Lead Organization*

To understand the IWA connection to North Lawndale, as well as the evolution of the North Lawndale Employment Network (NLEN) as the IWA lead organization in that

community, one must begin with the Steans Family Foundation. This philanthropic organization was founded in 1987. In the early 90's, the family decided on a funding strategy that would be based on a partnership between the foundation and a select community. They set out to assess the potential for this strategy with five possible communities: North Lawndale, Englewood, Cabrini Green, Humboldt Park, and Austin. By 1995, they had selected North Lawndale, and began their "I Have a Dream" project designed to encourage elementary school students to commit to a college education.

The next area the foundation tackled was employment. They hired a consultant to do a needs assessment and outline potential strategies to address the need. Out of that process came the decision to create NLEN. A search was conducted to find a director that led them to hire Brenda Palms-Barber who came to their attention due to her work for an employment project based in Denver and funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Brenda came to Chicago in 1999.

As IWA was just beginning to take shape, and Richard Kordesh convened a series of meetings to become acquainted with the needs and programs that existed in North Lawndale, the Steans Family Foundation was involved. The first meeting took place at North Lawndale Christian Development Corp. and was attended by Brenda and Deborah Wesley-Freeman, director of the Sinai Community Institute (SCI), which housed NLEN and served as its fiscal agent. Several organizations made presentations on their mission and programs, and Palms-Barber asked for an opportunity for NLEN to present at the next meeting. Following that, Kordesh selected NLEN as the lead organization for IWA in North Lawndale. He was impressed with the research they had done to support their decision to work with ex-offenders, the program that had emerged, and the use of technology (Client Track) to track participants during and after program participation.

While many local organizations expected IWA to bring new funding to North Lawndale, Brenda says Kordesh explained that the initial thrust of the IWA was about relationship building, connections, and access, as these pertained to state agencies working with IWA target communities. Not only does Palms-Barber acknowledge that valuable connections have been made with the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC), but that it appeared that additional funding would be forthcoming as well. In March 2002, NLEN was scheduled to receive a \$300,000 grant for their work with ex-offenders. Finally, as a result of NLEN's connections with IWA, Brenda was invited to serve on a state task force on the ex-offender issue.

NLEN's Ex-Offender Employment Service Network (EESN) is described by program manager, Walter Boyd, as a job readiness program open to ex-offenders from North Lawndale and those willing to travel there for the program. The focus on ex-offenders was based on research that indicated that North Lawndale had the highest number of ex-offender residents of any Chicago area community. It is estimated that 70% of the area's men, ages 18-45, have criminal records.

Currently, EESN participants spend 15 hours per week for four weeks. The program has four modules:

- Anger Management – helping the ex-offender cope with his personal anger and/or tendency for violent behavior.
- Right Thinking – helping the ex-offender to reflect on how his/her behavior affects family and community
- Working It Out – concentrating on interpersonal skills required in a work environment
- Gear Up – concentrating on job search and interviewing skills

Following this workshop series, NLEN, in partnership with the Safer Foundation and the West Side IETC (Illinois Employment and Training Center), assists participants with job placement. Participants are also encouraged to take advantage of the Individual Development Account (IDA) program. IDA encourages residents to set aside savings, to be used toward the purchase of a home or further education. The worker's contribution is supplemented by the Steans Family Foundation.

Finally, the EESN uses an Internet-based data collection software management tool called Client Track. This database helps NLEN member organizations keep track of their clients – who they are, how they are being served, and what their needs are. The database also allows for electronic referrals.

## 2. *Partner Organizations/Key Players*

In North Lawndale, as in other IWA communities, there are other key organizations that are either closely linked with the lead organization, doing complementary work, or are addressing other IWA-supported goals. One way of recognizing partner organizations is through the deployment of Americorps Volunteers (AV). Each IWA lead organization was assigned 11 AV slots to work in their community. NLEN chose to deploy their AV with organizations in their network in order to strengthen their relationships with them. Those partner organizations will be addressed in the next section. Those key organizations not receiving AVs will be discussed here.

The first of these, the Steans Family Foundation, has already been mentioned but warrants further discussion in this section. Their work with the North Lawndale community dates back to 1995. As noted above, they were instrumental in starting NLEN and in getting North Lawndale selected as an IWA community. Their initial investment in North Lawndale of \$250,000 has grown to \$2.5 million in seven years. In addition, while difficult to quantify, their commitment has undoubtedly leveraged even more resources. They continue to stress workforce development as a top priority, both at the early stages of career development, at the K-12 level, and then with adults who need vocational training. Lack of decent affordable housing and access to affordable home ownership is also viewed by the foundation as a serious problem.

Other employment-related partner organizations include United Baptist Church, West Side Tech, a satellite of Daley Community College, and the local IDHS office that works with TANF recipients in their welfare-to-work transition.

Rev. Wilson Daniels, United Baptist Church, 4242 W. Roosevelt Road, described the church's involvement with ex-offenders dating back to 1989. Until NLEN came into existence and decided to focus on ex-offenders, United Baptist was involved with ex-offenders and their families in an ad hoc, one-on-one, counseling and referral type of situation. When NLEN was looking for space to house their ex-offender workshop series, Rev. Daniels made space at United Baptist available. He meets with EESN staff regularly and continues to take an active role in addressing the issues that constantly challenge the successful re-integration of ex-offenders. The Steans Family Foundation first made him aware of NLEN.

Staff at the **Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) North Lawndale office** has been making referrals of TANF recipients who are primarily female and ex-offenders to the EESN since January, 2001. This relationship was established after local staff attended the early IWA community meetings held in North Lawndale, and was then formalized as Senior Administrator, Julio Rodriguez, assigned Victor Rosario to work with NLEN. Since IDHS has as its overall goal to help ex-offenders to become self-sufficient, they looked to NLEN to assist by providing employment and job training services.

As of March 2001, IDHS reports they have referred 20-25 ex-offenders to NLEN and that, as of that date; only two had completed the program. Explanation for the limited success, from the IDHS perspective, involves several issues. First is the recruitment process, which involves identifying ex-offenders who admit to needing and wanting help. Second is the issue of engagement and intensity. The NLEN program has participants in class 15 hours a week for four weeks. IDHS would like to see this increased to 30 hours per week and include a work experience component. (This would address the TANF requirement that recipients work 30 hours per week.) Thirdly, the addition of case management services to the program might strengthen retention and completion as well as recruitment.

Mr. Rosario could see where additional funding would be needed to support this kind of program expansion. The possibility of raising grant dollars to support work with female ex-offenders through collaboration with the Jane Addams School of Social Work at University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) was mentioned by Brenda Palms-Barber, in addition to the forthcoming IWA grant.

In the course of conversation with NLEN director, Palms-Barber, the potential of working with **West Side Tech, a City Colleges of Chicago (CCC)** site, located not far from North Lawndale in the Pilsen community, was mentioned. NLEN had done research on health care careers and had identified 11 entry-level positions open to ex-offenders. The dean of West Side Tech confirmed that his institution could assist North Lawndale ex-offenders with access to careers in health care and manufacturing, in spite of their

criminal records. In fact, the dean indicated he would like to establish a collaborative partnership with a North Lawndale CBO that is working on employment issues. (They already work closely with Instituto Progreso Latino in Pilsen on training for manufacturing.) But to date, there has been no follow-up to his initial conversation with NLEN's director.

Two other organizations figure prominently in the North Lawndale IWA scenario. The first, the **Sinai Community Institute (SCI)**, is identified as a close partner organization with NLEN. The second, **Agency Metropolitan Program Services, Inc. (AMPS)** is identified as a key IWA player, and mentioned by NLEN as a member, but working more independently.

The Sinai Community Institute is a component of the Sinai Health System, undoubtedly one of North Lawndale's community assets. The Institute is connected to IWA directly with some programs of its own, and indirectly, through two other North Lawndale organizations. SCI has served as fiscal agent for NLEN and provides office space. SCI's executive director, Deborah Wesley-Freeman, serves as president of the NLEN board. Interests further overlap with NLEN in relation to the work done on the feasibility of careers in the health care system for ex-offenders.

While NLEN now has its own 501c3, SCI continues to serve as fiscal agent for Balanced and Restorative justice (BARJ), a peer jury comprised of North Lawndale youth, designed to reduce/prevent youth violence and involvement with the Juvenile Justice System.

SCI has its own IWA-related health care program. Their major focus has been on increasing the immunization of children in North Lawndale. In this effort, they are partnering with Lawndale Christian Health Center. IWA has helped them leverage \$600,000 in grants from the Illinois Department of Public Health for the immunization project and to assist Lawndale Christian in opening a new health center in Homan Square.

A final key player in the North Lawndale IWA effort to be discussed here is **AMPS**. Executive Director, Steeve Kidd, describes AMPS as a HUD certified Housing Development Organization (CHDO) whose mission is to further the economic growth and health of North Lawndale via employment, job training and education, and housing initiatives. But AMPS' primary focus currently is the revitalization of 16<sup>th</sup> Street (Kedzie to Kostner, 3200-4400 west) through a retail and housing redevelopment project. When AMPS presented this initiative at one of the IWA orientation meetings, Dr. Kordesh was so taken with the idea that he helped AMPS secure a \$90,000 planning grant from the state for Phase I property research and GIS data mapping.

In addition, Kidd indicates that the IWA connection has helped AMPS connect with several state agencies, including IDHS, DCCA, and the state Budget Office. He mentions receiving support from State Senator Ricky Hendon and State Representative Art Turner. Private organizations that have helped include LISC and JCUA. Finally,

AMPS is negotiating with Harris Bank for a \$3 million investment in the implementation phase of the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Project. While Kidd acknowledges the need for increased funding for more staff, he argues that the strengthening of state relationships is equally important.

AMPS and NLEN partnered three years ago as part of the North Lawndale Industrial Development Team to attract industrial firms to North Lawndale. AMPS pulled out of that project as they shifted their focus from industrial to commercial development. But AMPS is still an NLEN member.

### 3. *Deployment of Americorps Volunteers*

Initially, NLEN made 11 Americorps placements, but, since inception they have employed 17 volunteers, all African-American; 7 men and 10 women. Two withdrew before completing their year of service, and three were hired after the interview process was completed. Two were not available for interview, one being on sick leave at the time. So, a total of 10 Americorps Volunteers (AV) participated in the evaluation process.

Of the 15 currently active AVs all but one were placed with NLEN member organizations; one was assigned to NLEN. NLEN's Associate Director, Lea Weems, sent out an RFP (Request for Proposal) to member organizations to determine their interest in and use for an Americorps Volunteer. They had more requests than volunteers. Placements were based on volunteer preferences and the promptness of agencies in returning their proposals. In general, the NLEN strategy was to strengthen their relationship with members by offering the Americorps program as an added resource.

Three of the original AVs were placed with *North Lawndale Community News*; two are involved in youth and after school programs through the Small Grants Initiative; two are assigned to work with ex-offenders through Faith, Inc. Other placements were with: Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS), North Lawndale Charter Prep School, the Metropolitan Technology Foundation, the African-American AIDS Network, and the Chicago Chapter of National Black Nurses Association (NBNA). The AV placed at NBNA withdrew and no replacement was made. She was transferred to the YMCA. Two consecutive AVs were assigned to the Metropolitan Technology Foundation, neither of which worked out for very long. A new site, the AGAPE Network at Howland School was added after the evaluation period. NLEN's AV was assigned to work on health care issues.

***The North Lawndale Community News (NLCN)*** began publication in October 1999, as a result of the convergence of community need, entrepreneurial initiative, and philanthropic support. Isaac Lewis developed the idea of publishing a community newsletter following his participation in a 10-week entrepreneurial training program. With signatures from 200 residents in support of the idea of such a newsletter, Lewis received a \$2,500 grant from the Small Grants Initiative (SGI). One of SGI's funders, the Steans Family

Foundation, suggested Lewis consider developing a full-fledged community newspaper and offered to fund the paper's printing expenses. Lewis also reports that the newspaper has received a \$90,000 grant through Illinois First for equipment and training. Isaac recruits community writers via monthly writers' workshops and currently utilizes 25 freelance writers. Lewis believes that one of the goals of NLCN is to create work opportunities for area residents. The newspaper is published monthly. The paper also receives funding from Harris Bank.

The three AVs assigned to NLCN are responsible for facilitating the paper's education and training workshops on civic journalism. These workshops include desktop publishing, website development, and marketing. One volunteer is also upgrading the paper's media kits and advertising base. While Lewis acknowledges that the AVs have increased his operation's capacity significantly, he reported disagreements over hours the AVs were expected to work. This was eventually worked out. Lewis also noted that, overall, having the AVs has strengthened the relationship with NLEN.

Meola Ivy was one of the volunteers assigned to NLCN. She has an AA degree from Malcolm X College and was recently accepted into UIC's graphic design program. Her career goal is to teach. So she sees her assignment to teach desktop publishing workshops as a great opportunity to gain experience. She had been volunteering at the paper prior to joining Americorps. The stipend helps with her expenses and the tuition benefit will help with her continuing education. She reported some dispute with her supervisor over the hours she is expected to work. She credits Brian Banks at PRAG with helping to straighten out the problem and with an overall mentorship role.

Anissa Hunter, a marketing and journalism major at Columbia College, also had been a volunteer at the paper before working there as an AV. She works on attracting advertisers to the paper, writes a news column, and assists the business manager with invoices. She expressed pride in being able to increase the number of advertisers while at the same time noting the difficulty of the task. Her experience at the paper is a good fit with her career goals. She also noted the issue with Mr. Lewis over hours.

Ronnie Allen is the third volunteer assigned to North Lawndale Community News. He is a sophomore at the Computer Systems Institute and was a volunteer at the paper when Mr. Lewis suggested he apply for Americorps. He is happy to have help in paying off his college loans through his Americorps service. His assignment at NLCN involves maintaining the paper's computer network, facilitating web design and desktop publishing workshops, and attending town hall meetings. Ronnie also recruits young people for the paper's workshops right off the street corners. He worries/hopes that they will learn enough from his workshops. He is also trying to recruit other volunteers for the paper to join Americorps when his contract is up. He believes the AV experience has broadened his networking, leadership, and communication skills. He mentioned that while attending one of the training sessions at PRAG he was approached by an AV from Englewood who invited him to do a web design workshop in Englewood. In the future he hopes to find full time work in the newspaper business.

**Small Grants Initiative (SGI)** is a program that awards grants to community organizations or residents in North Lawndale interested in creating or enhancing community-based programs or ideas. Grants are divided into two types. The first type awards up to \$2,500. There were 100 applications for the last round of Type I funding. A second type offers grants up to \$8,000 for partnerships among three or more community organizations working on a common project.

In 2000, SGI created the Youth Action Fund and Youth Media Ink, programs geared toward North Lawndale youth. The concept has youth making grants to other youth with community-minded program ideas. At Youth Action Fund youth create RFP's, facilitate technical assistance workshops, make funding decisions and administer program evaluations. The maximum grant is \$1,500. This program is funded by the Steans Family Foundation. A related program is Youth Media Ink set up to document Youth Action Fund's grantmaking process.

Youth Media Ink program coordinator, April Kunze, reports that the increased staffing capacity resulting from the assignment of two AVs through the IWA program was instrumental in helping SGI secure a grant from the city to set up their after-school program. This program serves 30 youth, four days a week and is located at United Baptist Church. Youth Media Ink was able to set up a computer lab with funds from SGI, which is used by the after-school participants.

Supervision issues and disputes over number of hours the AVs were required to work were an issue at SGI just as they were with the North Lawndale News. Kunze believes the AVs need an orientation on professional work skills and that supervisors need to be given clearer, written guidelines about the expectations of AV time commitment.

Rev. Kenneth Holiday of New Beginnings Church signed on as an Americorps Volunteer in order to spend more time helping young people stay off the streets. Rev. Holiday's role with the Youth Media Ink after-school program is to work with young writers interested in having their work published. He tutors and offers counseling regarding any issues the youth may be facing. He works at the program two days a week. He has also recruited volunteers from his church to work with the program.

Upon completion of his year of Americorps service, Rev. Holiday has plans to work with another church to set up a family-counseling program. He has participated in grant-writing workshops organized by Americorps volunteer, Rev. Lorraine Powell of the Englewood IWA program. He cited the need for more grant-writing assistance and resource development for smaller churches. Holiday said that he had never heard of Americorps prior to being approached by Youth Media Ink to apply for one of the slots. His experience has given him a new slant on the community and his role in it. He also plans to use the Americorps education benefit to get his bachelor's degree in theology from Hudson College in Elgin.

Leonard Cook is the second AV at Small Grant Initiative. He is a student at Harold Washington College and works for Small Grant Initiative part time. He is responsible for

coordinating SGI's Youth Action Fund and tutoring school age children in the after-school program. He helps the youth with setting up the workshops they do at local schools to let the youth know about the Youth Action Fund.

Leonard did not set out to be an AV. He really wanted to become a member of Youth Action Fund. But April Kunze asked him to work for her. Since he had been trying to find a job for 6 months, he accepted the offer. The closeness to home, the opportunity to work in his community, and the tuition benefit were all part of his decision to become an AV. Leonard observes that the Youth Action Funds suffers from a few flaws – in staff supervision, limited awareness of the program, compounded by weak networking. Nevertheless, he believes that his Americorps experience has changed his life, helping him to better understand his strengths and weaknesses. His frustration is that his position is only part time while the work demands full time attention.

**F.A.I.T.H., Inc.** is located in the Austin area, not North Lawndale. However, it is a member of NLEN due to their common interest in serving the ex-offender population. F.A.I.T.H., Inc. has been working with ex-offenders since 1986. The Executive Director, Rev. John Crawford, serves as chair of IDOC's Chicago area advisory council. The organization assists ex-offenders, incarcerated persons, and their families with counseling and referrals for services such as housing, health care and employment. They also engage in advocacy and policy development around issues affecting ex-offenders. One example involved getting IDOC to issue temporary identification to incarcerated persons upon their release which they can present to the Secretary of State's office to acquire permanent ID that is required for seeking employment, registering to vote, etc.

Rev. Crawford approached NLEN to be included in the IWA effort and Americorps. He said that he had people on his volunteer staff who could benefit from becoming AVs so they could receive some income and earn the education benefit. One AV processes IDHS vouchers for ex-offenders in need of transportation, uniform, and childcare assistance. Another works as an advocate for people who are still incarcerated. The increased staff support provided by these Americorps positions has allowed F.A.I.T.H. to serve more people and freed up Rev. Crawford for more counseling and policy work. His only complaint is the paperwork and attendance at Americorps meetings that takes his staff away from their work.

One of the AVs at F.A.I.T.H., Inc. was asked by NLEN director, Brenda Palms-Barber, if she was interested in being a volunteer. At the time she was living in a shelter. She jumped at the opportunity to earn some income to find another place to live for her and her 5 children. She hopes to attend college with her AV education benefit. She finds her work in helping ex-offenders get the benefits they are eligible to receive from IDHS very satisfying. She has also been able to make some referrals for services. She feels she is an effective advocate because she has been in need of similar services herself. She also compiles the monthly reports to IDHS that documents how their money was spent.

The other AV at F.A.I.T.H., Inc. has been volunteering for the organization for 9 years. She corresponds with inmates, attends parole and clemency board hearings, prepares care

baskets for female inmates upon their release, and lobbies for better state and national ex-offender legislation. At the time of the phone interview, she was in California, meeting with Illinois prisoners who were transferred there. While she says she enjoys her work the limited resources of the organization also frustrate her. Specifically, she cites here lack of regular access to a computer. With all of her traveling to various prisons, she could use a lap top computer. She would also like to see F.A.I.T.H. get a new van and hire a driver for taking people to visit family members who are incarcerated. While she appreciates the personal benefits she is gaining from being an Americorps Volunteer, she does not really see the point of all the meetings she is required to attend.

The **North Lawndale Neighborhood Housing Services** office assists residents with low costs loans and counseling to become homeowners. They offer home improvement workshops and cultivate relationships with local financial institutions. NHS is familiar with NLEN through its participation in the IDA (Individual Development Account) collaborative. NLEN approached them and asked if NHS could use an AV. The person originally assigned to NHS did not work out and withdrew from the Americorps program. He was replaced by a person who had approached NHS looking for work. The AV's duties include attending housing court on days when North Lawndale properties are up for building code violations and tracking the status of 180 vacant lots in the area with photos and other updates.

While the NHS director knew Brian Banks at PRAG and had met Richard Kordesh, he was not clear about the overall IWA mission or how NHS fit in except through their AV. He did not understand why the AV needed to attend meetings during work time and wanted to see NLEN take a more aggressive role in administering the program.

NHS' second AV had been in the program just over one month at the time of his interview. He was looking for work when NHS offered him the Americorps position. He sees the Americorps experience helping him discover his talents and interests as well as providing an income. He expressed some concern for his safety when he is out in the neighborhood documenting vacant lots, but in general, he is looking forward to making a contribution to NHS. He has enjoyed meeting political officials through meetings he attends with the NHS director. This helps him to develop his communication skills and gives him the opportunity to network with different people. He regards Brian Banks as a mentor who helps keep him focused.

**The African American AIDS Network (AAAN)** began in 1987 under the auspices of Operation PUSH. The director explained that the organization came into existence when AIDS education was not popular in the black community but studies indicated that the prevalence of the disease among black males was growing at an alarming rate. As society's concern about AIDS has begun to wane, AAAN has incorporated diabetes, hypertension, asthma, and other diseases disproportionately affecting the black community into its education and outreach efforts. AAAN is a member organization of NLEN and was thus approached by Lea Weems with the offer of an AV. To date, this has been the only IWA benefit she is aware of. She would like to see more support from NLEN and from IWA to increase her organization's financial resources. She also noted

that cohesion and communication among NLEN's IWA partners is lacking. She would like to know more about other IWA organizations and explore ways they might work together.

Nevertheless, she has greatly appreciated the work of her AV in increasing AAAN's visibility among area youth. She describes the AV's main duties as working and networking with national and citywide health agencies, attending and speaking at the organization's health fairs, and teaching health education classes to area third graders.

AAAN's AV heard about Americorps through an e-mail sent by Brain Banks to a list serve she was on. As a resident of North Lawndale she was interested in an opportunity to work in her community. She needed employment and the education assistance was an additional incentive. Prior to signing on with Americorps she had received certification from the American Lung Association, preparing her to teach classes on asthma, tuberculosis and HIV and she is currently a sophomore in nursing at UIC. As she contacts various agencies to offer her services as an AAAN speaker, she feels her networking opportunities have greatly increased. She is especially pleased with her work in educating staff at shelters and transitional housing programs to be more aware of their clients' potential health problems.

Another health-related organization that shares office space and works closely with AAAN is the **Chicago Chapter of the National Black Nurses Association**. NBNA's mission is to offer health education in the black community and to recruit more African Americans to become nurses. They have been in existence for 30 years. The executive director of NBNA/Chicago is a board member of NLEN and well known in Chicago health circles. While they were approached to have an Americorps volunteer, the person assigned did not work out and was transferred to a different organization.

North Lawndale's **Charter College Preparatory School (CCPS)** is just 4 years old. They have put their AV to work assisting the school's technology coordinator in both the operations and educational arenas. As she is currently a computer network major, in her sophomore year at Robert Morris College, she says she has put all the skills she gained at school to use and been stretched to learn things not yet covered in her classes. She was very involved in the development of the school's technology plan, which resulted in a \$ 1 million dollar grant from the federal government. She was pleased that her input was valued and she was treated as a colleague in this process. She has also been involved in a survey of parents that resulted in the school offering weekend computer classes for them. Finally, she has been responsible for finding summer internships for CCPS students, contacting companies and local agencies to find opportunities.

The AV believes her Americorps placement has been very educational and more than what she expected. The hands-on computer experience has been very valuable and her exposure to some teaching has led her to consider the possibility of a career in that area. In recognition of her value to the organization, the school has offered her the technology assistant position outlined in the technology grant when her year of service ends. She heard about the AV opportunity from her cousin who is also a North Lawndale AV.

The **Metropolitan Technology Foundation (MTF)** is a two-year old organization that provides a 16 week information technology training course to help unemployed residents in low income communities find jobs in the IT field. The MTF director was not familiar with the overall IWA initiative. She had just heard about the opportunity for additional staff through Americorps. Unfortunately, the volunteers assigned to work at MTF did not work out. The first one became ill and could not complete his service. The second one worked briefly and then decided she wanted to pursue a career in childcare and left Americorps. During the time the volunteers were employed by MTF, they were responsible for researching funding sources, doing community outreach, and identifying other organizations doing similar work.

While the volunteers did not work out in the long run, the MTF director appreciated what they were able to accomplish. She got some positive responses from letters sent to potential funding sources by the AV, and the other volunteer created a directory of organizations in North Lawndale doing similar IT work. She believes in the value of Americorps in giving people important work opportunities and intends to apply for another AV this fall.

### **C. Englewood**

**Ms. Robinson indicated that what she regarded as both critical and refreshing about her early conversations about IWA with Dr. Kordesh was the understanding that the community needed to dictate the priorities that would be addressed under the broad IWA umbrella.**

#### *1. IWA Goals and Lead Organization*

The lead organization in Englewood is the Mary McDowell Settlement House (MMSH), a settlement of Chicago Commons, an umbrella organization founded by Graham Taylor in 1894. MMSH defines its service area as encompassing Englewood, West Englewood, and New City, roughly an area from 55<sup>th</sup> to 75<sup>th</sup> Street and from the Dan Ryan Expressway to Damen (2000 west). In its current mode of service to children and families in this area MMSH has been in operation since 1980. Area Director, Josephine Robinson, has been involved in this community for over 25 years.

When IWA Director, Richard Kordesh, was considering Englewood as an IWA community, he visited with Josephine Robinson and Vincent Barnes at Re-birth of Englewood Community Development Corporation (ROE/CDC). ROE is a community development corporation that was organized with significant support from Congressman Bobby Rush to address economic development issues in Englewood. Barnes and Kordesh then planned the first IWA community orientation meeting. Eventually, MMSH was designated as the lead organization in terms of its focus on education and its responsibility for recruiting and placing IWA Americorps Volunteers for Englewood. At the same time, ROE continued to play a key role in the Englewood IWA process.

Vincent Barnes serves as chair or convener of the Englewood IWA collaborative working group and the coordinator of the community's economic development efforts that are also supported by IWA. So, to a certain extent, Robinson/MMSH and Barnes/ROE are co-leaders of Englewood's IWA effort.

Ms. Robinson indicated that what she regarded as both critical and refreshing about her early conversations about IWA with Dr. Kordesh was the understanding that the community needed to dictate the priorities that would be addressed under the broad IWA umbrella. There was no difficulty in their agreeing that improved educational outcomes were critical to altering Englewood's future by lifting it out of poverty. Furthermore, to move forward, Englewood has to work on strengthening its capacity to collaborate to get things done, setting aside old conflicts that foster mistrust and inhibit productive outcomes.

Under the broad goal of improving education, the following objectives were identified:

1. improve current test scores and GPAs in target schools
2. increase college admissions
3. increase parent involvement in their children's education and in local schools
4. improve parenting skills

Six elementary schools and one high school were selected based on academic need, demonstrated desire and capacity to work with the community, previous relationships with school staff. Several organizations already engaged with the schools were also invited to participate in what would become the IWA Education Subcommittee, chaired by Josephine Robinson. As the possibility of an IWA grant for Englewood's education activities emerged, it was this subcommittee that determined the spending priorities. Ms Robinson explained that a grant of about \$250,000 was awarded and would be used to hire two social workers for the target schools and to offer a series of parent workshops. Southwest Women Working Together (SWWT) was selected to serve as fiscal agent.

At the same time that the Education Subcommittee was meeting and planning, Barnes was overseeing the development of an Economic Development and Employment and Training Subcommittee. He articulated the goals of these groups as giving community residents the opportunity to achieve economic security through full participation in the market economy. Indicators of economic health in Englewood would include increased salaries for workers and an increase in new business starts. Improvements in those areas are, in turn, connected to decent, affordable housing and quality job training, and, of course, improved performance of local schools. He sees the entire education effort in Englewood embedded in the overall IWA focus on economic development. Objectives like improved student test scores and GPAs as well as increased college attendance are critical components of an economic development strategy.

## 2. *Partner Organizations and Key Players*

In Englewood, IWA partner organizations fall into the two categories or networks described above. There are the education players and the economic development players. Many of the education partner organizations are also hosting Americorps Volunteers (AV). In the economic development arena there appears to be three other key players besides ROE: Southwest Women Working Together, New Englewood Village Development Corporation (NEVCorp), and the Englewood Chamber of Commerce.

**Southwest Women Working Together (SWWT)** is a not-for-profit organization whose mission it is to empower women, expand their opportunities, and promote the fundamental rights of women and children. One of their key initiatives involves preparing women for apprenticeships in the construction trades. Bob Fittin, Director of Employment and Training for SWWT, describes his organization's initial experience with the IWA process as a challenge, at least in the economic development area. Actually, SWWT seems to occupy a unique position as the only Englewood organization heavily involved in both IWA initiatives, economic development and education. However, Fittin feels it took some pushing to get SWWT to the IWA table on the economic development front. While SWWT staff attended some of the earlier IWA organizational meetings, he got the impression that there were "done deals" with key organizations before SWWT was seriously engaged in the IWA process.

At this point, however, SWWT is a key player on the Employment and Training Subcommittee. SWWT also cites the awarding of a small grant of \$4,000 from the state to support SWWT's training program in the construction industry. SWWT also submitted its own training proposal to IWA for \$109,000. To date this proposal has not been funded.

Once SWWT was included in the IWA economic development activities in Englewood, Fittin could see IWA's contribution in its focus on collaboration, which he hopes will overcome residual feelings of mistrust and rivalries among Englewood organizations.

Ed Ollarvia, Executive Director of **New Englewood Village Development Corporation (NEVCorp)**, was very clear as to the purpose of IWA. He stated that: The purpose of the program is to cut through categorical boxes to get resources directly to communities. State resources are to be used to leverage those in the communities to knit together programs to have direct impact via concrete community-based plans and goals. NEVCorp had Empowerment Zone funds to facilitate commercial revitalization and encourage new business starts as well as help existing ones grow. They were anticipating an IWA grant of \$95,000 that will be managed by UIC as fiscal agent and will be used to hire a Business Development Specialist to do some commercial advocacy work.

Ollarvia chairs the Economic Development Subcommittee of IWA and sees their goals including the creation of new jobs and new businesses as well as "knitting" resources from the city and the state. What he hopes IWA will accomplish is bringing various groups to the table to work collaboratively, identifying common issues and gaps in

service or capacity. Then he would like to see strategies/solutions developed by thinking outside the box, not just writing proposals to get funds. Unfortunately, he fears that this piecemeal approach for pursuing funds continues to keep Englewood from seeing the big picture. This situation is further aggravated by the “Balkanization” of Englewood into numerous political districts, resulting in both agencies and wards competing for the same funds, cultivating rivalries and mistrust instead of collaboration. If IWA can overcome this obstacle and help Englewood create a unified plan for community development it will be a success.

Other key players in Englewood’s economic development network that received mention were the Englewood Chamber of Commerce, mentioned only by Barnes, and the Englewood Conservation Council, mentioned only by Fittin. All mentioned MMSH and Josephine Robinson. In fact, Robinson chairs the NEVCorp board. Ollarvia also mentioned the Boulevard Arts Center, a key player in the education network.

Most of the partner organizations in the education network also received Americorps Volunteers and will be addressed in the next section. However, one organization identified as a key player, but that is not an Americorps site was the **Free People’s Clinic**. It was obvious from the interview that Laura Misweet, Executive Director, was invited by Josephine Robinson to participate in IWA because she is a collaborator. While her agency is focused on health care, she was very conversant with Englewood’s education goals. Her sense of IWA’s importance rests with its success in increasing the willingness of residents to get involved in the community. While she believes Englewood needs more state funds, she also believes that dollars alone will not make the difference; it’s the relationships that will be developed. Furthermore, IWA’s success should not be measured by agencies getting grants, but by the people getting what they need.

### *3. Deployment of Americorps Volunteers*

Since inception, Mary McDowell Settlement has recruited and placed 12 Americorps Volunteers (AV), 11 African Americans and one Caucasian. Five were males and seven, females. One withdrew early, one replacement was hired after the interview period, and one was unavailable for interview. Of the 9 AV interviewed, all but one were placed with organizations that are members of the Englewood IWA Education Subcommittee and the schools they work with. Ms. Robinson explained that the economic development partner organizations were not interested or prepared at the time to take on an AV.

One AV was placed at MMSH to work with youth in technology. Seven were assigned to target schools to do tutoring. The target schools include: Sherman, Holmes, Henderson, Nicholson, Wentworth, O’Toole and Robeson High School. Two were supervised directly by MMSH; three were supervised by other partner organizations; school personnel supervised two. Another AV was assigned to teach creative writing at two schools and was supervised by a partner organization. One AV, a minister herself, is working with the Englewood ministers’ coalition but does not report to MMSH.

From September, 2001, when the first AV were recruited, until April, 2002, MMSH did not employ or designate anyone other than Josephine Robinson herself to take responsibility for coordination of Englewood's IWA AV. The lead organizations in the other two IWA communities had designated an associate director to take on this responsibility until funds were available from IWA to either pay an existing staff person for carrying out these duties or to hire someone new. When Michael Simmons, the new AV coordinator was interviewed, he had just been given his new assignment and was not very informed regarding the Englewood Volunteers.

Robert Kerr heard about Americorps through his church. He was looking for an opportunity to engage in community service as a pre-requisite for attending law school. The education stipend was also an attractive element. Robert works with youth who come to the **MMSH computer center**, teaching them how to use various software programs. He also produces a monthly calendar of community events for MMSH and works with Project Elevate through Youth Net as a mentor for teens at Robeson High School, helping to reinforce the benefits of going to college. Finally, he helps coach a local basketball team. In addition to Ms. Robinson, the person he identifies as his supervisor is Thelma McGee, also of MMSH.

He mentioned Evelyn Johnson of 7<sup>th</sup> District Youth Net as a key player, while arguing that her supervisor, Joe Sanders, was not. In general, he perceived that problems with the leadership of 7th District Youth Net were preventing youth at Robeson from getting the quality of attention they needed.

Robert has found working with the kids very rewarding. While he has experienced some frustration regarding communication among MMSH staff, which results in the lack of a big picture point of view and frequent failure to follow up on good ideas that surface at staff meetings, overall, he has been thrilled with the program and believes he has grown as much as the kids have.

Norm Davis spends part of his time working with the **Common Ground youth program at MMSH** and part tutoring at the **Sherman and Holmes elementary schools**. He identifies Mike Simmons and Ms. Robinson as his supervisors. Other leaders or programs he is aware of include Re-birth of Englewood and Imagine Englewood If. He attends monthly meetings of the AVs at MMSH and Brian Banks' monthly meetings. He commented that he feels more like he has a supervisor now that he is working with Mike Simmons. He voiced some conflict over the low level of stipend and the hours he was spending. He was thinking about shifting to a part time volunteer status but was not sure how that would affect his educational stipend. Norm has enjoyed working with the kids and found the schools grateful for his assistance. He did not mention any specific goals following his year of service.

Nineteen-year-old Shohunna Dowd received a flyer at her house concerning AV opportunities in Englewood. Both her mother and her aunt were past volunteers. She plans to attend college to study accounting. She is assigned to tutor children in reading and math at the Holmes and Sherman schools. She was frustrated at the beginning

because there was no job description for her and some delay in getting her started at the school. Now there is more work and she understands what she is supposed to do. She was not thrilled about working with kids initially, but says she has come to like it.

One of the key players in the IWA Education Subcommittee is the **7<sup>th</sup> District Youth Net**. Youth Net is funded by the City of Chicago to operate in several Chicago neighborhoods to work with youth and their parents. Joe Sanders is the director of Youth Net in Englewood. While he does not participate in the IWA Education Sub-committee, his Outreach Coordinator, Evelyn Johnson, does. Youth Net offers parent training workshops and regularly makes presentations and distributes information about college admission.

Joe's only connection to IWA is through his supervision of an AV assigned to work with **Project Elevate at Robeson High School**. He sees the Americorps program as an opportunity for extra help for his program but also a means to helping community residents get back into the workforce. The AV experience offers volunteers improved self-esteem and a sense of belonging to the community. Sanders notes that they have seen college placement increase by 50% since Project Elevate began. He could see even better results if he had more volunteers to work with.

Sanders observed a need for improved supervision with more structure for the volunteers. Volunteers need direction to be successful and supervisors need training in areas like preparing job descriptions for the volunteers, monitoring their progress in regard to the tasks assigned, and setting deadlines for completion. He sees too many supervisors making assumptions about the skills of volunteers that are not warranted. A structured program of supervisor training is needed.

Chyrisse Adkins-Dunnorum is a single parent with teen-age sons. She is tutoring freshman and sophomores at Robeson, working with the school's Youth Council as a mentor, and assisting with Project Elevate college placement activities. She saw a flyer about AV in her building and believed this program offered her an opportunity to get involved with her community. She wants to increase parent involvement in their children's education. She has also appreciated the opportunity to enhance her own skills, particularly in the area of collaboration. She hopes to attend college and study child development.

Evelyn Johnson was invited by Vincent Barnes to attend an IWA meeting and subsequently joined the Education Subcommittee. She views IWA as enhancing services in depressed areas such as tutoring, increasing parent involvement in education, and empowering them to take back their community. She sees a direct benefit from the IWA \$250,000 grant that is funding more parent workshops, in addition to paying for two school social workers. She has not observed any increase in state agency contacts but mentioned collaboration with two private organizations: Imagine Chicago and COFI (Community Organizing around Family Issues). COFI has developed a recognized model for developing parent leadership skills and increased involvement in their schools. In Englewood they are working through SWWT and Pam Dominguez who sits on the

Education Subcommittee. One of IWA's major contributions, from her point of view, is getting people to the same table and emphasizing collaboration over competition and turf battles.

**Southwest Women Working Together (SWWT)** has figured prominently in earlier sections of this report, indicating that it is the only organization, besides MMSH that has significant, direct involvement in both the Education Subcommittee and the Employment and Training Subcommittee. As Bob Fittin represented SWWT in the area of economic development, Pam Dominguez is SWWT's liaison with education. In fact, she co-chairs with Josephine Robinson and SWWT is the fiscal agent for the IWA grant.

Dominguez is enthusiastic about IWA's contributions to Englewood. She sees the Americorps Volunteers enhancing their work with the schools through their tutoring, and looks forward to the forthcoming IWA grant paying for services to address needs the community identified. One of these needs is increased parent leadership. She is an advocate of the COFI model that works with parents as individuals first, then in relationship to their children's school, and then to the community. She also stresses the importance of Project Elevate in increasing college attendance. While she had previous relationships with most of the Education Subcommittee members (MMSH, Youth Net, Imagine Englewood If, Boulevard Arts Center) she feels the IWA process has strengthened these relationships and helped them focus on new ways to address their common goals, to get past personalities and learn to compromise. She also acknowledges that issues of trust still linger and hopes that better forms of communication will help dispel rumors. She cites as examples, the community calendar that MMSH is publishing, the possibility of publishing a newsletter in the future, and increased communication with elected officials. It might also be helpful if there was a "central IWA office" for Englewood. Overall, she describes IWA as a holistic approach that broadens choices, and she hopes IWA will improve Englewood's image as a community that can get things done.

Dawn Thurmon is the AV that Pam Dominguez supervises as she tutors at **Wentworth School** and has some awareness of COFI's involvement, naming COFI's director, Ellen Schumer as a key player. She was recruited by Dominguez, but associates some supervisory responsibilities with Josephine Robinson at MMSH as well. She felt that not enough information was provided to her at the outset as to what was expected of her as an AV while assumptions were made about her skills that were not accurate. Even though the MMSH orientation for AV emphasized community service as the basis for Americorps, Ms. Thurmon viewed the AV position as a "job." She wanted a day job so she could be home with her son in the evenings. But she has not felt like this was a real job. She is not convinced that her AV experience has had any real impact on her life. She would like to take some computer classes, but, as a single parent, when her AV year is over she will have to find a job.

Jean Carter-Hill is connected to IWA education activities on four levels. She is Executive Director of **Imagine Englewood IF** (a part of Imagine Chicago), she is employed as the School Community Rep at **Nicholson School**, she supervises the AV

assigned to her school, and she serves on the IWA Education Subcommittee. Imagine Englewood If offers parent training through its link with Imagine Chicago. The training is designed to help parents identify areas where they can help their children with school work, improve parent/child interaction with improved computer skills, and assist parents with job search skills. Imagine Englewood also partners with the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs in leadership development classes for parents and COFI has provided some workshops. This parent-oriented approach will benefit from part of the IWA education grant as well. Ms. Carter-Hill regards this as totally appropriate as she sees parent involvement as key to improving education and improved educational outcomes as key to economic development.

AV, Janise Harmon, tutors at Nicholson School, continuing previous volunteer work in a program called “60 Minutes of Reading.” She observes that issues at home often complicate the children’s lives, and discussion of those issues often takes up most of the tutoring time. She also stresses the importance of getting kids out on field trips to see new things, build their social skills and self-esteem. But more funds are needed for transportation.

She is aware of other IWA partner organizations such as Boulevard Arts Center, Youth Net and Imagine Chicago and that her supervisor serves on the IWA Education Subcommittee. She feels like she is having an impact when kids come to her wanting to read. For her, the AV experience has helped her with her own parenting skills, and she hope she will be able to get a teacher’s aide position with Chicago Public Schools when her year of service is complete.

Pat Reed, Executive Director of the **Boulevard Arts Center** was recruited first to participate in the IWA general working group, and later asked to serve on the Education Subcommittee. However, since she believes that the first priority in Englewood is economic development she also serves on the Economic Development Subcommittee. The BAC is helping parents and kids explore the arts as a way to enhance self-esteem and improve academic skills, and is developing job training programs for careers in the arts as well as small business opportunities. She would like to find funds to hire a business incubator manager for their small business development program.

Her opinion of IWA to date is that it is a positive strategy but is moving too slowly (since Fall, 2000) in terms of bringing new resources to the community. A figure as high as \$500,000 was mentioned as available for investment in Englewood. To date she is only aware of the \$250,000 to be awarded to the Education Subcommittee. She is encouraged by that since she believes the Education Subcommittee has the potential for achieving its goals. Already, all 6 participating elementary schools are off probation. IWA also promised new contacts with state agencies. She has not seen this materialize either. A few people from IDHS attended early meetings but she has seen no evidence of increased involvement.

Keith Jackson had already been volunteering at the Boulevard Arts Center when he was approached by Pat Reed to become an Americorps Volunteer. He teaches creative

writing classes for grades 6-8 in the after-school programs at Henderson and Nicholson Schools. The challenge he faces is motivating the children to become engaged and take writing seriously in the face of so many personal and family issues they are dealing with. He has to be content with small victories, as when a student actually brought a dictionary to class to help him with his assignment. Once the children are engaged, writing is a great tool for self-expression.

At the time of the interview, Keith had just been an AV for three months and was still a little vague on the IWA connection. He was frustrated by what he described as poor communications about AV meetings at MMSH. While he sees other AVs at the schools, he was still feeling isolated due to a lack of information. While he has an AA degree, he anticipates returning to school to get his BA.

Betty Jones, School Community Rep at **Henderson School**, has been active in community affairs for over 30 years. She was contacted by Ms. Robinson to participate in the Education Subcommittee. She endorses the basic Englewood education goals: improve educational outcomes, develop parenting skills, encourage college enrollment. She indicates that IWA has been instrumental in keeping their after-school program going longer during the school year, but does not specify how. She also credits IWA with providing resources for more parent/child field trips to museums, etc. She supervises the AV who tutors at Henderson and is involved with the AV from the Boulevard Arts Center who teaches in the after-school program.

Deborah Hale had been on the school/parent patrol at Henderson School when Josephine Robinson encouraged her to apply for Americorps. She tutors 3<sup>rd</sup> graders who were held back from 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Her goal is to help them pass the Iowa Basic Skills Test so they can move up. Besides upgrading reading skills, Deborah also teaches the children some computer skills and she helps out in the after-school program. Besides attending the AV meetings at MMSH and PRAG, she regularly attends the parent workshops provided by Imagine Chicago. She experiences satisfaction when reading scores improve but also frustration from trying to work with children who resist being helped. She feels she has learned some things about addressing public officials from her classes at PRAG and she is still getting used to running around to so many meetings. She has no college plans right now.

The last of the Englewood AVs is Rev. Lorraine Powell. Unlike the other Englewood volunteers, she is not engaged with the IWA Education Subcommittee. Prior to IWA and Americorps, she was working with a group of pastors from churches in **Englewood, West Englewood, and New City**. This **faith leaders group** was organized to build capacity among pastors to become more involved in addressing the economic, education and employment needs of their communities. Rev. Powell organizes seminars on topics like non-profit management skills, how to get a 501c3, etc., so they can become a vital force in their communities during the week as well as on Sundays.

While she is working in Englewood, she does not attend AV meetings at MMSH with the other Englewood volunteers. Her supervisor is really Brian Banks at PRAG. He helped

her get the ministers group started, continues to mentor her in that role, and recruited her to be an AV so that she would have some income to support her work. She sees her work as being very much in sync with IWA goals of empowerment and coalition-building. She is not familiar with any new state funding that IWA has brought to Englewood besides the AVs.

**Pam Dominguez of Southwest Women Working Together in Englewood describes IWA as a holistic approach that broadens choices, and she hopes IWA will improve Englewood's image as a community that can get things done.**

### **III. Comparative Analysis**

#### **A. Introduction**

The next step in the evaluation process involves an analysis of what can be learned about how each target community has developed in relationship to some key indicators, and compare that development for the sake of examining different models, not to make any kind of performance judgments. The indicators are as follows:

1. Status of social network development
2. Determination of community priorities and IWA projects
3. Access to state resources, funds and department involvement
4. Deployment and impact of Americorps Volunteers as a specific resource

#### **B. Social Learning Network Analysis**

**A basic premise of the Illinois Workforce Advantage initiative is that distressed communities increase their capacity to change their situation for the better by utilizing a collaborative approach. The formation of a social learning network that brings a diverse set of stakeholders to the table to pool their expertise to assess community problems, plan strategies to address them, and implement those strategies will be more effective than an array of organizations operating independently, competing for limited resources and duplicating services.**

Scholarly literature on the formation of social networks varies in its views of network-building. (Sociology: Knoke and Kuklinski, 1982; Scott, 1991 and Social Work: Hardcastle, Wenocur, and Powers, 1997; Murty, 1998). But, in general, network analysis helps assess the existing relationships in a community before and after a planned intervention. In other words, social learning network analysis is a device to facilitate the assessment of the set of complex relationships that make up a network of stakeholders – how the members communicate, how “influence patterns” enable (or inhibit) cooperation, for example.

Variables that have been used in this type of analysis are as follows:

- Size** How extensive is the network? How many participants are there and what areas of community life are represented?
- Density** What is the level of interaction among participants? Depth? Frequency?
- Coordination** What is the level of conscious, mutual planning and adjustment taking place among participants?
- Centrality** What is the extent to which participants must communicate with a particular person or organization in order to interact with other participants?
- Symmetry** Is there a balance of resources and critical activity among various members of the network?
- Domain**
- Consensus** What is the level of agreement among participating units – persons, organizations, committees – about their responsibilities and functions?

Following is an examination of how each of these variables applies in each of the three target communities.

### Size

There is no prescriptive guideline here that suggests bigger (or smaller) is better. Optimum is what works best to get the job done. Here is what was observed for the three communities.

**Humboldt Park** has by far the largest network. It pre-dates IWA and centers around the lead organization, **Near Northwest Neighborhood Network (NNNN)**. NNNN claims a membership of 118 organizations, with 57 organizations mentioned by name by those interviewed for this report, and a core group of 32 organizations named by almost everyone interviewed as key players and/or NNNN board members. Within this network there are some significant subgroups: 15 churches are named, several of them identifying with the NNNN Clergy Caucus; 10 schools make up the NNNN local schools network; there are 6 economic development/employment organizations identified as network participants and 4 housing organizations; there are 12 social service organizations, including two settlement houses; 3 block club federations; two universities (DePaul and UIC) and one community college; one arts organization. NNNN has also organized four action teams for education, housing, youth and economic development.

Besides these organizations, four elected officials are named as key players: State Senator Del Valle receives the most mentions by far; the others are State Representative Cynthia Soto, Alderman Billy Ocasio, and Cook County Commissioner Roberto Maldonado. Eight Americorps Volunteers work within this network.

In **North Lawndale**, the size and configuration of the network are considerably different. First of all, **North Lawndale Employment Network (NLEN)** as the lead organization is a much younger entity than NNNN, which has had 16 years to develop. NLEN just came into existence in the mid-90. As such, they provide a better example of the potential of IWA-influenced development of their network. One might describe the North Lawndale IWA network as three concentric, larger and larger circles. At the core are 5 organizations linked to NLEN. These include the organization that put NLEN together, the Steans Family Foundation (SFF), NLEN's first fiscal agent and continuing host, Sinai Community Institute (SCI), the Small Grants Initiative (SGI), another SFF-supported operation, United Baptist Church, a key player in NLEN's ex-offender program, and Agency Metropolitan Program Services (AMPS), an economic development organization focused on commercial revitalization. AMPS is put into the inner circle more because of its position vis-à-vis IWA than due to a close relationship with NLEN, although the two organizations have worked together in the past.

The second circle is occupied by 9 organizations that all received Americorp Volunteers (AV) and the Volunteers themselves. NLEN staff indicated they would like to strengthen ties with these organizations and hoped the offering of an IWA/AV would contribute to that objective. One other partner organization identified in this circle is the local IDHS office that has linked with NLEN's Ex-offender Employment Service Network (EESN) to assist their TANF clients. North Lawndale is the only one of the three communities to identify a state agency as a partner organization. Besides IDHS, only one other organization in this circle deals with the ex-offender population as a primary focus. The rest are a mixture of social service, educational, health-related, communications, and housing organizations. Their tie with NLEN is not particularly strong. They are linked to IWA by their AV.

The third and largest circle has 12 organizations that were mentioned by others as connected to the EESN, partnering with AMPS on the 16<sup>th</sup> Street project, or working with one of the Americorps partner organizations. This brings the total to 27 organizations that are linked to IWA in North Lawndale. This is definitely a growing, but more loosely linked network than the Humboldt Park network.

The **Englewood** IWA network is closer in size to North Lawndale than Humboldt Park, but shares some of Humboldt Park's characteristics in terms of closeness of relationships. In Englewood, under the IWA umbrella, there are in fact two parallel networks that only intersect in a few places. Fourteen organizations were identified as strongly connected with IWA in Englewood; six others were mentioned by the core organizations as having a more peripheral connection. Three of these are citywide organizations that have provided technical assistance to the IWA partner organizations; two are Englewood-based economic development organizations that were named as players but do not seem to be directly active in the IWA process. So that brings the total number of organizations engaged in Englewood's network to 20.

Concentrating on the 14 core organizations, these are unevenly divided into two priority areas: education and economic development/employment and training. There are 5

target schools and 5 allied support organizations engaged with those schools that participate in the IWA Education Subcommittee under the leadership of Josephine Robinson, Executive Director of Mary McDowell Settlement House (MMSH). Those 11 organizations have been working closely together to shape Englewood's education agenda under the IWA umbrella. Partly because MMSH is the lead organization on the dominant Englewood IWA project, and because they were given the responsibility of recruiting and placing Englewood's AVs, they are generally regarded as the IWA lead organization.

However, the earliest IWA orientation meetings for Englewood were convened by Vincent Barnes, Executive Director of Rebirth of Englewood CDC (ROE). He continues to coordinate those Englewood organizations that identify economic development as a community priority. For all intents and purposes, this is a network of three: ROE, New Englewood Village Corporation (NEVCorp.), and Southwest Women Working Together (SWWT). Only SWWT is actively engaged in both networks, although both Barnes and Robinson, as individual leaders have ties with organizations in both camps.

### Density

While depth of interaction may be a challenge to measure in terms of quality, frequency of contact is easier to observe. Humboldt Park (HP) organizations/leaders definitely meet themselves coming and going. There are NNNN board and membership meetings; there are meetings of HPEP (Humboldt Park Empowerment Partnership) a planning arm of NNNN left over from Empowerment Zone planning days; there are meetings of the four NNNN action teams organized around schools, housing and economic development. Then there are meetings of the Clergy Caucus, and the block club federations as well as each block club. With the addition of Americorps, there are meetings of all HP Volunteers with the NNNN Coordinator every other week and weekly meetings with their site supervisors. It would be a fairly accurate assumption to estimate that of the 32 core group network members, each of them meets a fellow member at least twice a month at an NNNN or IWA-related activity. This is a very dense network.

With North Lawndale (NL) we move to the other end of the spectrum. The NLEN Board meets quarterly, involving several of the inner circle network members. On the other hand, it was clear they are in close communication with the Executive Director by phone or e-mail to keep up-to-date. The Americorps partner organizations in the second circle made it clear that they almost never meet with each other, nor are they working closely with NLEN on common projects. There are a few organizations in the third circle that meet more often with NLEN because they are connected with NLEN's ex-offender initiative. This includes organizations like Chicago Jobs Council, the Safer Foundation, and UIC. But in general, the North Lawndale social network is not very dense.

On the density spectrum, Englewood lies between HP and NL. On the one hand, the 3 organizations that make up the Englewood IWA Economic Development Subcommittee or sub-network reported that they did not meet often, and each seemed to work independently on their own programs. On the other hand, the Education Subcommittee

members seemed to live in each other's pockets. The Subcommittee meets monthly, but key players see each other on a daily or weekly basis as they cross paths at the target schools or attend each other's meetings between the Subcommittee meetings. Also, since all of the Americorps supervisors are also members of the Subcommittee they also see each other at supervisors' meetings. Several members also reported serving on each other's boards. While at the outset of the IWA process members of both networks met together under the IWA Working Group banner, that group has not been meeting regularly for some time.

### Coordination

Strong coordination in a social network is exhibited through mutual planning and adjustment on the part of many participants. It is about accountability. Who holds whom responsible for getting things done or setting up roadblocks?

The numerous meetings in Humboldt Park described above are indications that there are many opportunities to discuss plans, reach consensus, and follow up on implementation. That is how the structure is intended to work. With such a large and active network, it is not surprising to find that not all participants believe that planning the community's agenda is mutual enough. Some members complained that they are required to report extensively on what their organization is doing, but that the same level of information on overall NNNN plans is not communicated in the same detail. Furthermore, most of the member organizations do not have the capacity that NNNN has to do research and access resources. So they find themselves more dependent on NNNN's capacity to plan and implement, sometimes with more limited input than they would like.

As was noted earlier, in North Lawndale there is the NLEN internal network and the broader IWA network loosely looped around that. While the NLEN board, for example, does some planning together, they seem to depend on Brenda-Palms Barber, and hold her accountable for the organization's plans and activities. It appears that she relates to her board members more as a sounding board than joint planners. The larger IWA network of Americorps sites completely lacks coordination. NLEN did not originally recognize it as their responsibility for coordinating these organizations or their volunteers. No one was assigned this function once the AV were recruited and placed. Until IWA funds became available, early in 2002, to hire an Americorp Coordinator, NLEN did not bring together the volunteers or their supervisors to do any mutual planning. Considering the diversity among the North Lawndale Americorps host organizations, it will be interesting to see what more coordination will yield in terms of overall IWA and/or NLEN goals.

Again in Englewood, coordination is very high among the members of the Education network. Their consensus on their IWA education goals was obvious. Members repeated them so consistently, it was clear that they owned the decision-making process from which they had come. On the one hand, they expected leadership and direction from MMSH, but on the other had they were accountable to each other for what was happening in their bailiwick. This same level of coordination did not apply to the Americorps volunteers. More than once volunteers indicated that when they began they lacked a

clear picture of what was expected of them, or more was expected of them than they were capable of. This situation undoubtedly arose from the fact that Ms. Robinson was coordinating the volunteers along with all of her other duties. With funds for an AV coordinator this situation should change.

On the Economic Development side of the equation in Englewood, SWWT felt like it had come late to the game, after deals had already been done, and had to fight for a place at the IWA economic development table. There was a sense that very little “big picture” planning had been done, and that each organization (ROE and NEVCorps) was getting IWA resources to do their own programs. Overall coordination was entirely lacking.

### Centrality

This variable is intended to examine the extent to which network participants must communicate with a particular person or organization in order to interact with other participants.

In Humboldt Park, as far as IWA is concerned, there is one central contact point, and that is NNNN and Eliud Medina. He took the initiative to get NNNN selected as an IWA lead organization and has directed the goal-setting for IWA and coordinated the allocation of IWA resources. They are receiving a major IWA grant and they determine the deployment of the IWA Americorp Volunteers.

However, there are some examples of “off-center” activity and leadership in Humboldt Park. In terms of IWA, for example, Enrique Salgado, director of the Division Street Business Development Association (DSBDA) has made an effort to establish his own relationship with IWA Director, Richard Kordesh, and to outline some of their IWA projects. The projected transportation study for the Paseo Boricua is an example of this, assuming a grant from DCCA is forthcoming and awarded directly to DSBDA.

HPEP (Humboldt Park Empowerment Partnership) also represents a slight deviation from centrality, perhaps more in attitude than anything else. It was noted during the interview process that some participants identify more with HPEP than NNNN. Nevertheless, NNNN started HPEP, before Medina was on the scene, and it continues to be a part of NNNN. A key player in HPEP is Association House and a number of groups indicated a stronger relationship with the settlement and Associate Director, Miguel Palacio, than with NNNN. But even with its satellites, Association House travels in the larger NNNN orbit.

In North Lawndale, NLEN occupies a dominant position in the IWA network, a position that comes with the designation of “lead organization.” And standing just behind them is the Steans Family Foundation that sought and secured IWA designation for North Lawndale. However, not all IWA activities flow through NLEN in North Lawndale. While the ex-offender initiative has captured significant IWA resources and the attention of IWA director, Richard Kordesh, there is a secondary area of IWA activity. Again, as in Humboldt Park, this is taking place in the business development/commercial

revitalization area. Steeve Kidd, Director of AMPS, has drawn IWA attention and resources to the 16<sup>th</sup> Street revitalization project. To date AMPS has received a \$90,000 grant from the state, through DCCA, for planning and property data mapping. Kidd credits IWA not only with help in securing the grant, but in establishing credibility in the community and with several state agencies and political leaders. There is also activity in the health care arena with the Sinai Community Institute taking the lead on an immunization project. However, to date this effort has not drawn on any IWA resources.

While NLEN played a central role in setting up the Americorps program in North Lawndale, the wide dispersal of Volunteers to organizations that were linked to NLEN, but were not previously linked to any NLEN IWA activity, had a somewhat de-centralizing affect. If NLEN had retained coordination of the AV, as did NNNN in Humboldt Park, this may have been a more centralizing activity. Now that NLEN has an Americorps coordinator on staff it will be interesting to see if/how centrality might increase.

Centrality in Englewood is bifurcated, and therefore, not really evident for the community as a whole. As has been discussed numerous times, there are two centers of IWA activity in Englewood. In the education arena, Mary McDowell Settlement House (MMSH) and Josephine Robinson are dominant. Moreover, MMSH controls the deployment of Americorps Volunteers and has assigned all of them to work with members of the Education Subcommittee or at MMSH itself. A strong second here is Southwest Women Working Together. SWWT will serve as fiscal agent for the IWA grant coming to the Education Subcommittee. The fact that the grant is going to the work of the Subcommittee and not to MMSH indicates that MMSH's role is less central than NNNN's or NLEN in that regard.

The second area of IWA activity, in the area of economic development, is described as being coordinated by Rebirth of Englewood CDC, and director Vincent Barnes does have a direct connection with IWA director Richard Kordesh. But so does NEVCorps director, Ed Ollarvia, who has secured state funds through IWA. Only SWWT perceives ROE as a gatekeeper of sorts and feels that they have not been able to break through and establish their own relationship with IWA and secure significant IWA resources for their own agenda. From this description, and references to individual organization agendas and funding, the lack of centrality in the economic development arena of Englewood is evident.

### Symmetry

Is there a balance of resources and critical activities among units of the three community networks? IWA resources to date consist of cash, Americorps Volunteers, and state agency contacts and involvement.

For the most part, the units of the Humboldt Park network would say that the distribution of resources lacks symmetry. In terms of cash, NNNN has been awarded a \$300,000 grant for their schools network, and \$48,000 to support their Americorps Coordinator.

Half of the 8 Americorps Volunteers currently active in Humboldt Park are assigned to the NNNN action teams, and these teams are directing critical IWA activities such as the schools network, a feasibility study for a youth center, the supermarket development project, the small buildings preservation program, and the development of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center at the Humboldt Park stables, although the latter is more directly connected to HPEP. As was noted earlier, the Paseo Boricua, through DSBDA may draw some of its own state resources for the transportation study. But that remains to be seen. As a critical area of activity, NNNN regards the Paseo and related Division Street activities as within the NNNN purview. This is reinforced by NNNN's choice of DSBDA for one of the four AV it allocated to partner organizations. Furthermore, a key success related to Paseo Boricua, the opening of Café Urbano, is credited to the work of DSBDA's AV.

As for state agency involvement, IWA itself continues to be the main player. DCCA is the only other state agency that was mentioned by HP network members, and that involvement seemed to pre-date IWA or to be linked to HP through Senator Del Valle rather than IWA. But as the youth center project unfolds, state agency involvement has moved to a new level. The Department of Human Services (IDHS), Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), and the Illinois Development Finance Authority (IDFA) are working with the community as part of the planning team.

In North Lawndale, distribution of IWA resources is also uneven, but more symmetrical than Humboldt Park. To date, NLEN has received the lion's share of cash. They have been awarded about \$300,000 for their work with ex-offenders and \$48,000 for their AV coordinator. A smaller but significant cash disbursement of \$90,000 has gone to AMPS, through DCCA, for the 16<sup>th</sup> Street development project. In the context of the IWA/North Lawndale relationship, approximately \$600,000 was leveraged for an immunization project and the Lawndale Christian Clinic at Homan Square from the Department of Public Health.

On the other hand, Americorps resources have been more broadly distributed to organizations throughout North Lawndale that may be members of NLEN, but are employing their AV to move forward on their own agendas. In several cases, the AV is someone who was working at the organization as an unpaid volunteer and is now getting paid. The use of AVs has not contributed to any new IWA-related activities, nor are they supporting NLEN's primary IWA activity, but are sustaining and stabilizing existing programs of importance to North Lawndale.

Increased access to state agencies is probably more evident in NL than in the other two IWA communities. This increased access has primarily benefited two organizations: NLEN and AMPS. Dr. Kordesh was instrumental in getting the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) to begin to work collaboratively with NLEN on their ex-offender initiative. While the relationship is actualized through NLEN, the larger community has acknowledged that working with ex-offenders is a critical area of activity for North Lawndale. Similarly, Kordesh was instrumental in helping AMPS secure its DCCA

grant. It can also be argued that the 16<sup>th</sup> Street project offers a broad benefit to the larger community and can be acknowledged as a critical IWA activity.

With the exception of AV deployment, resources and critical activities are somewhat more evenly distributed in Englewood than in the other two communities. The Education Subcommittee has been awarded a grant of \$250,000 – the Subcommittee, not the lead organization. Cash resources coming through IWA for critical activities in the economic development arena total \$99,000. Two organizations have been the beneficiaries: NEVCorp received an award of \$95,000, for which UIC is the fiscal agent; and SWWT has received \$4,000 for their pre-apprenticeship program to help women access jobs in the construction trades. Needless to say, SWWT sees this distribution as significantly uneven. However, economic development activity in Englewood is receiving a significant boost through these programs. The lead organization, Mary McDowell Settlement received \$48,000 for their Americorps Coordinator, as did the other three lead organizations.

Distribution of Americorps Volunteers, however, was not symmetrical in terms of Englewood's two areas of critical activity. All the AV were assigned to organizations in the education network, with 3 of 10 working out of MMSH, and the rest at Englewood's target schools and their allied organizations.

### Domain Consensus

Domain Consensus is about spheres of influence and division of labor.

Domain Consensus is an issue in Humboldt Park. While many organizations recognize and accept NNNN's dominance/power as a source of pride, others expressed concern about the blurring of lines of responsibility and areas of expertise. In particular, economic development organizations like DSBDA, feel that NNNN's job is to organize the community and empower it to act collectively. However when it comes to economic development projects, the responsibility and resources should go to the economic development organizations. Under the IWA umbrella, there is a perception that NNNN is competing with its own members for certain resources. The fact that no NNNN member has received an IWA grant could underscore that perception. Furthermore, the concentration of AV resources at NNNN seems to be part of that pattern. On the other hand, two of the four AVs that were allocated outside of NNNN went to organizations that are not always completely in sync with NNNN: DSBDA and United Blocks of West Humboldt Park. And two of the four organizations to receive AVs were grassroots block club-based organizations could be an indication of NNNN's recognition of the need to share resources even in the domain of community organizing.

In North Lawndale, there appears to be domain consensus in regard to NLEN's leadership on the ex-offender issue. The only other NL organization involved in this area prior to IWA was United Baptist Church, and they seem comfortable with NLEN's role as supportive of their work. No one seems to dispute AMPS' leadership in economic development. However, Lawndale Business and Local Development Corporation was

not interviewed. The third and weakest domain of IWA activity is health care. Again, no one seems to dispute the Sinai Community Institute's leadership in this area.

Of course in Englewood there are two domains. MMSH is the acknowledged leader of IWA education activities through Ms. Robinson's role as chair of the education Subcommittee and coordinator of Americorps Volunteers in the education domain. There does seem to be some confusion or overlap of responsibilities in the area of parent training. At least three of the Education Network members define this as an area of responsibility: Imagine Englewood If, through Imagine Chicago, and SWWT through COFI. The issue is not the need for broad-based activities in this area, but is anyone responsible for monitoring these various approaches to parent involvement and evaluating what works best.

In the Economic Development Network, there also seem to be two domains: employment and training and economic/business development. While ROE/Vincent Barnes was initially acknowledged as an IWA lead organization, by both education and economic development players, their federal funding for employment services led them to decline IWA financial support. Subsequently, NEVCORPS has moved to the forefront in Englewood's economic development domain and in the IWA involvement there. SWWT argues that they also make a significant contribution in that area as well.

**So, in summary, social networks are alive and well in each of the three target communities.**

NNNN's is the oldest and most developed in spite of a few perceived imperfections. In North Lawndale, the Steans Family Foundation fostered early network formation and it remains to be seen what the extent of IWA influence on the expansion or perfecting of that network will be. Englewood offers the best example of an IWA-influenced social network in bringing together the education key players to work in a more consciously collaborative manner. And even though the economic development activity has its own network it is still loosely linked to the education network under the IWA umbrella.

### **C. Determining Priorities and Projects**

At the time the interviews were conducted, which was nine to ten months into IWA's first year, all three areas were wrapping up the assessment and planning phase and had decided where they wanted to target state funds that IWA was now making available to them for special projects. In all three target communities, IWA resources were directed to expansion of ongoing activity.

#### **Humboldt Park**

**The notion that schools are critical access points to adult community leaders is as old as community organizing itself. As was demonstrated by Logan Square Neighborhood Association and COFI (Community Organizing on Family Issues), Community Learning Centers can be instrumental in engaging parents, while at the same time, improving educational outcomes for their children.**

In HP, as in many lower income communities, the “priorities” are numerous. Through NNNN the community is working on education and youth issues, strengthening grassroots block club organizing, addressing economic development goals vis-à-vis the Paseo Boricua and other business attraction activities, supporting immigrant services, and planning more affordable housing.

As new funds became available through IWA, NNNN decided to focus these new resources on education, not only for children but for their parents as well. So, with a grant from IWA of \$300,000, NNNN proposed to distribute the funds to their partners in NNNN’s local schools network. Each partner school has received a grant of \$30,000 based on a set of objectives and a work plan developed by principals, teachers, and parents at that school. The participating schools include: Burr, Casals, Chopin, Lafayette, Moos, Pritzker, Pulaski, Stowe and Von Humboldt.

The overall goals are: 1) to strengthen educational outcomes among the students, and 2) to develop the skills of their parents as parents, leaders, and productive workers. The creation and expansion of community learning centers (CLCs) at the schools, to serve both students and parents after regular school hours, is a key objective that is expected to facilitate the accomplishment of these goals. Activities at each school vary, depending on their unique plan. But in general, a key component of the strategy involves extending access to technology. Increased communication and collaboration among the participating schools is an additional anticipated outcome of the schools network. NNNN also received a grant of \$30,000 for grant administration and coordination of the schools network.

Underlying all of this activity is another priority: empowering the community to act effectively in its own interest. The notion that schools are critical access points to adult community leaders is as old as community organizing itself. Residents become engaged in their community only around issues of critical concern to them. In most instances, their children are number one. But as organizations like COFI (Community Organizing around Family Issues) have argued, today’s urban parents often feel powerless and unprepared to take action in this important arena, much less other areas of community concern. Building up their skills and self-esteem becomes the first step to broader leadership. Based on evidence of the success of earlier efforts in the Logan Square neighborhood, CLCs can be instrumental in engaging parents, while at the same time, improving educational outcomes for their children.

Thus, with these additional IWA resources NNNN is developing a sub-network within its already extensive network to increase its own capacity to be the engine for community empowerment. Or, put another way, NNNN is committed to enhancing its already substantial accumulation of social capital by spreading new state funds throughout the community via the schools network.

Unfortunately, on the economic development front, the hope for state funding, through DCCA, to support a transportation study in Humboldt Park, was snuffed out in the severe, end-of-the-year budget cuts. Enrique Salgado expressed his frustration over the

numerous failed attempts to get this study funded. Similarly, a proposal submitted by Bickerdike Redevelopment Corporation (BRC), an NNNN partner organization that has been building affordable housing in the community since 1967 was rejected by the Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA). This rejection was not part of the budget cuts debacle. In fact, given that the City of Chicago's Department of Housing had already approved and funded the project, and the IHDA money would have simply filled a gap in the financing package, NNNN is puzzled and disappointed that the state support was not forthcoming.

### **North Lawndale**

**As the North Lawndale/IWA relationship evolved, the need and the opportunity for focusing on the ex-offender population emerged as a compelling agenda item.**

A combination of dramatic statistics on the high number of ex-offenders returning to NL from prison, and the energy and commitment of NLEN to find employment for ex-offenders, a major factor in their successful re-integration in society, captured the attention and imagination of IWA director, Richard Kordesh.

As early as August 2001, Kordesh worked with NLEN to set up a community meeting on the ex-offender issue and invite the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) to participate. Participation included attendance by the IDOC Director and several of his staff as well as preparation of information on IDOC educational programs for prisoners and the flow of releasees to North Lawndale. The meeting was successful in solidifying community interest in the issue and in establishing a relationship between IDOC and NLEN. Since the August, 2001 meeting, two IDOC staff have joined the EESN Advisory Committee. However, NLEN Director, Palms-Barber, cautioned that their Ex-offender Employment Services Network (EESN) was still a relatively new and small initiative. In order to take advantage of the opportunity to work more closely with IDOC, more resources would be required.

Those additional resources have been forthcoming as NLEN was awarded a \$300,000 grant through IWA, from IDHS, in March of 2002. The overall timeframe for this grant extends to June 30, 2003. However, this is divided into two deliverable periods: March 1 to June 30, 2002 and July 1, 2002 to June 30, 2003.

There are three areas of activity under this grant to assist ex-offenders with re-integration:

1. Job-readiness training and placement
2. Family re-attachment services in the form of counseling
3. Re-entry Support Services that include emergency funds for food, clothing and transportation and referral assistance for services like child care and substance abuse

The job-readiness training is based on the curriculum developed by NLEN described earlier and includes Anger Management, Right Thinking, Working it Out and Gear Up.

When participants complete the training, NLEN is assisted in placing them by the Safer Foundation, North Lawndale Industrial Development Team, the Westside Health Authority, and the local IETC (Illinois Employment Training Center). Payment for the training and placement component is based on a 60-day retention. In Phase I, NLEN/EESN trained 18 ex-offenders and, by the June 30 deadline, had placed 8 who met the 60-day retention requirement, for a placement rate of 44%. The goal for Phase II is to train 144 (about 12 a month per 4 week training cycle) and place 54, a placement rate of 38%.

Family re-attachment services are delivered in the form of counseling. These services are being provided through a subcontract with the Institute for Clinical Social Work at the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC). The goal for Phase I was to counsel two families; in Phase II the goal is 15 families.

In Phase I, NLEN set out to provide re-entry support services to 50 ex-offenders; in Phase II they aim to serve 378 clients. The IWA grant covers the cost of hiring an employer liaison to work with EESN and a Client Services Coordinator to work with EESN participants and coordinate the broad range of re-entry services outlined in the grant.

Looking to the future, NLEN, at the request of Congressman Danny Davis, has joined with other organizations that participate in the 7<sup>th</sup> District Ex-offender Task Force to submit a collaborative proposal to the US Department of Justice for work with ex-offenders. The proposal, which was put together by IDOC staff, was for \$2,000,000; if funded, NLEN's share would be \$900,000 for their employment services and a deeper working relationship with IDOC would also result. At the time of publication of this report, the grant had been approved.

While the ex-offender program of NLEN represents a major commitment and centerpiece of IWA activity and resources, **AMPS** has been successful in persuading the state to support North Lawndale in another arena of economic development activity. As noted earlier, IWA has helped AMPS secure a \$90,000 grant to support the planning process for a major housing and retail development in the vicinity of 16<sup>th</sup> and Hamlin. The state designated the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) as the fiscal agent for this project, through the Great Cities Institute (GCI) and their Center for Urban Economic Development (CUED).

According to Steeve Kidd, AMPS' executive director, the plan is to hire a development consultant and a part time planner with GIS skills to assist AMPS in advancing the 16<sup>th</sup> street project by conducting property research and mapping property locations. UIC will be responsible for grant management, reporting to IDHS, and providing technical assistance and data analysis. Kidd reported that AMPS is still negotiating a final contract with UIC as they work out who owns the final data and reports associated with this project. He also indicated some internal re-structuring at AMPS to be in a better position to lead this project. For example, they will probably form a CDC (Community Development Corporation) to direct this project and distinguish the development activity from AMPS' other programs and services.

Finally, as a further effort to bolster anchor institutions in North Lawndale, IWA leveraged grants through the Illinois Department of Public Health to establish a community-wide immunization outreach effort and expansion of a federally qualified health center. The immunization project, jointly operated by the Sinai Community Institute and the Lawndale Christian Health Center, utilizes trained community members to go into homes, churches, and other neighborhood sites and find parents who have yet to get their pre-school children immunized. The new health center is serving families in the Homan Square Community Center. About \$600,000 has been committed to these projects.

So, for North Lawndale, IWA involvement has resulted in two major economic development initiatives, both in areas critical to reducing poverty: employment and affordable housing, and a major health care initiative. The total investment of dollars to date is \$ 990,000. But both AMPS and NLEN have seen increased involvement of state agencies and expect to use IWA resources to leverage other resources, public and private. UIC has also emerged as a key player and community partner in the implementation of North Lawndale's IWA projects.

## **Englewood**

**Turning local schools around through parent involvement so that students learn what they need to know to pursue advanced education and family support jobs lays the foundation for sound economic development and access to productive careers in the future.**

The awarding of \$250,000 to the Englewood IWA Education Subcommittee in the spring of 2002 has re-enforced a number of activities with the Subcommittee's target schools: Henderson, Holmes, Nicholson, O'Toole, Sherman, Wentworth, and Robeson High School. The primary goals have been: 1) the engagement and education of parents through activities provided at or through the schools, and 2) improvement of educational outcomes among the students, directly through tutoring and access to social services, and indirectly by helping their parents to help them with school work and help themselves to improve their economic situation.

During 2001-2002, Imagine Chicago was active in Englewood, offering parent workshops. Going forward, more parent workshops will be offered, this time with support from COFI, working through SWWT. Both sets of workshops are funded by the IWA grant. Boulevard Arts Center is also being paid to offer art workshops to the parents. In addition to the parent workshops, the grant calls for a series of focus groups with parents and with children to provide ongoing feedback to the Education Subcommittee regarding participants' needs.

Two social workers are being hired to work at Nicholson and Wentworth Schools to address the kinds of issues several of the Americorps Volunteers observed in their work

as tutors. That is that children are often distracted from learning by the numerous family problems, both social and economic, that are part of their educational milieu.

The grant provides for hiring a Youth Specialist two days a week to help develop youth councils at all of the target schools. There will also be a special training event for partner organizations and schools featuring the Search Institute from Minneapolis presenting their program on “Youth Assets.” This program emphasizes identification of the assets young people possess instead of always concentrating on their flaws and problems as a more appropriate strategy for working effectively with them.

Finally, the grant will pay for printing an updated Englewood Resource Directory for parents, schools, and community organizations. The Englewood District Health Council originally prepared this.

New funding has also been made available through IWA for members of Englewood’s IWA Economic Development Subcommittee. Initially, there were plans to award three grants: 1) \$78,000 to Re-birth of Englewood (ROE) to enhance a federally funded employment training program; 2) \$95,000 to New Englewood Village Corporation (NEVCorp.) to stimulate commercial revitalization and new business starts; 3) \$4,000 to Southwest Women Working Together (SWWT) to enhance their program to prepare women for careers in the construction industry.

The grant for ROE was never made. The reason for this, explains ROE’s director, Vincent Barnes, is that the requirements of the grant from IDHS were not compatible with what they were trying to do with their federally funded employment training program. IDHS wanted ROE to focus on TANF recipients and they structured the grant in such a way that Barnes felt that accepting the funds would complicate rather than streamline the kind of employment and training strategy they envisioned. Their original concept was to use the funds to pay organizations that were already providing the kinds of social services IDHS defined as employment-related and that ROE did not specialize in. But IDHS could not figure out how to do that in the framework ROE suggested. So ROE’s response was basically “Thanks, but no thanks.” (With no hard feelings or regrets.)

In addition to these grants, and as a result of PRAG’s work in Englewood prior to IWA’s engagement, PRAG staff member, Brian Banks, introduced IWA to the Ford Motor Company training program at Kennedy-King College that was organized by Reverend Henry Barlow. An IWA grant of \$150,000 will enable this program to get up to 20 residents, mostly from Englewood, to earn certification as automotive technicians. With this certification, technicians will be placed in Ford and Mercury dealerships, as well as in other auto repair shops. This brings the total IWA investment in Englewood to \$449,000.

In summary, IWA in Chicago is heavily invested in education, with 17 schools targeted as partner organizations. While tutoring, the more traditional educational intervention, is being utilized as one strategy, the larger effort is centered on the role of parents.

Parenting skills, parent leadership, vocational skills for parents, all linked with utilizing school facilities and resources outside of the regular school day, are being addressed as an important means of improving educational outcomes in both Humboldt Park and Englewood. In other words, schools are not just for the kids anymore. In Humboldt Park, following in the footsteps of their neighbors, West Town and Logan Square, schools are encouraged to become community learning centers. While Englewood might not use that nomenclature, the goal is the same.

North Lawndale deviates from this pattern by allocating their major IWA resources for increasing opportunities for employment for a specific subset of NL residents, ex-offenders. This is, in the parlance of the Ann E. Casey Foundation, “job-centered economic development” and it is the cornerstone of IWA in North Lawndale.

While each lead organization has a lead project that they are spending their six figure IWA grant on, they also have a “secondary” project or projects that may or may not be currently funded by IWA. In Humboldt Park, the planning for a youth center has become an important activity that is drawing the attention of state agencies, and state dollars. Similarly, the Division Street Business Development Association is continuing to pursue state funding for a HP transportation study.

IWA in North Lawndale is also supporting a second economic development initiative with state funds and agency involvement -- AMPS' 16<sup>th</sup> street housing/retail development as well as extensive health care initiatives. And IWA in Englewood has a secondary focus on economic development, both job-centered and business development oriented.

However, a number of community leaders across all three neighborhoods expressed the belief that, in reality, this is all about economic development. Turning local schools around through parent involvement so that students learn what they need to know to pursue advanced education and family support jobs lays the foundation for sound economic development and access to productive careers in the future. In combination, economic development and education are the keys to reducing poverty today and eliminating it tomorrow. With IWA's investment to date of over 1.3 million dollars in these Chicago communities this new venture is well under way.

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## **D. Other IWA Benefits**

### **1. Access to State Agencies**

Getting an entire bureaucracy in sync with this proposed paradigm shift is another matter and will take time. But the optimism regarding IWA's potential is there.

Throughout the numerous conversations with community leaders about IWA, many were quick to point out that their understanding of IWA was that it was not just about financial resources. It was about relationships – relationships within the community and relationships with state agencies. The relationships in the community were discussed above in the section on social network analysis. Now we turn to how well IWA is doing in regard to improving relationships with state agencies.

Representatives from state agencies who were interviewed for this report described IWA as an effort to change the mindset of how state agencies think about helping communities. Interviewees included: June Dorn (DCFS), Dan Keefe (DCCA), Julio Rodriguez (IDHS), Sharnell Curtis-Martin (IDFA), Tim Roth (IDOC), and Michael Gaines (Illinois Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service). Most were able to articulate that IWA is a place-based approach to funding or providing technical assistance. As one agency representative put it, IWA calls for moving away from the “silo mentality” that has each agency operating in isolation, thinking only of their programs as solutions to community problems instead of considering the potential benefit of a multi-disciplinary, multi-agency approach. IWA asks the question: What can we do collectively to address community issues, as the community defines them, versus offering our existing programs whether they fit the problem or not. Agency representatives agreed that IWA represents a paradigm shift.

That is the theory behind IWA. How has it played out in practice?

First of all, IWA has created a state agency task force that meets bi-weekly and includes representatives from the following departments:

- Capital Development Board
- Central Management Services
- Community College Board (ICCB)
- Department of Aging
- Department of Agriculture
- Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)
- Department of Commerce and Community Affairs (DCCA)
- Department of Corrections (IDOC)
- Department of Employment Security (IDES)
- Department of Human Services (IDHS)
- Department of Natural Resources/EPA
- Department of Public Aid
- Department of Public Health

- Environmental Protection Agency
- Governor's Office
- Housing Development Authority (IHDA)
- Illinois Development Finance Authority (IDFA)
- Office of Banks and Real Estate
- State Board of Education (ISBE)

This was the first step -- getting agencies to meet regularly so they could share information about their departments and discuss information and requests coming from the IWA communities. The Governor's Office, and particularly Richard Kordesh, was credited with making this happen. Without the authority that office represents, IWA would not have the "teeth" needed to get agencies to the table and get things done. Once at the table, several interviewees indicated that they still retained a fair level of skepticism that this approach would work. Most have since become believers. Having said that they are quick to point out that each of them is only one person from their agency. Getting an entire bureaucracy in sync with this proposed paradigm shift is another matter and will take time. But the optimism regarding IWA's potential is there.

To determine how this new state agency mindset was playing out on the community level, we asked agency reps to describe examples of how their agency relates to the three Chicago IWA communities, and we asked community representatives the same question.

As indicators of state involvement, agency reps were asked to name key players/organizations in Humboldt Park, North Lawndale and Englewood and specific instances of assistance provided by their agency in these communities.

DCFS and IDHS seemed to have the most familiarity with key players in the three communities. Admittedly, that is partly due to pre-IWA relationships based on agency contracts. This was certainly true in Humboldt Park where Association House and Casa Central, who are major state subcontractors with DCFS, were mentioned as key institutions. While Association House was also identified by other organizations in the community as a key player, Casa Central was not. Youth Service Project was also mentioned, as was Eliud Medina and NNNN. The key project mentioned for Humboldt Park was the youth center. Besides DCFS and IDHS, IDFA was at the table on this project as well.

In North Lawndale, agency reps were familiar with the key IWA players, NLEN/Brenda Palms-Barber and AMPS. They also mentioned the Steans Family Foundation and Mt. Sinai Hospital. DCCA had offered TA to AMPS in writing proposals for the 16<sup>th</sup> Street project. DCFS provided TA to NLEN regarding issues of child support, re-connecting ex-offender fathers with their children, and other family issues. The IDHS local office has been sending ex-offender/TANF recipients to the Ex-offender Employment Services Network (EESN) for assistance with the welfare-to-work transition.

IDOC's position vis-à-vis IWA is somewhat unique. Clearly they have been engaged with NLEN on the ex-offender issue since the August 2001 meeting in North Lawndale

set up by IWA director, Richard Kordesh. They have representatives sitting on the EESN Advisory Committee. IDOC has also been the lead agency in putting together a proposal to the US Department of Justice for \$2,000,000 that would greatly benefit the NLEN/EESN effort. While IDOC is connected with the IWA State Agency Task Force, Mr. Roth did not mention it nor did other Task Force members refer to IDOC.

The Englewood leaders mentioned by state agencies included Josephine Robinson in connection with Mary McDowell and the IWA Education Subcommittee, and Vincent Barnes and Re-birth of Englewood. No state projects were mentioned. Only June Dorn from DCFS spoke of some direct involvement with the Education Subcommittee.

One state-funded player that is not an “agency” and does not sit on the IWA State Task Force is the University of Illinois Chicago. UIC has been named in several IWA contexts. They are serving as the fiscal agent and technical assistance provider through the Center for Urban Economic Development (CUED) for two IWA economic development grants, for AMPS in NL and NevCorp in Englewood. UIC’s Institute for Clinical Social Work is a partner in carrying out NLEN’s commitments under their IWA grant by providing counseling for families of ex-offenders. Again in Humboldt Park, UIC/CUED is working with the Governing Committee of the HP Youth and Community Center Asset-based Feasibility Process, as is the UIC City Design Center.

This might be as good a place as any to note other university connections with IWA, something that Kordesh wants to see developed further. In fact, one of the reasons for bringing PRAG (Policy Research Action Group) to the IWA table was to strengthen IWA connections with PRAG’s four partner universities: DePaul, Loyola, Chicago State and UIC. As PRAG’s fiscal agent, Loyola has been involved in the management of the IWA/Chicago Americorps contract. Through the efforts of Brian Banks, PRAG’s Americorps Coordinator, Chicago State has been engaged with Englewood’s Project Elevate, promoting increased college enrollment. DePaul had a prior relationship with Humboldt Park and UIC/Great Cities Institute had been working with NLEN on the ex-offender project. In those cases, IWA has created more opportunities for the kind of university/community partnerships PRAG has been promoting since 1989.

The community’s perception of state agency involvement as a result of IWA varies from neighborhood to neighborhood as to its pace and intensity and its reflection of what the state agencies themselves indicate as their level of involvement.

In Humboldt Park the relationship with state agencies could be characterized as a gradual unfolding. From day one, Eliud Medina has had nothing but praise for the role played by the Governor’s office and Richard Kordesh in particular. For about the first 8 months of the program, that was the only fruitful IWA state connection that he and other HP leaders could identify. In fact, interviews with key HP leaders revealed that, with the exception of Americorps, and a somewhat vague reference to DCCA’s help in securing a lease from the city for the Puerto Rican Arts Alliance, IWA continued to remain virtually invisible in HP. Their primary connection to state resources had been through Senator Miguel Del Valle, not IWA. Or, the flow of state funds to HP was through traditional contracts with

DCFS and IDHS, and through DCCA's JTED (Job Training and Economic Development) program. In two instances, where there had been hope that the IWA connection might be helpful the results were disappointing. DBSDA did not get a DCCA grant for their transportation feasibility study, and Bickerdike's application to IHDA for gap financing was rejected.

Then the IWA grant came through for the HP Schools Network. This was still primarily due to the relationship with Kordesh, but it marked the beginning of a new stage. In early April, the idea of studying the feasibility of building a youth center in Humboldt Park began to pick up some steam. Since that process got under way, representatives from IDHS, DCFS, and IDFA have all been engaged in discussions with the community around this project.

In North Lawndale, the situation was quite different. Only two months into the IWA program and NLEN witnessed the benefit of participation in IWA in helping them to establish a breakthrough relationship with IDOC. That relationship has continued to develop and is expected to solidify as they work together under a new federal grant. Along the same lines, Steeve Kidd at AMPS reported receiving assistance from DCCA, IDHS and the state budget office as a result of the IWA connection. DCCA's technical assistance was noted by Dan Keefe at DCCA as a new way to work with an organization that was more collaborative than adversarial, which can sometimes be the tone of a typical RFP process. AMPS also suggested that their project's credibility with their state legislators was enhanced due to their connection with IWA.

While North Lawndale may have the strongest state agency connections to date, Englewood's may be the weakest, outside of the Governor's office and Kordesh. This is more due to the nature of Englewood's projects than a lack of effort on the part of the state. With its major focus on education, the more natural level of involvement is with the Chicago Board of Education. However, one might ask where ISBE (Illinois State Board of Education) stands vis-à-vis IWA. They were not mentioned by other state agency reps as a key player. One state agency player mentioned by some of Englewood's education leaders was June Dorn at DCFS, a connection she herself pointed out.

In the case of Englewood's economic development agenda, Re-birth of Englewood was offered a grant by IDHS to fund supportive services in conjunction with their federally funded employment program. But as was noted above, ROE did not accept the grant.

## **2. Americorps: A Value-added IWA Benefit**

After dollars and clout, organizations in "distressed" communities can always use an extra pair of hands, another creative mind and dedicated spirit. The shortage of human capital is a constant challenge in serving, organizing, or developing an IWA target community.

In the face of this reality, the opportunity of having up to 11 additional players (33 in all) through the Americorps program was universally acknowledged in all three IWA communities as a definite added value associated with IWA participation. This is not to say that there were not some bumps in the road in working with the volunteers, but the trade-off was worth it.

*A Demographic Profile of the Americorps Volunteers (AV)*

For the purposes of this report, only the 41 volunteers recruited prior to June 30, 2002 are included in the profile. Of these, 27 were interviewed as part of this evaluation. Among the 14 not interviewed, five had withdrawn prior to the interview period, two were on sick leave, and several were recruited after the interview period that ended April 30, 2002. Sources for Americorps Volunteer (AV) data include the interviews and personnel files set up by PRAG as Americorps Program Coordinator. (See Appendix for table with individual detail.)

Nine of the AVs recruited (25%) were previously attached to the organization where they were placed. Their supervisors wanted to give them an opportunity to receive some payment for the work they had been doing as volunteers, and in some cases to increase that work now that some payment was available. But most were new recruits, coming from the zip codes in and around the target communities. Seven (17%) reported suburban home addresses.

Other characteristics include:

- 76% of the AV were African American, 17% Latino, and 7% Caucasian.
- 63% were women; 37% men
- Ages ranged from 19 to 65
- The average age was 25, but the median (more typical) age was 32

Educational characteristics are as follows:

- 12 had earned a high school diploma only (including 2 GEDs) (29%)
- 17 reported college classes or professional training beyond the 12<sup>th</sup> grade (41%)
- 10 had earned a college degree (25%); this included 6 AA degrees (15%) and 4 BA degrees (10%)

Volunteer Assignments:

- |                                     |          |
|-------------------------------------|----------|
| ▪ Schools/Education                 | 11 (39%) |
| ▪ Block Club federations/organizing | 3        |
| ▪ Community Newspaper               | 3        |
| ▪ Youth                             | 2        |
| ▪ Economic Development              | 2        |
| ▪ Housing                           | 2        |

- Ex-offenders 2
- Health 2
- Social service 2

Future Goals: (25 gave an answer)

- College 13
- Graduate School 1
- Post Secondary Training 1
- Continue community work 4
- Find a job 1
- Nothing specific 5
- No information 16

One final note on retention. As of June 30, only 6 AV (17%) had exited early, failing to complete their year of service. One of these went to work as AV Coordinator of NLEN. So the retention rate was over 80%.

Three Different Deployment Strategies and their Effect

- NNNN 50/50, Half assigned to partner organizations and half assigned to NNNN; of the half assigned to NNNN, two were assigned to the lead project
- NLEN 95% assigned to partner organizations; one assigned to NLEN; no one assigned to lead project
- MMSH 95% assigned to lead project, with supervision coming from lead organization and partner organizations

NNNN consistently worked with the smallest number of AV (8) and generally used them to support the underlying mission of NNNN that is community empowerment more than it is any one project. By using AV to support their action teams, they continued to strengthen their capacity to be an engine for empowerment. By assigning two of the volunteers to block club associations, the importance of that grassroots level activity was acknowledged and supported. Support for DSBDA and the Paseo Boricua and Centro Sin Fronteras and immigrant services reflects NNNN’s awareness of the cultural roots of their constituents.

NLEN thought to “spread the wealth” and strengthen their connection to their network members by placing all of their AV (except one) outside of NLEN. An RFP process was used to select host organizations, but there was no programmatic guideline or theme. Consequently, the North Lawndale AV were scattered in a variety of directions, none of which were necessarily focused on IWA objectives. Furthermore, since there was no

staff person assigned to coordinate North Lawndale's AV until Victoria Cammon was hired in March, 2002, NLEN did not really achieve their original objective of enhancing the relationship with their members. This does not mean that important work was not being done by AV and their host organizations in NL, just that there was no strategy to tie it all together.

In Englewood, all the volunteers but one were spending at least some of their time in one of the 7 target schools. Three are supervised directly by MMSH and the other 6 are supervised by members of the IWA/Englewood Education Subcommittee. The only exception is the person working with the Englewood ministers coalition, a project that pre-dated IWA, who is supervised by Brian Banks. This deployment certainly enhances the resources for the lead project and makes IWA very visible with all the key education players. Ms. Robinson reported that none of the Englewood economic development players were prepared to take on an AV at the time assignments were made last fall.

### AV Coordination

The mention above of the critical human resource challenges faced by IWA-type communities applies to the lead organizations as well as all of the organizations that welcomed Americorps Volunteers. It became apparent early in the program that the recruitment, assessment, placement and optimal ongoing coordination of 11 volunteers and their supervisors, was going to require a considerable amount of time on someone's part. The lead organizations argued they should be compensated for such a commitment so that they could either hire a new person or support the salary of an existing staff person to take on this additional responsibility. Dr. Kordesh agreed and awarded each lead organization a grant of about \$48,000 in the form of a subcontract with IWA/Chicago's Americorps Program Manager, PRAG. However, funds were not available to put subcontracts in place until February of 2002.

So, from July to March, AV coordination among the three communities was as varied as everything else. NNNN assigned their associate director to assume responsibility for Americorps in Humboldt Park. With a staff of 11 at NNNN, Gabriela Roman was able to take this on. Also, her AV crew was smaller than in the other communities and half of them were working for NNNN. Therefore, it was easier to keep them in her purview. She met frequently with all of the AV, weekly at first, and could easily communicate with their supervisors, half of whom also worked for NNNN.

Initially, NLEN also assigned their associate director, Lea Weems, to coordinate the IWA AV program. However, this was only envisioned as a temporary assignment to get the program off the ground. Once the AVs were recruited and placed, Lea returned to her other duties as planned. This situation had two less than desirable effects. First, the NLEN strategy of forging stronger links with their members through the AV assignments was not realized because it was no one's assignment to do the forging. Secondly, the North Lawndale AV had no clear understanding or connection to IWA or to each other. Some expressed confusion over being required to attend "IWA" monthly volunteer meetings at PRAG/Loyola. And then when they got there, they realized that AV in the

other two communities were linked with each other and had an idea of a central focus of their work. Some issues surfaced with supervisors who were not always clear about what the Americorps rules were. In some instances, Brian Banks, as overall coordinator of all the Chicago AV could step in and resolve these difficulties, but this was not ideal. In March, NLEN hired Victoria Cammon, herself an AV with NNNN, and things began to turn around. Victoria has initiated regular meetings with all of the supervisors and with the AV.

MMSH did not have the personnel or financial resources to assign anyone else the duty of Americorps coordination. So, as is frequently the case at MMSH, Josephine Robinson took on that responsibility herself. She also had previous experience with the Americorps program. Because she was not always accessible due to other pressing duties, and was not on site for immediate supervision, some volunteers expressed some sense of isolation and lack of clarity regarding expectations. But the volunteers were brought together for regular meetings at MMSH. As in Gabriela's case at NNNN, the AV supervisors were close at hand. While they did not work at MMSH, Robinson saw them regularly at monthly Education Subcommittee meetings. It was clear from the interviews that the Englewood AV knew what the Education Subcommittee goals were and generally what they were all working toward. With the additional funding from IWA, Michael Simmons was hired in April as Englewood's new AV coordinator.

**Regardless of the varying levels of coordination in the three communities, there is one overarching level of coordination provided by PRAG, and specifically, Brian Banks. His monthly training sessions with all of the AV provided some continuity and a sense of the larger mission of service, providing a context for their local assignment.**

These sessions have multiple uses. Some of the AV used them to troubleshoot problems, brainstorm issues associated with their service, reflect on life after Americorps, and explore new ideas that Brian put before them like "social capital." Some of the AVs spoke of these sessions as important for developing a support network and a sense of camaraderie. A number of them described Brian as a mentor.

Between meetings Brian keeps in touch with the volunteers by e-mail and phone. He has visited all of the sites at least once. Periodically, he meets with the executive directors of the lead organizations and with the local Americorps coordinators. He is also the liaison with the state agency that coordinates AV for Illinois, the Illinois Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service, and with the IWA lead agency for all grant awards, IDHS. He is also in regular communication with IWA Director, Richard Kordesh. He is assisted with grant administration and reporting by the PRAG Director and Loyola's accounting staff. Personnel files for all the AV are set up and maintained by PRAG's administrative manager who also acts as liaison with Loyola's Human Resource and Payroll Departments regarding 30 temporary employees, on average, who are paid once a month.

## Challenges

As popular as Americorps is with the IWA communities, issues will arise. Some of them would probably not have surfaced if full time AV coordinators had been in place from day one, but not all. Issues raised by lead or partner organizations will be addressed first and then issues raised by the AVs will be examined.

Regardless of the fact that Americorps provides training for supervisors, a number of supervisory issues emerged, including the complaint that there should be training for supervisors. Questions were raised about the AVs' job readiness and general workplace expectations around hours and attendance. While Americorps speaks in terms of a "year of service" many supervisors viewed their AV as a regular employee who was being paid (even if it was only a stipend). The definition of full time as 30 hours a week was not clear in all cases. Nor was the requirement that the AV be released to attend Americorps meetings, with the lead organization or with PRAG. None of these are insurmountable problems, and with appropriate intervention they were generally resolved. Occasionally, a volunteer was reassigned for a better fit with the job description or a more compatible supervisor.

Some volunteers complained that they were not given any kind of written job description and were confronted with expectations of their skill level that were unrealistic. The amount of the stipend was an issue for some, especially if they were thinking of the AV spot as a substitute for a real job. Nevertheless, even in the context of service, the AV had trouble covering their transportation costs for getting to and from their assignments and related meetings. The amount budgeted for volunteer travel was woefully inadequate.

**For the most part, volunteers were grateful for the Americorps opportunity. Some saw it as a chance to gain skills that could help them secure employment after their year of service; most viewed it as a life-enhancing, eye-opening experience.**

Since half of the AV who answered the question about future plans indicated that college was in their sites, a number noted the Americorps tuition benefit as a real plus.

While not every community partner understood the IWA connection at the outset of the program year, and some are still pretty vague, they are clear on the Americorps benefit as IWA's most visible and broad-based benefit to date.

## **IV. Observations and Recommendations**

Conclusions regarding the success of IWA to date are necessarily tied to the goals described at the outset. But as with any project based on a complex set of relationships some things happen that were not anticipated. Those instances need to be calculated and figured into the evaluation equation. One of those unanticipated outcomes may be that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

To re-cap, the four areas of investigation on which the research for this report was based, required examination of

- the evolution of community social networks in the IWA neighborhoods,
- an increase in community access to state agencies, and a shift in mindset at those state agencies from a problem-based to a place-based approach for working with distressed communities
- the status of lead project planning and implementation
- the benefit of additional resources in the form of Americorps Volunteers

Briefly, each of the three communities has made progress in demonstrating some capacity for establishing a network that functions as a central resource, a hub of activity for the individuals and families that live there. However, if we think of such a network as an engine for change, they are not all equally revved up. Nor did they all start in the same place.

### *Social Networks*

Humboldt Park benefits from a 40-year history of community organizing and networking before it was called “networking,” and NNNN has been inventing itself for the last 16 years. Under Mr. Medina’s leadership it has maturity and savvy. It is poised to take advantage of a new paradigm at the state level.

North Lawndale has not shared an organizing experience comparable to Humboldt Park’s, but in recent years has reaped the rewards of having a benefactor in the form of the Steans Family Foundation that has planted the seeds and the funding for collaboration and resource development. IWA can be just the stimulus to bring a fledgling set of relationships into full bloom.

Englewood, by contrast, and by admission of its own leaders, has been the victim of what one interviewee called “balkanization.” The geographic division of one community into multiple wards, legislative and congressional districts has led to the formation of numerous rival camps. Battles over turf, assigning of credit and blame, has made it difficult to sustain long term leadership or encourage new leaders to come to the table. But the IWA initiative has given new hope to veterans like Josephine Robinson and a new table to sit at for relative newcomers like Vincent Barnes. Whether this new table will ever seat as many players as the banquet in Humboldt Park remains to be seen. But among a cadre of education activists at least there is a table.

### *State Access and the Place-based Paradigm*

. . . the governor’s office is listening. Instead of the state, through its various agencies, telling the community that they have a set of grants and programs which the community must wiggle to fit into, they are being asked to set the agenda and write the proposal before the RFP comes out, so to speak. . . . This new approach involves agency representatives in creating a winning scenario together.

key member of the Governor's staff come out to chat with community leaders in their own conference rooms is new and indicative of the notion that place matters. Some community leaders have had a similar opportunity with their state legislators, but never with the executive branch.

Second, the governor's office is listening. Instead of the state, through its various agencies, telling the community that they have a set of grants and programs which the community must wiggle to fit into, they are being asked to set the agenda and write the proposal before the RFP comes out, so to speak. As a result, over a million dollars has flowed into these communities over the last 6 months to fund two major projects in each community – a "lead project" receiving an award of \$200,000-300,000, and a second project, generally funded at the \$90,000 level.

Third, there has been evidence of a new kind of more direct participation of state agencies that are joining in the community planning and project implementation process. Again, this differs from waiting for the responses to the RFP to arrive at the office and then choosing the winners. This new approach involves agency representatives in creating a winning scenario together.

The best evidence of this kind of activity, as has been alluded to in earlier sections of this report, is the working relationship that has evolved between NLEN and IDOC, to the point where they have written a joint proposal for federal funding to address the ex-offender issue in North Lawndale together. And AMPS reports a developing relationship with DCCA.

An emerging second example is the feasibility study process unfolding in Humboldt Park for the construction of a youth center. Representatives from IDHS, DCFS and IDFA have been attending community meetings as the study progresses. How each might participate at the implementation stage is not known. The possibility of defining this role as the center's physical and program design emerges is a marked contrast to past practice.

This new state presence is not as clearly observed in Englewood. The education initiative seems primarily linked to IWA itself. On the other hand, the NEVCorp project may better lend itself to this new mode of operation.

Another state player that is becoming intertwined with these communities through IWA is the University of Illinois Chicago. UIC is the fiscal agent for at least one project in each community and is providing an array of technical assistance.

To date, most of the grant money that has been disbursed comes from IDHS as the fiscal agent for IWA. It is confusing to some community leaders as to whether IDHS is funding these programs with their own money, so to speak, or just passing through IWA's money. When it becomes clearer that DCCA, DCFS, IDHS, etc., are making funding decisions and awards out of their own budgets, that will be a true confirmation that a new paradigm is firmly in place.

From the perspective of state agency reps, this day may not be immediately upon us. While many are convinced this is the way to go, not all can see their departments as a whole moving quickly to embrace this new approach. But all of those interviewed for this report believe IWA is definitely worth the effort. It is hoped that the next governor will recognize its merit and continue on.

### The Status of Lead Projects

While there was a general dissatisfaction with the pace of grant distribution, by the second half of the year, lead projects were up and running in each of the IWA communities. Humboldt Park has distributed IWA dollars to nine schools for activities around the development of Community Learning Centers. By the last quarter of the year the youth center feasibility project had consultants, academics, and state agency people working with the NNNN Youth Action Team to move this initiative forward.

NLEN has already completed the start-up phase of their IWA funded employment program with ex-offenders and have worked with IDOC on a federal grant to expand resources for IDOC and the EESN to work together more closely. The AMPS project is getting a slower start as they work out a contract relationship with UIC.

The Education Subcommittee in Englewood has its list of program objectives for the coming year, with a great deal of emphasis being placed on parent education. NEVCorp is still at the early stages of implementation.

**In summary, there is a whole lot of IWA going on in each of these communities.**

### Americorps

In a sense, Americorps is the icing on the cake that arrived before the cake did. As Dr. Kordesh suggested, it was an unanticipated bonus. In the early months of this program year, the AV were often the only IWA benefit that partner organizations and community residents could see. But before any new funds or access, this new human capital was very welcome. If IWA did nothing else, some said, this was a gift.

Englewood is probably the best example of engaging the AV directly in “IWA work” as they all were assigned to schools that were engaged in the IWA Education Subcommittee. But wherever they worked the AV were strengthening organizations that are of value to the community and increasing their capacity to become part of that social network that is a key component of the IWA strategy. Since the early days of the Peace Corps, the enthusiasm for the “Year of Service” concept and its impact on those who join a Corps has not waned. It is a win/win program that benefits the community and the individual. This message was affirmed by most of the IWA AV and their supervisors.

As always, it works better for some than for others. This applies to organizations as well as volunteers. There were some rough spots related to local coordination in getting things going, but most of those spots seem to have smoothed out. The consensus is that next year will be even better.

### **Finals Thoughts**

**. . .there is a general sense of accomplishment and momentum around the lead projects, and an optimism that community transformation, in the context of a state partnership is fraught with possibilities.**

In conclusion, the Illinois Workforce Advantage, as it is being carried out in Chicago, is proving to be a very worthwhile venture from the point of view of the participating communities and representatives of state agencies that have been serving on the IWA Steering Committee. As IWA investment, financial and programmatic, has become a reality, and as the participating organizations have settled in with their Americorps Volunteers, there is a general sense of accomplishment and momentum around the lead projects, and an optimism that community transformation, in the context of a state partnership is fraught with possibilities.

There is also a level of concern that, just as things are falling into place, there will be a change of administration, and that what has had such a promising beginning could be shut down prematurely. It remains to be seen to what extent the social networks in each community will be able to use their emerging strength to protect their own interests in this regard.

### **Questions/Recommendations/Suggestions**

1. One comment that came up over and over pertained to the desire to get a better feel for all IWA-related activities at the local level and across all three communities. Are people asking for another meeting or two? Perhaps.
2. With all of the education activity the question arose: Where is ISBE (Illinois State Board of Education)? Is there some way they should be involved?
3. The role of the governor's office is key to keeping this initiative going. How can the principal players sell it to the next governor?
4. How about a directory of state agencies for the church pastor, school council president, chamber of commerce director, et., to use to find out who does what and who to call. This was a suggestion of several interviewees.
5. It would be helpful to conduct another in-depth review of the IWA communities next spring, a year after most received their major IWA grants, to evaluate outcomes.

6. One of the Americorps coordinators suggested another kind of report. It would illustrate the benefits of IWA and the AV program by putting together a collection of stories/anecdotes of specific accomplishments of individual AVs that illustrate the impact they had on the people or organizations they worked with and the impact of the experience on themselves. Photographs to illustrate this would enhance the report.

## Appendix A

### References on Social Learning Network Analysis

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