



# UIC Neighborhoods *Initiative*

Building Partnerships for Stronger Communities and a Stronger University

Summer 1998

The University of Illinois at Chicago

Great Cities Institute

## Another Year Gone By

"The Initiative is based on developing relationships between the university and the community," said Loomis Mayfield, coordinator of the UIC Neighborhoods Initiative. "It's the idea of establishing on-going long term relationships that sets our organization apart from traditional academic models. Traditionally, many academic institutions have worked independently and separately from the community. The UIC Neighborhoods Initiative (UICNI) is a new, collaborative approach to this relationship. We facilitate real collaborations between the university and the community."

The Initiative's new coordinators, Loomis Mayfield and Nacho Gonzalez have faced many challenges and seen a great deal of changes this past year. When Mayfield and Gonzalez came to the UICNI, it already had several existing projects, such as Guadalupano Cultural Center and CITYLAB. The existing projects serve as models for new projects that are developed. Many of these existing projects are funded by the Joint Community Development (JCD) HUD grants.



Some new projects that Mayfield and Gonzalez have worked on during the past year are the Affordable Housing Fund, the Near West Side Commercial Development, and Health Link.

"Hopefully we will soon be able to pull funds from the Affordable Housing Fund to use for home improvement in Pilsen and the Near West Side," said Nacho Gonzalez, co-coordinator of the Initiative. "We also hope that there will be a ground breaking in September for a new Walgreen's that will be built at the intersection of Madison and Damen."

Nacho Gonzalez, co-coordinator of the UIC Neighborhoods Initiative

Health Link is a new project slated for UIC's Mile Square Health Center. It began development with participation from residents of Henry Homer, Business People in the Public Interest, and the UIC Chancellor's office. It grew out of a community revitalization initiative, where residents identified the lack of adult optical and dental care as a health problem and a barrier to employment. Currently the partners are putting together a proposal and looking for foundation support.

"Residents from the Henry Homer housing center have a hard time getting jobs due to lack of dental and eye care," said Mayfield. "Poor eye and dental care is a chronic problem at Henry Homer. Residents feel that going to an interview with missing teeth or showing they have poor eye sight only hampers their job search."



The Initiative can be described as a mediator between the university and the Pilsen and Near West Side communities, that seeks to facilitate the partnership between these two entities.

"The UIC Neighborhoods Initiative is like a transmission belt between the university and the community," said Gonzalez. "The community offers opportunity for fieldwork to our students and gives them invaluable practical experience that they don't get in the classroom. The community can use all the university's resources, ranging from students to funds, at no charge to improve the quality of life in their neighborhoods."

Loomis Mayfield, coordinator  
of UICNI

Gonzalez said that the goal for next year is to monitor and pay attention to new projects more closely. "For the first six months we were trying to get a grasp of how the Initiative worked, but now that we don't have a learning curve anymore we can start out the fall term by being more proactive in our roles," said Gonzalez. "We would like to concentrate on our best projects and use them to pull everything forward. It's the quality and not the quantity that's important."

For more information about the UIC Neighborhoods Initiative, please contact Judd Morrissey at 312-355-0956.

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## Youth Club Teaches Life Skills

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It is 8 am on a rainy Wednesday morning at Bond Elementary School, located on the South Side of Chicago. The school gym is filled with 6, 7, and 8th graders who have showed up more than one hour before the regular school day begins. They are members of the Coaching Club. Frequent passes, quick dribbles, and free shots dominate a lively game of basketball. A motion by the instructor immediately gathers the boys in a circle. Don Hellison, professor in the UIC department of Kinesiology and faculty scholar at UIC's Great Cities Institute, as well as director of the Coaching Club thanks everyone for coming and asks for two volunteers who will act as drill coaches this morning.

"This is not a sports team where kids come to play basketball. It is a club where we focus on implementing life development skills in the students," said Hellison. "We try to teach kids self-control, leadership, teamwork and other self management skills that apply to all aspects of their lives."

A young girl wearing an oversized down jacket and baggy pants enters the gym and does not hesitate to join one of the ongoing drill sessions. She is one of two girls in the club.



"I used to have a bad temper and get into a lot of trouble," said Jasmine Austin. "Being a part of this club has taught me self-control, and that I don't have to get into fights."

Coaching Club Students at Bond Elementary School

Self-control is a word often

used by the students. All of the students at Bond-as well as at Suder Elementary school and the James Jordan Center on the Near west side, where the program also runs- come from underserved environments where gangs, violence, prostitution and drugs are a part of their every day life. When a child's life is at stake, they will use any means to defend themselves and they usually end up in out-of-control situations where they hurt themselves and others. The club tries to teach these kids that there are other ways to get out of troubled situations apart from fighting and drug dealing.

"This club is really not about playing basketball," said Tianthony Keller, a tall and eager 8th grader who is not afraid to voice his opinion. "This club is about learning self-discipline and self-control. It's also about learning how to share with others and get others involved."

The club was created as part of the Urban Youth Leader Project in 1990 and it was funded by the Great Cities Institute at UIC. The goal of the project is to provide youth programs to inner city Chicago communities, in order to teach personal and social responsibility to underserved youths. Some of the project's current programs are, a summer apprentice teacher program, a mentor program, and an in-school P.E. program for juvenile releases from the Illinois Department of Corrections.

All the programs use the Responsibility Model, which is based on 25 years of research and development, in addition to reports from teachers and youth workers across the country. The model emphasizes the importance of the instructor-student relationship; caring about kids as whole people; respecting their struggle, their individuality, their voices and their capacity for decision making.

It is 8:45 am and the game is almost over. Once again, Hellison gathers the kids in a circle. It is time for the mandatory post-game meeting. The purpose of the meeting is for the students to evaluate the program, as well as evaluate their own performance. Hellison asks everyone to reflect on their use of respect for others, self-motivation, teamwork, goal setting, and leadership during the game. The kids rate their performances by a thumb-up, thumbdown, or somewhere in the middle.

Besides UIC, five other universities in the United States have adopted the Urban Youth Leader Project Model in their Kinesiology professional preparation outreach and research activities.

"What makes our program unique, is that it is empowerment based, " said Hellison. "We want to shift responsibility to the kids and teach them respect, leadership, individual decision making and selfevaluation. We also want to work where the kids spend most of their days, that is in the schools."

Several masters and Ph.D. students in the departments of Kinesiology and Education at UIC, work and do research for the project. Dave Walsh, a graduate student in Kinesiology has helped Hellison implement several youth clubs at Suder and Herbert Elementary School, and the James Jordan Center on the near west side. Walsh said working with these kids is rewarding and a helpful complement to his academic studies.

For more information about the Coaching Club, Please contact Don Hellison at the UIC Great Cities Institute at 312-996-8323.

