

A New Initiative Focuses on Men's Health

Since 1986, women and children of the west side community have counted on West Side Future (WSF) to be a "one stop shop" for health needs, birthing assistance, parenting and GED classes. As a division of the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago, it was originally established to combat staggering infant mortality rates in the community. Over the past 16 years, it has successfully developed programs that has decreased this

statistic by 50%, and has continually challenged itself to provide programs as a solution to the community's changing environment. Its latest program addition will help it achieve its next goal to become a holistic family health center.



Clients at West Side Future - where "caring people care for you"- receive case management and health services.

Boyd. "With an impeccable track record of serving the women and children of this community, and knowing their new organizational goals, I felt WSF would be interested in partnering on this initiative." Dr. Barnes-Boyd contacted West Side Future's executive director, Angela Ellison, to seek her organization's involvement and create a planning committee to develop the ABLA Initiative for Men (AIM).

"In general, men do not have a track record of accessing health care that women do; they typically only go to a doctor when something is wrong," says Ms. Ellison. Add this to other barriers facing this high health risk group including substance abuse, unemployment, gang issues, lack of health care programs and lack of awareness, and there is definitive cause to find ways to get men to access the state-of-the-art services provided by the hospitals in ABLA's backyard.

In October 2002, West Side Future, UICNI, and Rush, Cook County, and UIC hospitals began looking at men's health issues. While there are few entitlement programs that serve men, preventative programs not only help the men in the ABLA community, but also could save them hospital costs down the road. Recently the Chicago Community Trust came to the table with a three-year grant to develop AIM and begin programming.

The planning committee has identified three major goals of the AIM program:

1. To educate men on health issues;
2. To provide information on self-assessments, prevention and general health education;
3. To encourage care before a health issue becomes a crisis.

AIM will target teenagers and adults, and attempt to reach "underground males" in ABLA - the men who have connections to women and children who live in ABLA but may not themselves live there.

The program will provide youth advocates in schools and at ABLA, sponsor monthly health classes, community health screenings and tours of health facilities to familiarize them with the care already available. The planning committee is aware of how difficult it may be to market this new program and its services to this community. "Outreach and marketing to this population is difficult. There are no barbershops or other informal networks we can readily tap into, so one of the first challenges will be developing creative strategies to get the word out," states Ms. Ellison.

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UICNI and West Side Future are teaming up to find additional sources of funding to keep the AIM timeline on track. In the meantime, partners are signing on to be part of this exciting health initiative. Mile Square will provide health screening and help to develop a referral system with participating hospitals.

Contact Cynthia Barnes-Boyd, cboyd@uic.edu, for more information about AIM.

Meet UICNI Community Partners

Part of a continuing series featuring UICNI Community Partners

Angela Ellison, Executive Director, West Side Future

As Executive Director for West Side Future, a UICNI partner, Angela Ellison is the embodiment of her organization's motto: *Caring people caring for you!* Her congenial nature, friendly smile and hearty laugh are contagious and resonate throughout the office, which help to make the waiting room a welcoming area for clients and guests.

Her spirited attitude is equally matched with a high level of professionalism and an expectation of quality service delivery for all clients. West Side Future, which links expectant mothers and parents with medical care, self-sufficiency needs, and an array of other social services through an intensive case management delivery system, has been guided under Ms. Ellison's vision since 1998.

"Clients always come first," says Ms. Ellison. "Whether we are evaluating a program, hiring staff or determining future projects, everyone here knows that decisions are made with the client in mind." Placing emphasis on the client in decision-making has led to an incredible success rate: the infant mortality rate on the west side has decreased by 50% since the agency's inception.

Ms. Ellison began with West Side Future as Program Coordinator in 1986 when the organization was founded. During that time of organizational infancy, she had the opportunity to build the agency from the ground-up: developing systems, creating programs and designing the services for the families it assists. She then went on to serve as Director of Case Management for Mile Square Family Center in East Garfield Park, again



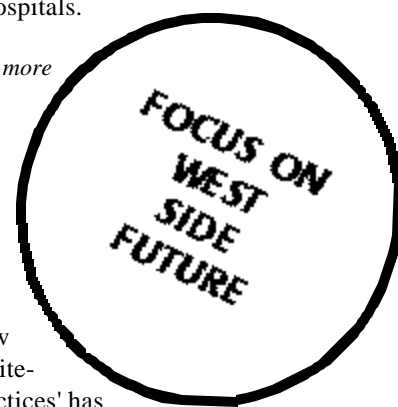
Angela Ellison
Executive Director
West Side Future

developing that agency's case management flow and delivery system. Rubbing her hands in excitement, Ms. Ellison explains: "Creating 'best practices' has always been my favorite part of each job. I love to go in and figure out what the steps should be for different models of services. I love to put systems in place!"

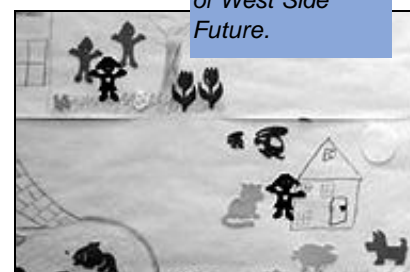
Undoubtedly her experience as a direct service provider on the front line has contributed to her ability to understand the needs of staff and clients as well as appropriate service delivery design. Managing 34 full-time staff members, overseeing seven satellite offices, and providing services to 4,000 families a year requires a determined director with strong leadership skills. Ms. Ellison is earning high marks in managing all of the above. "On a good day, I think my staff would describe me as fair, goal-oriented, and as someone with a vision, who demands that the client comes first. I don't know what they would say of me on a bad day though," she says with a chuckle.

Her vision for West Side Future continues to expand and propel the organization to a greater level of service. "I am committed to making this organization a 'one-stop-shop' for families," says Ms. Ellison. To do this, WSF is striving to become a holistic service provider to populations besides women and children. Ms. Ellison admits that the most challenging part of her job is fundraising. During tough economic times for most nonprofit organizations, Ms. Ellison finds strength in her spiritual beliefs and personal motto, "everyone's got a light to share."

Thanks to Ms. Ellison, many families - especially babies - will be able to share theirs.



Children's murals decorate the walls of West Side Future.



Parents Write Their Worlds:

A Parent Involvement Program Bridging Urban Schools and Families

by Hal Adams and Janise Hurtig

Parents Write Their Worlds is a project that sponsors adult creative non-fiction writing classes to parents and other adults in poor communities who ordinarily do not think of themselves as writers, and publishes their writings in the magazine *Real Conditions*. This community writing and publication project takes an innovative, "parent-centered" approach to involving parents from poor and immigrant urban neighborhoods in their children's schools and in the improvement of their communities. By promoting parents as thinkers and leaders and building upon the contributions of family and community to children's education, *Parents Write Their Worlds* aims to create a more effective and democratic educational relationship between schools and homes in poor and immigrant communities.

The project is based on three key premises. First, a primary way in which all children become literate, motivated learners is by seeing their parents engaged in literate, creative and meaningful activity that is valued by the larger society.

Second, parent involvement programs are most effective when they support the intellectual, artistic, and leadership roles of parents in their communities. Third, the educational experiences of students from disenfranchised communities are enriched by integrating the history and knowledge of their cultures into the school curriculum. *Parents Write Their Worlds* offer parents the opportunity to become recognized contributors to the cultural and intellectual development of the school and community by:

- Exploring their shared experiences and knowledge as members of communities with unique cultural heritages through creative writing;
- Publishing their writing in a magazine that is distributed in their schools and communities;
- Participating in their children's education as sources of knowledge, understanding and wisdom.

Parents Write Their Worlds uses a writing workshop methodology of the Community Writing Project, an approach that draws upon the pedagogy of popular educators such as Paolo Freire, and the critical insights of revolutionary thinkers such as Antonio Gramsci and C.L.R. James.

"I never would have imagined that I could write or that someone would be interested in what I write, but now I realize that this is not so. We all have something interesting to write and we can all become great writers."

For the past year and a half, participating parents in the Near West Side and Little Village communities meet weekly at the school, during the school day or after school, for the two-hour writing workshops where their creative products are the primary content of the sessions. Participants read and discuss each other's work, and collectively help develop writing that then appears in the magazine *Real Conditions*. The publications are circulated to the entire school community. Twice a year, following the release of the magazines, the writers host public readings for their families, friends, neighbors,

and interested others, where the writing can be discussed more widely. Parents have written on topics ranging from violence in their homes and neighborhoods to lessons learned from their parents and grandparents, to their own school and other childhood experiences, to their visions for a better life for their families and communities.

Through the writing workshop, participants come to recognize the universal significance of their experiences and insights, and their own artistic abilities. As one writer put it, "I never would have imagined that I could write or that someone would be interested in what I write, but now I realize that this is not so. We all have something interesting to write and we can all become great writers."

Hal Adams is Director of the UIC Community Writing Project, College of Education. Janise Hurtig is a Senior Research Specialist at the UIC Center for Research on Women and Gender.



Photos from the Parents Write Their Worlds at Telpochcalli School

Right: Maria Valazquez at work.

Bottom: Meeting of the writing group.



UIC Nathalie P. Voorhees Neighborhood Center Celebrates 25 Years of Community Support

25 Years of Service

Are you witnessing a neighborhood phenomenon for which you can't quite figure out the cause? Do you have a hunch that your organization's programs may need to change to serve a new population or trend in your neighborhood? Are you simply interested in your neighborhood's history?

The Nathalie P. Voorhees Neighborhood Center (VNC) has been helping neighborhood organizations and community members answer such questions for 25 years as Chicago's resource for technical assistance and neighborhood-based research. The Center staff works with community partners to perform applied research and technical assistance projects specializing in affordable housing and community development.

Congratulations to VNC for reaching this milestone and for its many years of service to the Chicago community!

For further information about VNC, please visit <http://www.uic.edu/cuppa/voorheesctr/>.

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