

## NTA Health and Wellness Center Celebrates New Expansion and Renovation

The idea is brilliant in its simplicity – bring much-needed health and wellness care right to kids where they need it – at school. Thanks to UICNI partnerships, many generous sponsors, and a willing community, hundreds of Southside children now have access to top of the line health and wellness care. The UICNI Health and Wellness Center recently finished the expansion and renovation in a large classroom the National Teacher's Academy (NTA), an innovative public school that serves children from infancy through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The center, at 55 West Cermak Street, has undergone a dramatic change in the years since it opened. "People who had seen it that first year wouldn't even recognize it now," said Dr. David Perry, Director of the Great Cities Institute.

The mission of the University of Illinois at Chicago Neighborhoods Initiative is to increase the capacity of communities near UIC. The wellness center achieves this on many levels, from helping residents become physically and mentally healthy to strengthening community partnerships. "This project is interdisciplinary – it brings everything together in one school," said Dr. Cynthia Boyd, Director of the UIC Neighborhoods Initiative, during a speech at the ribbon cutting ceremony. The ceremony was held on September 28, 2006, just four years after the center first opened at the school.

The center provides a full range of health services, including routine physical exams, immunizations, treatment of minor physical injuries, as well as management of chronic illnesses. The center also offers nutrition and oral health education. These services are so important because the children may not receive them elsewhere. There were approximately 833 visits to the center for medical services and over 200 visits for mental health services during the 2005 – 2006 school year. The center is open to NTA students and their siblings, as well as other children in the neighborhood. Next year, the center plans to provide services to seniors in the community as well.

The mental health section is a very important component of the health center. It offers individual sessions as well as group therapy. The children who use the mental health clinic range in age from 5 to 15, though children as young as three or four years of age have been referred to the center. Older children that came to the center when it first opened and are now in high school are able to come back for special appointments.



Dr. Barbara Freib-Lannon guides Dr. David Perry and Nacho Gonzalez through the mental health section of the Center.

It didn't take long for the community to embrace the center. Nurse practitioner Mary Kay Foley saw children start to trickle into the center from the first day it opened, and the clinic grew very popular through word-of-mouth. By the end of the first year, 300 children were signed up at the center. Over 500 children signed up the second year, and attendance only continues to grow. Most of the

children come from the nearby public housing project, the Harold Lckes Homes. Currently, nearly 80% of the families with children in the school receive some help from the center. Foley credits some of the popularity of the clinic to its substantial feel. "The community knows it's here to stay," she said. However, Foley said that if the housing projects were to be torn down, the center would



UICNI Director Dr. Cynthia Boyd, left, Chancellor Sylvia Manning and Community School Health Centers Program Director Regina Ortiz look on as two students from the National Teacher's Academy cut the ribbon to signify the opening of the renovated health center.

lose most of their clientele. But the center has successfully adapted to changing situations before. It originally operated for twelve years in Henry Suder Elementary School before that school closed. Luckily, the center was able to transfer to the NTA, a school that serves a similar population with similar needs.

Luck was also with the center when it came to renovating. Dr. Cynthia Boyd stresses that the center's renovation and expansion is in a very large part due to the generous sponsors. In 2005, Boyd sent a proposal to McKesson, the nation's largest healthcare services company. She outlined what she hoped the wellness center could be, and how much she estimated it would cost. McKesson responded quickly and offered to give above and beyond what Dr. Boyd had requested. "That almost never happens, where you get more than you ask for," she said with a smile at the ribbon cutting ceremony. However, budget projections changed, and the project still needed more funding. In the end, Chicago Schools stepped up to pay the rest. Other generous sponsors include Aetna, who funds the oral health program, Bureau of Primary Healthcare, Illinois Children's Healthcare Foundation and the Illinois Department of Human Services.

In 2003, there were 1,500 School Health Centers in the country, 46 of them in Illinois. What makes the NTA Health Center special is that it is deeply involved with the community around it, and it shows. "The Wellness Program has been a big success because it links with the community," says Dr. Perry. "It creates a national model."

"We at the university can bring knowledge and expertise, but we don't have the money," said Sylvia Manning, Chancellor of UIC, at the ribbon cutting ceremony. "So when we partner with foundations, it's then that we can do really great things." The NTA Health & Wellness Center has proven that a healthy body can lead to a healthy mind and that strong community partnerships can lead to a healthy city.

For more information, contact Regina Ortiz at [Pray@uic.edu](mailto:Pray@uic.edu).

## UICNI Partners Assess NorthLawndale Employment Network Resource Center

For over five years, the North Lawndale Employment Network (NLEN) has offered employment services to ex-offenders in North Lawndale and its surrounding communities. After receiving hundreds of inquiries per year, NLEN has recently expanded to provide employment services to members of the general community.

Since March 2006, the Resource Center has been teaching general skills such as interviewing, applying for jobs online, and writing resumes. The newly renovated center is equipped with high-speed internet access as well as fax machines, a photocopier, voice mailboxes and other essential tools for finding a job that many residents may not otherwise have access to. NLEN has received general operating support from several sponsors and is in the process of seeking additional funding to expand the center's offerings.

To date, 63 local residents have used the center each month. Work still needs to be done to determine whether the community's employment service needs are being met. To this end, NLEN has partnered with UIC's Center for Urban Economic Development (CUED) to conduct a study of the employment service needs of North Lawndale resi-



North Lawndale Residents utilize the computer lab in the NLEN Resource center.

dents and to help design service enhancements that NLEN will implement at the Resource Center. The study was funded by the Community Outreach Partnership Centers New Directions grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The purpose of the grant is to expand the scope of the UIC Neighborhoods Initiative programs to new activities in the North Lawndale neighborhood.

While the results of the study are not yet finalized, Ron Tonn, NLEN's Chief Operating Officer, has discovered some interesting trends. It seems that the

client base is more diverse than they had expected. For example, many of the clients are public housing residents. Also, about a quarter of the people using the services are currently employed, but wish to gain more skills. In particular, they require financial counseling. As a result of learning this, the Resource Center has increased financial counseling classes from part-time to five days a week. "Bad credit history can be a huge barrier to gaining employment," said Tonn.

While the Resource Center may not meet all of the needs of people in the neighborhood, it is certainly meeting the employment needs for many residents. CUED plans to continue gathering more detailed information to recognize and identify employment needs. Tonn stressed that the quick turnaround time and flexibility in working with CUED has greatly enhanced their working relationship. "They have been very accommodating and sensitive to our needs," said Tonn. So far, it's easy to see that the new Resource Center is making a difference.

For more information, contact Nacho Gonzalez at [nacho@uic.edu](mailto:nacho@uic.edu) or 312-996-7194.

## UICNI Partners Work to Educate Residents on Expiring Section 8 Housing Contracts

By the year 2010, over 30,000 units of low-income Section 8 housing contracts will come up for renewal in Chicago. The owners of those units can choose to continue their contracts with HUD, or they may convert the housing to market-rate units. Many residents of Section 8 housing may not be aware of their vulnerable housing situation. This was the case just a few years ago in North Lawndale, a neighborhood where UICNI seeks to promote economic and civic health.

In January 2004, UIC's Nathalie P. Voorhees Neighborhood Center and the Chicago Rehab Network (CRN), a community development group committed to preserving affordable housing, began to develop a series of workshops, training sessions and a resource guide on expiring contracts to the residents of North Lawndale to help them maintain the Section 8 housing in their neighborhood. However, the scope of the project changed in the fall of 2004 when a series of events caused HUD to start plans to foreclose on the 1,100 identified units - a vast majority of the section 8 properties in the community. Through the vigilance and hard work of residents and the city, 23 different developers bought the properties. Despite the change in ownership, the section 8 occupants have been able to continue to rent the units.

By the time the study period had ended, the Voorhees Center and CRN were working on a project that was substantially different from what they had started with. Now that residents in North Lawndale are more aware of Section 8 issues, the UICNI partners have turned their focus to the Section 8 properties in the private sector and in other neighborhoods.

Rachel Johnston and Gené Moreno of CRN have taken the lessons learned in North Lawndale and applied them as teaching tools in other communities. First, they extended the target area of the project to include most neighborhoods on the Southside. The Southside Affordable Rental Housing Preservation Summit met in June and was

a success for a number of reasons. Around 500 people attended the meeting, including 400 tenants. "There is a critical mass of groups asking for help on the Southside, and a critical mass of Section 8 housing in danger of expiring," said Moreno. Of the 12,400 Section 8 units on the Southside, 7,100 units are at risk of being lost within four years. The most important thing for advocates to do is distribute information so that low-income residents know where to turn if they are a resident of HUD, and if that property's lease will be coming up for renewal soon. The Voorhees Center helped CRN to compile important information, including registered voter information



(L to R): Janet Smith, Co-Director of the Voorhees Center, and Gené Moreno and Rachel Johnston of the Chicago Rehab Network discuss the current affordable housing situation in Chicago.

and maps of housing units. Deciding how to present that material was critical. "Every handout needs to have information, even the invitation [to the summit]," said Moreno.

Janet Smith, co-director of the Voorhees Center, now has the task of processing the information that has come out of observing the processes in North Lawndale. "The challenge will be in determining how much of that was luck - certain people pushing a certain way - and how much of it is reproducible," said Smith. "Researchers and community partners alike need to pay attention to what trends are going on in neighborhoods. You must constantly adapt to neighborhood change while retaining the spirit of the project and producing a quality product for the partner," says Smith.

In the end, the goal is to work with changing circumstances and still give community partners a quality product.

This project was funded by the Community Outreach Partnership Centers New Directions grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to expand the scope of the UIC Neighborhoods Initiative programs to new activities in the North Lawndale neighborhood.

For more information, contact Janet Smith at janets@uic.edu or 312-996-2151.

## UICNI Announcements

### 5-Week Online Course in Program Evaluation Being Offered

The University of Illinois at Chicago's Online Certificate in Nonprofit Management is currently offering a 5-week Online Course in Program Evaluation. The goal of the course is for participants to learn to define program goals, determine appropriate methods of data collection, tie program evaluation to program administration, and to write professional evaluation reports.

This project was funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. For additional information, visit <http://cnm.cuppa.uic.edu/ni.htm> or call (312) 996-8078.

### UICNI Rolls Out New Website Design

The UICNI website is getting a makeover. When the new website is unveiled in mid-November it will be easier to navigate, reflect the strong partnerships between the university and community, and continue to be the primary source for UICNI activities and information. New features will include information for neighborhood-based grant writers, including updated neighborhood profiles and links to other sources.

The web site address will remain at <http://uicni.cuppa.uic.edu>.

For more information, contact Nicholas Crite at [ncrite1@uic.edu](mailto:ncrite1@uic.edu).



The New UICNI website will offer more resources for community partners.

### Save the Date

**November 17:** GCI Faculty Scholar Seminar, "Yamuna Gently Weeps" at 3:30

**November 21:** UICNI Partners Council Meeting (West Side)

**November 28:** GCI Faculty Scholar Seminar, "Transaction Costs and Cooperation in Economic Development" at 1:00

**November 29:** GCI Faculty Scholar Seminar, "The Upside of Down: Catastrophe, Creativity, and the Renewal of Civilization" at 3:00

For locations and other information, see <http://uicni.cuppa.uic.edu> or <http://www.uic.edu/cuppa/gci/>.

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