Learning Exchange Launched for Community Developed Initiatives

Grantees from all funding cycles gather

The inaugural gathering of the first Community Developed Initiatives (CDI) Learning Exchange was launched successfully last March 19 in a whole-day event full of activities. The venue for the event was the conference hall of St. Anne’s, a community-based nonprofit located near downtown Los Angeles.

The event marked the first-ever gathering of grantees from all three funding cycles of First 5 LA, and was an opportunity for representatives and project staff of different organizations to meet with each other.

About 120 representatives from CDI grantees, First 5 LA, and Semics attended the event.

Hosted by Semics, the initiative-wide evaluator, the Learning Exchange featured lively introductions, presentations, brain-teasers, and cooperation among the community of CDI grantees. To signify the theme underscoring the Learning Exchange, the event opened with a dramatized narration of “Stone Soup”, a folk tale that illustrates the unexpected wonders that result from small contributions made by individuals. The story further depicts how these modest contributions and gestures of sharing result in communities that are stronger and more cohesive. The narration was performed by members of Grupo de Teatro Sinergia, a local community-based theatre group.

In a slide presentation titled “Who Are CDI Grantees?” Grant Power of Semics described the organizational profiles of CDI grantees (see related story on page 2). The presentation was followed by a brief question-and-answer session.

To familiarize others with the diversity of CDI, participants gave brief introductions about their organizations and their projects. Descriptions were given for localities, project strategies, activities, and target populations. In another segment of the Learning Exchange, grantees shared with others their current needs, emerging interests, and how they are planning to build on and extend their current projects into other areas. They also provided very helpful suggestions on how to make the best use of the Learning Exchanges as a venue for networking and sharing of project experiences.

Another event highlight was the construction of a story assembled from separate and unrelated viewpoints that illustrates the unexpected twists that drew loud laughter. Workshops and small-group discussions capped the Learning Exchange. The workshops allowed participants to further explore commonalities they share with other organizations, and to gain a better understanding of how other CDI projects are addressing concerns in implementation and evaluation.

The event ended mid-afternoon, with participants declaring their interest to attend other Learning Exchanges in the future.

In response to the requests of CDI grantees made during the March 19th Learning Exchange, and to further promote the formation of initiative-wide linkages, Semics has opened an online forum to facilitate real-time communications and interaction between grantees.

The website is intended to be a complementary venue to actual Learning Exchanges, where participants personally meet with others in a large gathering. The new online venue has the benefit of immediacy and open access. It supports networking, sharing of resources and expertise, and promotes mutual assistance among different grantee organizations.

The URL of the site is www.cdilearningexchange.com.

The Home Page

The Forum Page

The Forum Page

CDI Resource Directory Released

To whom can my organization refer children with developmental challenges? Who provides services for children at risk for maltreatment? Who can help our project team to develop a well-rounded curriculum for very young children? Where can we find more information about assessment tools for mental health? Who can use partner with to develop effective parenting classes?

In the course of implementing their projects and engaging deeply with communities, CDI project teams come face-to-face with these and other similar questions. There is always the ever-present need to find fully with other organizations and to identify resources.

CDI grantees, First 5 LA and Semics staff at the first Learning Exchange

Learning Exchange Goes Online

Semics moderates and maintains the website and will provide online technical assistance for evaluation when requested.

To participate in the forum and to post information related to the CDI, log into the URL address below and follow the instructions for registration.

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Participants had an entertaining time developing a storyline in one of the segments of the March 19 Learning Exchange. As an exercise in group creativity, the activity of assembling separate chapters of “A Story in Many Pieces” was one of the lighter moments of the gathering. Each table was presented with a common cast of characters and a common starting point which read:

In a village not so far away, before town folks had settled into their daily routines, the news had spread quickly. In a sleepy village where nothing much happened, this was most unusual.

At the inaugural meeting of the CDI Learning Exchange on March 19, 2004, Grant Power, Managing Director of Semics, described to participants some of the organizational characteristics of CDI grantees and their projects. Profile information for the presentation was taken from proposals submitted to First 5 LA and summarized in graphics and charts (see below).

Key observations: Grantees are evenly distributed across the three funding cycles and tend to be providers of a single service (59%) such as health, childcare, and early education. Other grantees (41%) provide multiple interventions in their CDI projects. Most serve populations in more than one Service Planning Area (SPA), and grant-related activities are predominantly direct services focused on achieving child outcomes related to school readiness (47), social/emotional well-being (44), and good health (36). Majority of projects are intended to benefit primarily or exclusively young children, their families, or guardians — while a few projects aim to serve other service providers.

Who Are CDI Grantees?

A new resource directory prepared by Semics may provide some answers and narrow down the search for needed information. The directory comes in a handy booklet form for ease of use and ready reference. Although not comprehensive, the directory gives CDI grantee organizations initial leads to various organizations and resources. The information provided may also help organizations in linking up with other agencies that provide supportive or complementary services.

The directory includes brief profiles of CDI projects, contact information, internet-based resources, and other forms of useful information. It also shows the distribution of areas covered by CDI Grantees in each of the SPAs in LA County.

Semics invites CDI grantees to provide corrections, revisions, and suggestions to further improve the directory and to make it more useful.

A Look Back At “A Story In Many Pieces”

When later assembled and stitched together, the separate sections of the story blended coherently with each other.

There were many unexpected turns in the resulting story, and also many points of humor and strong imagery. “Participants saw the activity as a metaphor of the CDI,” said Rhonda Scott, who led the activity and who read the entire story back to the attendees.

To this day, the mayor’s wife denies seeing anything. She claims that she was in her kitchen stirring a pot of porridge when it all happened. She says that the blacksmith should have seen:

Each group received a chapter heading different from those given others. Each group worked independently and had no idea of how other groups were developing their respective chapters. The following were the chapter headings:

The Dark Pond
An Old Chest
Books and Bottles
Crooked Doors
The Upside-Down Mirror
The Unclaimed Present
Distant Bells
Other Signs
The Water Wheel

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Despite the dissimilar conditions in the beginning, there is a strong sense of commonality that brings the entire story together.”

CDI Cycles

Majority in Cycle 2 (20 grantees)
Cycles 1 and 3 have 17 grantees each

Years of Existence

The years of existence are equally distributed for grantees

Target Population Frequency Distribution

• Children only (21)
• Families (17)
• Parents, guardians, pregnant mothers (10)
• Child Care / Programs (5)
• Providers (5)
• Communities (2)

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Making the Connection: CDI Grantee Networking in Action

The possibilities of networking between grantees of the Community Developed Initiative (CDI) came to life in May as representatives of two grantee organizations met to discuss possible opportunities for playground space for faith-based child care facilities.

Representatives of California Council of Churches (CCC) and Los Angeles Conservation Corps (LACC) met at The First Baptist Church of Maywood on May 14, which was also attended by representatives of CCC member congregations. Phil Matero and Sarah Higgins of LACC gave a multimedia presentation showcasing their recent playground projects in southeastern Los Angeles county (SPA7).

The presentation featured LACC’s ongoing efforts to build or renovate playground space for children in low-income communities, illustrated by colorful pictures of recent park openings in southeastern Los Angeles county. Among the important points highlighted were LACC’s experience in building more than 100 parks around the county, partnering with other organizations and indicating the various funding possibilities available. This was followed by a roundtable discussion moderated by the Rev. Kathy Cooper-Ledesma, associate director from CCC.

The discussion was working on a project to install recreational equipment for infants, toddlers and preschool children in city parks. The very next day, Cooper-Ledesma got on the phone with Matero to discuss possible joint funding opportunities. It proved to be an effective connection, as both agencies viewed SPA7 as an important area of need.

During the discussion, she also pointed out that faith-based organizations are not eligible to receive state funding. But since 25% of child care in California is provided by faith-based organizations, the need for improved facilities is important.

As a result of the event, Kathy is planning to invite the entire faith-based child care network to hear the same LACC presentation. This would hopefully generate interest among 15-20 child care centers to work on collaborative application for funding – with LACC as the lead grantee agency – for playground renovations.

“The potential partnership with Council of Churches is a natural connection in helping to improve playgrounds and the safety of children,” said Matero. “Working through the California Council of Churches is a great opportunity to partner in applying for new grants,” Matero said, “and LACC is looking forward to working with the providers to be in compliance for licensing and/or accreditation.”

Cooper-Ledesma says a follow-up meeting is scheduled for mid-July.

Harbor Interfaith Services

From its inception in 1983, Harbor Interfaith Services has been serving homeless families in the South Bay area by providing temporary shelter and a range of other services. The agency operates a food pantry and a 20-unit apartment building which the organization purchased in 1990 for its shelter program.

Harbor Interfaith serves the port district of Los Angeles, which includes the cities of San Pedro, Wilmington, Harbor City, and Lomita. With offices and facilities in the business and cultural corridor of San Pedro, the organization is located in an area that enables its clients to access potential employers when clients are ready to enter the job market.

Harbor Interfaith is the only family shelter in South Bay that accepts families with children. In the typical situation, children of homeless families are placed in temporary foster care. This results in the separation of family members, and has subsequent effects on the emotional and psychological state of children, especially the very young. In contrast, Harbor Interfaith strongly believes in preserving the unity of the family and in the ability of the family to learn from adversity.

Harbor Interfaith has been the recipient of two CDI grants from First Five LA. The first grant under funding Cycle 3 allowed the organization to complete the development of a Family Resource Center. The center functions as a “one-stop shop” for homeless families and provides a full range of support services that encourage self-sufficiency and independence.

For those who make it through Harbor Interfaith’s rigorous screening and transitional living program, the odds are excellent. According to follow-up data, fewer than 5% of the families became homeless again within one year after leaving the shelter.

The H.S. Tots childcare center in San Pedro.

Connection for Children’s Monthly Support/Networking Meetings

Connections for Children has been providing free child care referrals and support services to parents and child care providers within and around the Santa Monica area since 1976. They are one of ten Child Care Resource and Referral agencies located within Los Angeles. With funding from First Five LA’s Community program assistants, Brianne and Veronica.

Those childcare providers not currently enrolled, but who attend the workshops, will be given priority for the next round of providers chosen. The meetings are open to these providers currently enrolled in the program, as well as to others looking to connect with those in their community. These informal potluck gatherings serve as a forum, where providers share ideas, concerns and useful information. Participants themselves give presentations on specific topics of interest to them. These include subjects such as age appropriate curriculum, accreditation, working with parents, business and marketing, and other related topics which contribute to the provision of high-quality childcare.

Spanish translation is provided for those whose primary language is other than English.
Healthy Babies/Happy Moms is a health outreach program that gives special attention to the low-income communities in the San Gabriel Valley by offering medical services and improving referrals for low-income Latino, Asian and African American at-risk expectant mothers and children. Among the services provided are prenatal care and health promotion. The program has four major components: GEM (Get Every Mother Project), CPSP (Comprehensive Perinatal Services Program), COPE (Community Outreach for Prevention and Education), and a mobile free clinic (Kids Kare-A-Van).

The project builds on a remarkably powerful and effective door-to-door program calibrated to target groups. The CDI-funded program runs under the direction of Maria Peacock (Grants Administrator) and Tom McGuinness (Senior VP), both from Citrus Valley Partners. The project is also strongly directed towards building the capacity of disadvantaged communities, and to other avenues and alternatives that would otherwise not be accessible. Outreach activities engage target communities in their own language and use the values, life styles, and family traditions of their culture.

The Promotoras de Salud component of GEM, whose coordinator is Irma Muniz, outreach in schools, churches, and scheduled neighborhood services. Representatives educate the community about available health insurance enrollment, and make health services known to a large number of children and pregnant women who qualify for health coverage but who would otherwise not be informed and are likely to miss out on available resources.

Together with the mobile clinic and with the support of CSPS and the medical staff of Citrus Valley, GEM provides medical referrals, immunizations, health education, and mental health consultations.

About 200 active women volunteers comprise the group of Promotoras de Salud. These are mostly mothers and elderly women from low-income Latino communities, with an Asian counterpart that is also growing. As an indication of the effectiveness of the project, 182 applications for health coverage have been completed with the assistance of GEM staff.

The Promotoras de Salud is emerging as an important cornerstone of the CDI project. GEM staff and the promoters receive extensive training and materials from the Neighborhood Legal Services and the Industrial Areas Foundation. These Latino and Asian women volunteers are creating a strong foundation for the education and empowerment of communities, and at the same time strengthen the role of women in their respective cultures.

On average, CBOs used 75% of their grant funds for personnel, while day care organizations used over 50% of their grants for capital improvements and equipment.

By contrast, CBO’s tended to use funds primarily to improve their ability to assess community needs, develop relevant and useful materials, and carry out critical training sessions for parents and, in certain cases, for other providers. This use of funds reflects the central role of this capacity development to CDI.

An additional important finding is that small grants across the board – but particularly day care providers – invested in computers for various uses by children to be ready for school, and a vital way to streamline the agencies’ tracking systems for clients and core operations.

Many of these agencies often lack both resources to invest in technology and access to grant funding for such investments. CDI funds which provide support for technology can be a critical way of contributing to the overall improvement of day care services.

Small agencies that serve distinct neighborhoods, when day care agencies seek funding, CBOs are an important, but often overlooked, component of the child care/parent support delivery system. A key strength of the CDI Small Grants Program is that targeted, well-placed investments (even small ones) in this sector can leverage significant enhancements to the quality of daycare for children across LA County.

The CDI Small Grants Evaluation Initial Findings

Seminars recently completed a report on its evaluation of Cycle 1 of the CDI Small Grants Program of First 5 LA. The report releases early findings. First 5 LA’s stated goal for the CDI Small Grants is to strengthen the capacity of smaller agencies (those with annual operating budgets under $250,000) in order to better serve children 0-5, their families and communities in LA County.

Semina st staff in March and April 2004 reviewed First 5 LA and grantee documents, administered a questionnaire and conducted focus group discussions with grantees. Among the key findings are that agency needs differ by type of services provided.

About two thirds of Cycle 1 small grantees were child care providers, while most of the rest were community organizations (CBOs) providing a range of services (such as parent education).

CBOs used 75% of their grant funds for personnel, while day care organizations used over 50% of their grants for capital improvements and equipment.

The Long Beach Child Care Empowerment Project

The Long Beach Child Care Empowerment Project, implemented by the nonprofit agency Familedos Unidos de Good Health Foundation (FHGF) of St. Mary Medical Center, serves the Southeast Asian community of Long Beach.

The project aims to provide additional licensed child care slots for Burmese, Cambodian/Hmong/Lao language community. A study by the child care Resource and Referral Agency for Long Beach shows that there are only three (3) licensed Cambodian family child care providers in the entire city, and no Lao or Hmong providers. The study could not identify any centers that had a Southeast Asian language capacity. The project provides enroll a 26-week entrepreneurial and child care training. Thirty-five individuals were recruited through advertising and outreach in the Cambodian community that included a cable TV program, “Health Reports”. Twelve of the parents will receive assistance through the project to become licensed childcare providers.

Long Beach City College, college provides training materials. For its part, FHGF provides meeting space and translation services.

The most important objectives of the project is the strengthening of the concept of the parent as the child’s first teacher. Southeast Asian culture does not view the parent as the child’s first teacher. Traditionally, the school is seen as the first learning environment for the child. As a result, parents do not consider it their role to prepare the child for school.

The 2000 Census estimated Long Beach the most diverse city in the nation, with one of the largest communities of Southeast Asian immigrants, estimated at 30,000 - 40,000.

Community Calendar

Bethany Lutheran Child Care Center
Open House (Ulam Room)
2670 La Tierra Street
Pasadena, CA
626-792-1601

Citrus Valley Health Partners
Healthy Babies/Happy Moms
Free Mobile Clinic
Call for information: 626-814-2405

Union Station Foundation 15th Annual USF Alumni Picnic
August 2004 (TBA)

L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center
LGBT Family Celebration 2004: “A Night at the Beach”
Saturday, June 12, 2004 @ St. Anne’s Foundation Room
155 N. Occidental Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90026
To RSVP: 310-988-6017

5th Annual Children’s Garden at The L.A. Gay Pride Festival in WeHo
Saturday, June 19th
Noon-5pm
Sunday, June 20th
11am-5pm

Connections for Children
Family Child Care Resource Program
New Year Orientation
July 17th & July 31st
Location: TBA
Call for info: 310-452-3202

The Heart Touch Project
Training for Volunteers
June 25th - 27th
Heart Touch
3400 Airport Avenue #42
Santa Monica, CA 90405
Call for info: 310-391-2558

Pasadena Public Health Minority Immunization Initiative Immunization educational display at the Pasadena Public Library throughout the months of June

USC Community-Based Assessment and Treatment Center
“Facility Grand Opening” July 2004
For more information contact:

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