Grantees Navigate Common Ground
Mapping challenges and successes in Learning Exchange 3

**“Navigating Common Ground”** is the theme of Semics’ third CDI Learning Exchange (LE3) at St. Anne’s in Los Angeles on October 1.

The half-day event aims to keep the momentum going in contributing to First 5 LA’s broader purposes for the Learning Exchange: To enable grantees to meet, discuss and compare experiences and perspectives and share collective insight and information that will enable each organization to learn, continue to improve its project (s), and maintain or increase the impact of CDI in the lives of children age 0-5 and their families.

The event agenda includes a simulated talk show that gives “air time” to three CDI grantee guests working in diverse settings. These grantees are slated to share with us their experiences in tackling obstacles and creating alternatives as circumstances require. They also intend to share the reflection process they used to understand and address their internal operational demands and how their projects have been doing since implementing mid-course changes. LE3 will also ask CDI participants to engage in table discussions on their own experiences with project implementation, identify cross-cutting challenges and creative strategies in addressing them and report back in plenary about shared insights and recommendations.

Semics will note these points and as part of the closing session for the morning, look at an inventory of CDI grantees’ comments to gain an overall impression of commonly experienced difficulties and imaginative/ effective responses. After several visits to various CDI-funded projects in the last six months, Semics’ staff has noticed that operational issues are becoming more significant as agencies go deeper into project implementation. Whereas June’s Learning Exchange 2 sought to facilitate new connections and inter-agency collaboration under the theme of “Building Common Ground,” LE3 offers a roundtable on operational innovation, trouble shooting, problem solving and creative adaptation in the management and operation of projects in mid-course.

Operational issues facing a cross-section of CDI-funded projects include how to motivate parents to become (or stay) involved in a project, how to recruit and retain qualified staff and committed volunteers, how to avoid bureaucratic snags in institution-driven projects, how to anticipate and prevent delays in construction projects, how to design outreach activities that reflect a nuanced understanding of one’s target population and how to design and implement contingencies following unexpected outcomes, among others.

Semics believes that grantees can help each other to better understand and respond to them if they have a venue for discussions and collective problem solving.

### Our Saviour Center

**Transitional Prenatal and Pediatric Care: Lessons Learned**

When El Monte’s Our Saviour Center launched its Healthy Beginnings prenatal and pediatric program at its Cleaver Family Wellness Clinic, only about one-third of the anticipated number of mothers and young families showed up, despite its established reputation as a community clinic.

“We had implemented a traditional outreach plan,” said Dr. Melissa Bael, Our Saviour’s resource development manager. That plan included public events, pregnancy education programs and bilingual mailings to a network of local agencies.

Many of those relationships in that network stem back to 1985 when the Center opened as a food pantry. It evolved into a comprehensive social service agency which also includes after-school youth tutoring and parenting instruction.

The clinic, operating since 1999, initially referred its prenatal patients to local physicians’ offices. But as referrals grew, the agency applied for a First 5

newborn deliveries. With fewer than expected prenatal patients, the agency had to quickly evaluate why its new program was not being readily accessed. Through informal focus groups and consultations with community agencies, Our Saviour Center found out exactly why.

“School nurses thought of us as the place where you send students for immunizations,” said operations manager Karen Bohika. “Not the place where you send a pregnant teenager.”

Our Saviour’s outreach plan was based on promoting the identity it worked so hard to establish. Now it faced the challenge of reframing it. The agency decided to focus on school nurses, who see children and young families daily. An open house was created and the Healthy Beginnings program was introduced at local schools.

The shift in its marketing and class schedule and related agencies learned about the accreditation under the theme of “Building Common Ground,” LE3 offers a roundtable on operational innovation, trouble shooting, problem solving and creative adaptation in the management and operation of projects in mid-course.

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Semics Project Analysts – Coming Your Way!

Since the beginning of its evaluation of First 5’s CDI Program, Semics has assigned site teams of two – a research associate and a senior research associate – to work with the 54 CDI grantees. But now that the funding cycle for a number of CDI grants has ended or is anticipated to end soon, Semics has recently re-arranged its site team composition to shift site loads and work with grantees in an even better and more involved manner.

Now, Semics will be sending one of its staff members – with the new title of Project Analyst – to your agency for site immersion, Semics’ unique method of qualitative evaluation. Through observation, interviews and other data-gathering methods, Project Analysts will visit your site and focus on three areas of inquiry regarding CDI grantees: Changes in communities and target population, changes in the grantee organization and changes in service delivery. Semics Project Analysts will also be using a variety of evaluation tools, selected to most appropriately fit your project’s aims and other characteristics.

Other exciting changes include internal discussion groups, a feedback system and inter-grantee focus groups – think of them as mini-Learning Exchanges. For more information on Semics’ improved and expanded CDI evaluation methods, feel free to contact your Project Analyst or any Semics staff member at the Learning Exchange.

Origins of the Learning Exchange: Where Experiment and Experience Collide

The idea of a “learning exchange” is not new. It originated – and still continues – in developing countries where conceptual notions about projects quickly give way to economic, political and cultural realities.

In 2000, when the University of the Philippines’ social sciences program was contracted by the Southeast Asian country’s Department of Health to evaluate a multi-million dollar Urban Health and Nutrition Project, their research team soon ran into a problem. A tightly woven community of malnourished families and children can’t be divided into artificial control and experimental groups, only to inject food into just one sector of the community. The project involved the testing of nutritional interventions meant to arrest protein energy malnutrition in Filipino infants 6 to 24 months of age. This form of malnourishment has been a serious health crisis in many Third World countries for years. The Philippine health department divided its plighted urban communities into seven pilot areas, each in experimental and control clusters. The department introduced mother’s classes, weight monitoring and feeding guidelines in all but in the experimental areas, where a variable was introduced: Cereals, vegetables and other protein-rich food products were given to families.

The research team had to choose between writing the experimental variable – an artificial report based on what was actually happening. The team chose the latter and discovered a rich vein of informal dialogue among project coordinators, teachers and community volunteers about how to render meaningful a government experiment that had lost its connection with the community. The researchers framed in dialogue by facilitating a traveling nationwide open forum across all of the designated urban pilot areas.

The forum shifted the spotlight onto a number of spontaneous community innovations. Researchers learned that parenting class teachers made home visits to help increase attendance. Program coordinators used their own money to buy visual aids and other materials that were not budgeted for by the government. Medical students at local universities volunteered with weight monitoring and other facets of the program that were delayed or lost in the process. In scientific research, these factors are abstractly made “neutral” for purpose of creating clean measurement of a single variable. But community workers know that this is impossible, particularly when a community is suffering.

The nationwide forum allowed stakeholders to clarify what it took to address nutritional issues among diverse communities. It also demonstrated a more ecological understanding of community and the ripple effects of government intervention.

Our Learning Exchange borrows from this and other similar practices around the world. The hope is that it will benefit all of us – children, parents, implementing agencies, evaluators and First 5 LA. Of course, it still needs to be translated into a form that makes sense for our own context in Los Angeles County.

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Grantees learn, network at June’s Learning Exchange 2.

‘There were more opportunities to talk to other agencies to think about our programs and issues and where we are experiencing.’ said Wilmington Community Clinic’s Dolores ‘Dee’ Clay. ‘People felt a little more relaxed, a little more comfortable with each other than at the first Learning Exchange and that opened up the opportunity to have this kind of exchange.’

Groups providing parenting programs as well as health and literacy classes shared resources in their June sessions. Monrovia Unified School District’s Bookmobile, Harbor Interfaith Shelter, and WIC decided to combine their parenting and literacy classes to maximize use of speakers, information distribution and networking opportunities.

Several participants at the event made known general needs and services their groups are able to provide to other groups. The L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center, which wanted broader outreach to their community, offered diversity training services to other groups in their session. El Centro Latino is developing a computer-based literacy program, helpful for the Spanish-speaking target population.

Happy Bear School’s Casey Dalton (L) and Semics’ Melanie Stevens exchange information during the lunch break.

Open forums like this one in the Philippines are examples of learning exchanges overseas.
Grantee Spotlights

October 2004

Center for the Pacific Asian Family
Meeting the Needs of the API Community

With many levels of diversity that exist within it— from Korean to Hmong, Thai to Cambodian, Japanese to Vietnamese—the Asian and Pacific Islander (API) community can be a challenging population to serve. The list is long and rich with each culture having its own language, community, and family resource center. The API community continues to grow in size and diversity. The Center for the Pacific Asian Family (CPAF) has been able to navigate through that very difficult terrain.

The agency began in 1971 as the first multi-lingual hotline assisting API survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. They later expanded their range of services, opening the first multi-lingual and multi-cultural Emergency Shelter and later a Transitional Shelter Program. CPAF’s stated mission is “to build healthy and safe communities by addressing the root causes and the consequences of family violence and violence against women.” Their approach to service has always been dedicated to meeting the specific cultural and language needs of API women and their families. “We look at how each client defines themselves and to meet them where they are,” says CPAF’s executive director Debra Sul. From its inception, Center for the Pacific Asian Family was well aware of the very distinct needs of the API community, understanding that accessibility is a crucial part of outreach. CPAF provides services in 15 different languages to accommodate the varied families that seek their services. They are able to achieve this broad goal through staff, volunteers and partnerships with other API organizations.

The secret to CPAF’s success is not only its pioneering work in domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse services in Los Angeles, but more specifically, the level of attention and care paid to each of their clients, tailoring the services to meet individual needs.

Expanding on their reach, in 1980 they opened a multi-lingual and multi-cultural Domestic Violence Shelter, which was the first of its kind in the country to address families’ needs for isolation and for access to social support arising from domestic violence and sexual assault. They later expanded their range of services by introducing reading of children’s books aloud as a tool to enhance parent-child emotional bonding while helping parents to explore sensitive issues with their children, such as sibling rivalry, divorce and discipline.

Friends of the Family’s (FOF) is a non-profit, community based mental health and family resource center operating since 1972 in the San Fernando Valley and the greater Los Angeles area. FOF has developed an organizational culture in which learning is prized, literacy. In many ways, they serve as parent mentors by modeling how to tone down their delivery techniques, but also ways to talk with their children about sensitive issues that the books introduce. By sharing their own stories and struggles in raising their own children, the program’s facilitators create a safe environment for and encourage class participants to share their own challenges and struggles.

L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center
Expanding the Concept of Family

Founded in 1971, the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center is the largest gay and lesbian organization in the world and the nation’s first to incorporate the word “gay” into its name. The Center’s organizational mission is to empower the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) community, heal the damage caused by discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender expression and identity, advocate for full and equal access to health and lead by example. “As the LGBT family community continues to grow exponentially, the availability of information, support and services becomes more and more critical,” said Arielle Rosen, family services manager at the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center. “Thanks to First 5 LA, the Center will be able to support the development of healthy LGBT families by providing increased programming and greater sense of community among LGBT families throughout Los Angeles County. CDI funding has allowed the Family Services Program to diversify its programming and target population to better serve individual LGBT families as well as the larger LGBT family community. The L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center has made a concerted effort to outreach more LGBT families, expanding its roster from about 40 active families to more than 700.

Friends of the Family’s Project GoodStart
Adding Value to Community and Organization

Friends of the Family’s successful CDI project, Project GoodStart (PGS) is implementing simple, yet effective strategies. Expanding on their already successful existing parenting and literacy programs, PGS addresses multiple needs of the families they serve. With their target group being mostly English as a Second Language speakers, PGS aims to address families’ needs for social support arising from isolation and access to information related to child health and development. The project also addresses literacy by introducing reading of translated children’s books aloud as a tool to enhance parent-child emotional bonding while helping parents to explore sensitive issues with their children, such as sibling rivalry, divorce and discipline.

This has allowed FOF not only to learn from the implementation of PGS, but to develop its organizational projects. This has contributed to a strong internal support system. They have contributed to a strong internal support system. They have contributed to a strong internal support system. They have contributed to a strong internal support system. They have contributed to a strong internal support system.

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My daughter didn’t speak until the age of two, and then she began speaking in full sentences!” exclaimed Anait Sarkisyan, a child care provider at Friends of the Family’s Project Goodstart.

Continued on page 4
Continued from Page 3

**Adding Value...**

Facilitators are also able regularly to process their in-class experiences with each other during weekly team meetings. In addition, newer staff members are mentored by their experienced counterparts. Staff members at all levels of the project were engaged in the process of creating a comprehensive evaluation tool for the project. This not only ensured that staff understood the purpose and goals of the evaluation instrument, but gave them a sense of enthusiasm for implementing this part of the project as well. Because FOH has developed an organizational culture that nurtures among staff passion and commitment to serve the community and to adopt practices that promote organizational learning, it has been able to take good advantage of the resources and “added value” Project GoodStart has brought to the organization.

FOH has extended its visibility in the community it serves and deepened relationships with other organizations and leaders as a result of their CDI project. A recent community event originally planned for 300, attracted around 800 parents and children. “We own it now!” said Friends of the Family administrator Lisa Hirsch at Learning Exchange 2, commenting on the “added value” for her organization generated by PGS. The value added by CDI funding has turned to permanent value for an organization ready to its resources wisely to serve both the community and the organizational learning process itself.

**CDI Word Search**

E  N  O  Z  N  F  C  C  D  I  L  E  J  B  
L  V  O  Z  E  S  E  O  K  T  N  Q  W  H  P  
Z  E  A  I  M  G  I  C  I  L  A  F  B  
S  Y  A  L  T  M  R  N  I  P  T  M  R  P  X  
R  C  T  R  U  A  S  W  X  G  I  Y  C  H  U  
H  W  K  N  N  A  C  T  S  G  A  C  H  W  A  
N  D  I  T  A  I  T  U  C  O  T  A  I  C  T  
L  T  E  D  T  R  N  I  D  G  I  R  L  H  F  
Y  E  C  N  L  S  G  G  O  E  V  E  D  Y  N  
E  R  A  C  D  L  I  H  C  N  E  R  F  L  
X  H  D  H  T  S  J  J  P  H  F  I  E  G  V  
G  W  Z  Q  V  K  X  M  V  C  U  L  N  F  Q  
W  K  Z  Z  D  B  X  N  S  V  I  J  F  N  D  
V  L  H  T  L  A  E  H  D  M  O  H  S  P  W  
Q  E  Z  I  O  U  T  R  E  A  C  H  P  Q  V

**Look for the following words:**

- **CDI**
- **GoodStart**
- **Community**
- **Evaluation**
- **Grant**
- **Grantee**
- **Grantee**
- **Grant**
- **Initiative**
- **Learning**
- **Literacy**
- **Outreach**

**What Didn’t Happen at Learning Exchange 2...**

**Adele Cadres from Crystal Stairs inspected the damage that Semics created at her agency’s facility.**

**“The name is Bond . . . Carol Bond.”**

**Things got a little creepy when Shields for Families’ Aaron Gardner started channeling spirits from the afterworld.**

**To end the day, Amanda Bueno sang her rendition of Whitney Houston’s “Greatest Love of All.”**

**Community Calendar**

**October 2004**

- The HELP Group
  - The HELP Group Summit 2004
  - Oct. 8 – 9
  - The Radisson Hotel - LAX
  - Los Angeles
  - 818-779-5212
  - www.thehelpgroup.org

**November 2004**

- California Council of Churches
  - Faith-Based Childcare Network Universal Preschool Briefings
  - Nov. 3, 7:30 p.m.
  - Temple Emanu El Preschool Burbank
  - Nov. 4, 1:30 p.m.
  - Holy Redeemer Lutheran Church and Child Development Center Bellflower
  - 323-256-3162
  - kaluth@calchurches.org
  - www.calchurches.org

- The Heart Touch Project
  - “Candy Cane Lounge” Holiday Shopping Fundraiser
  - Nov. 7, 7 - 10 p.m.
  - The Beverly Center
  - Los Angeles
  - 310-391-2558
  - alexandra@hearttouch.org
  - www.hearttouch.org

- SCAEYC
  - National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Conference
  - Nov. 10 - 13
  - Anaheim Convention Center
  - Anaheim
  - 800-424-2460
  - www.naeyc.org

- Child & Family Guidance Center
  - In-Home Instruction Program Graduation
  - Nov. 19, 5 - 7 p.m.
  - Park Panthena Community Family Center
  - Northridge
  - 818-882-3147
  - www.childguidance.org

**December 2004**

- Children’s Hospital
  - Los Angeles
  - Parent Support Groups for Families of Children with Spina Bifida
  - Holiday Potluck Celebration
  - Dec. 9, 10 a.m. – 12 p.m.
  - Children’s Hospital Los Angeles
  - Los Angeles
  - 323-669-7079
  - aquiran@chla.usc.edu

**January 2005**

- LA Child Guidance Clinic
  - Statewide Early Intervention Mental Health Conference
  - Jan. 27
  - Burbank Airport Hilton Burbank
  - 323-766-2360 x3360
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