

NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORKS

Moderator: Michele Higgs
November 10, 2009
3 pm EST

Operator: Thank you for standing by and welcome to the Neighborhood Networks conference call.

Today's conference is being recorded.

At this time, I would like to turn the conference over to Michele Higgs; please go ahead.

Michele Higgs: Thank you. Welcome to the November Neighborhood Networks monthly conference call.

It's good that you could join us for today's call, which is "When Does Your Center Become a True Community Resource?"

Now, how does that happen? How can you make it happen? When you hear from our speakers, I trust you will come away with a picture of how a Neighborhood Networks center can be a functioning resource for the community in which it resides, and participate in a true give and take that benefits both entities.

First, I have a few pieces of news to give you before we get started. By now, HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinators, centers, and consortium members should have received technical assistance nomination forms, which herald the beginning of the onsite technical assistance process for Neighborhood Networks.

We will provide onsite technical assistance to 50 centers and 10 HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinators, and up to 13 consortia. Onsite technical assistance provides a rich hands-on experience for HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinators, centers, and consortia to make real strides toward their fullest potential. So take a look at these nomination forms and join us this year in an exercise that will help you create opportunities for the residents at your centers.

If you have not received your nomination material, please call the toll-free information line at 888-312-2743 and ask to speak to one of the technical assistance coordinators. The deadline for HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinators to submit their nominations is November 12 and the deadline for centers and consortia is November 20.

Also, on December 31 of this year, HUD will close the window of opportunity that permits Neighborhood Network centers that opened prior to 2003 to apply for Model classification with only one HUD-approved center assessment. Effective January 1, 2010, the center classification Model standard number one will require that a center applying for Model classification, regardless of when it opened, must submit three HUD approved assessments. Time is running out so don't let this opportunity pass you by.

For further information on center classification or Model standards or the technical assistance nomination process, again, I refer centers to the Neighborhood Networks information center toll-free line at 888-312-2743. The hearing impaired may access the number via TTY by calling the Federal Information Relay Service at 800-877-8339.

There are nine centers that have joined the ranks of Neighborhood Networks this month. So, let's welcome them into the fold. We have Hawaiian Gardens Neighborhood Networks Center in Hawaiian Gardens, California; Centro Educativo de la Comunidad, that's CEC, in Sabana Grande, Puerto Rico; Palm Springs Point Resource Center in Palm Springs, California; Renaissance 88 Neighborhood Networks Center in Thornton, Colorado; Morningside Gardens

Learning Center in Knoxville, Tennessee; International Place Apartments Neighborhood Networks in Tacoma, Washington; Victorian Woods Neighborhood Networks Center in Decatur, Illinois; Kingston Place Neighborhood Networks Center in Rockford, Illinois; and finally, Prairie Ridge Neighborhood Networks Center in Freeport, Illinois. Congratulations to all of you!

Now, let's talk about our call. How do centers fare when they open their doors to the surrounding community? How do they determine what they will offer and how to present it? Where do they begin and how? Let me tell you who our speakers are and they'll help you learn.

We will hear from Wendall Chin, who is the Pacific West Director with Sun Consulting and Associates in Oakland, California. Wendall has been organizing in the nonprofit sector for close to two decades. He has served as a project director, executive director, coalition director, and political organizer in the field of social, environmental, and economics rights and justice.

We would also like to welcome Dr. Clara Byes, center supervisor for the Jefferson Community Action Program community center (JeffCAP). Dr. Byes provided me with a long and impressive list of community links with which she has exchanged services for the benefit of her center and the community. In fact, JeffCAP and Dr. Byes were the focus of a March 24, 2009 Neighborhood Networks success story. I encourage you to visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.neighborhoodnetworks.org and take a look at that story. That's a clear sign that something is going right at JeffCAP. Dr. Byes, I'm sure our listeners want to know how you shaped your program at JeffCAP. So, I'd like to start off with a question for you. First, what are the activities that your center makes available and what are the most requested activities in the Gretna, Louisiana community? Can you start with that one?

Dr. Clara Byes: Thanks for inviting me to be part of this great event and I'd like to say hello to each and every one of you, and I wish you the best.

JeffCAP is a non-profit program that was organized in 1964, to create various activities for different communities to combat poverty in designated areas. Our main purpose and goal is to reduce poverty in our communities. We must work and focus our attention on gathering local, state, private, and federal resources because we can't do it with our resources alone.

We use these resources to assist low-income individuals and families to become self-sufficient. We have a commodity distribution or food box every two weeks. We distribute donated food to feed households under the emergency food assistance program. .

Then there's the Family Day Care Home Program. Senior citizens, or anyone who's not working, and has passed a background check, can provide daycare to children. We have a childcare feeding program that reimburses our individual daycare providers. The providers attend nutritional and safety seminars. The state pays daycare providers \$426 and provides food for the children.

Three components of this program are that daycare providers can watch the children before and after school, and also in the summer. A lot of our senior citizens already provide daycare to their relatives' children.

We also have a large Head Start Program. Many of you know about Head Start, which supports learning environments for 3 to 5 year-old children. We have at least nine different Head Start centers.

We also have a large housing counseling program, which offers comprehensive housing to tenants and home owners about housing financial assistance. We have a large first time home buyers program. We help people with reverse mortgages. We help them clean up their credit, if they have bad credit. We also have listings of houses and apartments that are available.

We also have home maintenance and financial fitness training for those that need this service.

Our life program is the Low Income Home Entity Assistance Program (LIHEAP). Twice per year, we provide this program for clients to help pay their utilities.

We have seven community centers that provide services all over the parish. Another type of service that we have is a weatherization program, which helps with energy efficiency improvement measures such as doors, windows, insulation, and caulking. For senior citizens, we assist them with their central air and heating. We also help the disabled and anyone who needs handicap ramps. Since Hurricane Katrina, there is money to help people remodel homes, especially those with roofing issues.

We also have an elderly transportation service. This is an excellent service, especially for people needing assistance with getting to the doctor.

Michele Higgs: Dr. Byes, on the heels of what you're saying, is there any mental health counseling or anything like that that comes into play since Katrina?

Dr. Clara Byes: Since Katrina, 200 "Louisiana Spirit" counselors have been hired. I have 12 of them here at my center, and they help with any type of mental health needs. Through our partnership with the human resources department, we are able to work with people with mental health issues.

We have some excellent counselors who go from door-to-door, asking people what type of assistance is needed. Last month, they helped 16,900 residents. They just held a big workshop with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA, at Tulane University demonstrating to the community the different types of assistance they have provided in our communities.

Michele Higgs: I want to go back to the point that you had about the long and impressive list of your center activities. I have two questions for you. With regard to skill enhancement or workforce development for the residents, is there any kind of computer training program in addition to the other things that you offer?

Dr. Clara Byes: Yes, we have a computer lab with 15 computers; 14 for the students and one for the teacher. My councilman bought us those computers and the furniture. We have a partnership with Delgado College through the Microsoft Program, and the college provided a teacher for us and the curriculum. We also have a partnership with our Louisiana Work Force Commission.

Our new governor has closed down all of the unemployment offices. The unemployment office now is a workforce development office, and the workforce development office helps residents complete job applications. We have a large training program because a lot of people have been used to doing certain types of work; however, those types of jobs are now unavailable. So this training helps open up other doors and avenues, and provides opportunities for residents to try other jobs.

During Neighborhood Networks Week, Louisiana Work Force Commission, Hope Center, Youth Build Program, and ProAdvance conducted workshops for our community about the different jobs and programs that are available through the workforce development program.

The workforce development program also placed software on our computers, whereby we are licensed to provide GED training. Residents can come, login, and identify the skills in which they are weak, and then take the GED test. A lot of people are unable to get jobs because they don't have the computer skills, so we have partnerships with various universities to help residents acquire those skills.

Now I am trying to partner with Xavier University, as we work with the Hope Center. We have contacted them to get another teacher because we have more than 100 applications for the computer class.

Michele Higgs: It sounds like you're putting a positive spin on all of this, particularly with regard to the workforce development. Now, let me ask you another question because you have so many good things going on. How do you track the overall success of your various programs?

Dr. Clara Byes: We have a department that writes up all the various projects and conducts the needs assessments. There are five basic steps to having a successful program: you must plan, you must develop, you must implement, you must operate well, and you must evaluate.

The first thing that you do when planning is to have an evaluation. You have to have a needs assessment and identify your needs. What has caused these needs? How are you going to go about finding resources to help you with those needs? So, that's your needs assessment.

Then, we have two steps for designing our program. You have process evaluation and you have product evaluation. Now, your process is a step in your needs assessment. Identify your problems, gather your data, diagnose your deficiencies, decide your need classification, and set your priorities. That is your product.

Now, for your process, you must be committed. You have to know your target area. Rather than design a program for the whole world, you should focus on the needs identified. Take a look at the needs identified, write up the objectives, and develop your program.

After that, design your program, and then look at your resource determination. What type of resources do you need? Let's see if we could get this program approved, or whether you have to seek out other resources to meet the needs that your assessment demonstrates.

Then after that, implement your program. Look at your outcome and evaluation, and then start your steps all over again. I work with this process with our department that conducts the needs assessment. I also work with our community development program because we don't have much money. Each councilman gets a piece of that community development money, so I have a close working relationship with my political councilman. I work with my community ministers and I work with the school system. You have to know where to locate all the resources to help address the needs that your assessment has identified. Because JeffCAP doesn't have all the dollars, it's up to me to locate those dollars at the local, state, federal, and parish levels. We also use our 501(c)(3). So, those are the activities that we do to meet our needs.

Michele Higgs: That's great because you actually tapped into a question I was going to ask. Do you reach out to the local government officials, and build a rapport with them and as a way to find resources?

Dr. Clara Byes: Yes, definitely. I asked my councilman how much money he had in his budget to help JeffCAP's proposal to refurbish the computer lab. The councilman allocated funds for the computer lab and he is thinking of other ways to help our center. When we first moved here, I really did work hard with ministers. I told the ministers that we only had a building, furniture and a staff person.

Michele Higgs: OK, that brings me to another question, staff? Do you have much in terms of paid staff or do you have a number of volunteers that work with you?

Dr. Clara Byes: OK, I have two community service counselors that help us with all these activities, plus one housing counselor, a custodian, and a receptionist. But I have 60 volunteers! Some of them have worked with me for 15 years.

The volunteers are trained volunteers. You don't know them from the staff members because I trained them all.

Michele Higgs: OK; this leads me to another question. How do you keep the community residents energized when there are waiting lists for the computer training or other ongoing activities?

Dr. Clara Byes: OK, we had a computer lab before my councilman helped us build this one, but because of Katrina, they moved 25 people into this building and FEMA took my computer lab down.

I worked with the different businesses and when they were changing over their computers, and wanted to donate them to the community, I let them know that we have some clients that don't have a computer in their homes. So, that's been our program for the past three to five years.

The children know how to use computers. This is how we really keep them engaged; when there are no classes, the computer lab is open. They come to the lab and get online. I have two employees that are paid by the counseling agency four hours a day to work with clients.

Plus, our Work Force Commission has a lot of computers at its offices about a mile away from us, and clients can go there and access their computers.

Michele Higgs: I see; so this is all community based?

Dr. Clara Byes: Yes, definitely.

Michele Higgs: I'm going to ask Mr. Chin if he would talk with us for just a minute. Wendall, are you there?

Wendall Chin: Sure I am.

Michele Higgs: How are you? I wanted to ask you some of the questions as followup from Dr. Byes.

With regard to working with the politicians in the area, how do you get activities going at a center that is open to the community?

Wendall Chin: Well, first, I wanted to thank Neighborhood Networks for inviting me to participate in this conversation and hear Dr. Byes' story. It's very inspiring. A lot of what Dr. Byes has spoken to can be viewed as a blueprint for how to involve the community in your work, and how to integrate into the community.

It sounds like, from Dr. Byes that the organization's story is very exciting to hear. In terms of the question about involving politicians, as you know we have a tough economy right now, probably one of the toughest in my time. Not one Neighborhood Networks center can claim to be or should try to be a resource for the entire community.

There's just too much going on in each person's life, collectively. Know your local city council, as Dr. Byes mentioned in the beginning of her talk. There's local funding. There's state funding. There's federal funding, especially now with the new presidential administration. We can thank President Obama for that. Actual money coming in, that's been coming into the stimulus packages; and of course, there's private money, income from corporations or private foundations.

Local politicians are very useful, but you also should be clear about how you approach them. I am not sure how it plays out in different parts of the country. You know each county or state is very different. Here in the Bay Area, most of the city council people in the major urban areas are paid. They have paid staff. They have multiple staff. So, they are paid to be responsive to the community. In other areas, I know they have all volunteer staff that gets perks or different benefits on the side. Here in California, especially in the Bay Area, most of the folks are paid a decent salary to be responsive to the community.

Having said that, certain staff are responsible for certain issues. Some are responsible for economic development. Some are responsible for health services. Some politicians have a particular expertise or belief or value base that is focused on eradicating poverty. Some don't care at all about poverty. They just care about other things.

They have to know the landscape as well; and you know that, for example, Dr. Byes is clearly familiar with the landscape having been a school teacher in the system for a while. You know generally who's on who's side and the changing landscapes. So, I think it's important to know what you're getting into when you deal with local officials; they have an interest, too. They want to get reelected, but they also are normal people in a lot of ways.

They're normal people who got involved in their job because they're in public service. So, that's not to be taken lightly. Public service is not an easy job to have, especially now. So, that's a little bit on how to approach government officials. You can find a lot more online, on the Internet. The Internet is the research tool, an educational tool for many people, poor or rich, black or white, English or no English. The Internet is the way to find out about how to approach your local government officials. There's more information there than you can gain in a one-hour meeting.

So, first identify your official, whether they represent your district, on which committee they serve; and whether they are on a committee that makes decisions on the finances. That, in turn, is important to one of the goals of Neighborhood Networks, which is to increase and improve civic engagement.

So, that's a perfect example of how you should work with your city officials. On one side, for example, Dr. Byes had a close relationship with one of the city council people; but on the other side, you also need to show public support, which helps shore up the decision of the politician to grant money. That's part of what civic engagement is about.

Michele Higgs: That's a perfect question and the perfect response, and on the heels of that, Wendall, how would you say that staff-starved Neighborhood Networks centers could identify those community activists that support the center? Now, I know you and I had talked earlier about centers that had few staff members and that's the way it happens a lot of times.

One of the things that the technical assistance coordinators do is counsel the center staff to be vocal and visible, by attending the local community meetings, the Kiwanis or Rotary Club in some areas, business meetings, as well as creating business cards and passing them around, and not being afraid to talk. But what else would you suggest to centers that are awfully thin in staff to identify those activists that might advance their call?

Wendall Chin: Well, I think, again, I will defer to Dr. Byes' story. She mentioned she has 60 volunteers. It sounds like three or four full-time staff but the volunteers are really the life blood of the organization. I mean, volunteers usually need to be trained and worked with, and directly involved and incorporated into the organization and the community.

The role of staff is usually to help provide information to help train the volunteers that go out, reach into the neighborhood, go door-to-door, and also participate in the different community meetings. You can never underestimate the value of the human spirit and the human resource that you have, and the Neighborhood Networks centers have incredible access. It sounds like if you're doing it right, you have the resources of the community. You have people power.

The strength of the community is that you can galvanize the community through volunteers to conduct leadership development trainings. They touch upon how to get out, how to talk to people, how to go into different districts, and how to divide the community in a culturally and linguistically, and economically appropriate manner. You know how to not be afraid to talk to your neighbor.

To feel the pulse of the community, you feel the pulse of the politicians and you have a wealth of stories and resources from which to pull. Then the community center staff members, which are paid, have the time to put it together and understand how to proceed. A part of that is why you call Sun Consulting and Associates. We conduct environmental scans or asset mapping exercises that help you and community leaders, volunteers, and staff members go through a strategic planning process.

This process helps you to understand how to be more effective and efficient with your time in reaching out to local officials, not just for funding, but about the programs that you develop that often require funding. Those programs have a relevance to the constituents in that neighborhood.

Michele Higgs: Wendall, you brought up a couple of things just now and I want to go and get questions, but I want to ask two things before you we do that. Can you explain to us an environmental scan? I have asset mapping in one of the questions I was going to ask, but it sounds like it's similar to an environmental scan. With regard to finding out what programs would work or where funding would come from, can you explain that?

Wendall Chin: An environmental scan measures and assesses the variety of stakeholders and players in the community, and issues. It's not extremely in depth in one particular area, but rather it's a scan, which is superficial. But it gives you a holistic view of your neighborhood or your region; who are the different stakeholders and players and institutions and networks that you need to be aware of.

Michele Higgs: Jay, do we have anyone on the line with questions?

Operator: If you would like to ask a question, you could do so by pressing the star key followed by the digit 1 on your touch tone telephone. If you're using a speakerphone, please make sure your mute function is turned off to allow your signal to reach our equipment. Once again, please press star 1 at this time if you would like to ask a question.

Once again, that is star 1 if you would like to ask a question. We do have a question from Veronica Sanders, Silver Spring, Maryland.

Veronica Sanders: Hello, this is Veronica Sanders from Silver Spring, Maryland. I have a question for Dr. Byes. Can you describe your homebuyers program and the credit program, and how residents can clean up their credit? Thank you.

Dr. Clara Byes: Our housing counselor works with the homebuyers and credit programs, and also community development. They have workshops every month. We trained at least 40 persons as first-time homebuyers. To be eligible, you have to have good credit. If your credit is not up to par, they allow you three to four months to clean up your credit. So, what does our counselor do? She works with the persons at the credit bureau to help potential homebuyers find out what they need to do to clean up their credit.

So, we have different resources from the various entities of the community. We also have real estate people that we work with to help homebuyers understand the value of homes and the best places to buy a home. The real estate people come to the first-time homebuyers classes and train them. Homebuyers get six nights of training.

You'll be surprised how many have bought beautiful homes. These are people who never thought that they would ever own a home.

Michele Higgs: OK, I got you. I'm going to ask another question and this is for both you. With regard to having a center as a community resource, how do you reach out to the poorest of the poor, especially in terms of developing self-sufficiency? Dr. Byes, I'm going to ask you that one first.

Dr. Clara Byes: OK, every year we have to write goals and objectives, and in writing them last year, I wrote two years' of objectives. From my objectives, I used the mission of rooting out of poverty. That's the campaign by America's Community Action Network, which has four different objectives that focus on maximizing participation.

We go out into the community. We find our way to low-income communities. We send people out to help us. We work with the managers of apartment complexes first. We let them know about the various activities that we have and how we best can serve their people. The apartment managers let us know about their residents' needs and what type of people they have in their apartment or in the project. We also work with the churches. Our "Louisiana's Spirit" counselors and our volunteers knock on doors. We sit and talk with them and help them to understand that they don't have to be ashamed of their condition. This is our main objective; to let them know that's why the community center is there to help them out. Our volunteers tell them that we need them to be a part of the process. We explain that we can't do it all by ourselves, we need them to participate in the process because the center was built for them.

So once you get them to understand, then we get them to do anything that we would like for them to do. All people want to know is that you care about them and you are committed to trying to help them to become productive citizens.

Michele Higgs: Sounds like it's a very personal approach.

Dr. Clara Byes: It is. They have to know that's where your heart is. They have to know that you care.

Michele Higgs: Wendall, I'm going to ask you the same question, would you be able to address that?

Outreach to the poorest of the poor? Particularly when you're trying to give them those services that would make them self-sufficient?

Wendall Chin: Yes. My first 10 years in the nonprofit sector was organizing in low-income communities and communities of color here in the Bay Area, actually in San Francisco. I would go out to different projects and lead a team of door knockers, and conduct community surveys.

Wendall Chin: You have to care and you have to believe that low-income people can change for themselves, as well as, for others and for society. So, it starts from the beliefs and the understanding that low-income people have been often at the forefront of making changes for themselves. They are for advocating for affordable housing, advocating for policies that will protect rather than punish them and advocating for better funding to support homeless shelters that are always getting attacked in the budgets.

If you don't know the neighborhood, you can conduct a scan. If you do know the neighborhood, you want to prepare a survey and service. You want to go to people and outreach strategically, you don't want to have people come to you. You must go to them. A lot of times, people say, "Nobody is coming to us. Nobody cares." Well, you have to ask. If you don't ask, you don't give them a chance and you have to be an agent of change. You go out door-to-door and it's your responsibility to ask and to continue to ask people to be part of the solution rather than the problem, right?

So, a lot of that is how you approach that particular sector of the community.

Michele Higgs: OK, I think you both have addressed it I have one more question here.

Joyce Mortimer: This is Joyce Mortimer, technical assistance coordinator. Good afternoon, my question is about intergenerational connections. How do the both of you describe your successes at getting the different generations to work together to strengthen a community?

Michele Higgs: Wendall, do you want take that first?

Wendall Chin: Yes, that's a dicey situation because I think you know our society actually is set up to create divisions by age, by race, by income, and education. But, I think one of the most exciting programs in which I participated was in San Francisco's China Town and I ran an agency that was multigenerational. They had a senior program for low-income women and immigrant women, and a housing program that was not even Section 8; it was single-room occupancy hotels where people live.

They were all seniors. We also had a youth program that focused on high school youth. We set up a program where the young people would go out and talk to the old people. Actually this is very interesting because in Chinese culture there's a respect for elders. So a lot of the young people were welcomed at the door by the seniors, who were incredibly impressed that a young person would go out and spend time to visit them in their homes. To actually ask them to come and participate in a program at the center, how did we get the young people to buy into this? Well, a lot of people look at it as a way to give back to the neighborhood. This is the way to give back to your elders. So, I don't think that's too different for others cultures in the United States. If you have young people work to involve the older people, then the older folks get involved. They see a new generation is coming and approaching them, they get excited because maybe they felt that nobody cared anymore.

So, I think this new generation, with President Obama, is led by young people. Young people now come and approach the older generation of people to bring in change that maybe older folks had thought might be able to happen. So, I think that's one way to approach it.

Michele Higgs: That's terrific. I like the whole idea of having the young folks approach the elders. Dr. Byes, you had mentioned earlier about the older folks caring for the babies.

Dr. Clara Byes: Yes, we have a large mentoring program where grandparents mentor our children in Head Start. We also have juniors and seniors from the high schools that work in the Head Start Program. We have our Microsoft computer lab where seniors who were afraid to even try working on a computer. But if the young people are here, they show the seniors how to build self-esteem and help them to understand that there is nothing to be afraid of. The youth take seniors by the hand and they show them how to work the computer.

Another goal of rooting out poverty is investing in the future. Everyone must understand that to have a better future, we all have to take part. And that's not just seeing senior programs or programs for children, but programs for families, for everyone. They can all be involved.

Michele Higgs: Let me see if we have anyone calling. Jay, is there anyone on the line?

Operator: Yes, we do have a follow-up question from Neighborhood Networks in Silver Spring.

Monique Caston: Hello, Dr. Byes. I had one question. What three types of programs do you find the most popular among the community members in JeffCAP?

Dr. Clara Byes: The LIHEAP program that I mentioned, which helps pay light bills. First time home buyers program and definitely our housing program. Our senior citizens are investing in a reverse mortgage program.

Dr. Clara Byes: Our utility bill program is the number one program. It is called the Low Income Home Entity Assistance Program, or LIHEAP. It is a heating and air conditioning program; we work with the gas and electric companies. All of the customer service supervisors, once a month, come and conduct workshops to teach people how to conserve energy and the different things in your home that cause your bills to be so high. They teach them how to read their meters and different things. It's an excellent program.

Michele Higgs: I hope you kept note of that and a number of details that we got from this call that I hope you were able to jot down. We have come to the end of our time today and I want to thank our speakers, Dr. Clara Byes.

Dr. Clara Byes: Can I say something before we end the call?

Michele Higgs: By all means.

Dr. Clara Byes: I want to personally thank Joyce Mortimer, for helping our parish and helping us to accomplish the things that need to be done using START and TARGET. I want to thank Neighborhood Networks; you all are super. May God bless you all.

Michele Higgs: That's wonderful. Thank you, thank you so much. I want to thank you both for presenting your wisdom this afternoon. That was Dr. Clara Byes and Wendall Chin. Thanks for sharing your time and your thoughts on this important topic. It's been a very full and a very thoughtful call for our participants.

Let me quickly review for you the resources that are available to you from Neighborhood Networks. First, there's a Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.neighborhoodnetworks.org.

Everything Neighborhood Networks can be found there, from a link to the Strategic Tracking and Reporting Tool, known as the START business plan, info on funding opportunities or detail about our networking opportunities like the RTAW and the annual training conferences plus special events like Neighborhood Networks Week.

START is your online resource for organizing your center's activities and planning for the achievement of its goals. You can even create a Web site for your center using START. You can use START to create an annual assessment and evaluation to review the center's progress and commence its climb in the center classification process. After a year in operation, center staff can complete the assessment and evaluation and have it approved by the HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinator, which will elevate the center to Certified classification and start it on its path to Model classification.

Visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site for details on advancing through the Neighborhood Networks center classification process or get information and assistance at the Neighborhood Networks information center toll free at 888-312-2743.

Also, don't forget the Interactive Virtual Learning Courses. These courses present residents and center staff alike with an opportunity to participate for free in a unique and meaningful learning experience. If you didn't participate in the live presentations, you can still access the archived session, by visiting the Neighborhood Networks Web site and submitting a registration form.

Remember, if you have questions about any Neighborhood Networks topic, you can call the toll-free Neighborhood Networks information center at 888-312-2743. You can also try online networking by using the Neighborhood Networks online message board. Just go to the Neighborhood Networks homepage and click on the Neighborhood Networks online networking link, to the right under the green banner labeled helpful tool.

A transcript of this call will be made available on the Neighborhood Networks Web site in about two weeks.

The topic of our December call will be "Tracking and Evaluation Outcomes to Ensure Funder Support." This should be of particular interest to you consortia that are in the process of growing funding.

Thanks again to Dr. Clara Byes and to Mr. Wendall Chin for sharing their experience with us today. Take good care everyone. Talk to you next time.

Dr. Clara Byes: Thank you, Michele.

Wendall Chin: Thank you.

Operator: That concludes today's conference. We thank you for your participation.

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