

INTRODUCTION

Community Planning in Action is a collection of community planning coordinators' and their partnerships' experiences during the first two years of the five-year Massachusetts Department of Education grant cycle (July 2000 – July/August 2002).

In year one, the focus was on building partnerships. In year two, this work has continued. Partnerships have expanded and diversified their membership, defined agendas, carried out activities that support the mission of the partnerships, and worked on community assessments that help provide direction for their work in the future. You will see evidence of the commitment, flexibility, and creativity of community planning coordinators and the ABE community partnerships in this collection.

Section I, *Thinking Metaphorically: A Pictorial View of Community Planning Partnerships* contains drawings by community planning coordinators and narrative descriptions of the pictures that they drew. Their drawings illustrate their understanding of their partnerships.

Section II, *Narratives and Interviews*, contains in depth descriptions by community planning coordinators of the development of their partnerships, the accomplishments, challenges, and next steps for the partnerships. These descriptions were gathered through interviews and personal accounts.

Program Profiles are found in Section III. The profiles contain brief descriptions of pro partnership activities, accomplishments, and challenges. They also contain coordinators' suggestions for their colleagues and contact information. This section is organized in alphabetical order by program or partnership name.

Section IV briefly discusses the partnership building themes found in the narratives, interviews, and profiles.

Section V contains references to print and online resources that relate to the issues and themes identified by community planning coordinators in this collection.

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Thank you.

Lisa Deyo, SABES West
Cathy Gannon, SABES Central

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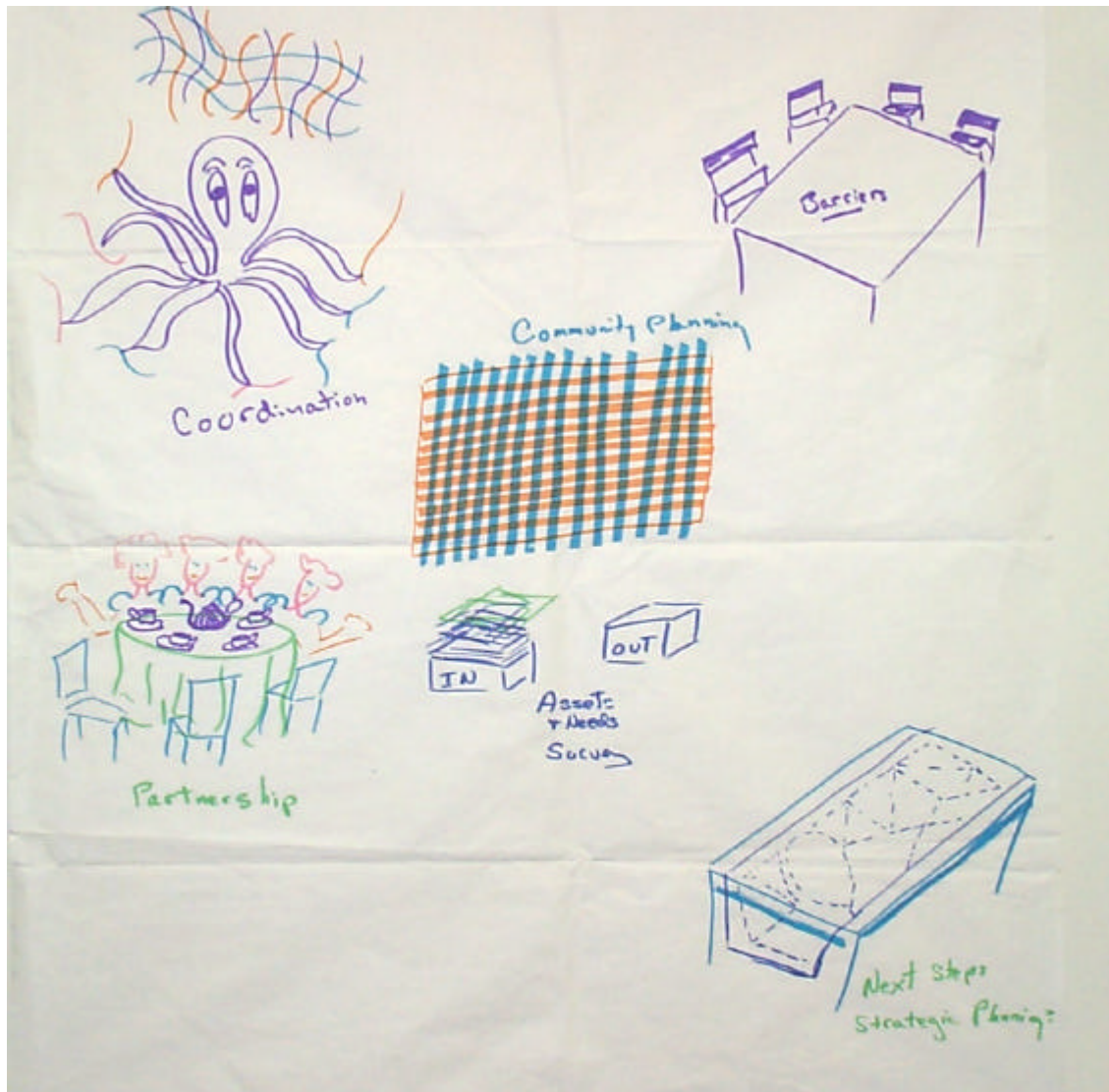
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**THINKING METAPHORICALLY:
A Pictorial View of Community Planning
Partnerships**

A Pictorial View of Community Planning Partnerships

At a workshop sponsored by SABES in July 2002 community planning coordinators from across the state portrayed their partnerships in pictorial form. In their drawings, they integrated their thoughts about the community assessment, next steps, challenges and barriers for partnership and presented their visions of their partnerships as metaphors. As part of this process, coordinators described their drawings to the group. Three drawings, portraying the Haverhill and Maynard/Hudson partnerships, with narrative descriptions, are found on the following pages. This type of activity was recommended for use at actual partnership meetings.

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HAVERHILL PARTNERS

by Nancy Tariot, Director Haverhill ABE, Community Action, Inc.

What would a successful community planning partnership look like if I could portray it in a picture? A fully functioning community planning partnership would be a tightly woven tapestry made up of the various community components working together to form a well thought out pattern or design of services.

Our current partnership is more like a group of little ladies at a sewing circle. We sit around the tea table congratulating each other on our individual programs and trying to think of ways to piece our individual works together. Each one brings something different to the sewing circle and somehow all

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these different pieces must fit together to make the tapestry. We meet regularly; we work together. There is a social aspect like I'd imagine at a sewing circle or afternoon tea.

In my portrayal of our partnership I have made the coordination of it in the form of a giant eight-armed octopus. An octopus doesn't belong at a sewing circle but it represents what it feels like trying to get all the pieces together. The coordination of our community planning is trying to get all those pieces and fibers together to make the tightly woven fabric, the tapestry. Pieces are here, there and everywhere and they seem loosely connected at best. The "tapestry" so far, has huge gaps and holes. It appears so fragile that it could easily unravel at any point. The coordination of the partnership allows us to uncover those gaps and try to insure that the weave is strengthened. The tapestry, though fragile, is recognizable in its potential.

The empty table in my portrayal indicates one of the major barriers that we face. We need to include people who have not yet joined the sewing circle. Each of those missing has pieces that will add to the tapestry of community planning and without whom our tapestry is incomplete. We know what potential partners are missing. These partners include local businesses. We are currently working on closing this gap and bringing the local business community to our sewing table.

The assessment of community assets and needs is most accurately represented by the "in/out baskets." Right now there's a lot of stuff coming in – it keeps coming in, coming in - with very little going out. We need to look at and sift through all this data and try to make sense of it and how it relates to our partnership and to the thrust of future activities. From all this data we will be able to assemble our tapestry pieces, identify the shape and pattern of our tapestry.

Our next step is the strategic plan. Once we have identified all the threads, warps and weaves, we will be able to discern the pattern that our community partnership will take. The ladies (and gentlemen) at the sewing circle (all our partnership members) will make a plan using the materials of the individual programs, the information from the needs and assets and the talents of the partnership to put all the pieces of fabric together. The end product will be something that goes together as a well designed whole – like a quilt made of different colors and designs yet stitched together to form one continuous fabric. While we work on our design, again we'll find some gaps in the pattern and we'll continue to build our partnership until the quilt of tightly woven fabric is complete.

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HAVERHILL PARTNERS

by Patricia Pelletier, Director of Planning and Development for Community Action, Inc. in Haverhill.

Community Planning is like a ship on a voyage, on a real adventure. The challenges that we face are like storms at sea. Sometimes we can see the storms coming; sometimes they catch us by surprise. For the Haverhill Community Planning Partnership an early storm into which we sailed was dealing with “turf issues” (or “surf” issues, to be nautical!) between the different partnership members. We tossed around in high seas in that storm for quite awhile. We were getting quite seasick. To calm our ills, we hired a consultant to work with members and, among other changes, we reorganized the partnership into a core group with extended members. The core group meets at least monthly and the extended group supports the partnership’s work on an ongoing basis and meets only a few times a year. It has been much smoother sailing.

The coordination of the partnership is represented in my drawing with the picture of the partners around the table looking at the chart, planning the route. The consultant helped us to determine each partner’s role in our partnership. We developed partnership goals and came to realize that to reach those goals we would each have to give up something, lighten the load of the ship, if we were to stay afloat. We have subcommittees now and different members take the leadership on different kinds of work. For example, the local school department provides leadership on family literacy; Community Action leads efforts related to ABE classes and workplace education; the local community college leads in transition programs and the library leads tutoring resources. When we are following our course our partnership members are all rowing the boat together.

The assessment of community assets and needs is the anchor to our partnership. Through this process, we are discovering common needs and resources that can benefit all of us. The common need will keep us from drifting off course. Our next steps are bringing us closer to the sunrise on a calm sea, our vision. Strategic planning and increasing membership of key community players are markers on our course to our vision.

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MAYNARD/HUDSON PARTNERSHIP

By Karen Pervier, Director, Maynard Adult Learning Center

The development of the Maynard/Hudson ABE Partnership makes me think of the preparation and serving of a wonderful meal. Each part of the meal can be served alone but when served together, our plain food becomes a “full course dinner.” Each part of the meal (members of the community partnership) brings various tastes and nutrition to our dinner. For example, our Maynard partnership representatives are characterized as the salad part of the dinner and our Hudson partnership is characterized as a hot plate of spaghetti. Maynard and Hudson view themselves as ‘a complete dinner’ in their own way; but our ABE partnership is trying to have them placed at the same table to create this new well balanced and rounded dinner.

ABE Community Planning is our attempt to bring all these ingredients together and make this great meal. Our partnership is a melding of the two separate and very different communities of Hudson and Maynard. Although the communities are only separated by a few miles, each community is very distinct and there is not a lot of history of the two communities working together on joint projects. The “common culture” of the communities is one of separateness and

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this is a barrier we are always facing. Our dinner serves as a common table where all the parts of the meal are going to be enjoyed.

My picture shows all the different parts needed to put together (and have ready for our enjoyment) a great meal (a great community planning partnership) to be enjoyed by all. On the table are a great salad (Maynard) and a bowl of superb spaghetti (Hudson). Just being on the same table enhances the appeal of each. Business is represented by the bowl of cheese, and the various agencies are the salt and pepper. Although the businesses and agencies question whether they should be part of our meal, they are very important because they make the meal well rounded.

Our utensils, the serving fork and spoon, represent the assessment of community assets and needs which is one of the tools that brings our meals together. In other words, the assessment is a way to get things on the same plate. Partners from both communities are working collecting data. Both communities will benefit from the information we are gathering. Our next steps include strengthening the partnership (silverware) so that all the residents of Hudson and Maynard can really enjoy the benefits of this great meal and all the community resources that our meal represents.

NARRATIVES AND INTERVIEWS

ACCESS Program, Cape Cod ABE and Literacy Team

Interview with Andrea Strout, ACCESS Program
By Cathy Gannon, SABES Central

2001-2002

Looking back over the past year, how has the partnership evolved?

We saw some real gains in the development of our partnership, the Cape Cod ABE and Literacy Team, this year. The partnership met regularly and at one meeting we brainstormed a list of people who we felt were “missing” from the partnership. Who would benefit from joining? Whom would the partnership benefit from having as a member? We extended invitations to these “missing partners” to join us. Invitations were accepted, and our membership grew.

The Partnership coordinated a Literacy Fair, which although a lot of work, produced a lot of benefit. Because of our involvement in that project we linked with other groups such as the Cape Cod Regional Transportation Authority. This was a very important linkage for us to make because of the importance of transportation to those who need ABE and literacy services. As we worked with other organizations on the Literacy Fair, we also had another opportunity to look more closely at our membership. We recognized that we needed more involvement from businesses.

The partnership participated in the design and distribution of the Capewide needs survey for the “The Human Condition Project.” This project of the County Commission was also our biggest project. We had decided to take on this project more than three years ago. The ABE and Literacy Team had conducted a literacy assets survey, and we wanted to do more. Joining with the County on the needs survey was the perfect next step. Our work with the County on this led to the increased participation of the Chamber of Commerce on the ABE and Literacy Team. The survey set up a situation where the ABE and Literacy Team and the Chamber shared information, and the mutual benefit of working together became very evident. Now there is something more to build upon as we try to increase the involvement of business in the partnership.

Ties with the Health Care Community also were strengthened as we worked together. We gave a lot of information and support to a survey that the Health Care Community was conducting. Because the members of our partnership had these opportunities to work together we “evolved” into a group where members shared more responsibility and saw some benefit to their being a member of the Cape Cod ABE and Literacy Team.

Our structure as a working partnership also saw major development this year. The ABE members are still the leaders of the partnership and the most active members. Now there are subcommittees and ad hoc committees that give more opportunity to different groups and organizations to participate.

What do you feel were your important accomplishments this year?

Definitely the legitimizing and professionalizing of the partnership were important accomplishments this year. The work on our projects put us right out there in the community. The increased collaboration, especially with the Chamber of Commerce, paid off for all involved. The new structure of the ABE and Literacy Team showed the community that we wanted opportunity for everyone to participate as much as they could.

Improved access to ABE/ESOL programming also resulted. The partnership was clearly a clearinghouse where members could share information, identify issues and work together to solve problems. ACCESS supported Catholic Social Services by offering professional development opportunities to their staff.

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St. Vincent DePaul established a special fund to support students who had housing issues and therefore more students could continue in class. The curricula in the ABE/ESOL programs were strengthened as the work with the Workforce Investment Board and Chamber increased our awareness of the extent of the need for workforce training.

What were key factors in making those accomplishments a success? What were the challenges?

There were several key factors to our success this year. I have given examples of how our having specific projects to work on together has really been positive. An important thing about our projects is that they have all had a definite beginning and end and they have given a broad range of opportunity for involvement.

We have listened to our members and to the community and in the partnership we acknowledge that we have differing viewpoints on things. The increase in membership has been good for us as a group.

There are challenges! There always are too few people doing too many things. Negotiating diverse opinions is not easy. Another challenge has been making sure that the team members receive acknowledgement for their work on the projects.

What are some next steps for your partnership?

Definitely one of our priorities is to increase the involvement of businesses in the work of the partnership and to work to get some classes at business sites. Our work with the Chamber, the County Commission and the Workforce Investment Board is the foundation for this part of our work. We will increase the involvement of the partnership in setting priorities for our work and will make sure that we give more opportunities for increased involvement to our partners as we progress with our assessment of assets and needs.

Based on your experience, what advice do you have for colleagues?

We have been building our partnership for five years so our advice is obviously “Stick with it. Don’t give up.” We have also realized the importance of setting priorities as a group and distributing the responsibility. Having co-chairpersons for the ABE and Literacy Team has helped with the management of the partnership and consistency with meeting times and dates is a must. Recognize that people bring their “egos” to the table and consciously work on ways to keep those “egos” in check.

CITY OF BOSTON PARTNERSHIPS CITYWIDE COMMUNITY PLANNING ADVISORY COUNCIL, ABCD DOWNTOWN & JP COMMUNITY CENTERS

Interview with Mary Mello, ABCD Downtown & Sandy Goodman,
JP Community Centers
by Lisa Deyo, SABES West

2000-2002

The Adult Basic Education programs located in the City of Boston find themselves in a unique situation. Twenty-six programs in the city have funding for community planning from the Massachusetts Department of Education. With such a large number of programs in the city, the Community Planning Advisory Council (CPAC), a central coordinating committee at the city level to support programs' community planning work in their neighborhoods and coordinate programs' efforts city-wide, was established. Each year, five programs, selected to participate in the advisory council, represent the larger ABE community. A consultant, hired by the 26 programs, convenes the group. In addition to CPAC, the 26 Boston programs have met bimonthly for a number of years prior to the start up of the community planning initiative. This body has served an important role in the process. At the neighborhood level, each program site is active in a local coalition.

I spent a morning with a CPAC member, Mary Mello (M) from ABCD Downtown, and Sandy Goodman (S), the director of the Adult Learning Program of Jamaica Plain Community Centers and member/chair of a local partnership in Jamaica Plain. We talked about the work of CPAC, the relationship that this coordinating body has with the neighborhood partnerships, and their own work in their neighborhood partnerships. What follows are the highlights of our conversation.

How do you think CPAC has evolved over the past two years?

M&S: The Mass Department of Education, in recognition that the resources and assets and needs are shared, wanted something that came from the city of Boston. The function of CPAC was initially to develop a job description for a consultant to work with each coalition and pull the neighborhood pieces together. Every neighborhood pools a portion of the DOE community planning money into a citywide pool to hire a consultant to facilitate CPAC's work.

M: The work of CPAC has changed over the two years. We learned a lot during the first year about what is doable and reasonable because CPAC is an additional layer on top of what other communities have. In the first year, we tried to organize the city of Boston, which meant convening meetings with stakeholders that represent Boston and putting forth the needs of adult learners. This was difficult.

S: The tension was between city-wide, institutional and local representation, for example, the schools. A program might work with a local school, but others on CPAC thought there should be contact with someone representing Boston Public Schools at the central administrative level.

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In the first year, CPAC called a meeting to which we invited staff of the big companies, hospitals, etc. that are the potential employers for all of our students. We also invited people from state and city agencies as citywide stakeholders to our ABE community planning efforts. This effort was not very successful, perhaps because we needed to devote most of our time in that first year to developing the consultant job description, hiring and overseeing the work, clarifying DOE's expectations of the City of Boston, etc. These were the tasks we were charged to do. It would take a lot more advance networking, and relationship building at a city and state level to achieve the stakeholder buy-in for a city wide group. This was beyond the scope of work for a group of ABE program directors, with local programs to run.

What has been the focus of CPAC's work in the second year?

M: It has been much easier to focus on the assigned task of an Assets and Needs Statement as opposed to what we tried to do the first year. Having a concrete product that you have to produce within a specified period of time focuses your energy. If you think of doing an Assets and Needs Statement for the city of Boston as a whole and each neighborhood individually, it takes a lot of work and oversight to do that. Things have gone very smoothly this year because there was a defined task.

What has been the role of the consultant in the Boston bimonthly meetings and neighborhood community planning efforts in the second year?

M&S: We hired the consultant to produce the macro picture for the community assessment and to provide training and some templates for information gathering, but he doesn't come regularly to our neighborhood meetings. The consultant took on the responsibility of doing all the secondary research for the city and some individual consulting. The neighborhoods are responsible for doing primary research for the community assessment.

M: The consultant also comes to the bimonthly meetings of all the Boston DOE programs. He provides updates and tells us, "This is what we are going to do next." The announcements that he mails out remind us about issues we will be discussing and making decisions about in the next meeting of the 26 Boston-wide programs. He has due dates for everything and reports to CPAC about which neighborhoods are on track and which aren't. Part of his job has been to call folks if those due dates lapse. This kind of system was set up because Boston stands or falls together.

The bimonthly meeting was not originally meant to be a citywide community planning meeting. When the city of Boston began to receive DOE money, the city became responsible for holding bimonthly meetings. In this way, the providers who have been attending these meetings have been doing community planning in that we share information as providers already and have this vehicle for doing so. Sometimes you don't count what you are already doing.

S: The bimonthly meetings have been a good vehicle for us to share information about what each of our local partnerships is doing and gives us a place to make administrative decisions about Boston-wide community planning matters. However, the focus on community planning has supplanted any other sort of work, information sharing or guest speakers that we might have.

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How are the neighborhood coalitions organized?

S: In some neighborhoods, there is only one DOE funded site. In others there are more than one DOE funded site. Some programs have sites in different neighborhoods. There are strengths and challenges to these different scenarios. The programs that have sites in different neighborhoods didn't get additional money for community planning although they might participate in more than one neighborhood coalition. In neighborhoods where there are more than one DOE funded site, programs have money to pool if they choose to. In neighborhoods where there is only a DOE funded site, programs carry the burden of balancing what you want to do in your neighborhood and what is required of you. For example, in a place like JP where we have been the only funded program until very recently it's even more important to let the group decide the direction. I prefer to be part of a coalition that determines its own direction, but I still feel the pressure to fulfill the DOE requirements. Ultimately it falls on me to make it happen.

How has the coalition in which the ABCD Downtown program participates evolved?

M: Initially, the coalition really struggled, and we had to take a stand that we wouldn't be responsible for citywide planning by happenstance of where we were located. We had a long discussion, in which we asked ourselves, "If we are not citywide, well, what are we?" In the first year we defined what our neighborhood is and established a name, boundaries, and our identity. We spent a lot of time trying to recruit other stakeholders into the group after we did that.

What has been the focus of the coalition's work in year two?

The focus of the second year was on assets and needs, and it was easier for the coalition to work on a specific task that we could put our hands on, one with a deadline. We conducted a number of focus groups, and they went very well. We did something a little different in that we were focusing on the gap between ESOL and ABE/GED, and trying to identify how we could bridge that gap. We asked these questions, "When does a person finish ESOL and when are they ready to start ABE? What kind of support do they need?"

There is also a bridge to college program in the neighborhood so we wanted to have a focus group with folks who have their GED or alternative credential and want to go to college but no one in their family has gone to college before. We wanted to see what kinds of supports that group of people needs.

Not only did we have focus groups with the usual folks. We also conducted a focus group with employees who weren't our students. Their identifying characteristic was that they were downtown workers who worked at a major employer. We made contact with the human resources through the consultant. We worked with the human resource person to put out a flyer through the employees' paychecks and paid the people who participated in the focus groups for their time.

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What was the partnership's most exciting accomplishment this year?

To me, the focus group interviews with employees were our most exciting accomplishment of this year. The focus groups with students gave us some insights, but these are people with whom we work on a day-to-day basis. The key factors that made the interviews with employees an accomplishment were the time and the expertise of the consultant who arranged it for us. Our consultant is vested in adult education and community building so I think he goes the extra mile. A key challenge was the level of trust of private employers. They have no reason to talk to us, and they have reasons not to talk to us about their entry-level employees.

Now we are planning to survey the Downtown Crossing Association, which includes businesses and nonprofits, at their annual meeting. This year we are on their agenda, and we will distribute a one-page survey to the people attending the meeting. Last year, there were about 300 in attendance.

What have been challenges for the partnership?

I think there are a lot of goals that were put forth five years ago. You have to readjust as you go along and take into consideration the reality of what is happening. We built on an annual meeting, in which a number of people participated and shared information, especially when we started focusing on assets and needs. We find it difficult to fulfill the assets and needs requirement at the same time we try to build a larger coalition when our main identity is linked to an assets and needs profile so specific to adult education. We are brainstorming continually about different ways to build the coalition and involve more stakeholders. We are also starting to consider what we need to do for the strategic plan.

What was the focus of your partnership in the first two years?

S: The partnership in Jamaica Plain (JP) was initiated by another human service provider in the community about 2 years ago. We took on a lot of leadership in that. We invited everybody that we knew who did some adult education and defined that pretty broadly at the time.

In that first year, we had a meeting just to put together a brochure that describes the adult education services in the community. We update it regularly and distribute it to local providers, bring it to outreach events, libraries, health centers, etc.

At the beginning of the second year, we didn't focus on the needs and assets, instead we focused on a literacy forum that we held in JP. We worked really hard to invite a lot of different project providers. You can't necessarily gear a single event towards raising awareness of providers and community members/potential students. We bounced around the question, "Who is the forum for?" and decided to make this one for providers. We sent out 2 mailings and made phone calls at the end. Over 40 people representing schools, health centers, youth projects, the city council, and neighborhood development attended. We didn't have a lot of employers; they continue to be our weaker link.

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The literacy forum was held on Dec. 4 during the big budget crisis. We were able to use that as a good vehicle for lobbying and got good media coverage. Even though the work was overwhelming to me, actually it was perfect timing. We intend to do another event/open house for potential learners.

Holding the forum at the time of the budget crisis also meant that adult education providers who are not state funded for their literacy work in our coalition, could say loud and clear, “We all go down if they go down.” That forum was meant to raise the issue of literacy but ideally to do more to bring those diverse stakeholders to the table in an ongoing way.

What is the most exciting achievement for your partnership this year?

One BIG achievement for us – although it’s not clear if we were funded or not – is our application for the Mass Family Literacy Consortium pilot grant. To us, it looked like we could get funding to do what we were already doing. The grant focuses more on coordination than service providing. They are funding 5 pilots and they will only accept one from the city of Boston.

Our proposal was accepted to be the one from Boston. I feel really proud that we even found ourselves positioned to do joint grant writing. We all worked really hard on it together and felt like this was a great opportunity. I thought, wow, maybe we are positioned to do more projects together. If we get this grant, we will hire somebody to staff the coalition and do a lot of education in the community about literacy with the goal of bringing a more diverse group of stakeholders to the table.

Who are your partnership members? What’s in it for your partners?

S: Some programs are not working in adult education exactly, but their work is related. They are interested in the intersection; that’s why they keep attending. I send monthly updates of our coalition work and invitations to around 17 people who mainly work in workforce development and adult education in JP. We don’t want to replicate a multi-service, multi-disciplinary coalition, so we made sure we had some connection to the larger, more multi-disciplinary coalitions that already exist in JP. We have representation from these larger coalitions in our ABE partnership. A small core group representing the library branches, Headstart, community-based youth and family programs, neighborhood/workforce development and Early Intervention attend regularly. Our coalition has been more family literacy-focused given the mix of members, and the natural intersection with parents has been fruitful, e.g. for data gathering and surveys. I didn’t want to keep on going after people for what I needed or the coalition needed and wasn’t necessarily going to be useful for them. I feel that for the people who come, they are getting the same things out of it that I am. They are networking more and making connections. Their ideas are stimulated. There is a potential for funding down the road.

We are sharing some work together and are getting the word out to the other programs. I passed out the initial secondary data that our consultant compiled at one meeting right away; I wanted people to see that this information concerns them. I wanted them to feel like I’m not just holding onto information that they can benefit from.

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I tried to share the money that we had for CP and share the resources by getting people vested in the needs and assets because it will be important information for us. The partners helped us with our survey of the non-student population for the assets and needs statement. We conducted focus groups with students from two different programs in our community. The partners helped in getting these surveys done. And for the programs, if they need to do any kind of analysis or gather up-to-date data for their own reporting and fundraising that they are doing, then the needs and assets profile will also be valuable to them.

Another partnership link is the JP Neighborhood Development Corporation. They've had a lot of staff turnover, but that's what I hope to be our best link to the employers because they do so much workforce development. I have kept them involved. The best I've been able to say recently is, "Will you share some work that you are already doing with employers with us?" We offer a career fair with them and sent out a survey at the time. The employers have been harder to reach.

What are the challenges that the partnership faces?

I worry about us losing steam and focus. I get anxious about what is supposed to happen beyond this, especially when the next RFP is released. I don't know where we are headed this year at all because now we have to go over our project data and the assets information. The work that needs to be done for DOE will be less compelling to them.

What are some next steps for the partnership?

We acknowledge the strategic plan. We don't completely act like there is no other agenda but we try to fit it into what we are doing. When we wrote the family literacy grant, I made sure that was included in the strategic plan. But if that doesn't get funded, we are doing it ourselves. We have talked about wanting to do strategic planning.

I think there is such a funny contradiction between: Get out in your community and recognize the uniqueness of your community and make sure what you are doing fits what is there and at the same time, follow these steps. Get these people involved, and get these outcomes. Doing this means ignoring what your community wants to do or being very strategic about it. I think we have been able to build a coalition and have been most successful because we've been able to do projects that have been determined by the coalition.

Partnership members are attending some community events together. The World Fair is one event coming up in JP. The partnership members are all going, and we will set up our tables near each other. We are not ready to become one entity. We represent different agencies, but we will do some kind of family literacy activity together at the fair.

The next thing we want to do is become more family focused. The people at our table are much more family literacy oriented. I'm looking at the high school with a broader view of family literacy. This is because we are all part of multi-service agencies. I think that that this is the way to go more than the connection with employers. Not everybody is set up to make the connections

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with employers. If you make the time to build connections with employers, then you wouldn't have time to do all the other things.

What advice might you have for other community planning coordinators?

S: My advice is in part about respecting your community and the ideas generated there. This is true especially for the ones who have been the only one DOE funded program in their coalition. DOE-funded programs need to find a way to balance what is required of them and what the people who don't have these requirements generate themselves.

How do you balance your own program's requirements and the interests of the coalition partners?

S: This is where I've let go of it several times. I've just decided I'm not going to get any further with the requirements until I have a group gelled. It's better not to panic and get the group gelled a little, then see where it goes later. I have really dedicated people in my neighborhood. They are awfully busy ...yet they are willing to devote the time to this.

M: I think you need to make a good faith effort to meet the requirements and do the best you can without trying to reinvent the wheel or to do something that won't fit your community in any way shape or form. We work here everyday. We know the strengths and weaknesses of this area. And we are the best judges of how to go about doing this. We also need to use the requirements as goals, not as the end all.

To their credit, DOE tells us to be flexible and make judgement calls. I take that to heart. Does this make sense for my neighborhood? The more it makes sense, the more people will accept it.

HAVERHILL PARTNERS FOR LITERACY

2000-2002

by Nancy Tariot, Community Action, Inc.

Year One of the Partnership (2000-2001)

A few years ago as part of an initiative in literacy sponsored by Senator John Tierney, an attempt was made to form a community partnership that included local businesses and ABE providers. The purpose of the partnership was to focus on the literacy needs of the adult population of Greater Haverhill and to bring together both literacy providers and community businesses to address these needs. At that time approximately 27% of the adult population did not have a high school diploma or GED. In addition, the number of non-English proficient households had increased and more children from non-English speaking families were being serviced by the school system. Senator John Tierney, who had a special interest in education, worked with communities within his district and lent his name and support to these neophyte partnerships. In some areas, a specific lead agency emerged that continued to pull the newly developed partnership together and push for more commitment from its members. In Haverhill, this did not happen. Once the Senator moved on to other issues, a strong leadership did not emerge. While there seemed to be some interest in a partnership or at least a dialogue among businesses, schools and ABE programs, there did not seem to be enough to sustain the momentum. Without a specific lead agency, the initiative died.

When the DOE made community partnership building part of the funding requirements for ABE programs, old contacts in Haverhill were resurrected. Both the Haverhill School Department and Community Action, Inc. received grants from the DOE for which a community partnership needed to be established. These two agencies, the Public Schools and Community Action, Inc., adult education programs were basically in the same position; a partnership had to be established to be in compliance with the funding requirements. The funder, Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE), wanted a community partnership focused on literacy and adult education. While this seemed to be a mutual goal, each funded organization had its own perception of what and how a community partnership should be formed, run and focused.

Working together to establish attainable goals and develop a vision for the future did not come easily. The initial meetings were forced, and not satisfying. An outside consultant was brought in to help the new partnership to focus on its purpose, prioritize its efforts and to think in terms of what could reasonably be attained in a short period of time to identify what must be worked towards over time.

What things were worth doing that were difficult to do?

Giving up a certain amount of control/ownership of the partnership and identifying mutual goals helped the funded partners include the other stakeholders. Initially, in Haverhill, the two DOE funded entities sparred for leadership of the partnership. The DOE funding mechanism and the competitive nature of grants often work against the concept of working partnerships. Trust

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between and amongst competitors does not come easily and it can be difficult to expose both strengths and shortcomings to other agencies. A consultant was brought in to help the partnership work out its priorities and take a wider perspective on what the goals of the partnership should be. As the partners continued to flesh out the concepts of partnership and made an effort to identify the purpose of working together the conversations seemed to take a turn, making the leap from “my” program to “our” community. It became easier to talk about the goals of the “partnership,” identify other potential partners and develop a strategy to enlist the support of other community entities.

Obtaining the interest and support of the political leadership in the community has been difficult. In Haverhill, the political leadership has not yet become involved in literacy issues. I believe that if a community partnership succeeds it will need to have the interest, support and input of the political body of the community. How this is accomplished is something about which I am still learning. Recently, a partnership wide graduation ceremony was held to honor all community members who had received their GEDs during the past year in any of the partnership programs. As a community wide activity, we were able to draw the Public School Superintendent, the mayor and a local representative to the ceremony.

What do you feel were your important accomplishments?

During this first year of the Haverhill Partnership I think that we have established a core group of providers who feel that they are actually part of a greater organization. We have in the first year:

- Set up sub committees to focus on specific tasks, such as fund raising, publicity and marketing, and collecting and collating statistical information.
- Published a resource guide that identifies the various programs in the Greater Haverhill area.
- Invited business organizations through the Economic Development Council to dialogue with the ABE community to explore ways to approach workforce development needs.
- Developed a referral form that will allow us to both track an adult learner and be able to provide better referral services to him/her.
- Shared information and resources that will benefit provider programs and the students they serve.
- Agreed to coordinate the types of standardized assessments used to facilitate transferring students from one program to another.
- Identified activities that would involve all provider agencies.
- Organized a joint partnership graduation ceremony for GED recipients in the Amesbury/Greater Haverhill area.

What have you learned and how did you learn this?

Each program has an important role to perform and the needs of the student/client adults are better served if services can be coordinated. Quite simply, one program or agency cannot do it all for the literacy needs of the community population. The needs of the adult ABE/ESOL population are diverse and multi-dimensional. The support of the other agencies and resources within the community, interaction between and among these agencies, and recognition of

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appropriate available resources will improve the level of services, the ease of access, and identify the gaps which exist. As the needs and assets surveys are developed, we are still uncovering services that were not well known yet can provide additional resources. We also are able to be more visible within the communities. Businesses and industry are more aware of the services that can be offered to their employees and to them.

For a partnership to continue to build there needs to be a core group of active members who are committed to literacy and community improvement. One organization or individual will not succeed in maintaining a partnership or reaching its goals if there is no input or commitment from others within the community.

Is your hard work paying off?

The Haverhill partnership has come a long way since last summer. After some initial turmoil those who are on the partnership seem to be more willing to work together and are less rigid about their own personal perspective of what a partnership should be. We seem to be making progress in the area of focusing on the learner as a multi-dimensional being. There are many gaps in services, not all of which have been identified. However, we are increasing the awareness of those gaps and this may be the first step to addressing them.

Do you see changes in the services available to students?

This is the first official year of the partnership in Haverhill. We are referring students to other programs and are having more conversations with businesses than we had last year. We are still working to improve what we are doing. There are still many gaps that have not been addressed and many other players who need to be brought into the partnership. Our referral system to track students and provide information to providers needs work but we feel that in time such a system will reduce the frustration of adult learners and providers. Many times an individual has gone from program to program without leaving any trail of what has already been tried, provided or accomplished. People show up at a program and are administered the same assessments. Providers have asked the same questions at each program because there has been no contact between programs.

Referrals between partnerships have improved access to services. We are more easily able to send potential students to other communities for services that are not provided locally.

The biggest change this year is that there is beginning to be coordination of services community wide. Change in terms of services currently being offered will happen as more is learned about what is needed on a community wide basis.

Do you see changes in the role ABE plays in your community?

As of now the role of the ABE programs in the community has not changed but the partnerships are new and the first years are for ironing out some of the wrinkles. We have begun dialogues with the business community to uncover where the needs of adult students coincide with the

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needs of the business community. We have both the Public Schools and the Community College as partners. The programs our partners represent are diverse, from family literacy, to tutoring, occupational skills training, ESOL, workplace education, self-sufficiency training and GED prep. We still have much work to do if we are to speak the same language.

What was important about your Community Planning work this year?

This first year, most of the effort was put into developing a core group of involved people and programs. Those active on the current partnerships are providers and community agencies. The most important result of this first year of partnership has been the communication among providers. Most programs groaned when the community partnership became a requirement of the DOE funding. It hasn't been easy. It is another meeting to attend, another set of expectations to meet. However, it has allowed/forced a continuing dialogue among providers to take place. It has provided us with an impetus to look beyond the services we already provide and seek out the areas where we are not providing services.

Year Two of the Partnership (2001-2002)

Haverhill Partners For Literacy – “What Now, Brown Cow?”

During this past year programs around the state were faced with the threat of enormous budget cuts as the state budget languished in the House and Senate for months and the fiscal year appeared to be coming to an end only six months into the program year. The ABE programs lined up their entourage of followers and managed to alert state representatives and senators of the need for adult education and literacy programs. The result of the deluge of support for ABE resulted in budget cuts on a far smaller scale than was originally intimated. While students, teachers and other usual advocates of adult education were instrumental in advocating for ABE, it is quite probable that additional support came from others who had become involved in ABE partnerships. In our own community, the Partnership is beginning to take on a persona of its own and is beginning to be recognized as a separate entity.

Who is the Partnership? This year as in the past two years, the core partnership is made up of providers of adult education. These core partners are very committed to the partnership and its growth and include programs for which the DOE is not the driving force behind Community Planning. Both the Community College and the Occupational Training Program (LARE) have been ardent partners as has the Haverhill Public Library. Our main work is outreach. The greater partnership is comprised of representatives of a variety of agencies and organization across the community that have services to offer to the population served by the adult education and family literacy providers. Currently in the wider partnership are the Community Partnership for Children, the Haverhill Family Network, the Association for Retarded Citizens, the Y.W.C.A, and many more agencies from the community who share some of the target population. The new mayor in the community has been supportive and open to discussing the need for adult education and English for Speakers of Other Languages. The partnership has provided him with facts and

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figures regarding the status of services, the level of need and the lack of adequate available funding.

The partnership initially broke the larger partnership into multiple working groups and identified specific target areas on which each needed to focus. From that initial effort emerged one central core group that undulates amongst the various tasks. The larger partnership members have been called on to perform certain tasks and have been more or less willing when asked to do so. The Partnership is actively working to expand the base of core members so that new tasks can be taken on and work can be delegated more efficiently. This year the Chamber and the WIB helped coordinate an ESOL Business breakfast and the leadership development group designed flyers for the breakfast and is working on a brochure.

Perhaps this is what partnership is about, connecting to different people with different strengths and different talents who are willing to come forward for a specific purpose. Time constraints are omnipresent in most people's lives and the members of the core group have come to the conclusion that every new contact made is not going to be present for every meeting. The goal is make sure that each new contact is kept apprised of the current status of the partnership and is contacted when and if that contact's expertise can be most beneficial. Through Workplace Education, the occupational skills training program and the Chamber of Commerce, the partnership is delving to bring the need for basics skills training and ESOL in the workforce to the attention of community businesses. They are the target members yet to be captured.

Despite fiscal crisis, the partnership is beginning to be recognized as an entity within the community. During this last fiscal year, some of the highlights of partnership activities include:

- Collaborated with the Chamber of Commerce to bring adult literacy to the business community
- Gained financial support for the partnership to set up a contact person and clearing house for adult literacy and ESOL.
- Connected with a local marketing group, who is developing a marketing strategy to promote adult literacy, English for Speakers of Other Languages, family literacy and vocational training programs.
- Collaborated on new funding (EvenStart in Haverhill and Amesbury/Newburyport area, the 21st Century Schools, Out of School Youth Programs) that increases available services for our students.
- Co-hosted a GED graduation combining the graduations of five programs
- Increased inter-program referrals to meet the needs of the students better
- Increased contact with the local political officials
- Hosted a Meet and Greet with local and state political officials

There has been more activity and input from the LWIB. The partnership provides them with a working group as opposed to a multitude of individual vendors. This may well be to the advantage of the community at large as the partnership can pool its knowledge of the needs of the community when providing data and information to the WIB. This fall the partnership is planning to hold a partnership wide meeting rather than the smaller group meeting to update all partnership members of this year's accomplishments, and identify the strengths it has found and continues to find in the community. It will do this in conjunction with a grant awards

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presentation of Work Force Training Funds that the WIB is making to a local management corporation. This combined meeting will reinforce the partnership's commitment to building basic skills in the workforce and connect the partnership with business needs.

Community Action, Inc., a lead agency in the Community Partnership, has been developing its five-year strategic plan this year and has gathered an immense amount of data for that project. Specific questions regarding literacy, access, importance, and impact were included in focus groups and on surveys. That information is available to the Partnership for use in the assets and needs survey. In addition the Haverhill Public Schools amassed considerable data during their application for the EvenStart grant. Each core member of the partnership has had to bring together information in order to access current funding. All will be sharing this information for the Assets and Needs Survey. In addition, the Youth programs have been involved in an Asset Mapping project this summer. Again, all the data will be available to the partnership. Essentially, the partnership has accumulated or has access to an enormous amount of data about the community at large. Sifting through it and determining what will be valuable and where gaps exist will be the focus of the next few months as the core group works towards a draft document. Both the Community Planner and the ABE director have attended workshops on data collection, analysis and synthesis to help with this task.

The goals of the partnership are:

1. Elicit from the community, interest in and commitment to the educational opportunities of its citizenry
2. Provide adult learners with as many options as possible when they arrive at our doors needing services.
3. Identify gaps in services
4. Collaborate to leverage funds for more services

The partnership is trying not to be so insular. It is reaching out beyond the classrooms and inviting the community to be open to the idea of adult education in other settings. It is also connecting the various types of programs together to provide students with options to educational access and support services. The ESOL breakfast was not intended to enroll students in our classes but to offer businesses awareness of and resources to respond to a growing non-English proficient workforce.

The commitment level of the core group of the partnership is the driving force. While some are mandated by the DOE to "build that partnership" this would not happen if non-DOE members were not present and interested in the literacy needs of the community. It has also been able to tap into and be adopted by groups whose strengths can be utilized to make it more visible. A professional development class has chosen the partnership as a marketing project and is designing a brochure for us. A local business has donated supplies, and the newspapers have followed up with a few articles about the partnership.

The challenge to the partnership is two fold: outreaching to a community that has other agendas and concerns, and maintaining the larger vision of a partnership while keeping the individual program agendas on low. The partnership is working because of the commitment of core providers. The need for more core members who are active partners remains.

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This year the partnership plans to work more closely with the mayor's office, the Chamber of Commerce and the LWIB in reaching out to the community through businesses. The partnership will pursue efforts to promote adult literacy as a means of economic revival and productivity in the local community by reducing barriers to job retention through literacy and language skill improvement. The foundation is still in the curing stage but definitely there is more in place this year than last. There is work to do and the need for more active partners to do it.

Partnership building takes time and needs to be measured by inches rather than feet. Publicity, public events, involvement of the local politicians as well as state level support are some of the stepping stones. Partnerships need to build an identity that is separate from the individual programs and broadcast.

Holyoke JUNTOS ABE Collaborative

2000-2002

Year One of the Partnership (2000-2001)

by Paul Hyry, Community Education Project

What is your program's experience in collaborating within your community before this year?

The JUNTOS Collaborative dates back to 1994-95, when CARE, CEP, and HALO joined together to apply for DOE-ACLS funds, and HCC/The Mentor Program was added to the Collaborative as part of the grant negotiations. JUNTOS has done a lot of internal collaborative development over the years, and also was a Community Planning Pilot Grant recipient in FY99; this included generating an ABE assets and needs statement. Because we have so many ABE partners involved, and Holyoke is a relatively small community, there were already existing linkages between one or more of our partner programs and many/most local community organizations and institutions.

It is important to share that the ACLS FY2000 RFR process actually set our local partnership back. The crux of the problem was that because several organizations that were not previously funded by ACLS had participated quite eagerly in the previous year's Community Planning process, certain expectations about funding (getting "a piece of the DOE pie") had been generated. When we came to the table to discuss the RFR, however, it quickly became clear that while the DOE would only fund one proposal in Holyoke, it would be impossible to include every organization/program that might be interested in ACLS funding in a single proposal – there was not enough money available to include 8-10 partners, and ACLS was in fact discouraging splitting the grants up into "little pieces." As a result, the process of community discussion in relation to the RFR was very tense. While the existing JUNTOS partners were happy to be able to include two new programs (MCDI-Holyoke and NEFWC) in the proposal (and ultimately as funded partners), there were several other programs whose administrators were unhappy about being "rejected" (as they experienced it) by JUNTOS.

As a result of some folks feeling "burned" by this experience, we had to begin our work this year with a recognition that trust needs to be built/rebuilt. We recognize that this was an essentially unavoidable outcome given limited resources. However, I think it is also important to document that it is crucial to talk about funding early and often in community planning processes, in order to minimize the degree to which unrealistic expectations get set up and relationships ultimately get strained when money enters the picture.

What was a milestone in the development of your partnership this year?

We had two important milestones this year. First, our Partnership (which, again, pre-existed this year) reached consensus on both its own mission/structure and the establishment of a joint Advisory Council for JUNTOS as a whole. The Advisory Council has a dual role – to provide advice/support to the JUNTOS programs and to provide leadership to the ongoing community planning process. It was formed in late 2000 and includes representation from JUNTOS (learners and administrators), the local business community, the Workforce Development system, and the Holyoke School Committee, and local non-profits. Since beginning to meet in December the Advisory Council has established its

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own mission statement and begun to plan the next steps for community planning as well as the development of a Holyoke/JUNTOS web site.

Second, the JUNTOS programs jointly carried out our first “Learner-Teacher Day” in May. Approximately 100 learners representing all six of the programs participated in this full-day event, together with their teachers. The theme of the event was “ABE Transitions,” and its purposes were to:

- 1) Begin promoting the same level of cross-programmatic collaboration among learners that we have achieved among administrators and teachers over the years; and*
- 2) Carry out a participatory assessment process in which learners from multiple programs could work together to assess their own programs’ and the wider community’s, strengths and weaknesses with regard to supporting learners in meeting their post-ABE goals.*

The Learner-Teacher day event was quite successful and provided a range of learner feedback about ABE programs and other community institutions (what’s helpful and what’s missing) that we probably could not have achieved in any other way.

What was worth doing that was difficult to do?

Both of the above-mentioned ‘milestones’ involved difficult-but-worthy activities. In addition, it was hard to begin approaching people who had felt ‘burned’ by the RFR process to ask for their re-engagement in community planning. We have more work to do in this later area.

What is the most important thing you learned about ABE Community Planning this year? How did you learn it?

Perhaps this was more of a ‘re-learning’ or at least reaffirming experience than anything else, but both our local process and hearing about processes in other communities have made me (and I believe all of the JUNTOS partners) very clear about two things:

- 1) It is very difficult – and requires significant creative thinking – to engage learners in community planning in a meaningful way and at the same time it is very easy to tokenize learners. I am clearer than ever that I don’t believe that the model for student involvement currently promoted by the DOE (having one or a few student ‘representatives’ sitting in rooms full of ‘representatives’ from a wide range of sectors of community agencies and institutions) has the potential to lead to a situation in which learners are true partners in the planning process. The numbers are simply too lopsided, and providers are too adept at setting up spaces in order to get what we want/need out of them (beginning by being the ones who handpick the students who will be invited); so what happens in these spaces is that learners’ “participation” is too often simply reduced to testimony about how great their teachers are and the learners’ presence becomes simply an opportunity for providers to feel good about our accomplishments and meet funder requirements at the same time. (I don’t mean to deny, however, the significant accomplishments of ABE teachers and programs – just to say that 2-3 learners in a room full of providers, makes a truly critical dialogue with learners virtually impossible).*

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Community planning is not 'real' if it does not involve tension and, at times, conflict. I believe that as community planning coordinators we should be trained to feel unsuccessful if everything works too smoothly – because (I believe) 'smoothness' indicates that power is not being truly shared.

Year Two of the Partnership (2001-2002)

Interview with Paul Hyry, JUNTOS
by Lisa Deyo, SABES West

What has taken place in your partnership over the past year?

Last year, our advisory council was beginning to meet regularly. We started to clip along because we thought the report was going to be due much earlier, then budget crisis came and everything got set back.

Since last year, we have expanded membership and interestingly there is a fairly strong higher education presence now on our advisory board. We have representation from University Without Walls (UMass), Elms College, and Holyoke Community College. This year in general the relationship with HCC has taken off. That's nice cross representation from higher education. I think it is emblematic of our work as a whole. Over this year the partners have adjusted to thinking of ABE as a stream that runs all the way from beginning literacy through getting people into college and supporting them through the tough adjustment period of college.

The Community Education Project was also funded to do an ABE-to-college transition program with funding from Nellie Mae. We insisted and it really took a lot of work. The college was fully on board for the grant writing process. Now we have a MENTOR coordinator who does early college awareness with lower level classes across the collaborative and more directly with advanced GED students who might make the transition directly.

We were very involved in HCC's process of putting together a proposal, which was funded by Kellogg. This is to provide additional programming funding to do a community planning process to look at how HCC can overall strengthen its ability to contribute to Latino educational success and how it can more effectively team up with a variety of community partners, including JUNTOS. In several different ways there is direct and indirect communication and also mutual representation on matters related to community planning, ABE system building and governance.

The advisory council has crystallized in that they were rock solid for us during the funding crisis. It's clear who our core consistent members are. I know who exactly I can count on for what through continually meeting, advising and updating. One reason is because when the performance data for FY01 came out, I put together a one-page performance report for the collaborative as a whole and for each partner compared to statewide data. The advisory council was very interested in that. There was someone to be accountable to outside us. And it's not in their charter nor their interest. In developing the mission and vision for JUNTOS they expressly excused themselves from any sort of decision making about funding allocation. The mission is essentially to provide sought after advice and spearhead community planning.

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Another development in our work was a learner teacher day that was about community participation this year. This was a citywide day that was about promoting adult learner participation in the community and people figuring out what was important to them and what they wanted to work on. It started at city hall with welcomes from superintendent and police chief, who responded on the spot to the audience. The mayor also came to the event. A panel of former ABE learners who had gone on to be involved in different kinds of civic participation work told their stories and talked about their own community participation.

After that, we went to MCDI into rooms where teachers had prepared to do workshops in which students from the different programs in mixed workshops identified community issues that were most important to them. The teachers were paired up from the different partners, for example, a CARE teacher and a CEP teacher did a Spanish language workshop together. The students told us the issues that they saw the community was struggling with the most and what they saw the major community institutions doing. This is data for the assets and needs statement. We put these on a flip chart, dot voted a primary issue, put that in the middle of wall size sheets of paper, then put a big circle with the issue in the middle and city hall, schools, police, community institutions all around and asked around that issue – what do we know that city hall is doing? What should city hall be doing? What do we know the police are doing? What should the police be doing? The next step is to provide this report to the JUNTOS partners for a discussion on how we will take next steps.

Out of the learner teacher day many of the students were very enthusiastic about community participation and following up on that day. It may be that student involvement in organizing works in ways that are somewhat parallel to the community planning process. We may draw some advisory council members out of that, or we may inform the advisory council process out of that. In the fall we might do another program modeled after our learner teacher day. We can bring learners from different programs together to develop a wider analysis of the issues – community violence, employment, and violence against women - we identified.

There is one other major development that is overarching and enveloping for us. The schools now have a high level administrative position at a level with principals whose job it is to work on ABE. That's a major thing because the schools are very supportive of our efforts. The fact that we have the increasing institutional support from the schools opens a lot of doors. There are a lot of resources that come with the job.

What are some accomplishments for your partnership this year?

We've continued solidifying the relationship with workforce development without being swallowed into the workforce development system. I think the primary case in point is that a core document done by the staff of the Holyoke Employment Partnership (hosted by the Chamber) will provide crucial data for our report. As part of the study, they conducted focus groups with our students.

The draft report was released to the JUNTOS Advisory Council first. I think it was because the workforce development community is so clear that the data and anecdotal information point to the fact that, if we are going to solve the major employment-related challenges in Holyoke, then the basic skills problem – to put in the language of the workforce development – is at the core. The workforce development people went to bat for us and took the initiative to meet with the mayor to say that more city funds need to be allocated not for workforce development programs but to ABE. As a result, we saw a 33 percent increase in Community Development Block Grant. The JUNTOS

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partners had applied separately before, and this year we put our separate applications together under a single cover sheet and submitted them together as a group. We didn't get a huge amount of money, but we got a third more than what we had been getting altogether and this in a year where the total CDBG funds went down in Holyoke. I think this is a real success.

Part of what interests me for the last few years is that we've been seeing what are hoped for as long-term outcomes of community planning efforts supposedly after you have progressed through the requirements step-by-step. I imagine that doesn't happen in any community. Certainly in Holyoke, partly because JUNTOS was already a collaborative and because everything happens so collaboratively in Holyoke, the outcomes are coming hand in hand with the developmental work instead of coming afterward. And hopefully more outcomes will come over time.

What are the key factors in making the partnership's accomplishments a success?

I think at the broadest level the key factor that helps us to be successful, to the degree that we are able to be successful in Holyoke, is that the way we do business matches the way that this community does business. Holyoke is a city of collaboratives. People look at JUNTOS as another highly viable collaborative that matches the way people come together in Holyoke. They like that and want to be associated with it.

There are key people in institutions who have been very good partners to us. I also think that there is a lot of maturity among our partners. We constantly talk about building JUNTOS and building the ABE system. Certainly, each partner is committed to its own organizational success. On the other hand, when we speak, we speak with unity, and I think that's a very nice place to be. That's a BIG factor.

Also the SMARTT system is an important tool if programs use the hard data from SMARTT to their advantage. To the degree that data capture reality is always questionable but in general the system is getting more reliable. We can really talk in terms of accomplishments and specific challenges that the data show us.

The fact that Holyoke was going through a very well run and progressive workforce development audit over the last year and a half has also been incredibly helpful. It has meant that I've been able to focus on building relationships and establishing groundwork as opposed to having to spend lots of hours pulling up Census data. That is very helpful in being up to speed. Some of those assets sides of the report that we have to prepare exist in others organizations' community plans and the Holyoke master plan.

The fact that Holyoke has been overstudied and that multiple planning documents have been prepared for Holyoke is working in our favor at this moment. So much of the data is at hand that dialogue becomes a real possibility. That may turn around and turn out to be a challenge because I think once we are at the point that we have the report and the strategic plan, carrying out the strategic plan will be hard because people are overtaxed and people have to write new reports for some new thing.

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What are some challenges?

A challenge is student involvement, but not student involvement in general. It's the particular kind of student involvement that is the dream. This is when fully empowered students sit alongside employers and others in our advisory council and dialogue and debate with them.

Getting student input is not a problem. There are many students available who are interested and committed to our programs. Finding the right set of students to sit through those long meetings is more of a challenge.

I can put key findings and data points into an accessible format and have a dialogue with a group of students. I don't know if I can put a few students in the advisory council and have that work effectively. Students the first year just came and went. In the second year, the students were really interested in working on the budget advocacy, not in the advisory council. The budget crisis broke that momentum in building students into that process. I proposed that we form a JUNTOS-wide student council which runs parallel and sometimes meet with the advisory council.

What are some next steps for the partnership?

We formed a community planning subgroup that has made a plan for the time between now and our final submission of the community planning report. I will collect the remaining data, draft a report, then distribute it for feedback. We will call a more significant community meeting, give the group the data in whirlwind fashion, then draw conclusions and implications together. I will prepare a final draft and circulate it for feedback before submitting it to the DOE. It's the right level of intensity for bringing people together. We are finding the right balance between making sure that there is real attention to ABE and at the same time not asking people to drop everything and devote their entire lives to ABE.

Putting together a good report and distributing it around town it gives people around town another look at us. I'm considering putting information from the refunding package in a more readable format and posting it on our website. That information captures a lot of the work that we've systematically done over the course of this fiscal year. We can give it to people which makes the advisory council members and other people in the community who play a supportive role feel like they are getting something concrete back.

What advice do you have for the people doing community planning?

In communities where there are multiple ABE programs, directors and program coordinators have to get together regularly. I think it needs to start with what the directors and program coordinators want to get out of this and see what goes into the report. Program directors need to get together at least once a month at least through the time that the report is written and participate in the work in a collective way.

Secondly, it's crucial to find out how the workforce development system operates in your community and learn who the movers and shakers and decent people that you can work with and get committed to your process are. The workforce development people have access to a lot of information that can be immediately useful to community planning. I think a strong alliance between workforce

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development and community planning creates a real 'power with' space in your community, not a 'power over' space.

The other thing is, just thinking about other communities, it's that every set up is so different. It's possible to get a lot of people to the table, but is the institution willing to engage with people who might be potentially critical of how ABE services are delivered? This often comes from engaging with small community-based organizations who very often feel legitimately shut out of power and out of the picture. People need to look at how to engage with and include those folks; otherwise, you get a much less rich picture when you ignore small community based organizations working at a peer level with many of the learners. I think you need to go the extra mile to go out and meet people where they are rather than just calling them to you. The capacity to listen and structuring the listening process is really important.

Year One of the Partnership (2000-2001)

Interview with Kelly Cosenke and Sheila Kelly, MCDI/Westfield
by Michele Sedor, SABES/West Associate Coordinator

Spending time at the Massachusetts Career Development Institute (MCDI) in Westfield is to watch Community Planning in action. While I was there to talk to Sheila Kelly and Kelly Cosenke about their community planning experiences, I was treated to seeing community planning incorporated into conversations with community members who stopped by. A member of the business community set up a job interview for a student, although this wasn't his original purpose for coming to MCDI. A community-policing member stopped by just to say hello and ended up in a conversation about community planning. These two examples both happened in the span of the 50 minutes.

MCDI received a pilot community planning grant in 1997. Many of the community folks involved in that initial process faded away so when MCDI began working on community planning for the current five year funding cycle, they needed to start fresh. However, working in Westfield, described as a "small town in a big city" by Sheila, one never starts completely from scratch since so many people know each other.

In this current incarnation of community planning, MCDI is focusing on what works best for the Westfield community and, from that base, seeing how that works with what DOE wants. In the pilot project, they first concerned themselves with what DOE wanted and tried to make their community fit into that. Experience, however, has shown them that not only is that more difficult, it isn't as effective for their community.

For Sheila and Kelly, community planning has always existed; they are just formalizing what has been on going. Kelly is devoting one day a week solely to community planning; in fact, dedicating this time to the initiative has really paid off. In addition, at MCDI they work as a team on community planning. One of the most difficult things that Kelly confronted this year was going to a Chamber of Commerce "card exchange." This was due in large part to the differences in culture between adult education and the business community. However, Kelly made good contacts at that event, and these contacts have been sustained. She also learned the importance of working as a team; as a result, three people from MCDI went together to the next Chamber event. They are now official members of the Chamber and feel that connecting with businesses around workers' literacy skills and needs has been one of their major successes.

MCDI's partnership is based on one-on-one meetings that Sheila and Kelly have with representatives from organizations in the community. They found that this is what fits best with the Westfield community. People were willing to sit down and talk one-on-one in their own environments (in some cases while they were stuffing envelopes for a mass mailing) but had less time to devote to large group meetings at an off-site location. Through these meetings they have made new connections and reinforced old ones, thus re-establishing and reinforcing MCDI's role in the community.

Sheila and Kelly feel that there are both difficulties to overcome and goals that they want to work towards meeting in the upcoming year. One difficulty is that sometimes it is necessary to work both

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during the day and in the evening to make the necessary community connections. Another is finding the time to document all that they do on a daily basis. Community planning goes on, but finding the time to write it all down is often impossible.

One goal that the partnership continues to work on is connecting more with one of the local hilltowns, both in terms of including community members in their partnership and in providing ABE services to that area. This is difficult due to lack of transportation in that area, but they are working on ways to make it work, including working with the local cable access stations. ESOL services are also in great need in the community and they are working with partnership members to try find a way to provide more services.

Sheila and Kelly point out that one of the major accomplishments this year is that there will be a community-wide calendar of various providers' events and services. In addition, they feel that they have made great connections with other organizations; in some cases finding out about things that they didn't know existed (for example, they are now part of a Russian Task Force). They also had a well-attended large group partnership meeting at the end of the fiscal year, bringing together students and many of the one-on-one contacts they made throughout the year. They will do these twice a year and continue to meet with folks regularly on a one-to-one basis.

When asked how they learned what they learned this year, both cited that the SABES Community Planning listserv was helpful as well as some of the SABES workshops and groups and the technical assistance they received from a community planning consultant. They said the most important thing they learned, however, was something they learned by themselves; that it's important to follow their instincts. They know what works best for their community. Watching them in action and listening to them talk about community planning; it's evident that this is true!

Year Two of the Partnership (2001-2002)

By Sheila Kelly, MCDI/Westfield

How has your partnership evolved over the past year?

Through our needs and assets data compilation and grants proposal we have collaborated with other agencies, i.e., Westfield Public Schools, Community Partnerships for Children, Title II Head Start, Career Point, and nursery schools. One statement to come out of this was that we should all meet about four times a year.

What were your important accomplishments this year?

Westfield Public Schools has decided to restart night classes at the Vocational School. MCAS is also a deciding factor. We (MCDI) will collaborate on assessment/testing procedures.

A web page with links to different resources has been created, and we are currently distributing a service providers booklet. Noble Hospital has also started Russian-to-English interpretation services with assistance from MCDI on the assessment and orientation processes.

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What were key factors in making these accomplishments a success? What were the challenges?

The grant proposal for Family Literacy was definitely the key factor for all partners sitting down at the table. The key challenge is always time.

What are some next steps for your partnership?

Although the Family Literacy Grant has been not been funded in Westfield, the group as a consensus would like to meet on a quarterly basis. “Family” was the difference in getting groups to the table. A new superintendent of Westfield Public Schools has also made a difference.

Based on your experience, what advice do you have for colleagues?

I am involved in community planning on a daily basis. At a recent Community Partnership meeting by SABES my coordinator and I attended different sessions. The question asked was, “Where do you see your partnership?”

My answer was, “It’s like New England weather. It changes from day to day.”

My coordinator’s answer was, “It’s like the solar system. We keep going around in circles.”

The perspectives we hold are very different. This is because we are involved in community planning in different ways.

I would tell my colleagues that being flexible, knowing that the partnerships will change – as the community changes, that’s all right.

Middlesex Community College, Adult Basic Education Program Community Planning Partnership

Interview with Elizabeth “Betty” McKiernan, Middlesex Community College
by Cathy Gannon, SABES Community Planning Coordinator

2000-2001

Year One of the Partnership

Betty was hired as the Director of Middlesex Community College Adult Basic Education Program just two weeks before the DOE Directors’ meeting last October. The first time that she heard about Community Planning was at that meeting. She was overwhelmed with information pertaining to her new job as Director and although she did attend the session on Community Planning she still did not have a clear idea of what ABE Community Planning was or should be. The role of Community Planning Coordinator became hers pretty much by default. Betty felt unprepared to hire someone else for the position because she had little idea of what that person would be involved in doing.

During our interview, Betty referred to her first year as Director as a “baptism by fire”. Although that description also applies to her work as the Community Planning Coordinator she did find support from three sources: the SABES regional sharing group, the Lowell Community Planning Partnership, and ultimately her program’s own Partnership.

Betty attended the SABES Community Planning Coordinator Sharing Group meetings in her region. Slowly the concept of community planning began to get clearer as she heard about the experiences of other coordinators, especially those who had been funded for Community Planning for several years. As Community Planning slowly moved it’s way up the pile of “Director’s Things to Do”, Betty began contacting potential partners one by one. As she learned more, she could explain better what Community Planning was.

A very significant support for her Community Planning work was her participation as a member of the Lowell Adult Learning Center Community Planning Partnership as the Middlesex Community College representative. Because Middlesex Community College has a campus in Lowell, Betty (as the ABE Program Director) is a member of the Lowell Partnership. This experience gave her confidence in her own efforts and some very practical experience in the development and maintaining of a partnership. She saw the fruits of partnering when she established connections with the Public Schools and a homeless shelter, which resulted in increased programming. She was still not convinced that she could “sell” the idea of a Community Planning Partnership to potential members nor was she convinced that she herself could facilitate a situation for partners where individual benefit would be evident and motivating. She continued to discover the community through making one-on-one contacts.

In February, Betty convened the first official meeting of the partnership. Although she felt driven by the DOE Community Planning First Year Plan, the impetus for the partnership to move forward was very evidently the result of the enthusiasm of the members, their willingness to work cooperatively, and their recognition that coming together supports them in their individual work. During the introductions at this first meeting, members were already arranging referrals and sharing resources! The lack of transportation in the community developed as a common concern and the discussion

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showed that partners realized that a solution was more likely to be found if they worked together. The Partnership itself became a support to Betty to continue the Community Planning work.

As time progressed, communication between the members improved and increased both at the meetings and outside of the meetings. Betty felt that the main accomplishment of the group was that they recognized each other's achievements, and discovered that they had common goals and faced common barriers. Signs of the group's approaching issues as a team began to develop.

Working through the Community Planning process this year also benefited Betty personally and professionally. She feels personal accomplishment because she worked through the concept of Community Planning from the very nebulous to something more concrete. Her Community Planning work helped with other aspects of her role as Program Director also. Building upon her foundation of ABE experience as an ESOL teacher she realized more clearly the role of the program in the community.

Betty is optimistic that dividends from the work of the Community Planning Partnership will continue to increase. The Partnerships work will result in strong linkages between the partners and between the college and the community. The work of the Community Planning Coordinator is not easy nor is success something that will come quickly.... Year #2 of the process is worth doing!

Plymouth Literacy Program

2000-2002

Year One of the Partnership (2000-2001)

Interview with Evelyn Strawn, Plymouth Literacy Program
by Betty Vermette, Associate Coordinator, Southeast SABES

While interviewing Evelyn Strawn, I couldn't help but notice her enthusiasm about the community planning process that she engaged in during this past fiscal year.

The Plymouth Literacy Program, located in the Plymouth Public Library received a community-planning grant in November 2000. The Director of the ABE/ESOL volunteer program, MaryAnn Odell, has been an active member of community organizations throughout her career at the library. She is one of the core members of the Greater Plymouth Inter-Agency Council and her connections to social service providers, schools and the Career Center were very helpful as the project got underway. The first community planning meeting took place in January, 2001. Those invited signed off on a "Preliminary Community Profile of Adult Basic Education Assets and Needs, which was required in the grant. At that time there were thirteen "signers."

Although there were human service agencies and some schools involved, there were still several barriers that the group faced, such as trying to get non-traditional players involved. Part of the first meeting in January was devoted to discussing who else needed to be involved in the process. This discussion and attempts to expand membership continued throughout the year. Through a series of community planning meetings, the group learned to work as a team around community planning issues; a shared vision became the outcome, and a shared task was completed.

Through a group process, connections were made with the Career Center, DTA, Workforce Investment Board and the Chamber of Commerce. They also made connections with Quincy College and discovered that the college has a program that offers a home GED program to residents of the South Shore. As the group learned more about the community, it was discovered that women in a local homeless shelter (Kingston) needed access to information about obtaining their GED - Quincy College agreed to send a GED instructor to the shelter. Currently, the group has additional representation from the Plymouth County Jail and DSS, as well as from HeadStart where it was discovered that many of the parents of the toddlers had literacy issues. The Community Planning (CP) group has grown from thirteen to twenty-one participants and most of them attended all of the meetings.

Through a collective effort the CP group also learned that most of the employers and the Career Center staff were concerned about having sufficient training for the emerging Cape Verdean and Brazilian population in the greater Plymouth area. This is one of the issues that will be addressed in the months to come.

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Several major conflicts were resolved, such as members coming with their own agendas (i.e. how to get services for their own population). It became possible to move discussions from specifics such as how the women from the homeless shelter get access to GED programs, to a more general focus on the unmet needs of the community. The group is now taking a leadership role in the community, and group members have discovered that they have a firm base to complete a comprehensive needs assessment.

Overall, the partners learned that persistence pays off. They are re-establishing themselves in the community, continuing to make new connections and reinforcing old ones.

Year Two of the Partnership (2001-2002)

Interview with Evelyn Strawn, Plymouth Literacy Program
by Lisa Deyo, SABES West

How do you see how the partnership has evolved since last year?

The first year, it seemed like there were all these possibilities with the people coming together. This second year feels a bit more pedestrian. Into the second year people started getting used to each other. The excitement begins to wear off and you begin to be taken for granted. It's like a marriage. You say, oh, isn't this wonderful – but still take the partnership for granted.

The basic partnership has stayed the same. There were a lot of people involved who signed on. In the past year, that group has continued to be involved. People are committed to working together. One addition to the partnership has been the local hospital. The reason for their involvement has been the growing Brazilian population in the area. A lot of different agencies are struggling to serve this population and don't know how to do it.

The hospital's decision to join the partnership has been an exciting addition. They even came to a training on focus groups at SABES. This is the first time a partner has shown up to a training event. In the end, we worked together to come up with questions open enough to cover ESOL and health related topics, and the Plymouth program conducted the focus group interviews.

Plymouth is a small place. Everyone knows one another. You think you know everything but when you start talking, you realize that you don't know as much as you do. Getting people together for the partnership has given them an opportunity to come together to write grants and figure out how to help the students who are struggling. Partners tend to see their role as advisory not participatory. They coming up with ideas of what I should do. They've been helpful. It's been a good process.

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What do you feel were your important accomplishments this year?

This is a small program with ESOL tutors. The work tends to be done at the library during the day; there is no evening availability. The best thing that has happened in the partnership this year is the new ESOL class. This was due to the efforts of a dynamic woman at the Workforce Investment Board. She approached the Career Center, a partnership member, about the class. The Career Center agreed to provide space in evening to hold classes, and Massasoit Community College was convinced to hold ESOL classes at the Career Center free-of-cost. When the class was advertised, 80 people who were interested in taking the class showed up; twenty people took the class. There is no question of need.

We made progress on the community assessment this year. We conducted key informant interviews with the Brazilian population. I went to the owners of the two Brazilian stores in Plymouth because I know that they are providing services to the Brazilian population, including sending faxes and money to Brazil and helping people find jobs. A few churches in the area serve the Brazilian population. One pastor is a graduate of ESOL tutoring program. People know him. The local Catholic Church now is doing a Brazilian mass. Choosing key informants from the group of people who work in and are an integral part of the community made sense.

I also tried to get at the employment issue without talking to employers by talking to the town planner, Chamber of Commerce members, and other agency staff.

What were key factors in making those accomplishments a success?

There is an energy about getting people working together. The partnership didn't wait to finish the community assessment. We got people together and did it; we started the class.

Another key factor in this success is from telling ourselves, "We're smart. We can come up with answers." The whole is greater than the different parts. People sitting in their separate offices weren't coming up with answers. Partners coming together did it.

What were the challenges?

Starting up the ESOL course was straightforward. A continuing challenge has been keeping people engaged and the process moving along. When something is accomplished, it's reinforcing. One thing that the partnership is trying to do is make something real happen as a result of the community assessment, not just let it become another document or an exercise in futility.

Another challenge is getting employers more involved. We tried to attract employers to the partnership, but it was obvious that wasn't going to happen. We have completed a lot of the assessment process. We developed two different questionnaires. One was for potential participants, and the other was for employers.

The questionnaire asked questions, such as, "Were employers having trouble filling positions? Did people need better math, literacy skills to progress?" The employers in the area are service providers and do seem not interested in people moving up. The employers' response to the questionnaire was that they don't have any problems. "Everything is just fine." They are happy with Brazilians not

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being able to speak English. We had thought we could partner with some of the larger employers and provide classes but learned that we need to come to this from a different direction. That was depressing. Once again, the Workforce Investment Board and their advisory board have taken this on as a challenge.

What are some next steps for your partnership?

Our next step is to make certain that people are engaged, now that we have a success and a concrete idea about what is needed. I am hopeful that the partnership can build on what has already been accomplished.

I think that people are engaged when they can see that there is some value for the people they serve. There has to be some self-interest. We need to find ways to make this relevant for a variety of people.

Based on your experience, what advice do you have for colleagues?

If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. Sometimes you need to be willing to give up your preconceived ideas. I knew exactly what I needed to do. I thought I had to engage employers, but it turned out I was wrong. So, if one approach doesn't work, it's possible to come around to what you want in a circular manner. In the case of the Plymouth partnership, local pastors and business people who are from Brazil and serve the Brazilian population were approached as key informants. It's necessary to be flexible and not be too invested in how your own ideas should work.

Another suggestion is not to give up on agencies that might not respond to an invitation to participate straight away. Don't write somebody off if they haven't participated early on. There might be a hook there; you don't know when it will work. In Plymouth, the local hospital wasn't involved for over a year. I sent them minutes to the partnership meetings and kept them informed of what was going on in the partnership. A year later, they joined the partnership and have been actively involved.

Somerville ABE Partnership

2000-2002

by Susan Riley, SCALE

Year One of the Partnership (2000-2001)

SCALE has a long history of working with other partners in the community to improve services for their students. Representatives from SCALE were already active participants on boards, advisory boards, and planning teams of other agencies in Somerville and the surrounding communities. It was not difficult to get members to participate in the Community Planning Partnership. It was a challenge though to develop an agenda that would make the partnership have value for all members. Early on it was clear that we would have to come up with a reason for meeting beyond “I’ll go to your meeting because you went to mine.”

The current members of our partnership are Susan Barnard, SCALE; Rosemary Beaudry, Career Place; Carmen Miranda, Concilio Hispano; Susan Donnelly, Bunker Hill Community College; Hilda Gomez, Concilio Hispano; Dr. Maria Madrid, Somerville Family Network; Susan Riley, SCALE; Julia Schlam, Welcome Project (housed at Mystic View public housing); and Melissa McWhinney, Mayor’s Office of Human Services. Some members of the partnership are well acquainted, have worked collaboratively over the past ten years in a variety of projects, and recognize our mutual dependence; other members are “new friends.” The partnership members have jelled as a group, but we are planning to add several additional members for FY02. In particular, we hope to attract one member each from the local business community and the Department of Transitional Assistance.

The Somerville ABE Partnership spent its first meeting discussing the various options for our FY01 focus. Although several ideas were proposed, we were unified in one respect: we all wanted a concrete final product that would benefit, in a clear and direct way, current ABE students. Another important consideration, though slightly less so, was that participants wanted the partnership’s work to somehow relate to their jobs and constituents. After some discussion we realized that we were in unanimous agreement that Somerville students needed a concise, easy-to-use mini guide to ABE services in Somerville and adjacent communities. Our plan has been endorsed by our program specialist. We have a working draft that will be completed by our July 13, 2001 meeting.

We found that the chief challenge in creating and maintaining an ABE partnership is that potential members are reluctant to participate in yet another group that is “all process and no product.” Everyone in (or near) the ABE system is asked to participate in various working groups, committees, ad hoc groups and so on each year. People need to choose wisely since it’s impossible to answer affirmatively each request for our time. We addressed these concerns by deciding early on to challenge ourselves to plan and execute within several months the mini guide. We also decided as a group to limit our meetings to 1-½ hours. We experimented with midday Friday lunch meetings, but based on group input switched to a late day Friday meeting. Having the meeting as the last official act of the workweek seems to work better for most participants.

Another problem is that the value of the partnership is quite different for each member and some of us need the partnership more than others do! Clearly the benefit of an ABE partnership is obvious for SCALE and Concilio Hispano who are partnered for the DOE grant. It has been difficult, though, to engage some of the ABE providers who partnered with SCALE during the proposal process but

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were removed from the partnership when DOE revamped the proposed program design and money was awarded. For us who are recipients of DOE funding, the benefit is crystal clear: our funding depends on our willingness and ability to create a partnership not only of ABE providers but also from TAFDC (DTA), trainers, major employers, REBs, etc, and then to transform that heterogeneous collection of people into a group with a unified focus. In spite of the fact that the concept of a mandatory partnership occasionally seems burdensome to the adult learning centers, the group feels positive about the work that has been done thus far and credits the partnership as the catalyst for that work. For the other members, the benefit of the partnership may be less apparent. We have worked hard as a group to guarantee that an individual, representing an employer or interest group, benefits in some fashion. We all agreed to streamline interagency communication so that we would avoid misinformation or—even worse-- the dreaded voice-mail loop. Thus, for example, Susan Donnelly from Bunker Hill Community College knows that she can call me directly with any question about SCALE services. If I'm not the correct person to handle her request, I will take personal responsibility for connecting her to the right party. Accommodations of this type may seem insignificant, but they can actually save a great deal of very valuable time.

The Somerville ABE Partnership worked quite well this year, although there is always room for improvement. Focusing on one single project with a beginning, middle, and end helped to keep members on track and involved. Maintaining this camaraderie in FY02 as we tackle the Needs/Assets survey may well be a challenge. Somerville is a small city and there seems to be a general consensus about what services are needed for ABE students. There is concern that doing the assessment will in itself increase the demand for services; a demand that clearly is not being met. Partnership members may be less interested in participating in meetings if they feel they are only “re-creating the ABE wheel” and devoting many hours to discovering what we already know about our city. Engaging the services of a consultant to help us craft an appropriate strategy might be advisable.

Year Two of the Partnership

How has your partnership evolved since last year?

There is a core of members who are committed to the process, however long it may take. But some partners tire of a project that never seems to end, so we are thus often searching for new members. Additionally, those working in adult basic education, career centers, and community colleges sometimes do have common concerns, but other times it feels as though we're trying to force a common purpose that doesn't truly exist.

On the bright side, one new member is a person who has a great deal of history in and understanding of Somerville and has provided some very good demographic information. We also recently added a representative from Somerville Housing Authority. It sometimes seems like a struggle to keep people interested. As you know, there are many demands on everyone's time.

What was the most important accomplishment for your partnership this year?

We determined what the focus of the partnership will be--attempting to develop native language literacy programming for those Somerville residents who need it. This has long been the goal of

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many people in the City, and it continues to be of interest.

What were key factors in making your accomplishment a success? What were the challenges?

My honest feeling is that students, providers, school department, and so on feel that we are operating programming that matches up with the needs of the City. Yes, there are other providers of adult literacy services in Somerville, but SCALE is certainly the key organization, and therefore we are "driving the bus." Although Somerville is very lucky in that it has a considerable array of resources for its residents and there is good interagency communication and assistance, it still feels that the community planning process is way too cumbersome and unnecessarily detailed and process driven.

What are the next steps for your partnership?

We're meeting this week to review all the data from various questionnaires and surveys and to determine how this information connects with the input from the community planning partnership members themselves.

What advice do you have for your colleagues?

Talk to as many people in your community as you can and try to find out what you're doing well, what needs to be done better, and what's missing.

Southern Berkshire Educational Alliance

2000-2001

Year One of the Partnership

Interview with Paula Hatch-Sato, Southern Berkshire Educational Alliance
by Michele Sedor, SABES Associate Coordinator

One of the biggest obstacles facing the Southern Berkshire Educational Alliance (SBEA) Partnership is geography, according to Paula Hatch-Sato, Community Planning consultant. For many years, there were two ABE programs that served all of Southern Berkshire County, with the classroom sites located in Lee and Sheffield. During the last round of five-year funding from the Department of Education, the Lee program did not receive an award. As a result, one of the early needs identified by the SBEA Partnership was reinstating ABE services in the Lee-Lenox area, which is in the northern part of the partnership's geographically extensive area.

Although public transportation buses run from Lenox (at the northernmost reach of the partnership) through Lee and Great Barrington (the new ABE site), all the way south to Sheffield, many people were not able to make what would be for them a 2-hour round trip. Despite providing ABE buses from Lee to the Great Barrington site and including door-to-door service for many students, the still lengthy round trip made it impossible for some participants to add it onto their day. It seemed essential to the fledgling partnership to help close the gap in ABE services in South County. Therefore, the Alliance submitted a proposal to the Nellie Mae Foundation and was subsequently awarded funds to begin providing ESOL services in the Lee-Lenox area in the fall of 2001.

After achieving this major accomplishment, the partnership began to build upon and expand the relationships formed during the development and writing of both the DOE and the Nellie Mae proposals as well as broadening its scope and connecting with other community organizations and individuals. In many respects, people in the SBEA have been doing community planning all along; now they have a structure for formalizing and documenting what they do with whom. As Paula says, the partnership is "growing the list."

One of the most important things that was underscored during the partnership building process is that personal contacts are best. Media can be used as a complementary means of connecting with people but Paula asserts that it cannot take the place of personal connections that grow and strengthen as she and others in the Alliance network through the businesses, agencies and organizations in the communities they serve.

During her tenure as the community planning coordinator, Paula has been able to draw upon the experiences gained from her other position as the School to Career Coordinator for the four public school districts that define the same geographical area as the SBEA. From that position, she has gained a good understanding of the nature of the community as well as forging many connections, which have served the SBEA Partnership well. In addition, both positions have large and, at times, amorphous mandates. Paula has learned that it is necessary to take the most meaningful parts of the mandate for your particular community and spend energy on that.

One of the more difficult parts of the year was handling the disappointment people felt when the Lee program was not funded under the Department of Education grant. Despite this, people from that area still continued to be part of the partnership, which turned a difficulty into an accomplishment.

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Add that accomplishment onto the others mentioned in this article and you can see that the SBEA Partnership already has a solid base to build upon as they enter the second year of the Community Planning process.