
SOLUTIONS FOR AMERICA

A Newsletter for the Pew Partnership's Project, *Wanted: Solutions for America*

July 2001

Don't Be a Wallflower! Getting Your Research Noticed

By Jacqueline Dugery
Pew Partnership

Program evaluation research has a fairly dismal reputation when it comes to utilization. More often than not, evaluators' reports languish unread on a bookshelf, disconnected from real-life program work and communities. This is particularly ironic in light of the fact that evaluations are conducted primarily to support decision-making.

As the evaluation field has developed, questions about evaluation use have emerged from the sidelines. To assist sites and researchers strategize around the *Wanted: Solutions for America* research, here are a few ideas culled from evaluation use research for improving the use of evaluation results:

Develop realistic recommendations that focus on program improvement. Key stakeholders—program staff, funders, board members—all want to improve programs. However, research reports often emphasize research methodology and findings and give only limited attention to developing realistic recommendations for the future.

One strategy is to informally engage stakeholders in a "test-run" where researchers and program staff review preliminary findings and brainstorm possible recommendations before the final report is formally submitted. In addition to being realistic, effective recommendations are timely, directed to an appropriate person or entity, easy to comprehend, and specific.

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Sean with Women In Construction members Melanie Cole (left) and Brenda Harris

Sean's Appalachian Adventure

By Sean DiGiovanna
Center for Urban Policy Research

Last month I packed my bags and took a ten-day trip to document the great work being done by *Wanted* sites in Appalachia. The site visits were a part of the *Wanted* research framework, designed to familiarize CUPR staff with the programs and to bring together the local research teams for discussion and reflection.

My trip started in Cincinnati, where I spent a day with Miriam West at the **Cincinnati Youth Collaborative (CYC)**. Throughout the day, I met with program staff, mentors, students, and school officials. I was struck by the dedication and enthusiasm displayed by CYC staff and volunteers. Visiting the schools and speaking with the students and their youth advocates, I realized how important it is for us as a society to spend the resources to support youth programs that work. CYC presents a great model of such a program.

The next day I hopped in my rental car and drove along the Ohio River to West Virginia. After a beautiful (if somewhat nerve-racking) drive through the mountains I arrived at Harts for a visit with Step by Step and its **West Virginia Dreamers** program. Michael Tierney guided me through an itinerary that included visits to two area schools, meetings with Dreamers' Americorp volunteers, and a long, winding drive to the Big Ugly Community Center.

Step by Step illustrates that much can be done with meager resources—especially when you involve the community.

Important Dates

October, 2001	Solutions for America, Issue 6
October 31, 2001	Final research reports due from local researchers
November 1-4, 2001	Participant Meeting in Colorado Springs, CO.

Taller San Jose: "Benchmarking" Progress ... Literally

By Deborah Visser
Center for Urban Policy Research

It is fair to say that Taller San Jose's (TSJ) approach to workforce development has given new meaning to our notion of "benchmarking." Through its innovative hands-on training program for at-risk young adults, TSJ's students learn to design and build Mission style furniture that is sold commercially—each bench completed by a Taller apprentice becomes a clear marker of an unlikely artisan's remarkable progress.

The benchmarkers of the "woodshop of Saint Joseph" represent only one facet of a multi-service learning center established in Santa Ana, California in 1995, to provide education and job-training opportunities for young people from some of the city's poorest neighborhoods, where 17% of the youth are unemployed. Sponsored by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange, TSJ set out to close the gap between the employment needs in one of the country's most affluent counties, and a potential labor pool of 18-28 year-olds without high school diplomas or job skills, whose lives had been complicated by drugs, crime, jail, or early parenthood. Over the past six years, working with a range of community partners Taller San Jose has recruited more than 1,000 young adults, helped them complete their high school education, and develop marketable job skills.

In addition to the woodshop, programs include GED test preparation, Computer Technology, Certified Nursing Assistant Training, and Intermediate ESL. As part of the organization's highly personal modus operandi, Taller staff routinely offers students advice regarding the proper attire for an interview, support in meeting childcare needs, or encouragement in remaining drug free. Evaluation findings to date reinforce more informal, anecdotal evidence that Taller's approach is having a tangible impact on the program's enrollees, with clear shifts in attitudes about school and work, as well as significant growth in the capacity to trust others and in participants' own sense of self-worth. TSJ alumni also report a positive "ripple" effect on their families, as siblings and spouses begin to improve the quality of their lives. In the words of one, formerly homeless student, Taller is a place "where you can set goals and dream and your dream becomes [more] reality."

Predictably, Taller's efforts have generated increased demand for its services. In response, TSJ has developed the Vocational Industrial Venture Alliance (VIVA), aimed at "growing" its job-training, education, and life skills programs. by matching at least 100 students per year with jobs in local industries. This ambitious agenda could challenge a less determined organization. For Taller San Jose, VIVA is a logical next step in ensuring that more disenfranchised young people have the skills to enter the workforce and make lasting, positive contributions to their communities.

For more information regarding Taller San Jose and its programs please contact Taller San Jose directly: (714) 543-5105.

Explore multiple uses of the study data. While data may have been collected based on a specific research question, they may have other meaning and use to the organization and various stakeholders. For example, data may have use for program managers, budget analysts, client advocacy groups, and others. The key is to identify interested parties and consider sharing data.

Continually remind decision-makers of findings and recommendations. Evaluation research presents a unique opportunity to change community perceptions. Widespread and vigilant presentations of the research will increase the likelihood that others pay attention to the research findings. Some outlets for the research include agency newsletter articles highlighting the research, presentations to agency leadership and staff, and introduction of research findings during critical decision making (e.g. strategic planning, program development, etc.) Here the goal is to build a constituency for the research among those charged with decision making.

Share findings and recommendations with broad audiences. When appropriate, organizations should share the research results with audiences other than the immediately affected stakeholders. For example, local media presentations will provide an outlet for informing the general public about the findings. (Such briefings have the added benefit of portraying the organization as committed to developing the most effective intervention possible and thus enhance the organization's overall credibility.) Briefing oversight organizations and client advocacy groups will also build credibility and may reduce any potential skepticism regarding the research. Organizations may also want to consider dissemination of the findings via publication in professional journals and presentations at relevant conferences and meetings. Last, making the research available to local universities and other relevant academic groups and describing how the results benefited the organization may build a case for future research partnerships. (Adapted from Carter, R. "Maximizing the Use of Evaluation Results." In Wholey, J.S., Hatry, H. and Newcomer, K. (eds.). *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation*.)

Thinking about how these ideas may be applied may be the difference between creating a tiny ripple or making a proper splash with your research.

Reflections From the Field

A Day in the Life of Taller San Jose By Sister Eileen McNerney

In January 2001, a former student at Taller San Jose, Jorge Ramirez (23), was arrested for aggravated assault related to a family altercation. Jorge's sister had called him to ask for help. She told him that her husband was beating her and that she wanted Jorge to come and get the two little girls out of the apartment. Jorge was recovering from a recent surgery for a double hernia. He didn't think he could get the girls on his own and asked a friend to help him. He made a poor choice. The friend brought a gun. When they arrived at the apartment, Jorge and his friend got into a verbal shouting match with the brother-in-law. Threats were made. The brother-in-law threatened to call the police. Jorge and his friend, both of whom had prior arrests, didn't want to deal with the police, and decided to get out fast. As they were running down the stairs, his friend dropped the gun and it went off. Later, Jorge and his friend were picked up by the police and jailed. No one had been injured.

Jorge and I had been talking about the charges that he is facing and the fact that the police had noted the incident as gang-related, a designation that can double the sentence. Jorge has a hearing on June 15th at which he either has to accept a felony with a possible 16 months in jail or go to trial. He swears that he did not have a gun the evening of the altercation with his brother-in-law and that his fingerprints cannot be found on a gun. I believe him. Jorge is now caught between pleading guilty to a felony and jeopardizing his immigration status or facing a trial with an uncertain outcome. If he is found guilty, he could spend eight years in prison.

Jorge and I know each other pretty well. We've probably met 10 times a year for the past 5 years. I've helped him with his immigration papers, consoled him during break-ups with his girlfriend, scolded him about having "wanton, careless" sex. He has become a self-appointed coach to improve my Spanish. The following conversation between Jorge and me refers to the issue of his arrest and the options set before him. Jorge begins.

"I didn't do nothin. I can't do eight years in prison. I won't be the same after. I'll have to act different in there – have to protect myself. I can get in trouble in there even if I don't want to. I've changed inside. Doin' time will change me back to my old self. I'm different inside now, not like I was before (*referring to gang activity prior to 1996*). I don't wanna go back to that bad place inside of me."

"I didn't do nothin," he said again.

"Didn't do *anything*," I suggested.

"That's what I said, I didn't do nothin."

"Listen," I said, "When you say, 'I didn't do nothin', you sound *maleducado*. Try saying, 'I didn't do *anything*'. It'll sound better if you're in court. Say it a hundred times a day. Look in the mirror and say it while you're brushing your teeth."

I wrote it down for him while at the same time giving him my grammar lesson on the importance of double negatives in Spanish and their forbidden use in English. The emphasis on

grammar didn't seem important just then, but I wanted him to sound right. I thought it might give him an edge.

He folded my grammar paper in half and shoved it in his pocket.

"Do you want to pray?" I asked. He nodded. His eyes teared up.

I pulled out the prayer that John Henry Cardinal Newman had written over a hundred years ago when he was down and out. I didn't give Jorge a history lesson about Newman. I just told him that Newman was a good guy who a lot of people treated poorly. I told Jorge that no matter who was against him, that God knew his heart -- that to God, and to his mother and to his girlfriend, Frieda and to me he was "*precioso*". Nobody could take that from him.

I read Newman's words slowly.

Therefore I will trust Him.

Whatever I am, I can never be thrown away.

If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him.

If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him.

He does nothing in vain.

He knows what He is about.

He may take away my friends.

He may throw me among strangers.

He may make me feel desolate,

Make my spirits sink,

Hide my future from me – still He knows what He is about.

I skipped the phrase, "I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth" . . . that was a bit of a stretch for Jorge. When I finished, he took the prayer, too, folded it and put it in his pocket.

Afterward, I let him read the letter that I had sent to his attorney – reiterating what I knew about Jorge, how long ago he had left gang life behind, how I viewed the situation as I understood it – a family squabble, not a gang-related crime. I emphasized without passion or naivete how young people of color were treated differently than the rest of us, how once the cards were stacked against them, they could be labeled for life. What I didn't say, but firmly believed, was that if Jorge were the son of a successful attorney, physician or CEO in another part of the county, he wouldn't be facing the same charges.

Jorge asked me if I would call the district attorney assigned to his case and tell her what I had told the defense attorney.

"I don't know if it'll do any good, Jorge. It's about winning and losing for attorneys. I don't know if she'll even talk to me."

"Talk to her," he pleaded. "You're white", he said, pointing to my skin. "You talk white. She'll listen to you. *Do it, Sister Eileen.*"

In the front office, he called his girlfriend, Frieda and got the name of the district attorney assigned to his case. He handed it to me. "Call her," he pleaded again. "Talk white to her."

"I'll call the Deputy Public Defender", I pledged, "and ask his advice."

As Jorge got ready to leave, his eyes were sad and pleading.

"I didn't do nothin," I said, doing my best to imitate his inflection.

"Didn't do *anything*," he echoed back.

SOLUTION

Boston Main Streets: Focusing on Neighborhoods

By Stephen Finn
Center for Urban Policy Research

The Boston Main Streets (BMS) program is helping to build stronger commercial districts in nineteen neighborhoods throughout the city of Boston. Established in 1995, BMS is patterned after the Main Street Center model developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, but with a much different focus. BMS diverges from the traditional Main Streets downtown focus by working more directly at the neighborhood level. In doing so, the program serves some of the city's most disadvantaged neighborhoods, and works to stabilize and strengthen local commercial areas and to improve the districts for the benefit of businesses, customers, and residents.

Three BMS districts are participating in the *Wanted* study and all offer different glimpses of the city's diverse resident life. In The Upham's Corner district, managed by Colin Riley, staff members are working with the neighborhood's residents and a strong base of community organizations to stabilize existing businesses and to attract new businesses to the neighborhood. The Hyde Park program, managed by Karen O'Connell focuses more on preserving the historic character of that district by financing, with BMS dollars, storefront improvements. And the Hyde Jackson district, under the direction of Enerio Barros, aims to build upon the strong base of Hispanic-owned stores in the area and advocate to protect local businesses.

The BMS strategy is to have each district create its own 501 (c)(3) tax-exempt organization, to be led by a manager and a board of directors. The districts are then eligible for matching funds from the city to support capital and operating needs, including up to \$100,000 for physical improvements, salary for a full-time staff person, and money for promotional efforts.

BMS director Emily Haber describes the BMS approach: "Boston Main Streets is a unique model of government facilitating civic participation and commercial investment in our neighborhood commercial districts by helping each local program maximize its access to financial and technical resources in order to fulfill the community's vision."

The BMS focus on neighborhood commercial revitalization has gained the attention of many leaders around the country, recently earning it the Economic Development Program award from the Council on Urban Economic Development.

For the *Wanted* study, researcher Karl Seidman, assisted by MIT graduate students, is working with the BMS staff and district managers to analyze the impact of the BMS program in the three focus districts. Through reviews of program records, focus group sessions with key stakeholders, customer and business surveys, and updates of business inventories, the research examines indicators such as net growth in businesses, changes in business sales, alterations in customers' shopping patterns, and other impacts.

For more information about BMS, please visit the program's Web site at <http://www.bostonmainstreets.com/>.



(left to right) Bob Hensley, Pat Cabe, and George Wilson show off the gazebo on the Bakersville Creekwalk

Appalachian Adventure

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The Dreamers program has given the area youth the ability to engage in constructive after-school and summer activities. The program structure allows the students to become involved in the planning and management of activities — and it was clear to me the students took this responsibility seriously. In the end, I gained a better understanding of the challenges facing rural youth and some good ideas on how to address them.

After another challenging mountain drive, I ended up in Asheville, NC for a visit with HandMade in America's **Small Towns Revitalization** (STR) program. After a meeting with HandMade staff, Pat Cabe led me on visits to two of the communities with which STR is working. In Mars Hill, I saw the improvements the town had made and was pleased to hear that the town has become a sort of mentor for other communities in the region. In Bakersville, I took a stroll on the lovely new creekwalk and took some shade in their lovely new gazebo.

The assistance and support provided by STR is much in demand. Pat informed me they have around 10 communities on a waiting list. I know that HandMade would love to help these other towns, but first they have to figure out a way to clone Pat! (During my visit, I believe we drove farther in one day than I drive in a month.)

My next destination was Kentucky to spend a day with **Women in Construction** (WIC), a program developed by Kentucky River Foothills. Stephanie Gorrell took me around and we spoke with some of WIC's collaborative partners. The highlight was meeting two program graduates currently working on a construction site in Lexington. Their insights and observations about the program were extremely perceptive and also indicated how much the opportunity had improved their lives.

As I flew home, I reflected on my visits and realized how lucky I was to get to spend some time with such dedicated people and to witness first hand the good work *Wanted* sites are doing. I'm sure the other CUPR researchers will have similarly profound experiences. On behalf of myself and my CUPR colleagues, I want to thank all of you for doing such a great job in organizing the visits and for being so welcoming on our trips.

SOLUTION

JCCI: Community Development through Citizen Participation

By Mark Pendras

Center for Urban Policy Research

The Jacksonville Community Council Inc. (JCCI) was created in 1975 as a mechanism for increasing citizen participation in community issues and for involving citizens in bringing about real change in their communities. Emerging as the result of the Amelia Island Planning Conference, a meeting which brought together 100 Jacksonville community leaders to discuss the needs and future of the city, JCCI has since made great strides toward achieving its mission of inspiring and facilitating an informed, unified citizenry ready to identify and follow the steps needed to make Jacksonville a great city.

JCCI's efforts began in the area of citizen-based studies. Through committee-based research, JCCI solicits input from a variety of community participants, from public officials and labor leaders, to at-large community members. This open study process identifies community problems and issues and then publishes its findings and recommendations in a final report that is distributed throughout the community.

But the work doesn't stop there. JCCI does not write reports just to see them sit unread on a shelf somewhere. Rather, because JCCI is committed to the implementation of its study recommendations, the community-based work serves as the foundation for its efforts in three other programmatic areas: the coordination of a Human Services Council; conflict resolution programs; and work with community quality of life indicators.

The Human Services Council, a coordinating and advisory partnership of human services funders in Northeast Florida, emerged from a JCCI study of local human services provision. Similarly, JCCI's conflict resolution training and neighborhood mediation program was the result of a Neighborhood Summit sponsored by the Mayor's Office. This program has to date trained approximately 300 community leaders in basic conflict resolution and numerous community disputes have been successfully mediated.

Finally, JCCI's community indicators program, begun in 1985, is also rooted solidly in community-based research. By tracking some 71 indicators of progress specific to the community scale and reporting the results in an annual publication, the *Quality of Life Report*, JCCI monitors the quality of life in Jacksonville, acknowledging areas of success and identifying areas requiring future action.

After more than 25 years, JCCI has gained national and international recognition for its successes in each of its program areas. And by participating in the *Wanted* program JCCI hopes to build on its successes by learning more about the dynamics of citizen participation within its study process, thus identifying ways to better incorporate broad-based citizen participation in its efforts to effect positive change in the local community.

For more information please visit the JCCI web site at: www.jcci.org.

News And Announcements: *Wanted* Programs on the Move

Dental Health for Arlington

Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General 2000 names tooth decay as the number one infectious disease in America today. During this year SMILES preventive dental program of Dental Health for Arlington provided 4,433 disadvantaged children free preventive dental care on site in their elementary schools. The program continues to bring decay rates down. When the program began in 1994, 16% of low income Arlington children suffered from severe decay, by having signs of infection, swelling and pain. Today after six years of the SMILES programs in the public schools, severe decay rates are at only 9%. Pain, swelling and infection from dental problems have been cut almost in half.

Stephanie Hunt, BSN, RN says, "As a school nurse of seven years experience, dental pain is one of the more common ailments reported by the children in clinic visits to me. Since Dental Health for Arlington's yearly visits to our school, the number of intermediate students, grades 4, 5, and 6, visiting the clinic for tooth pain has dropped significantly, thanks to sealants placed on their molars during 2nd and 3rd grades!"

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Boston Main Streets

Graduate students in Boston Main Streets local researcher Karl Seidman's Revitalizing Urban Main Streets Class completed their plans for the Upham's Corner and Hype Park Main Streets Districts. The plans were presented to Main Street Board Members and other interested citizens at evening meetings on May 14th and 15th. The plans combined economic development and physical improvements to advance the local neighborhood goals for each district. Both plans were well received and stimulated considerable discussion at meeting. A follow-up meeting with city agencies to discuss assistance with implementation is in the works.

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Jacksonville Community Council Inc. (JCCI)

JCCI recently released a study report on *Services to Ex-Offenders*, which represents the work of over 35 committee members who heard from 28 resource speakers at one or more of 21 weekly meetings held over seven months. Given that of an estimated 49,000 ex-offenders released in Duval County, Florida, each year some 18,620 (38%) are re-arrested within one year, the *Services to Ex-Offenders* study aimed to assess how the Jacksonville community can maximize the efforts of local corrections and service providers to assist ex-offenders as they re-enter the community and re-build their lives.

News And Announcements: Wanted Programs on the Move, cont.

Jacksonville Community Council Inc. (JCCI)

JCCI gained national recognition for its *Quality Report: Indicators for Progress in Local Government Guides to the Internet: Online Resources for Communities*. Presented by TVA Rural Studies and the National League of Cities, the book provides guidance on ways to obtain information that can inform leaders and help in the economic development of communities of all sizes.

David Swain, JCCI Associate Director, was contacted by the authors, Priscilla Salant and Christy Dearien in 2000. "JCCI appears in the book because of the extraordinary visibility Jacksonville and JCCI have gained—partly through the Internet—as a leader in community indicators work. Hundreds of citizen volunteers continue to be involved each year in JCCI's on going efforts to improve the quality—and usefulness—of its indicators," said Swain. "The City of Jacksonville, the Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce, and the United Way of Northeast Florida continue to be major supporters of JCCI's work because they see the value of being able to share key quality-of-life information about our community," adds Swain.



David Swain, Associate Director, JCCI

Beyond Shelter, Inc.

Beyond Shelter held a Grand Opening Celebration on May 4, 2001, for its *Broadway Village I, Beyond Shelter Family Services Center and Drew Child Development Center*. The Grand Opening represented the completion of "Phase I" of Beyond Shelter's Broadway Village I and the agency's ongoing commitment to breaking the poverty cycle and rebuilding neighborhoods. Broadway Village I is affiliated with Beyond Shelter's service-enriched housing complex, Umoja Apartments, at 74th and Main. Broadway Village II is currently in early stages of development and will be comprised of 50 units of service-enriched, affordable family housing and a Neighborhood Services Center at 51st and Broadway, with a childcare center nearby.

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