

# Journal of Community Power Building

## Reflections from Community Development Leaders and Practitioners

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### Artist Statement

This painting shows exactly the position I was in before I came to the center. The painting is split in half and my profile is in shades of grey. On the right, I am looking through a key hole into a bright and open space filled with all the things that I love and want to explore. I felt like I didn't have the chance to enjoy music, dance, fashion, and my sign (meaning myself). The peacock stands for wholeness, dignity, beauty, recognition, self assurance, and pride. This is what I believe my family represents and is part of me. The key, which opens the other side of my world, is on the bottom of the painting. It is an actual key I wear hanging off my chain necklace. It's been 3 years since I painted my self portrait. I am proud to say that it was recently used as promotional invitation for the *Eye of the Beholder Gallery* held on April 28, 2006 hosted by Movement City, Lawrence CommunityWorks.

- Edwige Nordulens

## **Massachusetts CDCs: Building community power to shape the course of neighborhood revitalization and development**

The Massachusetts Associations of CDCs (MACDC), an active statewide CDC trade association, and the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), a national community development intermediary, joined together in 1997 to create the Ricanne Hadrian Initiative for Community Organizing (RHICO). The program was designed to support CDCs expand community organizing as a core component of their development and neighborhood revitalization strategies. Since RHICO's inception, over twenty-five CDCs have participated in RHICO through learning, networking, technical assistance and grant-making opportunities.

At the heart of community development work there are the many challenges in building and exercising power for change. Building CDC power through a strong, organized group of community residents provides the necessary base for CDC's to help low-income neighborhoods realize their goals.

By placing organizing at the center of a CDC's work, RHICO helps to create groups that are more responsive to community needs, better able to create resources for affordable housing production and preservation, as well as influence critical public policies that affect their communities.

In the future, MACDC will continue to support CDCs in community organizing, both locally and statewide, through programming based on the successes and learnings of RHICO.



All articles presented in the *Journal of Community Power Building* represent the experiences and opinions of the authors.

***"Every moment is an organizing opportunity, every person a potential activist, every minute a chance to change the world."***

**Dolores Huerta, Activist and  
Co-founder of United Farm Workers**

Welcome to the third edition of *The Journal of Community Power Building*, a publication that chronicles power building within the neighborhoods of Massachusetts Community Development Corporations (CDCs). The *Power Journal* is a publication of the Ricanne Hadrian Initiative for Community Organizing (RHICO). For the past ten years, RHICO - an initiative of the Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC) and the Massachusetts Association for Community Development Corporations (MACDC), has provided resources, technical assistance and learning opportunities for CDCs engaged in power building.

The first CDCs were founded in the late 1960s to address the lack of investment in poor communities. The mission of CDCs nation-wide has been to include disenfranchised community voices in decisions over the development and improvement of local social services, businesses, and housing – in short, we work *with* local residents on what they need and envision for their communities.

Over the years, those who participate in our communities have changed. And with that change, which voices prevail in the development process can be a challenging and an ever-evolving point of contention. This is perhaps especially true due to changing demographics that include increased urban land value, gentrification, shifting immigration patterns, and class disparities.

In the past two volumes of the *Power Journal*, CDC board members, leaders, and staff have explored the concepts of power building and justice in our community development work. When the *Power Journal's* Editorial board, a volunteer committee of CDC staff, leaders and allies, was developing the theme for this year's edition, we focused on the definitions of community and community boundaries. Who are the people with whom CDCs work? When a CDC carries out leadership development or speaks of pursuing justice, who does it involve in its action plans? Who perhaps is excluded from its outreach? How is this connected to the CDC mission and any disparities in the community due to race, class, or limited resources? How might these questions be answered differently in urban, rural and suburban communities?

In the articles that we received, it became clear that the term *community* carries a deep emotional resonance with the writers. Many of the articles discussed community in terms of belonging and a sense of family. Although the

importance of personal relationships is almost a cliché in the community development field, these essays reiterate the point on a visceral level. The authors remind us that, for all ages, personal relationships and a stake in a community constitute the power that drives community change.

We open this edition with a trio of essays from staff and a board member of Arlington Comunidad Trabajando, a CDC serving the Arlington neighborhood in the city of Lawrence. In *“Our Neighbors Are Our Closest Family: An Immigrant’s Perspective,”* Evelyn Saint Hilaire reflects upon the values of her homeland, the Dominican Republic and how she – eventually -- found a new community through her CDC. Then, Ana Luna and Tennis Lilly provide an organizational perspective of the Arlington neighborhood in *“Constituents, Connections, and Communication: Creating a Framework for Empowerment.”* Here we learn how the Latino community in Lawrence rose up against an outdated economic and political power system and began to revive a depressed and disinvested neighborhood.

In *“Building Bridges between Businesses and Our Community for a Common Purpose”* Anabelle Rondon, also of ACT, writes in Spanish (translated into English), about the important role of the Latino business community in creating economic stability.

The next two articles discuss the steps new immigrants take to become rooted, and politically active, in their new communities. Both articles emphasize providing a safe place for newcomers to develop community advocacy skills – or to learn to transfer those they already have – in a different cultural setting. In *“Latinos en Acción,”* Bertha Mejia, and Juan Gonzalez, board and staff member of Allston Brighton CDC, chronicle the path Latino residents in Allston Brighton have taken, with the CDC’s assistance, to become more involved in that neighborhood’s political and economic power structure. In *“Leadership Redefined: a Work in Progress,”* Ana Rodriguez describes a similar experience of finding, with the support of Lawrence CommunityWorks, a welcoming network of Lawrence residents that supports leadership development, volunteerism and activism.

The next two essays discuss organizing, the quest for equality and the importance of the community’s voice in neighborhood revitalization efforts. Authors Jeanne Du Bois and Frederico Rivera, staff members from Dorchester Bay EDC, discuss transit equity and building power in *“Fairmount Indigo Rail Line CDC Collaborative: Building Community Leaders and Power.”* Here we learn about a collaborative project that includes CDCs and other community organizations. In Dr. Christopher Thompson’s piece, *“The Mission is the People,”* we learn about the Quincy/Geneva CDC. Dr. Thompson tells a story of a CDC’s transition amid conflicting community perspectives and the birth of a renewed organization.

We conclude with two pieces that highlight the importance of youth organizing and development in our communities. Ricardo Jordan, E. Franklin Miller, and

Sharron Smith from Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation (EDC) examine the growth of a youth organizing initiative in *“Developing Leadership among Youth: The Youth Force Example.”*

The final piece, *“I Grew up Here”* by Edwige F. Norduleus, is a personal journey of a young woman’s growth through creative expression in the dynamic environment of Lawrence CommunityWorks’ youth program, Movement City.

This *Journal* is meant to provide a forum for many of the voices in our movement that are not normally heard. Our writers are not professional writers or academics. They are people who have taken a moment from the demands of their lives to share stories from which we, as a network of activists, can learn. We hope these pieces leave you viewing your community and its people in a new light.

Shirronda Almeida  
MACDC

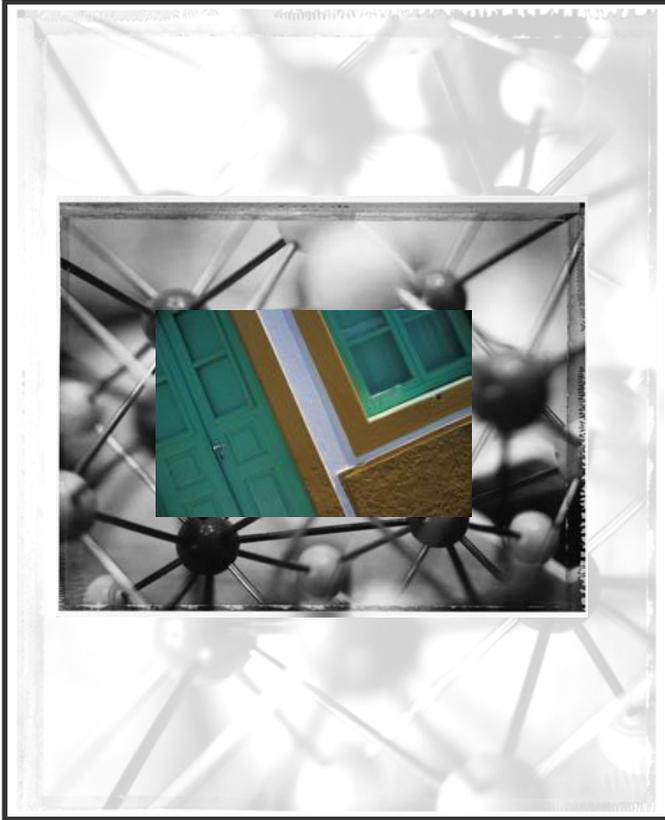
Ava Chan  
Allston Brighton CDC



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## **Our Neighbors Are Our Closest Family: An Immigrant's Perspective**

**Evelyn Saint Hilaire, Arlington Community Trabajando**

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When I immigrated to this country two years ago, I came with the belief that “our neighbors are our closest family.” This is a saying from my neighborhood, Bonaó, Moseñor Nouel, in the Dominican Republic. It signifies that we have to keep good relations with our fellowman because they are the ones who can provide us with immediate help when we are in a time of need.

Growing up in the Dominican Republic I had the best role model, my mother. She exemplified the saying, “Our neighbors are our closest family.” I remember when a neighbor was giving birth, my mother went to her house, to cook, clean, and help her with the newborn. She never accepted any form of payment. I admire and respect the values my mother instilled in me and when I decided to immigrate to the United States, I took these values with me.

However, when I arrived here I encountered another reality: neighbors are not your closest family. With a heart full of melancholy, I had to face a new culture, a new language, and a new lifestyle. I had left behind my friends, my job, and most importantly my network of resources. I found out the hard way that my network was the most valuable thing I had lost. In addition, the neighborhood I live in now is nothing like the neighborhood I left; we are not neighbors.

The way neighbors are here in the United States is very different from the Dominican Republic. Here people are more focused on their own life. There, helping neighbors is part of life as a community. This is why I feel the difference between what is a community here and what is a community there.

In the Dominican Republic, my neighbors used to come to my house to borrow money from my mother when they needed it because she did not charge them interest. Another custom in my country is to share food. We used to get together during the afternoon to chat or play some games, such as dominos, hide and seek, or cards. Also, if somebody was leaving the house for more than a day they would ask the closest neighbor to watch the house in case of thieves. We also had a neighborhood group that would take care of talking to the authorities when needed. These are the things that I believe can make improvements in the quality of life in the neighborhood.

Creating an atmosphere here similar to the one I left in the Dominican Republic seemed impossible because of what other people told me they had tried to accomplish here in the U.S. While taking a college course, I had a conversation with a classmate regarding neighborhoods, and we shared the same vision of changing attitudes about how people live here. We shared the vision of erasing the typical stereotype that exists about Latinos, specifically Dominicans; about

how lazy we are and that we do not help each other when we come to live here in the U.S. The belief in this stereotype also exists in our own culture. That was another reason I felt the desire to volunteer within the community, and then my classmate informed me about the organization Arlington Community Trabajando, Inc. (ACT).

Becoming a volunteer for a well-known community development corporation (CDC) such as ACT has reinforced my belief in what an ideal community should be. I became involved with ACT because of the need I felt to help others within the community. I remember when I went to my first ACT event, a Christmas neighborhood party in 2004. The collaboration and welcoming atmosphere made me realize that I wanted to be a part of this.

Since that day, I have been a volunteer for ACT and help plan events and participate in programs. I feel at home because this gives me the opportunity to be more connected with the community. Working with ACT, I found a place where I could implement the belief I came with from my country, the belief in caring about my community and being part of change. I realized we can contribute to improving the quality of life if we forget about our personal

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## **Constituents, Connections, and Communication: Creating a Framework for Empowerment**

**Ana Luna and Tennis Lilly, Arlington Community Trabajando**

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The Arlington district of Lawrence is an overwhelmingly Latino, working class neighborhood that has only recently begun recovering from a highly localized economic depression sparked by white flight during the 1980s. In the span of a single decade the local population shifted from Irish, Lebanese, and French-Canadian immigrants, who had grown into an established middle class, to poor and working-class immigrants from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic.

Spurred by the infamous riots in 1984, most of the middle-class “Anglo” population abandoned the community and took with them to surrounding suburbs the capital needed to maintain Arlington’s aging, turn-of-the-century housing stock. Combined with the final collapse of the local manufacturing job base, the neighborhood fell into a deep and rapid decay.

In place of a politically and economically established middle class of second- and third- generation immigrants linked by neighborhood groups and social clubs, the recent Latino immigrants, while socially vibrant and culturally cohesive, lacked economic and political power and were grossly under-represented in the local political-economic establishment.

interests and the differences in culture or position we might have. This belief is what makes ACT successful. Also, I would say ACT supports the neighborhood, the residents, as well as the business area, and the community's most valuable asset, its youth.

Community means joining forces for improving residents' needs in their neighborhood. This means resident involvement in creating solutions to benefit the neighborhood and thus, the city as a whole. There are certain vital components needed to build a community. In my opinion, the vital components for the ideal community are at minimum, caring for others unselfishly and sharing a common interest in solving community issues. And above all, individuals should join forces with community-based programs similar to ACT to increase the power of residents to voice their concerns.



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*Constituents...Continued from previous page*

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In the wake of disastrous (and sadly regular) floods in the Spicket River floodplain in 1996, several local political and economic "leaders," exclusively Anglo and most no longer residing in Lawrence, called for the Arlington district to be razed as part of a 1960s-style urban renewal project.

It was unbelievable to us, who have made this neighborhood our home, the way politicians wanted to help us was by demolishing the only place we could afford to call home. This moment of crisis confirmed our neighborhood's need to develop political power and true leaders from within our constituency.

One Sunday afternoon in 1996 Father Daily, a former priest of the now closed Assumption church, called an emergency community meeting. This meeting was the catalyst for many changes to come in the Arlington neighborhood.

So, as the Latino community decided to organize a neighborhood association, we quickly began identifying potential leaders, though deep down we knew it would take years to empower our people and create an organization that would become the voice of the Arlington neighborhood.

Our neighborhood was lucky to have residents like Rafaela Pichardo who began as a member of the Arlington Neighborhood Association (ANA) and is now the board president. Her involvement proved that truly selfless leaders come from among those whose lives are impacted by the issues. Rafaela still lives in the

flood zone and is focused on two main issues: affordable housing and youth development. Her desire to do something about these issues brought her into the organization. She currently helps coordinate youth activities, the annual neighborhood barbecue, and the National Night Out celebration.

It was through one of these organizing efforts that, two years ago, we were lucky to involve Evelyn St. Hilaire. The moment we left the microphone unattended she took over and began to entertain the crowd. At that moment we recognized another leader for our organization and she was hired as our community organizer. Her work has helped us engage new members, organize the community, and involve youth in all our programs.

Community organizing was an enormous challenge for our small organization; the Latino community had to create the economic and political networks to consolidate their power, spur civic activism, and build a local economy. We began building our networks, creating a board of directors, and as our membership grew we became more focused and began to believe that our political power was also growing.

This led us to one inescapable fact: we needed a stronger organization that would arm our leaders with the right tools to fight those who were ignoring our needs. We decided it was time to increase our power by transforming our small grassroots organization into a strong community development corporation, so in 1996 the Arlington Neighborhood Association (ANA) became the Arlington Community Trabajando (ACT) and an incorporated community development corporation (CDC).

The need to work in collaboration with other local CDCs, nonprofits, and neighborhood groups became paramount. Reaching out not only to ACT's constituents but also to stakeholders throughout the community presented a number of challenges and opportunities.

Thanks to constant networking, ACT has been able to successfully plan projects and turn out significant numbers of residents for events and regular meetings. We have made excellent use of local media including bilingual newspapers, local Spanish language radio, and local cable access. These connections helped us communicate our goals and engage the Latino community.

With resident involvement and support from our staff and board members we are now developing our second strategic plan, which will focus on our strengths and continue to build on our vision driven by residents and leaders who understand our struggles.

Organizing the Latino community was part of the work we had to do. In the process we learned how to develop leaders, engage our residents, and became the voice for our neighborhood. Simply put, we have been able to attract attention to

our neighborhood and teach others to see the “living” potential that resides in our community through our people.

It has been ten years since our initial meeting. We have learned many lessons in politics, developed numerous leaders and have run our organization with very little financial resources. We are also very proud to say that we have proved many people wrong. With our work, we proved that the Latino community could organize its people and focus on the issues affecting us. We have built strong networks and political relationships. Now we have power; opposing forces no longer have low expectations of us. We will never again hear anyone say “They can’t do this work” or “They’ll be gone in no time.” Instead we now hear them say, “Let’s invite ACT leaders to this meeting.”



**Tennis Lilly** is Chairperson of the Lawrence Conservation Commission. He previously served as Executive Director of Lawrence Grassroots Initiative. Tennis is active in environmental justice issues in Lawrence and first became involved in community activism by helping to lead the successful fight to protect Lawrence's Den Rock Park from commercial development in 1995. Tennis and his wife Michelle are raising their three children in Michelle's childhood home in the heart of the Arlington neighborhood.



**Ana Luna** is the Executive Director of Arlington Community Trabajando (ACT). For the past ten years, she has been actively supporting solutions on issues for social change, affordable housing, parks and open spaces, youth leadership, workforce and business development. She serves on several boards, where she takes on a leadership role and strives to motivate others to become leaders. She enjoys video editing and is currently the producer and host of ACT's television show.



**Evelyn Saint Hilaire** has always been a very mature individual; one who is family-and community-oriented. She believes the greatest influence on her has been her mother's willingness to serve others selflessly, and she wants to do the same. For the past two years, Evelyn has worked as a youth development coordinator and community organizer for the Arlington Community Trabajando, Inc. this has been a challenging and rewarding experience for her. During that time she strategized new ideas for the Youth Leadership Program, which helps provide young people with the skills needed to help the community and themselves.



# **Estimulando Puentes entre Negocios y Nuestra Comunidad para un Propósito en Común**

**Anabelle Rondon, Arlington Community Trabajando**

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Resulta que en los negocios, cuando se ofrece un servicio/producto a los clientes o cuando se invierte es con el propósito de hacer dinero, pero existe un conjunto social que no podemos descuidar: la comunidad en la que se hace negocios. Realmente la salud y el fuerte de una compañía están ligadas directamente al ambiente en la que el comerciante esta proveyendo sus servicios/productos, lo cual es la comunidad. Nuestras comunidades actúan como el hecho y el valor, expresando simultáneamente el mundo como es y como podría ser.

En nuestra ciudad (Lawrence, MA) el papel de liderazgo jugado por corporaciones o pequeños negocios latinos en la construcción de puentes con nuestra comunidad es bien diversa. Muchos de nuestros negocios latinos en nuestra comunidad no conocen la capacidad de su propia área o empresa. Nuestra organización (Arlington Community Trabajando) ha realizado encuestas en las que he entrevistado consumidores en la que con frecuencia no saben los servicios proveídos en su comunidad, por lo tanto ellos consumen fuera de la ciudad. Esto es señal de falta de existencia de una red efectiva entre negocios y la comunidad.

El potencial verdadero de una red de negocio en nuestra comunidad nunca se debe subestimar, este puede ser el catalizador que une la comunidad y proporciona medios para el desarrollo sostenible. Una red bien estructurada construye una estable comunidad y a la vez ofrece altos niveles de apoyo de gobiernos y el sector privado. Considero que a la vez debe de existir colaboración de la comunidad porque cuando se integra a hacer conexiones con negocios, nuestra gente llega a ser más unida y exitosa en lograr un crecimiento a largo plazo. Una vez estas conexiones son establecidas surgen nuevos negocios y creando oportunidades de empleo aumentando la habilidad de atraer y mantener clientes. Nuestro papel debe de ser un ejemplo para el cambio positivo en mantener nuestras comunidades: envolviendo a nuestro alrededor como familias, empleados y amigos a identificar las necesidades de estos, para así crear una visión de qué cambios deben realizarse, y a la vez, inspirar a los otros a seguir.

## **Porqué es importante la existencia de puentes entre los negocios y la comunidad**

Los negocios en la comunidad tienen un importante papel que jugar, y mucho en ganar. La relación entre ambos extremos de los puentes ofrece un sin número de beneficios como son las conexiones o relaciones potenciales que impactarían positivamente a los negocios. Otros de los beneficios serian el conocimiento que se obtiene, el liderazgo y habilidades que le ayudan de una manera u otra a

aumentar automáticamente la economía de su negocio y el desarrollo de la comunidad. Si las ganancias y los conocimientos aumentan mediante estos puentes, se crearía mas fuentes de trabajo enriqueciendo y empoderando con una significativa contribución para mejorar la calidad y medio de vida.

En este proceso debe de existir una participación activa, porque de lo contrario si estos NO participan en las desiciones y envisionar el futuro de la comunidad mediante estrategias y planes, el interés de estos disminuye. Es de suma importancia tomar en cuenta la calidad humana de ambas partes y para que sea efectivos los puentes se deben integrar lideres de negocios que faciliten los programas y planes de acuerdo a su nivel de experiencia, habilidades y conocimientos.

## **¡Negociantes! ¿Cual es tu rol como líder en la comunidad?**

En ocasiones he tenido la impresión de que muchos dueños de negocios tienen la idea de que tener una conexión activa en la comunidad significa tener la responsabilidad por el bienestar (welfare) y necesidades de la sociedad. Muchos de estos afirman de que este trabajo es responsabilidad de la iglesia y los políticos, y no, esto es totalmente negativo. Al igual que la iglesia y políticos, los negociantes son la parte activa e importante en la economía de la ciudad, son lideres con valores y estandares a seguir. Los jóvenes, la familias y la sociedad espera un liderazgo sin condiciones. Un liderazgo que practique reciprocidad, reconozca la acción de cooperación, busque maneras de implicarse más en la red social local de la comunidad en la que el negocio esta localizado. Deben de cuidar el terreno para hacer del entorno un mejor lugar donde vivir y trabajar, como también un buen lugar donde consumir e invertir.

*“Como entidad tenemos una comunicación activa con nuestros clientes. Identificamos lideres activos en la comunidad en la que ofrecemos nuestros servicios. Un buen ejemplo es que si estamos brindando servicio en una area donde una gran parte de la población es latina, nuestros representantes tienen que ser lideres latinos en la cual mantienen una conexión en un aspecto cultural y de desarrollo de la comunidad. Esto beneficia a la misma y a su vez contribuye a ser un puente entre esa comunidad latina y nuestra entidad, de esta forma que las necesidades de nuestras comunidad sean cumplidas de forma mas satisfactoria.”*

*Gladys Mencia, Sovereign Bank*

Si estos no toman un paso adelante y asumen su rol de liderazgo en la comunidad, estos podrían quedar fuera de las prioridades de los gobiernos y políticos. El empresario debe recordar o verse a sí mismos como las piezas del rey o la reina en un juego de ajedrez.

## ¡Empecemos a Estimular Puentes! Con la ayuda de Corporaciones o grupos de Desarrollo Comunitario

Cuando hablamos de estimular puentes es muy importante tomar en cuenta varios factores para la creación de estos. Entre los factores podría considerar los intermediarios con la comunidad que este caso serian los grupos comunitarios o corporaciones.

Pienso que como intermediarios no estamos buscando el 100% de su tiempo o cooperación queremos una participación activa teniendo en cuenta la cooperación de uno con el otro cumplimos nuestros compromisos mutuos y compartiendo los logros de nuestra comunidad, tal como las facilidades y recursos de manera responsable. Entiendo que un negocio tiene bastantes responsabilidades que seguir con sus metas propias pero deben mantener una comunicación con organizaciones o grupos comunitarios en la cual pueden ayudarles a estar conectado con la comunidad porque nosotros estamos día a día con el contacto directo de nuestra sociedad. Como organización comunitaria tratamos a todos con respeto, honorando la dignidad y el valor de cada miembro de nuestra comunidad.

### Deben de Informarse

Seria muy fácil mantenerse al tanto de que esta pasando en nuestra comunidad por medio a organizaciones comunitarias ya que contestemente estas están proveyendo al público fuentes de datos, informes o reportes anuales de los programas que ellos corren o de los fondos que reciben para el desarrollo de la comunidad. Otras de las ventajas de informarse y ser parte de estas organizaciones es el servicio que pueden ofrecer estas organizaciones a los

*“La conexión con nuestra comunidad es imprescindible; la idea es combinar recursos. El estar activos con líderes comunitarios, en actividades, eventos culturales y reuniones comunitarias nos permite a ambas partes facilitar aprendizaje, experiencia y desarrollo de habilidades.”*

Dolores Calaf,  
Cambridge College, Lawrence Site

negocios que en muchas ocasiones son gratuitos. Como por ejemplo hacer proyecto para los negocios, como hacer limpiezas anuales que embellezen y renuevan el área de su negocio, otro sería que a los programas que ofrecen estas organizaciones usted puede ir desarrollando una relación amistosa con su comunidad asegurando la representación mayor del negocio en un nivel estratégico.

## Estrategias e Ideas para Iniciar la Conexión de un Negocio a la Comunidad

- Conoce los líderes activos en tu comunidad y trata de involucrarte en ella, asistiendo a reuniones comunitarias, comparte opiniones e ideas y a la vez asegúrate de estar informado de grupo locales por medio a su sitio web, boletines, canales comunitarios, etc.
- Asocíate estratégicamente en tu comunidad o adopta una organización para traer habilidades esenciales, tal como el plan de trabajo de la empresa y el conocimiento de la economía local, que puede beneficiar mucho los planes para el área local.
- Abre tus puertas ofreciendo tiempo voluntario por un día o semana, patrocinando grupos comunitario por un tiempo determinado, como por ejemplo en el verano programa de baseball para niños. También puedes involucrarte en programas para mentores en la cual ayudarás. Aporta en becas educativas Individuales o donativos como recursos o computadoras que ya no utiliza.
- Promueve en tu negocio causas comunitarias como recaudaciones de fondos, folletos y circulares.
- Provee trabajo de verano a Jóvenes que necesitan la oportunidad de trabajar. Los jóvenes son el futuro de nuestra comunidad y posiblemente en el futuro sean los que administren tu negocio.
- Una vez envuelto en la comunidad trate de escuchar y comprender todos los puntos de vistas de las personas que tengan experiencia en tomar decisiones.

Para finalizar me gustaría recalcar nuevamente que como Latina y orgullosamente representante del programa de desarrollo de negocios de *Arlington Community Trabajando*, (CDC), (Corporación de desarrollo comunitario) identificamos una importante necesidad y es de reforzar asociaciones entre los líderes en nuestra comunidad, líderes de negocio, funcionarios y personajes públicos, en la cual procuramos construir comunidades fuertes. Juntos podemos identificar las oportunidades de dirigir las necesidades dentro de nuestras comunidades, y nosotros podemos trabajar para unir nuestros recursos, las habilidades y el conocimiento. Trabajando juntos como líderes en una comunidad sana, tenemos una oportunidad maravillosa para mover la esfera y para tener un impacto positivo en nuestra gente y la salud de la economía.





**Anabelle Rondón** nació y creció en Santo Domingo, República Dominicana. Ella inmigró a los Estados Unidos en el 2002 e inmediatamente se envolvió en la comunidad junto a Arlington Community Trabajando, Inc, una organización de desarrollo comunitario, con sus siglas en inglés (CDC) . En ésta coordina el programa de desarrollo de negocios llamado (BDI) Business Diversity Initiative.

Cuando niña, constantemente acompañaba a sus padres en su negocio de decoraciones de interiores y pasaba horas mirándolos trabajar. Una vez fue creciendo en éste ambiente, empezó a trabajar con ellos y tener nuevas responsabilidades, como sirviendo a los clientes y hasta balanceando los libros de contabilidad. De esta manera se fue desarrollando en ella la pasión por los negocios y su interés en los negocios dentro de su comunidad. Ella piensa tener su negocio algún día no muy lejano y por esta razón en la actualidad se está preparando para obtener mayores conocimientos y obtener su licenciatura en la administración de negocios en Cambridge college.

## **Building Bridges between Businesses and Our Community for a Common Purpose**

**Annabelle Rondon, Arlington Community Trabajando**

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When you offer a service or product to clients, or when you invest in a business, you do it with the intention of making money. But the community in which the business is located should not be forgotten. The health and strength of companies are tied to the environment in which they operate. Our communities react with action and courage, expressing how the world is and how it could be. In our city of Lawrence, Massachusetts, the role played by corporations and small Latino businesses in building bridges in our community is very broad. Many of the Latino businesses do not realize the potential for business in their own community. Our organization, Arlington Community Trabajando, has completed surveys that involved interviewing consumers who frequently indicated that they did not know that certain services are provided in our community, so go out of town to get what they need. This is a clear sign of the lack of an effective network between businesses and the community.

The real potential for a business in our community must never be taken lightly; it could be a catalyst that unites the community and provides the means for economic development. A well structured network can build a stable community and also offer high levels of support from the government and the private sector. At the same time there should be the collaboration. When you connect with businesses, people are more united and successful in reaching a long term growth. Once these connections are established, new businesses flourish and create job opportunities, improving our ability to attract and keep customers. Our role should be an example for positive change in keeping our communities: involving our families, employees and friends, identifying their needs, so we can create a vision for which changes can be made and at the same time inspire others.

### **Why Building Bridges Between Businesses and the Community is Important**

Businesses play an important role in our community and have much to gain from us. The relationship between these two sides of the bridge offer many benefits to businesses, such as connections or relationships that have a positive impact on businesses. Other benefits would include the knowledge you can obtain, the leadership skills that can help you improve the finances of your business and the development of the community. When income and knowledge improve through these bridges, this creates more jobs enriching and empowering as a significant contribution the community and improving the quality of life.

In this process, there should be active participation by local businesses, otherwise people's interest in the community will diminish if the decision making and visioning for the community lacks their participation. It is very important to consider both sides; for community development to be effective, business leaders must be integrated within the community by contributing their expertise and skills.

## **Entrepreneur! What is Your Role as a Leader in the Community?**

Sometimes I have the impression that many business owners think that having an active connection with the community means taking responsibility for the welfare and needs of the society. Many business people say that this is the work of the church and the politicians, but this is totally wrong. Just like the church and the politicians, business owners are important and an active part in the economy of a city, they are leaders with values and standards to follow. Youth, families and society expect unconditional leadership. A leadership that can practice reciprocity, that recognizes cooperation, looks for ways to get involved in the local social network in the community in which their business is located. They should take care of the environment in which they live to make it a better place to live and work, and also a better place to buy and invest.

*“As a community business we have active communication with our customers . . . . One good example is that when we offer services in an area where the majority population is Latino, our representatives must be Latino leaders who can maintain a cultural connection and help grow the community. This benefits us and contributes to building bridges in the Latino community, while making sure that our community needs are met in a more satisfactory way.”*

Gladys Mencia,  
Sovereign Bank

If business owners don't make the first move and take seriously their leadership role in the community, they may stop being a priority for the government and politicians. The entrepreneur must look at him- or herself as the king or queen in a chess game.

## **Let's Start Building Bridges with the Help of Corporations and Community Development Groups**

When we talk about building bridges between the community and businesses it is very important to consider who should act as intermediaries. This is the role of community groups or corporations.

I think that as intermediaries were not looking to local businesses for 100 percent of their time; we just want active participation because their cooperation allows us to fulfill our mutual promises. We want them to share our goals in the community. I understand that a business has a lot of responsibilities but they should keep in contact with the community groups that can keep them connected with the community. As a community organization, we treat business people with respect, acknowledging the dignity and worth of every member of our community.

## **Business People Must Stay Informed**

It is very easy to stay informed about what's happening in our community

*"The connection between our community is essential; the idea is to combine resources. Staying active with community leaders, through community meetings and cultural events, allows both sides to facilitate learning through experience and develops our skills."*

Dolores Calaf,  
Cambridge College, Lawrence Site

through community groups who provide, information or produce annual reports of programs. One advantage to businesses of staying informed and being part of these organizations is that they can use the free services provided by these community groups, like annual cleanups that beautify and invigorate the area. Another is developing a friendly relationship with your community to ensure a representation of the business on a strategic level.

## **Strategies and Ideas for Businesses to Get Involved in Their Community**

- Know your community leaders and get involved; go to community meetings, share opinions and ideas, and stay informed about local groups through their Web sites, fliers, public access television, etc.
- Build strategic alliances in your community or adopt an organization to bring special skills, like a work plan and the knowledge of local economy, which would benefit local plans.
- Open your doors by volunteering; sponsor community groups, for example, summer baseball programs for kids. You can also get involved in programs for mentors. Help fund individual scholarships, donate resources or computers.

- Promote community causes in your business through fundraising, newsletters, and fliers.
- Provide summer jobs for youth who need an opportunity to work. Youth are the future of our communities and could possibly even be managing your business someday.
- Once you are involved in the community listen and try to understand the points of view of experienced decision makers.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that I am a proud Latina and a representative of the business development program for Arlington Community Trabajando (Arlington Community Development Corporation). We have identified an important need to strengthen relationships between community leaders, business leaders, and public officials in order to build a strong community. Together we can identify opportunities to address the needs of our community and share our resources, skills, and knowledge. Working together as leaders in a safe community, we have a wonderful opportunity to make changes that will have a positive impact on our people and build a healthy economy.

The Arlington Community Trabajando Business Diversity Initiative has helped over 250 local entrepreneurs with resources for starting businesses, technical assistance, networking opportunities, and seminars. In 2005 the Initiative was in charge of the successful exposition for businesses called Business Expo. Designed to energize the business community, it provided a low-cost yet effective opportunity for local businesses to display, sell, and promote their products and services. It also served to bring organizations together for professional development, networking, and to support economic growth. Participants included schools, banks, dentists, opticians, grocery stores, fashion boutiques, and others. A second successful Expo took place in September 2006.



**Anabelle Rondon** was born and raised in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. She immigrated to the United States in 2002 and became involved with Arlington Community Trabajando (CDC), coordinating their Business Diversity Initiative. As a child, she often accompanied her parents to their home interior decoration business and spent hours watching them work. As she grew up, Anabelle started to work with them, waited on customers, and even balanced the books. In this manner she developed her passion for business and her interest in

businesses in the community; she is determined to have her own some day. Anabelle is currently working on her bachelor's degree in business management at Cambridge College.



## **Latinos en Acción**

**Juan Gonzalez and Bertha Mejia, Allston Brighton CDC**

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It is not easy to get involved and try to change a frustrating reality when you are a newcomer; you feel like a stranger and “not welcome,” speak another language, and your last name means “I come from another land.” The excitement of being in a new reality could energize the new resident to build dreams, but nostalgia could pull this person back to the home country. Discrimination against prevents any motivation to be involved in community life. Fear and uncertainty prevail, while the person lives with these mixed emotions.

Latinos in Allston Brighton were mostly program participants, attended ESL classes, worshiped at local churches, gathered at local coffee shops to exchange information about jobs, apartments, and to share stories and expectations, but they were not politically organized. Then in October 2000, a group of leaders decided to start an organizing process supported by the Allston Brighton CDC to respond to a concrete need for Latinos to become part of the mainstream Allston Brighton political, economical, and cultural life. The CDC Strategic Planning goals pointed toward that vision and *Latinos en Acción* was formed.

*Latinos en Accion*’s approach was based on cultural identity and the need to first create a safe environment in which members could effectively participate. The first step consisted of organizing community events to emphasize the importance of the diverse Latino cultures and heritages and show why visibility was critical. Creating a sense of a safe community for the members was a necessary and carefully planned step.

After several successful social events and a gradual empowering process, the core group of Latino leaders asked themselves some critical questions: How could *Latinos en Acción* become a community group that successfully fights for Allston Brighton Latino residents’ rights? How could Latinos move from being invisible and unchallenged to confronting the status quo and taking some risks? How could our personal stories be used to illustrate our reality and influence political decisions? How can we be safe as activists in this country? What kind of risks do we need to take? Safety and confidence in the leaders’ responses to these questions was the deciding factor in the decision to move to the next phase.

The time was right to meet and begin a collective reality check. The key concerns of Latinos in the area were quickly defined: Immigration, housing, education, health, and safety were generic issues that reflected a complex reality. This was followed by an analysis of how and when the group could be effective addressing these issues. They considered their strengths and weaknesses, their experience and the areas in which they lacked knowledge, individual and community concerns, the meaning of economic and political power, oppression and fear of retaliation. Housing was chosen as the first problem to be tackled, and

substandard housing the issue to be targeted. The result was a collective vision for a better future regarding housing for low- and moderate-income Allston Brighton residents.

In 2002 *Latinos en Acción* held several community meetings about the housing issue, and then, unexpectedly, several community residents began complaining about an unknown insect that was troubling them and their children. In the fall of 2002 *Latinos en Acción* confirmed the return of blood-sucking bedbugs: a menace to health, comfort, and finances. *Latinos en Acción* then had a clear issue to work on and dealing with a problem that can affect anyone was a good start to fighting substandard housing.

Early in 2003 *Latinos en Acción* invited non-Latino residents to help strategize the best way to address the bedbug outbreak, and the next move was to invite the recently elected local city councilor. Five tenants were nominated to share their personal stories to call the councilor's attention to this problem. Although five were invited, seventeen residents showed up for the meeting; they did not want to miss the opportunity to interact with an elected official and support the petition to hold a city council hearing on the problem. Their presence was a great help. The councilor began with a statement that bedbugs were not a health problem, but just annoying insects; therefore there was no reason to be alarmed. Tenants quickly responded with facts and were able to describe how bedbug infestations had made their lives miserable.

After hearing compelling stories from everyone in the room the councilor left the meeting with a clear picture of the problem and promised to schedule a hearing. For some residents this was their first chance to meet with an elected official and to test the power of their voices. Allston Brighton CDC began a media campaign and a local newspaper told the story of the bedbug outbreak in Allston Brighton.

The promised city council hearing was delayed by the city budget discussions but it finally was a reality in August 2003. A ten-year old Brazilian girl was the leading voice from the community. She described how her family's dream of having a bigger and better apartment turned into a nightmare: her little brother was covered with bites, her parents had to throw out their new, expensive furniture, her favorite shoes also went in the dumpster, while the landlord didn't give any help and blamed the tenants. Her story was followed by three other powerful testimonies, including one from a new homeowner in Allston. In the audience was a reporter from a main local newspaper whose report on the hearing appeared on the second page of the newspaper the following Monday. This article sparked intensive local coverage by six TV channels and a major Boston newspaper.

The city council responded with an increase in the Inspectional Service Department budget, but just enough to hire two inspectors. *Latinos en Acción*

felt that this was just the beginning. More action was required to achieve better responses from the city council. Early in 2004 Latinos en Acción decided to organize an Action Day to demand three basic conditions: resources to fund an educational campaign about the problem, monetary help to assist tenants and property owners, as well as an anonymous tip line to report infestations. Latino leaders contacted community residents who were experiencing the problem and were willing to take some action, and accumulated new stories; some with a humorous side, such as the story of “Bedbug Road” (*Pervejejo Road*) referring to a neighborhood street with several infested buildings. A classic response from people who have suffered oppression is to joke about a sad reality as a way to channel their frustrations.

Four residents volunteered to highlight their own experiences and to prove that a bedbug infestation can happen to anyone, that it is not linked to poor cleaning habits, and that it is a hard pest to exterminate in an apartment with cracks and crevices where the pests can hide. Elected officials, the media, and neighbors were invited to Action Day. As a result of Action Day the Inspectional Service Department quickly installed the tip line and promised more support by conducting full inspections in compliance with tenants’ rights to live in a decent place. Two local elected officials allocated resources to start the Bedbug Eradication Initiative. Soon after the Action Day, the Boston City Council toured the neighborhood and saw first-hand the infestation problem.

The Bedbug Eradication Initiative has educated residents about the infestation, it has helped tenants replace infested beddings, and it has provided resources to homeowners and property managers. This community experience transcended Allston Brighton borders. For the past year, Latinos en Acción has been working with members of other communities affected by bedbugs, and successfully hosted the first Greater Boston Bedbug Conference in September 2006.

Through the process, Latino residents have developed their leadership skills and have proven that they are active community members highly engaged in civic events. Working with the Allston Brighton CDC’s Community Organizing Department they have strengthened tenants’ organizing abilities and gained more community confidence. Latinos en Acción has made a difference. Now they are looking to the horizon again and new initiatives are emerging.





**Bertha Mejia** moved to Allston Brighton in 1987 from Nicaragua. She first came to the Allston Brighton CDC in 1997 for a home-buying class taught in Spanish. She then volunteered with planning the classes and became a member of the Ethnic Festival planning committee. In 2000, Bertha was elected to the board of directors of the CDC and became the first Latina board vice president *and* subsequently, first Latina president. As a North

Allston resident, Bertha is also active in the community planning process with Harvard University. She has been instrumental in getting her neighbors to participate in this process, as well as ensuring that their voices are heard and factored into long-range plans. Bertha holds an AS and BS degree in biomedical technology and clinical sciences from Boston University. She works at the State Laboratory Institute, University of Massachusetts Medical Center.



**Juan H. González** is Director of Community Organizing and Membership Development at the Allston Brighton CDC. In his country of origin, Guatemala, he worked for the Universidad de San Carlos and the United Nations Development Program. He assisted rural communities designing economic projects, preserving their natural resources, and carrying out leadership development

programs. Juan came to the U.S. in 1992, and joined Centro Presente as the Director of Community Education and Organizing, working with Latino immigrants who needed legal assistance. In 1999 he was hired by the Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership as a trainer for the Community Leadership and Organizing Center. Juan holds a master of science degree from the University of Minnesota. He joined Allston Brighton CDC's staff in 2000.





## **Leadership Redefined: A Work in Progress**

Ana Rodriguez, Lawrence CommunityWorks

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### **A Place to Guide in the First Steps Towards a New Life**

I am from Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, and, like many of my fellow compatriots, I came to the United States with the hope of making a better life. What does that mean? To be able to work and sustain my family and, often, my extended family left behind. To be able to learn a second language and have my children live in a place where there are more opportunities to get an education and have a successful life.

I moved to Lawrence, Massachusetts, in February 1986. Five years earlier, while pregnant with my daughter Karina, I visited for a month and fell in love with the city and especially with the amazing story of how “The City of Immigrants” came about. Lawrence appeared small enough to walk from one side of town to the other.

My experience when I moved to Lawrence is a common one. I looked for employment, a school for my children, a religious congregation, and a place that would provide me with the do’s and don’ts of the town. I was able to obtain many of those things but it took me a long time, some tears, and lots of work.

When I first joined the CDC-Lawrence CommunityWorks in 1988/89 it had one staff person and the board did a lot of the work. Through them, I learned about the housing problems, the cost of rent, and the need to have more affordable units. In 2002 I began to participate more actively with the organization. I joined the board of directors and was elected board president from 2003 to 2005. Serving on the board offered many opportunities for growth and learning. I also got to protest and rally and met with our city councilors many times to get things done.

I remember when we finally got the “green monster” demolished. A couple of blocks from my home, a green house was being used as a crack house and drug dealing place. It was not only an eyesore but also represented something we wanted to eliminate from our neighborhood—the gangs and drugs. Getting the green monster demolished was a great day for us. A family from LCW is now the proud owner of the two-family home in that lot.

Lawrence CommunityWorks (LCW) has been able to create an environment where members can find the network of support needed to learn about the new culture, the language, and the expectations of the society they have chosen to embrace. There is a need for this—according to the 2000 Census, Lawrence has a 90 percent immigrant population. Most of the population is of

Hispanic/Latino origin; Dominicans and Puerto Ricans are the predominant immigrant groups. What took me years to accomplish is reduced substantially when you are part of an organization like LCW.

At LCW all the meetings are structured so that participants are active decision makers. The way members participate also mirrors the scale of needs. For example, someone might become a member in order to join the Computer Club and learn computer skills, but later become active with the membership committee and reach out to new members. Or, she might join the PODER Leadership Institute, a tool for those ready to expand their leadership horizons. Participants of PODER prepare themselves to actively engage in the decisions that impact our community, such as the city budget, street cleanups, housing issues, etc.

## **An Organizing Strategy Based on Building Relationships**

Lawrence CommunityWorks has put in place multilayer strategies to get people to attend meetings and be interested and take action in their neighborhood. A welcoming smile, a warm hug, being called by your name, and familiarity with your projects are the marks that identify the members and organizers of the Lawrence CommunityWorks. Building relationships is integrated into every aspect of LCW activities.

## **How We Have Created a Sense of Belonging**

Creating an environment that is safe and investing in people are core values of LCW, and through its different programs it has been successful in bringing together people from all walks of life. To be a member the only requirement is to live or work in Lawrence. Today, the membership is made up of individuals of all ages and gender. The opportunity to work together helps to bridge generation and cultural gaps. Members have the choice of becoming involved in a number of courses or groups. Most activities are targeted toward the development of skills that can be immediately used by members. Or they can just attend neighborhood meetings as needed or participate in the annual meeting.

In order to reach the different ethnic groups and attract as many community members as possible, outreach strategies are refined and adapted as needed. Those who become engaged with the work of the LCW are able to have a voice in defining and prioritizing its aims. Once members feel that their voices are heard, they become committed to the work. As so many have said, “Lawrence CommunityWorks is like my family.”

The staff is easy to reach and many speak Spanish, the language of most of the community. Most of them live in Lawrence; many own property here. They

grew up and have relatives in Lawrence. They eat and party in the same places as the members of LCW, and open their homes to LCW activities, and many become mentors and often friends of young members. We cry together and celebrate our successes together.

I have noticed the growth of the members, their participation in public forums and presentations. Their aspiration to leadership roles is also noticed in the larger community. Marta Rentas, a kindergarten teacher and long-time Lawrence resident, joined Lawrence CommunityWorks three or four years ago; she was elected to the board of directors two years ago and is currently the president of the board. Ruth Rojas, who bought an LCW home in 2002, joined the board in 2003 and the PODER Institute in 2004. In 2005, she was the first member of LCW to run for a seat on the city council in 2005.

A quarterly newsletter keeps members informed of ongoing projects, new ideas, and, most of all, the people that have made things happen; collaborators, staff, and volunteers are featured and recognized. Stories appear of members' struggles to survive and how they found the support they needed at LCW. The youth always get the spotlight through the great events they organize.

The board is kept informed of our heroes through our Volunteer of the Month program. How much like a family LCW is; being able to meet other people; the satisfaction of contributing to the organization with their talents; and achieving a cherished dream through LCW are recurring themes in the stories shared by the volunteers.

## **A Case of Inspiration: How Lawrence CommunityWorks Impacts an Individual, Her Family, Friends and the Neighborhood**

Upon joining LCW, one of my neighbors, Teofila Richardson, changed from an unemployed single mother with little hope and lots of problems into a woman dealing with her financial problems while moving toward economic stability. She learned how to save and how to best use the resources available. She also learned how to make and decorate cakes and started her own home-based business. This woman learned that she could work from her house, attend classes to continue developing other skills, and save money toward a college-level course. She has been an inspiration to her children and friends. She inspired me to continue dedicating time to working in the community. Her involvement in LCW allowed her to see that life was more than the problems she was going through and that there was hope for better things for herself and her family. She is also someone who describes her friends at Lawrence CommunityWorks as her family.

## **Volunteers as Leaders**

The concept of volunteerism that we practice at Lawrence CommunityWorks is new in the Latino community. In conversations with some friends, we all agreed that helping a friend or neighbor is widely practiced in our countries. Cooking some extra food just in case someone shows up at dinner is done automatically in many Latino homes. I do it in my home. But we agreed that volunteering for the pleasure of giving time and sharing our talents, and doing it in a consistent manner, is new for a lot of us.

For a newcomer, having the opportunity to learn about the community, the types of jobs available, and where to gain new skills, is a vital step. A person who had just moved to Lawrence and didn't know about the organization was invited by his daughter to visit LCW. The first day he was there she gave him a broom to help clean up a park. He quickly learned that LCW is just what the name says; people from the community working together towards a common goal. The development of this community workforce is an amazing aspect of LCW; we have seen it grow steadily in the past two or three years.

While doing volunteer work at LCW, the member is able to tap into the network and acquire precious information, contacts, and job sites, all with support from members and staff. Volunteer work becomes something they can include in a résumé, along with using the LCW name as a local contact who will serve as a reference. Individuals with no previous exposure to a public forum are able to develop the confidence to speak up and advocate for a housing project, a new park, or clean streets. Becoming a member of an LCW board is not an impossibility. Each group functions as a small decision-making body that takes on fundraisers, community forums, and cleanups. Being in the group both requires and helps people develop a set of skills.

A volunteer who offers his / her home for a Neighbor Circle is also being trained in outreach, organizing, and facilitation skills. The volunteer learns how to conduct a meeting and later bring the ideas of the group to the next level with the implementation of solutions to identified issues. One learns how to prepare a small presentation to deliver to the city council. A language barrier or lack of education are overcome by the deep interest in expressing a view of how to make things better for their neighborhood. Every time a person takes on responsibilities and carries out an event from planning to delivery, he/she is able to redefine what leadership means. I have seen how the people grow in this process, increase their self-esteem, and go on to take on other challenges.

Recently, during a board retreat, an exercise we participated in that explored who we are, where we come from, and what we do, made it clearer to me what volunteer work means to different members of our board. For some board members, giving time back or doing volunteer work has been in the fabric of

their family, “I grew up doing volunteer work. It is second nature,” says Armand Hyatt, a founder of LCW.

For some, coming from another country and experiencing very hard living conditions, volunteer work comes later in life, and is a result of a need of or interest in the cause. Belgica Urbaez has a doctor’s degree and comes from a very humble family in the Dominican Republic. She has been a board member for a few years and giving time is a new experience for her. She joined LCW because, she says, “I liked the way I was listened to by the staff.” She and the staff from LCW met due to a problem; the result of the meeting was a great movement forward in our efforts to build a community center. Today this woman is a cornerstone of the committee that leads Our House, a technology and community center.

Our youngest member of the board came to the city of Lawrence from New York City for a family visit. However, he very quickly appreciated the potential that moving to Lawrence offered. “I liked the calmness of the city,” he says, “[and at LCW] I feel needed and that I can give.” His family are all members of LCW. For the children of our members, volunteer work will be second nature.

Our board is composed of people from all walks of life. We are lawyers, doctors, students, bankers, social workers, administrators, parents, nurses, native Lawrencians and immigrants, but we share a common ground: we are all convinced that we need to put our efforts together to make Lawrence a better place to live.

## **Leadership Is Redefined**

At LCW the opportunities to give and feel valued are endless. Each person has the potential to be a leader and LCW nurtures every person, allowing them to develop to their full potential. Leading a cleanup group, distributing flyers, identifying other members, promoting the programs, cooking dinners, organizing fundraisers, taking action on issues that concern the community, and having a voice at city council or legislative meetings—we are all able to find a way to apply our leadership skills. Leadership is redefined when you enter the doors of LCW.

It has been a great honor to work hand-in-hand with the staff, donors, and volunteers who have made possible the many amenities we all enjoy today. I am proud to belong to an organization that truly follows the mandates of its mission. The relationship of the organization and membership is based on an equal exchange of values, skills, and resources; all geared toward the betterment of the entire community.





**Ana Rodriguez** has been a resident of Lawrence since 1986. She has worked in the human services field for over 15 years and has experience with battered women, violence prevention, education of adults, and mental health of adults and children. Ana is a past president of the Greater Lawrence Family Health Center and Lawrence CommunityWorks and a current member of the Board of Trustees Lawrence Public Library. Ana is also active with St. Mary's of the Assumption Church and Habitat for Humanity. She has a Master's Degree in Administration of Services from Springfield College. Outside of work, Ana loves gardening and sewing. She

lives with her spouse and has raised two children as well as several dogs and birds.



# Boston's Newest *Smart Growth* Corridor

A COLLABORATIVE VISION FOR THE FAIRMOUNT/INDIGO LINE

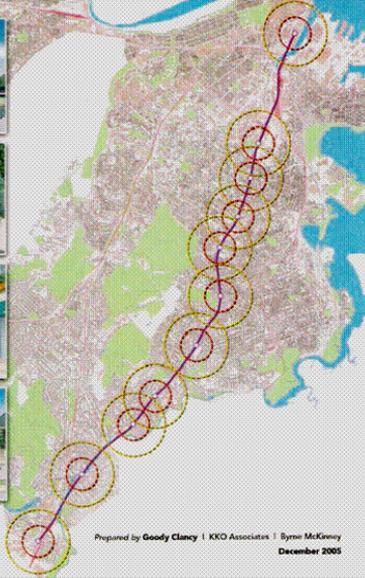
## Boston's Newest *Smart Growth* Corridor

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Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation | Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation  
Mattapan Community Development Corporation | Southeast Boston Community Development Corporation



Prepared by **Goody Clancy** | KKD Associates | Byrne McKinney  
December 2005

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December 2005

## **Fairmount Indigo Rail Line CDC Collaborative: Building Community Leaders and Power**

Jeanne Du Bois and Federico Rivera, Dorchester Bay EDC

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The Fairmount Indigo Rail Line Community Development Corporation (CDC) Collaborative is an immense community organizing effort that will affect over 170,000 people in Boston's communities of-color and immigrant neighborhoods. Four CDCs—Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation, Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation, Mattapan Community Development Corporation, and Southwest Boston CDC teamed up two years ago to form the Fairmount Line CDC Collaborative to organize with other transit allies and public officials to upgrade an underperforming MBTA commuter rail line with few stops and little service in these neighborhoods.

In the Dorchester, Mattapan, and Hyde Park neighborhoods, there are many immigrants. In Upham's Corner, over 67 percent of the population is Cape Verdean, Caribbean, Latino, or some other immigrant group. In Codman Square and Mattapan there is a large number of Haitian and other Caribbean residents. Hyde Park, formerly a white working-class area, is now over 50 percent people of color and has many immigrants. The average salaries in the area are low. The MBTA's sparse offerings in these areas demonstrate a strategy of institutional racism that allowed eleven stops on Fairmount Indigo rail line to be abandoned.

Suzy Sicard, a mother of three, who lives in Mattapan, is a typical example of the people from the area who use the MBTA daily to travel to and from work in Downtown Boston. Her journey requires two bus rides, a train ride, and takes over an hour's time each way. She is unable to understand why she is not able to take the commuter rail that passes through her community, which would allow her to save considerable time and money on her daily commute. She and others like her in Mattapan, Hyde Park, Dorchester, and Roxbury are denied a vital service that would make such a difference to the economic development of their neighborhoods. The rail service will increase access to the neighborhoods and support local businesses. By contrast, the Boston suburb of Brookline, which is predominantly white and affluent, benefits from three train lines less than a mile from each other. For thirty years now, because of poor transit services, lower income folks in places like Dorchester Bay and Codman Square have had to take twice as long to get to their destinations and pay twice as much. The more members of these communities realized that previously good services were taken away from them, the angrier they became.

Within the first twelve months of organizing, the CDCs provided additional support to the original transit activists who had been calling for change for four years. The activists included Four Corners Action Coalition, ACE (Alternatives for Community and Environment), Action for Regional Equity, plus individuals

from Transportation departments. The CDCs were rooted locally and were able to engage people along the entire nine-mile rail corridor between South Station in downtown Boston and the Fairmont neighborhood of Hyde Park. When state and local political leaders saw the passion of residents up and down the line, they responded to this important issue. By May 18, 2005, we had close to \$87 million in political and financial commitments for four new stops and increased service. The first \$35 million was allotted to upgrades to Uphams and Morton stops and on the bridges and rail infrastructure. The first dollars from the next \$50 million are starting the design process for the Four Corners stop in the fall of 2006.

The coalition is still pushing for the activation of the funding commitments so that designs for the other three committed stations can start this year as well. The coalition is still pushing for the MBTA and the state Department of Transportation to commit an additional \$8-9 million for a fifth station at Quincy Street and Columbia Road. In July 2006, the coalition met with Ken Miller and other leaders at the Commonwealth's Department of Transportation to "walk the distance" between the proposed fifth stop at Quincy Street and the Four Corners stop. Longer by street than by direct rail, it took 13 minutes for active walkers. Miller saw the density and the key cross streets at the proposed fifth stop. The coalition is now pushing for response from the Department of Transportation and the MBTA.

With the new stops and services, opportunities for development will expand. The CDCs together are currently raising funds to buy properties for both job creation and affordable housing. As the transit system improves and additional stops are added, the issue of gentrification will become a reality, so the coalition needs to be very aggressive in acquiring properties to protect affordability for years to come. The CDCs all have new properties acquired, new properties under agreement, or new development partners to acquire specific parcels. The CDC organizers are currently meeting with neighborhood leaders to plan community outreach activities to continue to define density and use issues near the current and future stops. We hope that these local organizing meetings will build greater control of their own neighborhoods and increased awareness and participation in the broader Fairmount Line organizing.

## **Community Players: Activists, Youths, and Residents**

This groundbreaking effort to upgrade the rail line and launch substantial transit oriented development relied on three groups. The first group to become involved was the executive directors and lead organizers of the CDCs. They worked in particular with Marvin Marin of the Four Corners Action Coalition and Noah Berger of the Federal Transit Administration. The early meetings also included Carrie Russell of the Conservation Law Foundation and Gene Benson of ACE. Together they advocated for improved transit in their areas and often attended several transit meetings a week. The statewide transportation

bureaucracy was slow to move, all the while giving these activists time to become experts in the subject of Boston transit. They also recognized that their small group did not demonstrate enough power to move the funding into action this year.

The second group to become involved were members, both adults and youths, of the four CDCs who came together to form the Fairmount Line CDC Collaborative. They surveyed local residents and conducted one-on-one visits to local civic leaders in order to build more relationships and engage supporters for this enormous fight. Youth leaders in the various CDCs enjoyed the local rallies organized to bring attention to the campaign. They also surveyed other young people on their transit needs and goals. Some had already been engaged in evaluating local bus service in Upham's Corner and other neighborhoods, so this larger campaign was a good fit.

The third group involved was the broader pool of residents who did not go to the Collaborative's smaller planning and research meetings, but who were desperate for improved transit and who came to special meetings or participated in activities concerning a proposed or current stop in their immediate neighborhood.

We found that language and cultural barriers can make people hold back in large organizing drives, but that people would come out to a meeting to keep their immediate stop open or to ensure that there would be a stop. In some of our neighborhoods, translation machines were used to maximize immigrant participation. When we got over one thousand signatures in 2005, we built up real momentum, but then the delays between MBTA commitments increased and people realized they would have to push officials more.

## **Local Base Building: Identifying Winnable Issues**

The CDC organizers and their development staffs continue to work very closely together to engage more people in their immediate neighborhoods. Consistent outreach has attracted people to meetings, as has word of mouth. We are now building local organizing committees who will work on more short-term issues, such as traffic patterns, stop signs, dirty vacant lots, and truck traffic. These smaller issues will help develop confidence and experience and provide local leadership to those residents less experienced on organizing large campaigns like the Fairmount Indigo Line. Now that the CDCs are buying up land and buildings, these new local organizing committees can help determine what should go on inside the buildings.

We have also learned that our focus on 1200 affordable housing units up and down the line was less critical for many local residents than a decent paying job. Now our recent commercial acquisitions may come under neighborhood review.

We have built relationships with local residents and youths, who have become engaged in all the different issues we organize around, such as affordable housing funds and health insurance. To this end, the Fairmount Indigo Rail Line CDC Collaborative will continue to identify local leaders and build broader community support. The community organizing process just outlined will continue to help us achieve effective community strategies to transform the Fairmount Indigo Line into a rapid transit system.



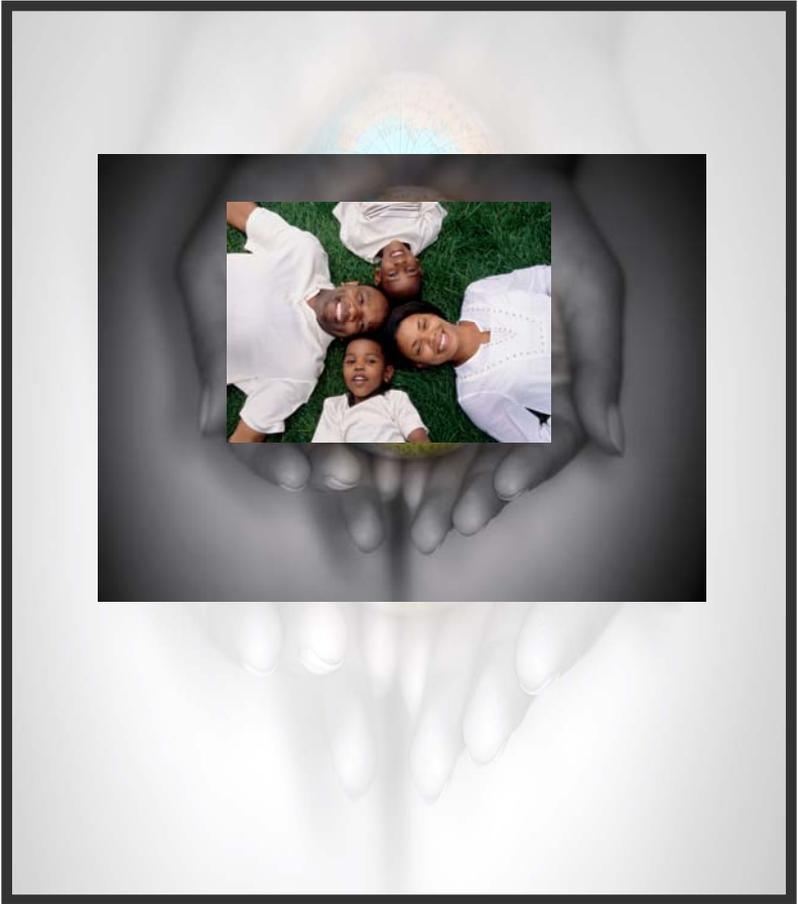
**Jeanne Du Bois** is the Executive Director of the Dorchester Bay EDC and has worked there for the last ten years. Raised in California, Jeanne has a BA from Stanford and an MA from the University of Wisconsin. A high-school social studies teacher for seven years, she now has a twenty-seven year career in community development and organizing. In the 1990s she served as co-chair of Roslindale Village Main Streets program and spearheaded a community organizing and

development effort that created the Roslindale Village Market. Jeanne’s many years of community organizing and community policing has informed Dorchester Bay EDC’s approach to real estate development, tenant mobilizing, community security, and asset management.



**Federico Aviles Rivera** was born in Puerto Rico and raised in the USA. He is the Director of Organizing at Dorchester Bay EDC. Federico has over ten years of community organizing experience. His passion and commitment to community organizing is rooted in his belief that “people are capable of doing things for themselves.” This belief and philosophy guides his day-to-day interaction in the community and at DBEDC.





# **The Mission Is the People**

**Dr. Christopher W. Thompson**

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In a complex world where people are disconnected, where neighbor doesn't always know neighbor, and where common cause is increasingly difficult to attain, community development corporations (CDCs) help to define, affirm, and represent their communities and to build a shared culture. The mission of CDCs is to involve all voices, unlike the broader culture of modern-day America, where only those defined as "winners" get heard. CDCs aim to make manifest the social contract that truly expresses the nature of a democratic society, attributing worth and value to each and every human being. Those who work or volunteer in the CDC field require the courage to confront the evils of greed, racism, classism, sexism, and lack of respect for the law.

Sometimes, however, community development corporations grow distant from the communities they try to serve, discounting grassroots input, telling a community what it should do rather than listening to and implementing the wishes of its members. This is a story of one CDC, Quincy Geneva Housing Corporation (QGHC), that came close to alienating the community it served and how it recovered.

## **The Case of Quincy Geneva**

Formed in the 1980s, QGHC is based in Grove Hall and serves parts of North Roxbury and North Dorchester in Boston. By 2002, it had secured an ownership stake in four hundred residential and commercial properties, but for many reasons was losing credibility in the community and with its financial backers. The QGHC board and its staff had distanced themselves from the community and had exhibited flagrant contempt for the needs, desires, and priorities of other residents' associations in the area. The allegations of financial impropriety surfaced, forcing the executive director to resign. Its board oversight, internal accounting and fiscal management systems were seriously flawed and the services it provided were inadequate. QGHC was operating in a vacuum and was betraying the true mission of the CDC movement.

Meanwhile, another organization, Project RIGHT (Rebuild and Improve Grove Hall Together), which was not a CDC, stepped in and was effectively building the Grove Hall community. Project RIGHT had formed in 1991 to address the issue of neighborhood violence and had evolved into a collaborative providing an administrative infrastructure to over sixty groups, helping with strategic planning, membership development, media advocacy, fundraising, research, data collection, mapping, desktop publishing, program design and evaluation. Its community organizing model helped these groups campaign to improve quality

of life, express community concerns, and impact public policy relating to Grove Hall.

QGHC was a member of Project RIGHT but was not an active participant and their relationship had moved toward hostility. The residents living adjacent to QGHC housing properties were becoming more involved in their community with help from Project RIGHT, and the QGHC leadership refused to enlist their support. Because of QGHC's financial troubles, an interim board was created for QGHC. At that time, I was a board member of Project RIGHT and I agreed to serve on the interim board.

After five months, it became clear that the interim board members who came from QGHC did not want to work with Project RIGHT's membership and were intent on merging QGHC with a different CDC. They framed the review process so as to secure approval for the plan by the community, emphasizing QGHC's "insolvency." It was now May of 2003, and I tendered my resignation and organized a "parallel board" for QGHC to fight the merger. The members of this parallel board were recruited from the leadership of the residents associations abutting QGHC properties. These associations would have been negatively impacted and disempowered if the merger were permitted to occur. The essence of a community development corporation is to allow input from the community it serves, not to tell the community what to do. In August of 2003 the interim board announced its decision to pursue the merger option. The parallel board responded by requesting the mayor, the Department of Neighborhood Development, and elected officials to intervene to stop the merger, but the interim board continued to press ahead. Pressure from these local officials and their requests for detailed information resulted in the breakdown of merger talks in early 2004. The parallel board then requested the interim board to transfer fiduciary responsibilities to them, and started to develop a long-range recovery plan. An election was held in August 2004, at which the parallel board was chosen to lead QGHC. We arrived in the offices to find that files and furniture had been stored, computer files washed, bills were unpaid, all staff had been terminated, and QGHC was two years in arrears on its annual audits and reporting.

Since that day, the new QGHC has worked closely with Project RIGHT. Together, we have created leadership initiatives, run a public safety campaign to address violence, drugs, and gangs, and have identified new workforce opportunities for residents in construction trades. The new QGHC thinks of itself as "an asset based/resident driven community development corporation" and works with local educational, financial, and faith based institutions, businesses, community residents, neighborhood associations, training providers, and governmental agencies to create a real community partnership for social justice.





**Dr Christopher Thompson** is Chairperson of the Quincy Geneva/ New Vision Board of Directors. He is active in community development, public safety, workforce development, and education in Boston and nationally. Dr. Thompson is employed by the Boston Police Department and serves as a senior board member of Project RIGHT. He has extensive experience in the fields of

education, workforce development, community organizing, substance abuse and mental health treatment, in addition to a number of other organizational development assets. He has a PhD in evaluation research from the University of Virginia.



Photo: Lolita Parker, Jr.

## **Developing Leadership among Youth: The Youth Force Example**

**E. Franklin Miller, Sharron Smith, and Ricardo Jordan**

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The primary goal of a community development agency is to develop the community it serves. To ensure that this remains true it is important to develop leaders within that neighborhood. And a key to developing leaders is to begin with youth. That youth are our future leaders is a much acknowledged fact. The conflict arrives, however, when we are called to act instead of just talking. For instance, when youth violence or neighborhood crime rises, the needs of young people are spoken about in terms of activities or opportunities aimed to better engage their interest, but the youth themselves are addressed indirectly. This means, that youth are participants rather than active organizers and decision makers in working to mitigate the community's problems. Indeed, adults may see themselves as the sole leaders in cleaning up problems they feel are caused by the young. Yet for the same reason that it is important to involve the community in community development, it is also vital to involve young people in developing plans and programs to help them "solve their problems."

There are a few factors that usually preclude young people from becoming involved with community development: respect, interest, and training. With regard to the first two factors, many older people do not think young people can actually help their community. Others don't feel that young people care about their community. It is true that not all young people are interested in helping their community, but most don't really know how. This is where training, the third factor, proves essential for building the foundation for youth leadership. Guiding youth through the first stages of community involvement, using strong role models and a framework of opportunities, will help them learn how to turn their time, energy, and interest into productive change.

What we have learned at Youth Force of the Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation (DBEDC) is that when building young community leaders, just as when we build leaders in general, it must be done in stages and through repetition. When Youth Force first developed, young people learned the stake they have in their community by organizing a survey of issues neighborhood youth faced and then developing action plans to address them. From there it was a matter of learning from the experience of creating action plans and developing leadership skills through persistence and the gradual addition of responsibilities.

## **The DBEDC Youth Force Example**

The Youth Force program began in the summer of 2004. Teenagers were hired via the Boston Youth Fund and the Action for Boston Community Development summer employment programs. These young people were asked to serve as community organizers within the Upham's Corner neighborhood of Dorchester and to organize the activities for young people at the annual Dorchester Bay Block Party, a celebration that brings together residents of Dorchester Bay properties and community members.

The initial success of this effort led to the program being extended into the school year with assistance from the Overbrook Foundation. Ten teenagers -- among them, the writers of this article were hired to continue the work of Youth Force through the school year. This group extended the format of community surveying begun in the summer to assessing issues important to the community. In our first year, we focused on the issues of trash, the dearth of youth jobs, and public transit inequities. In our second year, we focused on teen/police relations, youth jobs, youth violence, and trash again.

### **Intro through Trash**

During the summer of 2004, Youth Force surveyed members of the Upham's Corner community to discern the major neighborhood issues. Cleanliness was a large issue for the community. It was also deemed a "winnable" issue. Our first step in addressing this issue was to develop a petition. We had three hundred community members sign this petition which we then copied and faxed to our district councilors, the mayor, and our councilor-at-large. We did not get any concrete response until the fall. The school-year Youth Force was able to take up where the summer group had left off and so continued to follow up with the local politicians. Near the end of September 2004, we met with two city councilors, representatives of another councilor, the mayor, and the superintendent of the city's public works department. At the meeting, we made a PowerPoint presentation that included pictures of trash trouble spots and our suggestions for improving the problem. Then we took those in attendance on a tour of our neighborhood.

During the tour, we showed them a downed electrical wire that was reported immediately by one of the councilors. We also pointed out places where we thought additional trash cans would be helpful. As a result of the tour, we coordinated a community cleanup approximately one month later, when Youth Force, along with volunteers cleaned two consistent trash problem spots. The Department of Public Works provided us with tools for the cleanup and removed the trash we collected. They also installed trash cans in two places we identified as problem spots, and they still stand there today.

This experience helped the Youth Force become leaders in more than one way. The process of discerning a community problem and then getting those with power to address the issue became a basic operating procedure in the program. We not only learned how to prepare a PowerPoint presentation, but also how to develop allies within the city of Boston's power structure that Youth Force still counts on today. Unbeknownst to us, a board member of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative attended our presentation. We were later given a Clean and Green Award by that organization, which served as a reward for our efforts and encouraged us to build on our leadership skills. This campaign served as our model for future actions.

## **Know Your Rights**

In 2005, the surveys that Youth Force administered to our peers gave us four main issues to work on: teen/police relations, youth jobs, violence, and community cleanliness. We found out through our surveys that the most common issue for teens was police harassment. Many have been victims of regular random searches in the streets. We were convinced that the police frequently stopped young people for no reason, harassing young boys because they wear hoodies, and that no one knew what to do in these situations. In order to address this issue, we had a Know Your Rights seminar to educate people about their rights and how to use them.

We had members of the Roxbury Defenders Youth Advocacy Project, an organization that provides legal representation to youth, conduct a workshop on the laws you should know when you have an encounter with the police. The workshop addressed two persistent issues facing youth: declarations of probable cause and search and seizure rights. Sometimes the police would mention probable cause when they searched a youth, but many times they gave no reason. At the meeting we learned that the police have to have a reason to search someone, and they cannot give false information. We were also given some real life examples of what to do and what not to do in certain situations. For instance, we were asked, what should you do if you're driving a car, and the police have a feeling that you might have something illegal in your car and they pull you over? Can the police legally search you or not? The correct answer is that the police cannot search you unless they have "reasonable suspicion," which means they have to have a solid reason. All in all, the meeting was a big success; everyone left with information that they didn't have when they came in. This workshop was an example of planning an action to address a felt need in our community. Our next action was even more directly targeted. It addressed a recurring need voiced even before Youth Force was formed: jobs for youth.

## **Hopeline Day**

Many people within our community are in need of jobs. This is especially true among the youth. Teen jobs have been one of the top three issues for each of the years Youth Force has administered its teen peer survey. It is commonly understood that jobs for youth teach them responsibility and professionalism. However, in the inner city where many families hover on the poverty line and crime rates are high, it is especially important to have teens in jobs in order to keep them positively engaged and away from negative ways of earning money. So Youth Force organized a Hopeline Day during February school vacation that allowed 15 to 18 year olds to explore career opportunities.

In order to get summer jobs through the Boston Youth Fund, a young person needs to sign up for a Hopeline number during the February school vacation. If they do not sign up, they are ineligible for jobs from the Fund. Even with these time restrictions, more than 2,000 young people a year apply, but many are not able to get a summer job even with a Hopeline number.

Organizing our alternative job fair which we called Hopeline Day and planned for school wasn't easy. It took a lot of calls and a lot of patience to make it a success. Some of the stores we approached turned us down because they didn't have the time that week. But that didn't stop us from making sure that we got at least four different companies to participate. The companies were Staples, Stop & Shop, New England Aquarium, and Home Depot. Each company sent a representative who spoke about their company and the job opportunities available. The attendees and the representatives interacted very well with one another. About thirty youths attended and made it a very successful day. In addition, we were able to hire ten young people who signed up that day for our summer Youth Force program.

The Hopeline Day was also a very positive day for young adults in our community. We had representatives offering jobs for anyone 18 years and older who were ineligible for the Hopeline.

## **The Youth Summit**

As we considered how to address the main issues facing young people in Boston, we brainstormed on how we could bring youth together from throughout the Dorchester and Boston community to think together. We reasoned that it also had to be fun in order to get young people to attend. That's how we came up with the idea for our annual Youth Force Summit. We decided to have a summit that would present positive ideas through panel discussions, but would also include entertainment by young people to serve as a draw to other young people.

We found out about a grant given by a local youth organization to support youth activities. We spoke to them at an initial grantor's meeting and got positive feedback. We then went on to craft a grant proposal. Three Youth Force members and the director then participated in a proposal-related interview. In the end, we were unable to gain the support of that organization. However, Youth Force members learned how to write a proposal and clearly present ideas to grantors. This experience also served to help us to focus our ideas and become even more motivated to make the summit happen.

We arranged to have the summit at the Strand Theater, a Dorchester landmark. We figured this would serve two main purposes. It would bring the event some legitimacy, since most everyone in the community knows of the theater. It might also provide some incentive for performers. Since we could not pay them, perhaps the privilege of performing at the Strand would be a payoff. To help make the event possible the city government exempted us from 60 percent of the cost of the rental of the building. At the event, we had three panel topics: jobs for youth, higher education, and teen health. The panels addressed some of the projects and work Youth Force had been engaged in during the past year. They served as a source of information for youth about these vital issues while also challenging them to get involved or stay involved in the coming year.

The event turned out to be a success. We were able to get several entertainers, including dance groups, some rap artists, and an actor who performed a monologue. We were also supported by dancers, singers, and poets from Movement City, a group of artists from the Lawrence CommunityWorks, another community development corporation (CDC). These young people came together to provide excellent entertainment and brought out even more people, who came to encourage them. We had approximately three hundred young people in attendance. The Youth Summit was covered in the *Boston Herald*, serving to balance their regular negative coverage of our community.

Youth Force is now in its second year and has continued to build upon the achievements and work of the first year. What remains the same is the goal of developing leadership in young people by helping them think through issues they see in the community and preparing them to take action to address these issues. We have had a second youth summit and a host of activities dealing with issues facing young people. The program has served to create more than sixty youth leaders and has had an impact on hundreds more. This is an example of involving youth in community building and the possibilities of youth leadership development through a community development corporation.





**Ricardo Jordan** is nineteen years old and is from the Dorchester/Roxbury area of Boston. He is a recent graduate of Brighton High School who really enjoys writing. A member of Youth Force since its inception in the summer of 2004, he has done a lot of work in the community on issues such as police harassment.



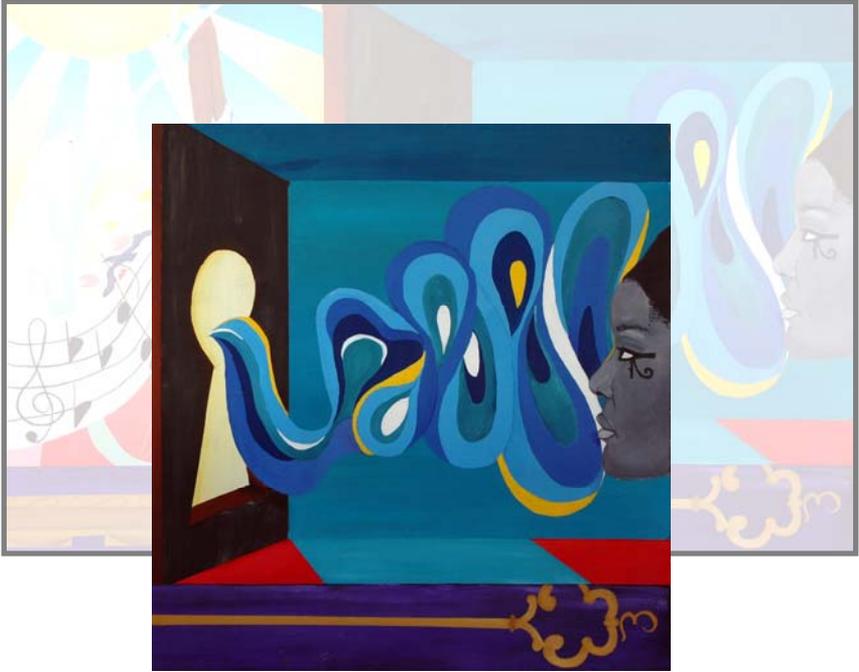
**E. Franklin Miller** is a Harvard graduate and Dorchester resident. He is currently pursuing a master's in public policy at Tufts University. A husband and a father of two, since moving to Boston for school, he has become immersed in the community and is dedicated to developing leaders in it. He is motivated by a Christian vision of community transformation. In addition to working at Dorchester Bay, he is also a coordinator of the Wendover and Quincefield Street Crimewatch and a board member at the Vine Street Community Center.



**Sharron Smith** is a student at Codman Academy in Dorchester. She enjoys writing and history and likes to play basketball as well. She is also a well-known gospel singer in her church and has been a member of Youth Force since the summer of 2005.

*Additional editing help was provided by Jennifer Niemann and E'lon Cohen.*





Artist: Edwige F. Nordeleus

## **I Grew Up Here**

**Edwige F. Nordelus**

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*“A lot of young teens in Lawrence have a hard time tapping into the creative side of their nature due to religion, race, income, and other social or personal issues in their lives. Self-expression through my creativity—which I developed at Hope Street/Movement City in Lawrence—helped me develop as an artist and as a person. I’m glad I put myself in a place where I was able to find myself.”*

## **I Never Once Thought that Dance would Take Me Anywhere in Life, but It Has**

As a shy and quiet five-year-old girl, whenever my brother would ask me to dance I would get nervous and nod “no” with a smile. He’d go into his little closet, which he called the lab, where his DJ equipment was set up, spin a record, and then slowly draw me into the center of the room by dancing with me. As I got all into it, he would just disappear and I would never notice he wasn’t next to me until the song was over.

My brother’s passion for the arts rubbed off on me and through the years I began exploring all the different areas in the arts. I took figure drawing, painting, poetry, photography, drama, fashion, and cosmetology, but dance was an area my mom would not let me tap into. She always supported everything that I wanted to do and let me participate in any extracurricular activities, but due to her religious beliefs, dance was one activity she did not agree with.

At the end of my junior year in high school, my friend Rose told me about a dance audition for Urban Jewlz, a dance group at Hope Street, a youth center for kids in Lawrence. I find it funny because I never once thought that dance would take me anywhere in life, but it has. My stomach would cringe at the thought of people watching me dance. I was way too nervous and shy for that, but I always admired dancers and I always wondered how it would feel to perform in front of a crowd that was feeling every body movement I made. I used to record music videos and study each piece of the choreography I liked whenever I was home alone and didn’t know what to do with myself. Picture me going back and forth, rewinding the tape to catch that one move the video gives you only a glimpse of.

It wasn’t until I decided to audition for Urban Jewlz that I started to get comfortable with the idea of being a dancer, and steadily I began finding a second home that encouraged my development in visual and performing arts. It felt like a natural transition for me to dabble in the other programs and through networking I was able to develop all the artistic skills I acquired throughout the years.

My mother knew I was a member at Hope Street but she didn't know exactly what I did. I told her I was in Fashion—which I was—but for nine months she had no clue that I was dancing in Urban Jewlz, that I was performing around the city, and that I was a choreographer. Yes, I rebelled, as some would say, but when I was asked to audition, I went to my mother first. She did not want me involved at all. I auditioned anyway, thinking that I probably wouldn't make it on my first audition ever. I went at my own risk just for the experience. Lord knows how shocked I was when I got the phone call to find out I made it. Now it was a matter of my mother finding out sooner or later, and I knew she would. When she finally found out she was very mad, but I had help from the director of Hope Street, Misael Martínez (a.k.a. Mikey), and my brother, Gilbert, to help her see that it was okay and that I could make my own decision. Now she's cool with it because she sees what the center has done for me.

## **Creating Movement City**

In 2004, Hope Street joined with the Young Professionals youth program of Lawrence CommunityWorks (LCW) to create Movement City a youth program. For Movement City members, being part of LCW means they have been able to do internships with LCW; some have become board members, engaged to make changes and suggestions for our city, and some have been hired to help reach out to youth like myself. Now, every year Movement City Youth Center gets a new staff member from other organizations like AmeriCorps. Before joining with LCW, Hope Street focused on the performing arts, but now we have from visual arts through modern technology, which gives members more programs to choose from. Now we also have new programs for fashion design, graphic design, and architecture, as well as Forum (where we talk about important issues going on in our community and in the world), money management, college prep, and girls' corner. We used to only take kids fourteen and up but now we take kids as young as ten. There are also more internship opportunities, not only for present members but also past members, and entrepreneurship programs for those who want knowledge, experience, and exposure in marketing and selling their product in whatever field of business they desire.

## **Nurturing Creativity In the Youth**

I think it is important that LCW focus on youth, and especially on youth in the arts. Through networking with other members way before graduating from high school, I've met a lot of individuals who felt there was no place in our society where young people were supported and motivated to express their creativity, and nowhere they could surround themselves in a positive atmosphere. Lawrence is filled with so many talented artists. We have a young generation who are hungry to be rappers, singers, dancers, designers, and actors. Reaching out to our youth through the arts is an essential part of revitalizing Lawrence.

Plus, art is entertainment however you want to put it. There are those who love to entertain and those who love to be entertained. Satisfying both worlds brings the community together. For a parent to see their child perform or get an award for giving back to the community, this brings his/her whole family out to see them.

Nurturing creativity in the youth is a way of guiding and helping them find themselves. You can support their goals and dreams when no one else believes in them. Once they have that support, they'll take matters into their own hands by showing a commitment to their dream—which can become a passion—and making it a reality. A leader is born, because now this individual is focused and has ambition and support. They know where they want to see themselves in the future, and will not let anything irrelevant stop, slow, or bring them down.

To be a leader means to be seen as a positive example of someone who is determined and knows what they want for themselves regardless of what is going on around them. A leader is someone another person can look up to and aspire to be like, someone who can pave the way for others to follow and learn from, and someone who can show you that there are other and better ways to be successful and happy in life.

## **In Movement City, I'm the Girl Who Does Just about Everything**

In Movement City, I'm the girl who does just about everything. The first year I was hired, I taught hip-hop aerobics, and this year I was hired as a dance instructor teaching intermediate hip-hop for members too advanced for intro but not quite ready for the advanced class. However, intermediate wasn't intermediate for long—they are now known as Fresh Effect, a new dance group in Lawrence. I am also an Urban-X dancer (aka Urban Jewlz), hired to do choreography and co-lead the group along with Marcos Aguirre, chief choreographer, and Rasec Vargas. Mikey, the director of Movement City, and I do a lot of collaborations for almost every event. He comes to me all the time with a concept for any event hosted by the center and I try my best to make that concept come to life with my flavor and using my artistic and visual skills.

Whether it be to sing at a show, help coordinate a promotional march for Movement Squad (a group for young leaders in the center), do make-up, braid hair, fix, make, or alter clothes, create a fashion display, and more, Movement City takes a lot of my time but I love it. It keeps me busy and I still manage to take care of all my other responsibilities. Looking back to when Movement City was Hope Street, we didn't have a whole bunch of staff members to look up to and help support our social and personal development. We had one person and that person was Mikey. Now the old school members are the staff reaching out

to the new school members the way Mikey reached out to us and we have a bigger network supporting us.

In the fall semester of 2006 I will be a senior at MassArt completing my last year of college and soon graduating with a BFA in fashion design. I am so fortunate that I've made it this far and that I was able to do so much by being a part of the Movement City for the past four years. Watching some of my friends, I've seen what a lack of education can do to a person in the long run. Now I can say that I am a leader and a role model working at Movement City as a dance instructor/choreographer for the youth coming in and out of the center. I support all the kids that I work with and I encourage them to make something of themselves. I am giving back what the center gave to me.



**Edwige F. Nordelus** is a twenty-one-year-old Haitian woman born in Queens, New York, and raised in Lawrence, Massachusetts. She graduated from Lawrence High in 2003 and now is a senior at Massachusetts College of Art in Boston, majoring in fashion design. She works at Movement City Youth Center as a dance instructor and has been a part of the traveling dance troop

Urban-X for four years. She is also a fashion contributor to a new magazine in Lawrence called *Stomp Fashion Magazine*. She loves to sing and dance and is very skilled in cosmetology.

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A special thank you to all  
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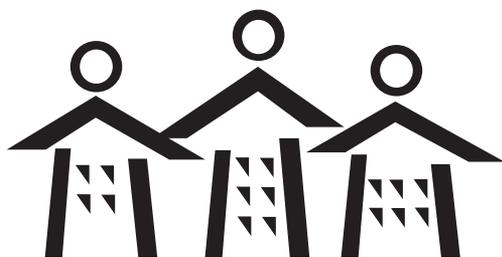
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### **Our congratulations to**

Bertha Mejia, *Allston Brighton CDC Board of Directors*, and  
Juan Gonzalez, *Director of Organizing*,  
for their article “*Latinos en Accion*” in this year’s  
Power Journal.

### **Congratulations to**

Tamara Daly, *Allston Brighton CDC Board of Directors*  
for her article “*Empowering Community in Allston Brighton*”  
in last year’s edition.

***Their work inspires us all.***

Thanks also to Ava Chan for her editorial work.



The Coalition for a Better Acre  
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*CBA is committed to ensuring  
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517 Moody St. 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
Lowell, MA 01854  
Tel (978) 452-7523 \* Fax (978) 452-4923  
[www.cbacre.org](http://www.cbacre.org)

