

## **Appreciative Inquiry and Management Team Development in Education Programs**

As a designated interim management entity for federal education programs which have lost their funding due to fiscal mismanagement and deteriorating services, Community Development Institute (CDI) enters such failing programs with the mission of restoring fiscal integrity and the quality of program services, through providing staff development training and streamlined operating systems.

In spite of our best efforts at creating partnerships between CDI staff with local program directors and their management teams, we have continued to experience a level of “Us and Them” separation between CDI and program staff. To strengthen this partnership and especially to increase the sustainability of gains made during the interim period new ways to strengthen local management teams were needed.

Our approach is to focus on expanding each program management team’s successful experience of being held jointly accountable for producing results according to mutually determined specific program goals, action plans and timetables. This does not mean just following the “CDI rules,” but rather sets up whole new levels of intentional communication, sharing ideas, addressing issues and obstacles to achieve desired outcomes. Integral to this process has been regular every two week focused meetings between program management teams and site managers. During the in between weeks program directors and CDI site managers and lead site managers have conference calls to document and acknowledge results, talk about next steps and provide on-going group support across programs to each other. This process has allowed many more CDI staff to engage in monitoring and development of program management teams at one time and much more rapid progress is being made in management team development than with any other approach we have previously used.

The structure for this approach is based on a series of 2.5 day Appreciative Inquiry training and development of management teams from all of our programs. Thus far we have conducted two Management Team Trainings and Action Planning using the Appreciative Inquiry format, one in Cherry Hill, New Jersey in June of 2008 for seven programs and the other in Denver, Colorado in January of 2009 for another eleven programs. The results have been phenomenal. Some examples are:

- The **Kendall County** management team felt very inspired and empowered with the AI Management training. With their action plan focus on creating community collaborations they became unstoppable in resolving a long term facilities issue within two weeks after the AI session.
- During transition from interim program to becoming a permanent grantee of a local sponsoring agency, gains and accomplishments are sometimes difficult to sustain. The **South Texas** program choosing to focus on partnership with their new sponsoring agency created a unification day with the transitioning staff from CDI HS and the Texas Migrant Council (TMC) staff and board members. The focus of the day was identifying

each other's strengths, creating a unified vision for the newly integrated program, action plans to achieve their goals and personal commitments from everyone to support the unified program. The day was a tremendous success with staff from both programs learning more about each other, committing to shared dreams and gaining energetic support from all, but especially enthusiastically from the TMC CEO, Mary Capello, to achieve their goals.

- Focusing on Professional Development **Mercer County, New Jersey**, created a staff development tracking system within the first two weeks of the recent January training. They communicated changes in federal requirements to all staff and are providing the AI training they received to the rest of their management team and to each service area staff. They have also worked with each center director to identify the positive core of each center and from that are creating daily lesson plans for the children from a whole new level of inspiration.
- Since the training one month ago **Camden, New Jersey** management team is pulling together around their strengths, engaging each other around difficult issues and willing to make decisions without the director. In management team meetings they are less defensive, not dwelling on minutia, talking more about specific accomplishments from their action plans created during the session and looking for the great things among their staff to build and expand. In general they are taking on more responsibility themselves and not dependent on their director or the site manager.
- Working on Professional Development the **NE Arkansas** management team created new Professional Development Plans and held individual meetings with each staff since the training a month ago. At their recent staff meeting they conducted a further inquiry into their "Heart's Desire" for the program and prioritized and developed implementation plans in the following areas: unity, cohesive teams and communication. A follow up training in strength based management will be conducted for all management team members and center/area supervisors.