



# Diversity Works

Office of University Partnerships

Minority-Serving Institutions Developing Partnerships, Building Communities

VOL. 6, ISSUE 1

## Community Partnerships Support People with Disabilities as Entrepreneurs

For more than 20 years, the Community Partnerships center at Adams State College (ASC) in Alamosa, Colorado, has assisted budding and existing entrepreneurs in the six counties that comprise the San Luis Valley. The center provides free, confidential business plan counseling services; offers business development workshops; and connects clients with other ASC resources, including business faculty, community volunteers, and student interns, to help start a business or meet existing business needs. ASC's 2009 Hispanic-Serving Institutions Assisting Communities (HSIAC) program grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) enabled the college to expand its services to include the Ability program, which offers customized business counseling to individuals with disabilities.

### Filling an Unmet Need

"We saw a gap in service for people with disabilities who are looking to start a business," remarked Mary Hoffman, executive director of community partnerships at ASC. "Once we started working with the State of Colorado's local Office of Vocational Rehabilitation in Alamosa, we learned of other services we could provide to this sector." Vocational Rehabilitation counselors are skilled at developing plans to help clients gain employment skills and live independently. However, few counselors had business development backgrounds, making it difficult for them to provide adequate support for clients interested in starting their own business. This is where the Community Partnerships center Ability program became a valuable asset.

"Once Vocational Rehabilitation counselors assess a client's basic skill ability and self-employment interest, they refer the client to us," said Hoffman. A business counselor is then paired with the client to help create a business development workplan and guide him or her

through developing a business concept, writing a business plan, and understanding the nuts and bolts of business ownership and management.



Karl Jolliff (left), ASC Community Partnerships center business counselor, discussing a business project with Chris Lopez.

One recent client referred by the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation to the center was Chris Lopez, a prelingual, hard-of-hearing individual. Lopez, an experienced cabinetmaker, wanted to start a woodworking business. He worked with Karl Jolliff, one of the business counselors, to develop a business plan. The process helped Lopez refine his business ideas, transforming his initial plan from more labor-intensive cabinetmaking to making and selling less labor-intensive jewelry boxes. Upon completion of the plan, Lopez decided to delay starting his business due to the economic downturn. Instead, he used his experience developing his own business concept to find employment in an unrelated field. Lopez still hopes to become an entrepreneur someday.

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# Virgin Islands Center Strengthens Framework for Economic Development

The University of the Virgin Islands' (UVI) Strategic Plan Vision 2012 designates social, economic, and workforce development as priority goals of this Caribbean institution of higher education. In collaboration with strategic partners, UVI is committed to a long-term program of education and training to meet these goals. That is why in 2003, UVI used its Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) program grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and leveraged funds from local partners to reconstruct a historic building in a blighted neighborhood in the town of Frederiksted, St. Croix. The two-story facility currently houses classrooms for training and office space for the staff of UVI's Community Engagement and Lifelong Learning (CELL) Community Outreach programs and offers voice and data infrastructure capable of videoconferencing and computing.

However, for UVI, this was just phase 1 of a two-phase infrastructure improvement and community reinvestment process in the Frederiksted area. Now, UVI is using its 2009 HUD HBCU grant to implement phase 2, construction of an extension to the two-story facility to house the Frederiksted Resource Center (FRC).

## Expansion with a Purpose

Construction for the FRC is slated to commence in the first quarter of 2011. When completed, it will provide easy and expanded access to CELL programs for residents and microenterprises. It will further enhance UVI's ability to use education and training to improve the economic conditions of low-income individuals—and those living in poverty—by addressing low academic achievement and illiteracy and by providing assistance to existing and potential microenterprises and employment services.

"Through the Frederiksted Resource Center, our intent is to increase and support entrepreneurship, stabilize and expand microenterprises, diversify the Virgin Islands' economy, and create new jobs," said Ilene Garner, director of CELL. "And the Virgin Islands Department of Labor [VIDOL] Access Point will extend the services of One-Stop Centers to this community to support job searches and provide training in high-demand and emerging occupations."

The additional FRC space afforded by the FRC extension will allow for the following:

- Creation of a 30-student computer learning center to deliver training programs to enhance math, reading, writing, English language comprehension, and computer literacy skills in youth and adults.

- Creation of a VIDOL Access Point to extend services of DOL One-Stop Centers into Frederiksted.
- Providing training for available jobs for very-low- to moderate-income residents and the unemployed.
- Improvement of the quality of life for disadvantaged individuals by enhancing employment and educational opportunities.
- Creation of a community business center that will serve as an incubator for existing and emerging microenterprises and offer occasional office space and administrative support.
- Diversification of the fragile and highly dependent Virgin Islands' economy by supporting microenterprises and individuals who wish to start businesses.
- Enhancement of economic development by preparing the workforce to assume positions in high-demand occupations critical to the success of local businesses and to the safety, health, and well-being of the community.

## Building with Partnerships

In addition to its HUD grant, UVI is leveraging the financial and in-kind help of local partners to complete the extension project and secure assistance and support for center programs and activities. VIDOL is providing \$25,000 in financial support for K-adult software programs. The Virgin Islands Department of Education will contribute \$80,000 per year for 3 years and provide support for the skills enhancement program focused on raising scores on college entrance exams. The Virgin Islands Workforce Investment Board will contribute \$7,500 a year for 3 years for various software programs.

For more information, contact Ilene Garner, Director, Community Engagement and Lifelong Learning, University of the Virgin Islands, St. Thomas Campus, at 340-693-1101 or [igarner@uvi.edu](mailto:igarner@uvi.edu).



Architect's rendering of Frederiksted Resource Center.

## Addressing Economic and Cultural Barriers Leads to Student Success

With the help of a 2007 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian Institutions Assisting Communities (AN/NHIAC) grant, the University of Alaska Fairbanks–Chukchi Campus created the Quanagiugu Tupiq: Savaaksraqput program, which loosely translates from the native Inupiaq language as Caring for Our Homes: Our Responsibility. The 2-year construction technology trades (CTT) program teaches valuable skills in a region beset by high unemployment.

Much of the Northwest Arctic Borough's economy is linked to the construction trades. Despite the availability of good paying jobs in areas such as welding, there are skill shortages among the region's residents. Employers often look outside the region to fill jobs. The CTT program, which targets residents living in the borough's eight villages, combines construction skills training in carpentry, electricians, plumbing, and welding with job-skills courses that cover construction math, business English, and human relations. The hands-on instruction and a schedule that allows program participants to return frequently to their villages help students successfully complete the program.

### Program Design Reduces Barriers to Student Success

CTT provides a bridge to employment for the region's unemployed and underemployed Alaska Natives. According to program staff, education is a key component of reducing area unemployment and linking residents to jobs. Less than one-third of the region's adult population has completed more than a high school diploma. For those entering college, many are the first in their families to do so.

When designing the program, Chukchi staff and partners—including the Alaska Technical Center (ATC), the Native Village of Kotzebue, Northwest Inupiaq Housing Authority (NIHA), North West Electric, and the National Park Service—were intentional about creating a supportive program that recognizes the environmental, economic, and cultural realities affecting student success.

One major barrier for students is the training schedule. The harsh weather conditions, the borough's vast and isolated geography, and the few roads can make it difficult for

students living in rural villages to travel to ATC's facilities in Kotzebue where classes are held. The high cost of living in the area can also hinder class attendance. Many natives depend on traditional subsistence practices. While many of the students qualify for a Pell Grant to pay for their tuition, meeting basic needs requires students to return to their villages to hunt, gather, and store food for the cold months. To allow for breaks for life and the environment, the program schedule is broken into increments. Students travel into Kotzebue for 2 weeks of instruction at a time and then return to their villages for 2 weeks.

Chukchi staff credit the HUD grant with helping them address barriers to student achievement. Specifically, the grant helped pay for travel and lodging costs for students from rural areas who otherwise would not be able to afford staying in Kotzebue for training.

### Putting It All Together

For the program's capstone, students participate in a practicum where they are assigned to complete construction-related projects with NIHA or other program partners. Projects may include completing new home construction, renovations, and weatherization—allowing students to see how their carpentry, plumbing, electrical, and welding skills are applied on the jobsite. The practicum also serves as an opportunity for partner organizations to evaluate students as potential employees.

Upon program completion, students are certified by the National Center for Construction Education and Research. This is a valuable credential and an important tool in helping students locate employment in the region.

Chukchi staff feel that the program is accomplishing its goal of connecting program participants to employment. To date, 36 students have enrolled in the program, and the 12 students who completed the program are now working with NIHA and other village housing authorities building and maintaining the region's housing.

For more information, contact Pauline Harvey, Director, University of Alaska Fairbanks–Chukchi Campus, at 907-442-3400, ext. 105, or [pharvey1@alaska.edu](mailto:pharvey1@alaska.edu).



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FIRST-CLASS MAIL  
POSTAGE & FEES PAID  
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Permit No. G-795

Return Service Requested  
Official Business  
Penalty for Private Use \$300

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### **A Beneficial Partnership**

The HUD HSIAC grant played an important role in facilitating the partnership between ASC and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. Previously, the two organizations had limited interaction. With the grant, the organizations formalized their relationship, increasing interorganizational understanding and improving community support for individuals with disabilities. Through the Ability program, ASC is better able to serve other disabled members of the San Luis Valley community. The business center receives word-of-mouth referrals and referrals from New Beginnings, a local mental health organization. Clients with disabilities who come directly to the Community Partnerships center receive information about services offered by community providers that address their specific needs.

The partnership also created the opportunity for ASC to help the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

locate appropriate work assessment and work practice opportunities for its clients. For example, one of the business center clients makes and sells boots and needed help in assembling his product. Community Partnerships center staff connected the business owner with a counselor from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. Together they devised a solution: have disabled clients assemble the product, which provides them with valuable job training.

“Our partnership with Colorado Office of Vocational Rehabilitation raises both our organizations’ capacities to serve this underserved population,” remarked Hoffman. “Our Ability [program] clients are able to move into productive, gratifying business ventures, while adding to the local economy and increasing area employment.”

For more information on the Ability program, contact Mary Hoffman, Executive Director, Community Partnerships, Adams State College, at 719-587-7372 or [mchoffma@adams.edu](mailto:mchoffma@adams.edu).

HUD’s Office of University Partnerships (OUP) provides grants to institutions of higher education to assist them and their partners with the implementation of a broad range of community development activities, including neighborhood revitalization, housing, and economic development. This newsletter, *Diversity Works*, highlights the efforts of grantees in OUP’s Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions Assisting Communities, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian Institutions Assisting Communities grant programs and includes a variety of interesting projects, compelling grantee profiles, and other valuable resources for minority-serving institutions.