

**A STUDY OF TWO NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORKS OF THE ADMINISTRATION
FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES:
CENTRAL HARLEM AND BROWNSVILLE-EAST NEW YORK**

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ABBREVIATED VERSION

**TERRY MIZRAHI, PHD, PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (PI)
PROFESSOR, HUNTER COLLEGE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
tmizrahi@nyc.rr.com**

This document contains highlights from the Executive Summary. There is more detail in the comprehensive final report. The Introduction and Background, Methodology, and Findings Sections are condensed here without direct quotes and details. It is important to both read the complete report which contains the “the voices” of the many ACS and NN participants, and to experience the richness and complexity of the NNs. Terms like “Additional information is provided” are inserted throughout this abbreviated version to indicate where there are more details and description in the complete report. This version does not contain the References and the four Appendices: Interview Questions; List of Activities of the CH & BENY Networks; Case Study of “Poster Contest” in BENY; and List of Leadership Attributes and Traits.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PREFACE

The draft Report on the Central Harlem (CH) and Brownsville-East New York (BENY) Neighborhood Networks (NNs) was submitted in early February 2006, a few weeks after the tragic death of a child known to ACS received major media coverage and glaring scrutiny by politicians, the press, the public, advocacy groups and parent-led organizations. From published reports, ACS is undergoing its own major re-evaluation of its policies and procedures with respect to child protection. The role and future of the Neighborhood Networks in this process is unclear.

Nevertheless, the unexpected and unfortunate turn of recent events should not cloud the perspectives that surfaced during the process of this research. **The perception conveyed to the PI during the latter half 2005 by many of the study participants in CH and BENY was a sense of disconnect between the NNs and Commissioner Mattingly's administration.** This view appears plausible for several reasons: First, Commissioner Mattingly's Three R's—*rightsizing, realigning, and reinvesting* that appear in his Report (NYC ACS, 2005) do not feature the Neighborhood Networks, nor does the Report's implementation strategy acknowledge the NNs as ACS' primary voice in those communities. Second, there is only a one page description on the ACS website about the NNs (www.nyc.gov/hm/acs); yet the internet is its face to the public. Third, to the extent that budgets reflect the priorities of "top" leadership, the NNs appear to be under-valued in terms of staffing. Additionally, there was a concern that the small amount of discretionary program funding directly available to the NNs was cut or eliminated. Fourth, these Networks seem to work in isolation from each other. There was no city-wide NN conference in 2005, and there is little connection among the different NN leaders. Fifth, several Executive Directors suggested that the structures established by prior Commissioners for bringing the NN leadership together are dormant. Finally, this is the first ACS funded evaluation focusing on any of the NNs since McGowan & Walsh's (2004) study.

Given the findings of this small study on CH and BENY, the PI recommends the continuation and strengthening of the Neighborhood Networks in consultation with various stakeholders and constituencies. There are several recommendations imbedded in this Executive Summary and at the end of the Report that emerged from many in-depth interviews, observations of meetings and reviews of documents that go back to 2003. **The most important conclusion is that ACS needs to make a major decision about its commitment and subsequent reinvestment in these Neighborhood Networks, and articulate that directly and publicly to the NN leadership.**

The following are the major implications from the rich data synthesized in this Report.

First, it is essential to recognize the extraordinary amount of in-kind contributions that leaders and members of the NNs have provided. This includes tremendous labor by hundreds of people in both communities —participation that goes way beyond the NN monthly and sub-committee meetings. Most of it comes from staff of various voluntary agencies, not all of which contract with ACS. And while some work is done “on the job,” many people have given extra hours, volunteering well beyond their responsibilities, or adding extra work to otherwise busy days. It is important to calculate the “comparable worth” of that investment (the equivalent of thousands of days). Nevertheless, there is a fervent need for ACS to visibly recommit and reinvigorate the NNs with a variety of tangible resources and moral support. The current NBS staff cannot continue to do the work alone and do it as intended, especially since the role of Agenda for Children Tomorrow (ACT) in the future of the NNs appears uncertain.

Second, the complexity of the programs and projects undertaken in both NNs must be understood and acknowledged. This includes the high level of professional, interpersonal, analytical and political skills needed to plan and implement any of these activities successfully, to sustain them, to expand them, and to begin to evaluate them, even with simple measures. Without articulating the level of competence demonstrated at the grassroots level, outsiders or higher-ups might underestimate the NN accomplishments.

Third, it is essential to validate the commitment of time, energy, expertise and resources it takes to sustain the NNs themselves. This includes the development of an infrastructure to permit the work to move ahead. The processes of recruiting, retaining, and replenishing members are on-going and labor-intensive, requiring skills *and* resources. Relationship building is not simple, easy or automatic. It is the core of what sustains these collaborations, and requires that NN leaders and NBS staff pay attention to “process” or what some call “community building.” In both NNs, maintaining and expanding the base, collecting and disseminating data, and connecting within and outside the NN, are all being done *without* technology resulting in *minimum* rather than maximum efficiency. It is no wonder that strategic/long term planning and data utilization goals are not easily implemented.

Fourth, ACS must be comfortable with and accept the ambivalent, and in some ways contradictory, roles that it plays in “the community.” Many participants, and especially ACS staff, stated that a secondary, if not primary goal of the NNs was to change ACS’ relationship with the community (i.e. “*to be a helpful and not just a hurtful presence*”). Nevertheless, it was also acknowledged that ACS has legal authority relating to children at-risk which must be exercised when appropriate. Within the NN framework, the tension for ACS is between demonstrating its commitment to the community through visible contributions of staff and resources, and at the same time not being viewed as controlling the agenda and mandating participation.

Fifth, when “*The 10 Essential Components of a Well-Functioning Neighborhood Network*” are applied to CH and BENY, both are evaluated positively. This “Components” document was prepared by ACS (No Date listed) and summarized in the McGowan and Walsh (2004) Report. After this in-depth examination, it is evident that the CH and BENY NNs have exceeded expectations of # 1- Participation, # 8-Matching Needs and Services, # 9-Collaborative Projects, and #5-Community presence. They have accomplished at least in part- # 4-Mission, # 3-Governance; and are still striving to achieve 2-Client involvement, # 6-Network Directory, # 10-Self-evaluation, and # 7-Agreements. With additional resources and support they could achieve or surpass all 10 components.

Sixth, assuming a major re-investment of ACS in the NNs, the challenge for ACS and the NN leaders will be to address the tension between depth and breadth of focus. At present, both NNs are conscious of the need to strengthen their core functions and goals by fortifying their infrastructure, reinforcing service coordination and expanding their successful programs. At the same time, they are endeavoring to increase their membership, develop additional collaborations with the public agencies, reach more consumers directly, and address external social and community conditions that affect child welfare and family well being. There is a lot on “the plate,” and lots of “plates” that appear to be of equal importance. The dilemma is driven by the desire to address a grander vision for the NNs, and the need for pragmatism. This can be reconciled only with some collective prioritizing and consensus-building among the NNs and ACS leadership.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful for the opportunity to have gotten to know first hand so many inspiring and tireless people at ACS and in the community. They must remain anonymous but they know who they are. I want to thank the Neighborhood-Based Services unit of the Division of Community Affairs for their cooperation and insistence that they want to hear the negatives as well as the positives. Virtually everyone was supportive inside ACS. Some NN study participants saw this research as a sign of ACS’ commitment to the NNs. While some people were easier to reach than others, and some materials were hard to come by, I didn’t feel hampered in the process of conducting this study. We were welcome everywhere, and appreciated when we showed up at NN events. It was our pleasure.

I want to especially thank the four research assistants— Emily Benedetto, Jessica Silver, Sanjana Ragudaran and especially Denise Torres—who contributed much to this product, although the interpretations are mine. As a professor who teaches community organizing with an emphasis on collaborations and coalition-building, it was satisfying to see up close how these processes work. The end result is that I have come to value the NNs more, and appreciate the commitment, contributions and competence it takes to make them successful over time.

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND OF STUDY

The purpose of this small-scale study was to examine the history and current functioning of two Neighborhood Networks (NNs), which are a part of ACS' Neighborhood-based Services. The two chosen by ACS were Brownsville-East New York (BENY) defined as the combined Community Districts (CDs) 5 & 16, and Central Harlem (CH) defined as CD 10. ACS also uses the term "Service Planning Areas" (SPAs) to define BENY (SPA 2) and Central Harlem (SPA 1).

METHODOLOGY

Data were collected from June 2005 through early January 2006. Notwithstanding a limited budget and timetable, the study methodology included: in-depth interviews with 38 people: (14 from CH; 12 from BENY; 9 from ACS and 3 from ACT); observations of 11 NN meetings and 5 community events; and an analysis of documents that included minutes of some meetings from 2003, and a few reports and proposals from BENY. Additionally, two outside "evaluations" of the NNs prepared by McGowan & Walsh, (March 2004), and White et al., (March 2005) were reviewed, along with a document titled: "One Community at a Time: The Central Harlem Story" (no date), prepared by a NBS senior staff person in late 2004. (See References and Interview Questions in the Appendices of the Full Report.)

Interview Questions. The questions as agreed upon between ACS and the PI focused on: NN Goals; Strategies to meet goals, an assessment of whether those goals have been met, and Accomplishments/Successes. Specific sub-questions were posed on the ACS goals of: increased prevention strategies; increased kinship placements; involvement of primary and secondary agencies; improved service coordination; and involvement of parents, clients, and residents. Participants were also asked about Frustrations and Failures, and Obstacles in achieving goals, and any Mistakes made in developing the NNs.

Additional questions related to the Strategic Plan, specifically its identification, perceived implementation and impact. And the respondents were queried about Long Term Goals; the Direction for the Future of the NNs, and Challenges to be faced. The use of Data was a separate

question—what existing data was used and collected by the NNs, and what type of data was needed.

Data Analysis. At least two members of the research team reviewed the data to ensure reliability. Differences in interpretation were discussed by the whole team. We analyzed responses to key questions. As this is a qualitative study, statistics will not be provided; however terms like “almost all,” “most,” “a majority,” “a few,” “hardly any” etc. will be used to characterize the extensiveness and intensity of responses. The terms “participants” or “respondents” will be used interchangeably to mean the 38 people interviewed.

Limitations: Given resource and time constraints, the interviews were skewed to the participants who are currently active in the NNs. We did not exhaust the dozens of names provided or identified in the minutes of meetings. Very few parents, or people who were unaffiliated community members, were named; none was interviewed. Only a few active public officials or public agency staff were named; one was interviewed. To the extent that there are differences in perceptions or accounts among those interviewed, those will be reported: no attempt was made to independently corroborate a set of facts or events.

Certain documents were missing, not forthcoming or incomplete. No minutes were available from before 2003. Hence the formation and early days of both NNs were reconstructed primarily from interviews.

FINDINGS

HISTORY OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORKS

The first marker for the beginning of the NNs identified by almost all participant was the needs assessment process titled “Matching Needs and Services.” This was a process whereby ACS brought together ACS field staff and contracted agency staff to review selected foster care placement cases in neighborhood clusters known as Service Planning Areas (SPAs). The purpose of forming the NNs was to refocus the efforts of ACS. It was driven by data showing the high numbers of children in foster care concentrated in certain Community Districts (CDs). Many respondents stated that a primary goal was to shift the ACS emphasis from placement to

prevention. Others saw the NNs goals as helping to keep children in the neighborhood when they were placed, to place them with relatives (“kin”) where possible, and to reduce the number of unfounded reports to the NY State Central Registry. ACS staff identified as an additional goal, shifting their relationship with “the community” from an adversarial one to a more collaborative partnership model. **Virtually every respondent wanted to change the image of ACS as a “baby snatcher.”** The projects that were begun by the new NNs in BENY and CH were linked to the results of “matching needs and services” (e.g. findings of educational neglect, substance abuse, absence of extended family, etc.)

[More background on the structure and demographics is included in the Full Report.]

Central Harlem: Background

There is some disagreement about the origins of the CH NN. Some Executive Directors (EDs) from Central Harlem mentioned (then) Assemblyman Keith Wright and Melba Butler, ED of Harlem-Dowling as taking initial leadership in the late 1990s to bring agencies together to focus on children “at risk.” Among the EDs involved in these precursor efforts included Thelma Dye of Northside Child Mental Health, Mario Drummonds of the Manhattan Perinatal Partnership, Jeff Canada of the Harlem Children’s Zone, and additional community-based organizations who came together to share resources and address common issues.

For all intents and purposes, the transition to the CH NN was a relatively smooth one. These same Executive Directors and additional ones from the Children’s Aid Society and elsewhere, have maintained their commitment to the NN through the involvement of their senior staff people in various levels of leadership. Wilma Morton and Travis Davis from ACS were the first co-chairs, followed by Regina Lawson-Hughes. Audrey Barclay (who subsequently moved away) and Wayne Dawson became co-chairs in late 2004. The ACS staff serving the CH NN as of 2005 include Melvin Alston and Gladys Screen, although both have other responsibilities as well. (Gladys unfortunately has been out of work since mid-July 2005 due to a serious injury.) CH NN also has been without the additional ACT staff liaison since the beginning of 2005. Very few CH leaders or ACS staff wanted to talk about the controversial tenure of the former ACT liaison, and although they are continuing to function, many expressed frustration at the cryptic selection process for a replacement.

Brownville-East New York: Background

The BENY leadership credits the “matching needs and services” process for getting the core people “to the table,” although they were not necessarily happy with ACS at the time. The BENY leaders point to the distrust the “community” had of ACS during the Guiliani era, but credit the ACS NBS staff by name for turning it around through their commitment and investment, especially: Boneface Eze, Nigel Nathaniel, and Laura White. The first chair was Paula Tarant Rivers, and early on in 2000, Helen Jordon (NY Urban League), Brenda Jackson (Women’s Prison Association) and Latricia Johnson (ACS Congregate Care), were recruited as three co-chairs where they remain today. Laura White remains as ACS NN staff (with other functions outside the NN), along with the full time assistance of Osman Boakye, the ACT liaison since 2003.

STRUCTURE

[General Structure of NNs is provided in the Full Report.]

Central Harlem had the following sub-committees in 2005: Education, Today’s Foster Care, Youth, Prevention, Membership, Housing (currently defunct). It has held three “Three Kings Days” Children’s Celebrations, several Community Fairs, a NN Retreat, and has housed the ACS Community Support Team (CST) initiative (now a part of the Preventive Sub-Committee as of late 2005). They also sponsored a Youth Forum (“What’s your 9/11”). (See Appendix 2 in the Full Report for List of Major Activities of both NNs).

The Brownville-East New York Sub-Committees in 2005 include: Child Abuse/Prevention; After-School-Tutorial, Substance Abuse; Education/Prevention; and its newest since 2004, Consumer Outreach. It has held 3 major Substance Abuse conferences, sponsored a schools-based “poster contest” on prevention (see Appendix 3); held 4 annual Breakfast Forums, several Back-to-School Events with local libraries, Family Days and other community-wide events [The ACT Role is described in the Full Report.]

MEETING GOALS

This section describes the positive side of the NN picture—and it is a rich mosaic of activities all tied to a greater purpose—the well-being of children and families. The CH and BENY leadership articulated clearly goals for their networks consistent with and supportive of the five core goals identified by ACS: Specifically these include: increased prevention strategies; increased kinship placements; involvement of primary and secondary agencies; improved service coordination; and involvement of parents, clients, and residents. . Indeed, some EDs, ACS Administrators and NN leaders saw the networks as a medium through which ACS achieves these goals.

Often, given the diffuseness of the goals and the difficulty in directly attributing network activities to attaining the goals, the NN participants cited indicators and/or surrogates for the goals and the strategies to achieve them. Furthermore, the interrelatedness of each of these goals to the larger goal of reducing child abuse and neglect and their non-linear character, causes some difficulty in “measuring” success. Nevertheless, the NNs have devised creative ways of tackling these goals through sub-committees and NN-wide events

[The Role and Function of Sub-Committees is described in the Full Report]

GOAL 1: Increased prevention strategies

The goal of increasing “prevention” strategies was often cited. There were many expressions that affirmed unequivocally, prevention as the primary rationale behind the neighborhood networks and the involvement of service providers. Some leaders defined prevention as finding alternatives to foster care placements, lessening the unfounded Central Registry calls, and preventing placement recidivism. Prevention also meant a more general approach to shift service delivery patterns. Given the diffuse nature of “prevention,” the NNs viewed their role, and by extension the role of their various subcommittees, as raising consciousness within the community about child abuse, and to make the community aware of the services designed to prevent placement.

Within the CH NN there was a clear sense that they were instrumental in lowering the ranking of the Central Harlem community in terms of foster care placements. In BENY, there was not the same sense of being able to directly attribute activities to clear changes in rankings or placements. They focused more on the number of people they've attracted to their programs and the number of people who they've helped through their own sub-committees, or through their community-wide and school-based campaigns (see **Appendix 3 in the Full Report for a detailed description of the BENY "Poster Contest" Case Study**).

NN leaders overwhelmingly identified the value and success of **short-term and annual projects** that are designed with prevention in mind. That is, the events provide the outreach and education needed in order to move toward prevention rather than after-the-fact crisis intervention. These events and activities are considered strong indicators of the Network's ability to get out prevention messages to the CH and BENY communities. Increasing attendance levels at meetings and events serve as specific and measurable indicators of "success." In reality, these activities (summarized in Appendix 2 of the Full Report) serve multiple goals (e.g., prevention, coordination of services, involvement of parents, families and residents, etc.).

GOAL 2: Increased kinship placements

Most respondents credited ACS with promoting kinship and community placements. Both CH & BENY NN leaders recognized the need for foster care, although they expressed hope that preventive activities will continue to reduce the numbers of families brought into care. The role of the networks in helping to *increase kinship placements* instead of other out-of-home placements is also viewed as important in increasing community awareness and preventing child abuse.

CH and BENY both created subcommittees to achieve this goal, but in ways that reflect their particular conceptualizations of how best to engage future foster parents. In CH, the **Today's Foster Care Sub-Committee** recruits foster parents from Central Harlem, whereas as in BENY the **Consumer Outreach Sub-Committee** serves this function. Within each network there is increased emphasis on developing consumer awareness so that if children need to be placed, community members can serve as an extended family.

GOAL 3: Involvement of primary and secondary community agencies

Both NNs view **involvement of primary and secondary community agencies** as critical to and interdependent with achieving the other NN goals. Increasing organizational involvement in the NNs was seen as a means to increase utilization of services and create a service community to prevent foster care. This was often cited as one of the NNs greatest accomplishments.

The Network meetings provide a space and opportunity for providers to present their services and familiarize themselves with existing and emerging services in the community. This accomplishes both instrumental and expressive functions: meetings provide an opportunity to gain information, to increase referral sources, to network with other providers, to vent frustrations around working in a difficult field, and to gain support and encouragement to continue to do this difficult work.

CH and BENY leaders see the growth of their memberships as clear indicators of the NN success. In CH, the need to increase their membership further is manifested by the creation and maintenance of the Membership sub-committee, which is charged with recruitment efforts, and the maintenance of a dues structure. Indeed, when members are confronted with particularly knotty or novel situations, they often use the NNs as a resource for consultation and assistance. Hence, the increased involvement of primary and secondary agencies in the community has directly supported improvement in service coordination (discussed next).

GOAL 4: Improving service coordination

All respondents identified improved service coordination as a goal and some suggested this is *“the biggest piece”* (BENY Leader-6). BENY and CH recognized the potential of the NNs to fulfill this goal given that they are at the nexus of ACS, service providers, other community-based organizations, and consumers. This unanimity appears an expression of the initial “matching needs and services” emphasis, and a result of an improved sense of community, itself a result of greater awareness and involvement of the myriad agencies involved at some level. Many NN leaders from both CH and BENY spoke about how knowing someone’s face, or

having a personal exchange at a NN meeting or event, facilitated the coordination of services and served to “lubricate” difficult or awkward situations.

The leaders see the NNs as a critical community-based approach to child welfare that is “in process.” With some support and technical assistance, members have very much “rolled up their sleeves” and focused on making the NNs successful. This development of a sense of community within the BENY and CH NNs required a breaking down of organizational barriers and resistance. In particular, agencies historically competitive of each other and functioning within “silos” (a term used by several people), were moved from distance and distrust to familiarity and, in many cases, mutually supportive relationships.

Beyond the barriers between agencies within the community, both NN leaders and ACS staff articulated an improvement in the ability of agencies to interact with ACS itself. The adversarial relationship between clients and ACS has often been mirrored in agencies’ responses to ACS; the agencies see themselves as advocates for and defenders of their clients. Now, through the work of the networks, according to most of the participants, the lens has shifted to one of partnership between organizations and ACS on behalf of clients.

GOAL 5: Involvement of parents, clients and residents

One of the most important goals to both CH and BENY has been to increase involvement of parents, clients and residents in the NNs. But, it has been the most difficult goal to achieve in any substantial numbers or with regularity. Given the historic lack of consumer participation in most agencies and service sectors, this may be the most radical goal of all. NN leaders articulated that in order to be able to achieve the other goals—reducing foster care placements, establishing more kinship or within community placements— they have to involve the community beyond the service providers. They also believe that ACS has been committed to this goal from the inception of the NNs.

Interestingly, both CH and BENY have used similar activities and strategies to accomplish this goal—developing specific “consumer” sub-committees; engaging former clients; tabling at various community events and fairs; making on-site presentations at schools and libraries, and

faith-based institutions; and creating special community events that celebrate families. The goal of the NNs is not to help families directly, but rather to put them in touch with the formal or informal services to help them. Many state that the goal is to have those who have been helped use their experiences to advise other parents and advise the professionals “at the table.”

The sub-committees in BENY and CH have done innumerable workshops and educational series that have served to engage parents around the issue of child welfare directly and indirectly. Targeted child abuse/neglect prevention programs and parenting skills trainings have been complemented by job skills training, housing information sessions, employment assistance, and recreational activities promoting individual and community wellness.

The NN leaders have held tightly to those few consumers, residents and parent advocates who have joined the networks. Furthermore, almost everyone, including ACS staff were sympathetic about the many obstacles and barriers to consumer participation. These include their difficult and often impoverished lives, structural inequities and discrimination, the distrust of ACS and the organizations affiliated with it, as well as time and resource constraints, etc. Therefore, the NNs ability to identify and engage even a few consumers is indication that their message is being heard and well received. And mostly importantly, they are constantly strategizing about ways to attract other clients and community residents.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN MAINTAINING MEMBERSHIP AND MOMENTUM

The CH & BENY NN leadership consider the NNs growing size in spite of technological, resource, and other constraints, a true success. Although consistency of membership and the involvement of particular sectors is not optimal, the NNs feel they have succeeded in gaining the investment of participating members and in growing the member body in the right direction. Many noted with great satisfaction the establishment of a core group of members.

Given the mission of the NNs, it is not surprising that a nucleus of child welfare agencies has developed within the NNs using it for networking, developing global and targeted prevention strategies, as well as for case specific problem solving, referrals, and general support. The strong and consistent representation of many divisions of ACS, while still encouraging grassroots

initiatives, has been instrumental in maintaining membership. In particular, the ACS field offices and research divisions were identified as providing occasional data and support to assist in the identification of needs and the accomplishment of goals.

Both BENY and CH expressed a desire to increase institutionalized support from EDs and Commissioner level staff, maximize membership and include as many community groups in the NNs; nevertheless, they also believe that present membership provides a good cross section of community stakeholders, and it takes a major effort to maintain their participation.

USE AND VALUE OF DATA

ACS was particularly interested in how the NNs utilized and developed data to inform their activities. Many of the participants in both CH and BENY stated that ACS provided data to inform their work, specifically the figures on Foster Care Placements and the calls made to the Central Registry. These figures were identified more often in CH as a driving force behind their work. Several mentioned discussion of the “Top 18” (CDs) list published by ACS a few years ago. Additionally, in CH in 2005, reports on the Community Support Team pilot program kept them aware of who was being served (66 families), and to a lesser degree, on the outcomes of the program.

The most frequently recalled ACS data mentioned by NN participants was that obtained from the “matching needs and services” initiative as part of the creation of the NNs. Also well remembered was information gleaned from the community walks (in 2003 and 2004). Many respondents reiterated how important those were in informing the NN on the needs of the community and what the NN could do to address those concerns. Several expressed the view that the data the NNs collected on their own was highly valuable. They were able to obtain a first hand feel for what was happening at a street level and to use that information on how to proceed.

Many BENY leaders in particular, mentioned their community walks in 2004 related to their attempt to target certain public housing developments when a disproportionate number of reports came from those sites. For CH, one of the memorable events from a few years earlier was when they sought to find out why so many removals of children came from certain blocks. The

revelation that many child abuse reports came from the homeless shelters led to targeted interventions in those settings. This included the placement of social work interns at those sites.

Occasional other public data-based reports were evident in minutes—from the Departments of Education, Youth and Community Development, and Health and Mental Hygiene. It wasn't always clear how those data were used beyond providing information to understand the community better. Some BENY leaders mentioned reviewing police data such as arrest records. Health disparities by community districts were also presented as an important social concern independently in both CH and BENY during 2005. (In the case of BENY, there was a discussion of forming a Health Awareness Sub-Committee, but it was put on hold.) However in general, data presentations were only sporadically provided at NN meetings.

To a limited degree, the NNs used different types of data from the past and present to drive what the NN needed to do for the community. Several emphasized that the use of data is important in determining services and the quality of service provision. All respondents agreed that there is a **need for more data to be presented**. The following are some types of data that more than one respondent said the NN needed:

- descriptive data such as the types of organizations that exist in the community, the resources they have, the types of programs they operate, and their vacancies;
- information about new businesses that they can tap into, and other economic indicators;
- descriptive data from city agencies in areas such as housing developments, mental health issues, substance abuse, school testing scores and drop-out rates;
- availability of grants and other funding opportunities;
- demographic data including shifts in the population (the impact of gentrification),

Both BENY and CH leaders say they want data more systematically collected, compiled and presented. ACS NBS staff also understood the importance of utilizing public data and generating

their own data collection. They have tried to be the conduit in the past, by bringing various data experts in from time to time, although less in 2005. Consistent follow through in obtaining asked-for data, or on completing their own internal surveys often got put on “the back burner,” given NBS staff responsibilities for other maintenance functions and program activities of the NN. These and other frustrations and obstacles to reaching their goals will be discussed next.

OBSTACLES/FRUSTRATIONS

It is important to put this section into context. As has been said, both BENY and CH are acknowledged by many ACS staff to be among, if not, the best NN models. The many problems and difficulties identified here, were for the most part, circumscribed within an positive atmosphere about what has been accomplished, dogged determination to keep improving, and cautious optimism about the future.

Nevertheless, most NN leaders and ACS staff acknowledged how much further they needed to go. Some of these obstacles were also identified in the McGowan & Walsh (2004), and White et al. (2005) reports; but others were not reported or do not apply to these two NNs. For purposes of analysis, these are classified as 1) Internal-Infrastructure; 2) Internal-Leadership/Organizational; 3) Complexities in Building Collaborations; 4) External Politics; 5) ACS related; and 6) Membership and Outreach. To be sure, these are overlapping and inter-related categories.

OBSTACLE 1: Internal-Infrastructure

Not surprisingly, **one of the most frequently stated problems by everyone was insufficient resources.** “*Resources! Resources! Resources!*”! This harsh reality was not asserted with a pessimistic or angry tone; rather it was stated in the context of how much more could be done with additional funding.

The sense conveyed by most of the respondents was that funding would augment the resources already provided, not replace the in-kind contributions of members and supporters. As important, it would also demonstrate ACS’ commitment to the community and to the NNs, beyond what they provide now.

More than direct funding per se, was the clear need for competent staff. Time and again, in citing reasons why certain projects or processes did not move forward, it was the **lack of staff** resources. For reasons noted earlier, the feelings about the lack of staff resources were more intense in CH because the ACT liaison position has been either frozen or withdrawn.

Additionally up through 2005, there had been a pool of funding available for NN use for relatively small amounts of programming (\$ 15,000). Leaders and staff are worried that this is now or will be gone in the near future.

The **lack of technology was the second obstacle in the intensity and frequency with which it was cited**. This was manifested over and over in participants lamenting the lack of a website, and the minimal use of even simple communication technology, such as email. There may have been funds allocated for doing an on-line and print directory since this item appeared in the minutes almost monthly since 2003. [In the case of CH, an ACS contracted person was engaged in the process for almost a year and then abruptly vanished, apparently leaving the job undone.] And like staffing, technology was viewed as an imperative to reaching their goals of community awareness and membership engagement.

A third resource concern identified by several leaders was the **lack of space**, which was also connected to the goal of increasing outreach and visibility. A place in the community was seen as vital in terms of permanency and legitimacy.

OBSTACLE 2: Internal-Leadership/Organizational

While the participants identified their leadership capabilities as an important contribution to the NN (see Appendix 4 in the Full Report for a list of the competencies and attributes provided by the leaders themselves), several acknowledged a series of **internal gaps or insufficiencies in the leadership and organization** of the NNs. These issues were raised in both NNs, but somewhat differently. The drawbacks cited came from a desire to be more efficient and effective. In CH, there was some critiquing of the **lack of a stable and consistent leadership** —at the paid (ACT or ACS) level primarily, although a few respondents raised questions about the changing volunteer leadership as well. In BENY, with a stable volunteer leadership, it was the **lack of**

follow through that was mentioned by both the volunteer and staff leaders. Some examples were given related to the unfinished Directory and the lack of a Strategic Plan.

Another internal area that many of the NN participants identified was the **lack of evaluation and systematic self-assessments**. It was conveyed as a frustration because they didn't have the time, resources, and in some cases, the expertise, to conduct or complete evaluations of their projects and of overall NN functioning. At times, it was related to their limited use or availability of data as discussed in the previous Section.

The ACS staff, and to a lesser degree the NN leaders, also expressed frustration that they haven't been able to obtain data to measure the effectiveness of ACS-initiated programs that involve the ACS contracted service providers. In these cases, the blame was placed as much on ACS as it was the NNs.

OBSTACLE 3: Complexities in Building Collaborations: Managing Differences

A third area of common frustration relates to the fundamental nature of inter-organizational collaborations. There are **tensions inherent in the model** itself (Mizrahi & Rosenthal, 1993; Rosenthal & Mizrahi, 1994). Participating in the leadership structure and decision-making process of collaborations is voluntary. Although there was a sense that the agencies contracting with ACS felt compelled to participate in the NNs, at least in the beginning, there was a consensus that additional incentives are needed to maintain the depth and breadth of their commitment. While they identified their success in bringing in increasing numbers of major organizational stakeholders to the table, there was some concern expressed about "who was missing?" This pertained to both the level of person representing an organization, as well as the organizations which do not regularly participate. There was a strong sense by the many leaders in both NNs that **a higher level and consistency of participation needed**, especially in the work of the sub-committees.

Several respondents also understood the downside of their own expansion success; that is, the larger and more diverse the constituency, the more complex it was to manage the various interests and agendas. As a result of the fluidity of participation, the NN leadership sent **mixed**

messages at times to the membership, or at least to those who showed up at meetings. Meeting participants were both praised for attending, but chided for not doing more. This was observed at meetings as well as mentioned in the interviews and minutes. Many of the staff and volunteer leaders were constantly appealing to those present to join a sub-committee or show up to an event, sometimes aggressively so. And while many of the leaders recognized that the major obstacle to participation was **the lack of time** and not lack of interest, they still expressed disappointment when people didn't come through.

OBSTACLE 4: External Politics: Tensions at the Institutional, Systems and Community Levels

Many of the NN leaders identified economic and political realities affecting agency relationships that were beyond their control. These included tensions between **competition among the members on one hand, and their willingness to cooperate for the greater good of families or the community** on the other.

Beyond the normal competition for clients and resources among agencies, there were tensions expressed about **the way ACS handled the contracted agencies outside the NN**. Agencies are evaluated and ranked by ACS using certain performance criteria, and are also informally appraised by their fellow service providers. At NN meetings this was manifested when complaints were made about lack of referrals to their agencies. Occasionally, this situation could be masking an underlying criticism of the quality of service that agency was providing. The question was raised as to how the NNs could hold each other accountable in collegial ways, and whether the NN should be a place where agencies openly shared their problems. Most NN leaders and ACS staff heralded the NNs for allowing those forthright exchanges, while recognizing that it could be problematic because ACS was present. Nevertheless, a few leaders and EDs shared instances confidentially where they felt the NN should be used for more than just information sharing and resource exchange. They felt that the NN was too lenient and did not hold agencies accountable enough for their actions. They understood however, that a level of trust would have to be engendered for an agency to expose its vulnerabilities, seek guidance, or accept criticism.

Beyond inter-agency ACS-related issues, the larger context that affected agency involvement was **the conservative political and economic agenda of cutbacks and downsizing** at all levels of government. The NNs began in earnest as the Bush and Pataki administrations tightened budgets, and as philanthropy was diverted to assisting with major disasters. According to many respondents, ACS and other governmental bodies have cut funding, required additional documentation, increased scrutiny, and even forced some agencies to close. A few participants used Commissioner Mattingly's term "rightsizing" in promoting this downsizing trend. Regardless of whether this ACS trend was viewed as justified or not—and there were NN leaders and ACS staff themselves on both sides of the issue—almost everyone recognized the negative impact these factors had on the investment in the NN by ACS contracted agencies and other CBOs. They did not have the time or willingness to invest as much as they knew they should.

Furthermore, both the NN leaders and ACS staff were astute about the **sharp divisions and competition historically among the public sector agencies**; they were most adamant about the obstacles in collaborating with the School system (Department of Education) and other public agencies. Many leaders asserted that to break down those barriers ("the silos"), it takes enormous skill, status and time, which they felt could not be done at the community level alone. The NNs need the involvement of top ACS officials.

OBSTACLE 5: Issues Related to ACS-Internal Tensions and Image

Three different concerns related to ACS as an entity were strongly expressed as obstacles to strengthening the NNs: first, the participation of the ACS Field Offices and their line workers; second, the absence of current Commissioner in NN activity; and third, ACS' traditional image.

First, there were differing opinions about the extent to which the Field Offices and the direct service divisions valued, supported the mission of, and were engaged NN activity. For the most part, there were more positive than negative comments. Unlike what White et al. (2005) reported, various ACS Field Office staff from different services and from different levels were present at both NNs, although they were observed in larger numbers at BENY. However, their roles were mainly as observers and occasional presenters; rarely did they participate in discussions in the

many meetings observed. And they were not identified as participating significantly in any sub-committee.

ACS field office managers articulated the same dilemmas that were heard by the contracted agency representatives, namely, the **squeeze on their time**. For the most part, the tensions about participation appear to be about setting priorities and being convinced that the trade-offs are worth the investment. Increased NN participation would divert their staff from doing required ACS and other essential tasks.

Second, there was an uneasy feeling on the part of some NN leaders and many of the ACS NBS staff that **changes occurring outside of the NNs** would eventually affect them. At a few meetings of both NNs, the NBS staff articulated Commissioner Mattingly's "three R's": *Rightsizing, Reinvesting and Realigning*, and tried to focus attention on them. They alerted the NNs, but there was little strategizing about ways to assure that the NNs fit in those priorities.

The **disconnect from the top** was voiced by several ACS staff and NN leaders, including executive directors, but expressed more often by CH leaders than by those in BENY. The absence of the Network Liaison and their Network Planner (who had been out for several months due to an accident), may have exacerbated the perceptions of the CH leaders.

On the other end of the ACS participation continuum, there was some criticism of **ACS for being too domineering and trying to control the agenda**. In the few instances it was expressed, it was related to the way ACS would bring their agenda to the table, or would "use" the NN to present an idea after the fact, rather than using them as a testing ground or sounding board.

The third obstacle to community involvement conveyed was the **ACS image** itself. Many NN leaders from both CH and BENY as well as ACS staff felt the community still perceived their mandated child protection role in "baby snatcher" terms. Additionally the term "BCW, the old Bureau of Child Welfare" was used by the NN respondents to portray the way many residents still viewed ACS, although they all acknowledged that it had really changed. (BCW was the former name of ACS more than 15 years ago.) The negative association was given as a reason why many people stayed away.

Given the current scrutiny ACS is under in early 2006, tensions around the appropriate role and image for ACS will undoubtedly be exacerbated.

OBSTACLE 6: Membership and Community Outreach

Overall, there was much frustration expressed about the lack of NN **visibility in the broader** community. Many NN leaders expressed the need for greater **publicity about the NNs**, which in turn was related back to lack of resources, technology, space and a commitment from ACS top leadership to develop a major public awareness campaign. Many felt that in spite of making progress, there was insufficient recognition of the NNs.

Additionally, obstacles to involving specific constituencies stood out: namely, 1) consumers, 2) executive directors, 3) public agencies, 4) faith-based organizations, and 5) political leaders. Almost all of the NN leaders and ACS NBS staff identified **the lack of community involvement** as a limitation of the NNs. It was voiced as a general concern, and specifically when asked “*Who was missing from the table?*” There appeared to be two components to their frustrations—one was bringing more community people into the formal NN, which presumably meant a greater involvement in the general and sub-committee meetings, and the other was in reaching out to the community, meaning to parents and families, to inform them about services and opportunities the NN and their member agencies provided.

An obstacle in recruiting the first group was related to the difficulty in defining the community and the consumer. There were multiple meanings given to those terms by NN participants. It could mean any community resident not working for a human service agency, or a client of ACS or an ACS-contracted agency. And the category “consumer” itself was interpreted in at least five ways: the natural/bio parents “whose children are in or were “the system”—in prevention or foster care settings; any parent from the neighborhood with the belief that all families are potentially “at risk;” current and potential foster parents; active community members who are leaders of informal networks or community-based organizations such as a parent associations or block associations; and finally, organized and trained parents who are a part of advocacy organizations such as the Child Welfare Organizing Project (which was named

several times), and People United for Children. Youth and grandparents were also identified as constituencies needed in their own right.

Furthermore, the type of community or consumer presence desired often related to the reasons NN leaders wanted them involved, and speaks to the difficulties in recruiting them. Those who wanted to reach out to and engage more consumers directly, usually had a **“case focus,”** meaning they wanted to help the clients get the information, resources, or support they needed to keep their families strong and intact. For others, consumers were wanted from a **collective “consumer empowerment” perspective**, because as a group, they knew best how the system worked or didn’t work for them. Several participants also stressed the importance of consumer surveys and the community walks to hear the community’s voice without necessarily having them as “members.”

Some of the NN Leaders and ACS NBS staff acknowledged the obstacles in getting more active consumer participation. This included the time the NNs met, as well as competing obligations of the parents—because they were working, taking care of their children, or in a program. Several recognized the stress many families were under, and the stigma or intimidation of having a connection to ACS, which kept parents away.

A second large missing group identified was the **Executive Directors** both ACS contracted and non-contracted service providers. In probing deeper, there were actual and symbolic reasons for this concern. Only a few thought the EDs should be at all the meetings, but many wanted evidence that they were still invested and committed. A few ACS staff thought there was a “lack of buy in” (the most common term used), among the EDs.

Notwithstanding this perception, all the EDs interviewed expressed great support for the NNs, and said they demonstrated it with their staff’s direct participation, and other in-kind contributions. A few EDs acknowledged that they would do more if asked directly. Nevertheless, many EDs also expressed a **disconnect at the ACS Commissioner level**, either because they no longer met as a group at that level, or because major structural changes were occurring outside the NN without the involvement of the NNs.

Public Agencies were the third difficult sector whose cooperation and collaboration at the appropriate levels was sporadic or missing. The number one frustration overwhelmingly voiced by both NNs, was the inability to collaborate with the **Department of Education** more formally and systematically, notwithstanding the inroads that had been made in working together in several local schools. Indeed in BENY, 18 different schools were mentioned by NN leaders or identified in the minutes.

The perception of **New York Police Department** representation was quite mixed. While the NNs had had positive interactions and some collaborations with their precincts, each suggested that they could benefit from more participation and information from the NYPD. In CH, there was a successful collaboration with the police in 2004. Both CH and BENY leaders felt the initial commitment from the NYPD was waning.

In both CH and BENY, the NNs inability to substantially involve the **New York City Housing Authority** was seen as critical in not achieving the goals of prevention and consumer involvement since disproportionately high numbers of reported incidents came from public housing. Some success—such as using NYCHA space and providing informational workshops—was overshadowed by the larger institutional barriers.

The lack of adequate representation of **clergy and faith-based organizations** was the fourth group mentioned by both ENY and CH networks. The centrality of institutions of faith in the lives of these communities was addressed head-on. However, some participants noted philosophical divides that make engagement of these culturally and communally important faith-based organizations difficult.

While there is the sense that faith institutions are interested, both CH and BENY lamented the lack of greater involvement, and clearly expressed a need for more active participation from them because they are an ear to community concerns and conditions, and also can play an active role in preventing child abuse and neglect. CH now has one active clergy leader, with others attending both NNs occasionally.

The fifth group not actively involved was the **politicians**. Some NN leaders expressed a desire for greater participation from political leaders, while others were skeptical. Both

CH and BENY felt their representatives did not demonstrate an interest in the networks activities commensurate with the importance of their work and their responsibility for what happens in their communities. Community board managers were deemed valuable, but only one (in BENY) was an active contributor.

STRATEGIC PLAN

ACS was particularly interested in how the NNs planned systematically and for the long term. There was an assumption that strategic plans were in place, and the questions posed were about implementation and impact. However, when questioned about a Strategic Plan, almost all the participants were hesitant or uncertain—ACS staff included.

The strategic plan as a product was “somewhere,” or “in someone’s hand.” Almost everyone acknowledged its importance; many respondents identified a person who they thought had it; a few people said it was incomplete or “in process.” Yet when asked to produce it, one mentioned that it was with the lower level ACS staff with supervisory responsibility. Some participants thought that it existed as part of the initial phase of forming the NN, but had not seen it. Only one CH leader spoke about a Strategic Plan in specific terms.

For the most part, leaders in both NNs recognized the importance of strategic planning, but accepted or lamented the reality that other priorities and/or lack of expertise or time prevented it from occurring. Overall, the ACS staff was more concerned about this gap than the NN leadership, but it was identified as a priority in the near future by NN leaders and ACS NBS staff. Nevertheless, in spite of a lack of specific strategic planning tools, follow up questions about their long term goals yielded a range of directions for the Networks.

LONG TERM / FUTURE GOALS

NN participants recognized that while the NNs had many successes, they still did meet many of their goals to the maximum possible. Therefore, they focused their long term agenda on the specific, yet complex goals identified in the earlier section of this report. These goals addressed

many of the obstacles presented above including: relationships with ACS; building their Infrastructure; and reaching the Broader Community.

ACS Goals: Long Term.

The NN leaders saw a need to continue to focus on **reducing foster care placements**. Toward this end, **prevention strategies** needed to be further enhanced which could in turn help in reducing foster care placements. Part of the emerging prevention strategies in CH is a **youth focus**; the CH NN will provide more youth related activities. In addition, the NN will continue to focus on ways in which they can provide **services to parents and custodial grandparents**, which in turn can help strengthen the family. **Outreach to the community and consumers** will continue to be an important aspect of prevention, especially to educate people about services in both BENY and CH. Additionally long term goals included continued outreach to CBOs as a priority.

Infrastructure Goals: Long Term.

In order to carry out these ACS related goals to the fullest potential, NN leaders have realized that they need to focus on maintenance issues related to the inner workings of the NN. These include **improved documentation**, the overall **governance** of the NN, and improved their **technological capability** as a long term goals.

Broader Community Goals: Long Term.

Some NN leaders and ACS staff wanted to be more focused, which conjured up a sense of narrowing goals and the scope of the work to specific child welfare issues. Other NN leaders focused on more visionary and holistic goals, long term. This was driven by poor community conditions and a sense that their communities had been neglected for too long. These leaders cited the interconnectedness of economic and social conditions in improving the well-being of children and families. For example, health data were presented at meetings independently in CH and BENY, which led to interest by the some in the NNs to focus on health disparities; both communities were very high on the list of preventable deaths and related health problems. Nevertheless these discussions did not lead to the creation of additional sub-committees; clearly there was a sense that too much was already on their plates. Only a few questioned whether the NNs were the right body to take on a health agenda—even with additional resources.

Very few conceptualized a **collective advocacy role for the NNs**, although a few recognized the powerful force the NN could be if they got bigger and stronger. Occasionally, someone would ask for support politically for an issue (e.g. write a letter; sign a petition; attend a rally).

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Two cautionary notes: While this Report contains rich data which hopefully speaks the “truth” from the perspective of the NN participants, it was not meant to be a comprehensive evaluation. For that to occur, the methodology would need to include interviews with less involved as well as formerly involved participants, and also surveys of selected groups in the wider community. The recommendations provided here are from the perspective of CH and BENY only, but hopefully will be reviewed with the forethought of applying them to other NNs as relevant.

Second, it may very well be that many of the recommendations that follow, and those suggested in the Executive Summary in the beginning, are already being considered by ACS. Hopefully these suggestions, synthesized from the voices of NN and ACS participants and written materials, will either reinforce or redirect ACS policies and resources with respect to the future of the NNs. These recommendations are directed to four constituencies, not necessarily in order of importance.

IMMEDIATE AND SHORT TERM WITH CH & BENY NN LEADERS

- Develop mechanisms to receive formal and systematic feedback on this Report from the CH and BENY Leaders, EDs, and other NN participants.
- Review carefully the *Long term Goals and Future Directions* enunciated by the NN participants in the Report. In consultation with the NNs, prioritize, and develop the means to implement those deemed necessary and most important.
- Invest immediately in information and communication technology for the NNs (equipment, and training as necessary). This includes internet based emailing, listserves,

accessing databases, web pages, broadcast faxing, etc. as well as computer capability for the creation of e-newsletters, power point presentations, mail merge, etc.

- Provide targeted technical assistance or designate staff responsible for development functions. It is essential to help the NNs obtain additional external resources through major grant development, and to assist them with “grassroots” and in-kind fundraising.
- Assign additional staff to the NNs. At the very least, there needs to be one full time professional planner in each NN, in addition to the technical support, supervisory and managerial assistance provided by others in the NBS unit. Clarify the role and function of ACT vis-à-vis future NN staffing, support and additional resources.
- Restore or allocate additional program funding for NN identified program expenses—suggested minimum amount \$ 25,000 per NN.
- Consider investment in a graduate Student Field Unit for MSW students in community organizing, planning, or “macro” practice, for placement with NNs.

DIRECTED TO ACS WITH RESPECT TO OVERALL NN DIRECTIONS

- Hold a NN “Summit” with top leaders of the NNs. (Each NN would select a defined number of participants). Alternatively hold a series of “hands on” Strategic Focus Groups with the Commissioner and other senior ACS top leadership and NN leaders. Provide incentives to volunteer leadership for utilizing their expertise. Use this Report with other NNs to ascertain common themes—strengths and limitations. Articulate expectations and future directions. Be optimistic and realistic at the same time.
- Develop a major public awareness media campaign to ‘market’ the NNs. Feature it more prominently on the website, perhaps with a webpage for each NN. Provide resources for the NNs to develop their own targeted outreach plans through local community and organizational media.

- Consider additional evaluation research to ascertain the universality of these findings. [The original discussion between Hunter College School of Social Work and ACS was to conduct a comprehensive system-wide evaluation of the NNs after this small-scale “pilot” evaluation was completed.]
- More generally, utilize the NNs as sounding boards before implementation of pilot programs. Strengthen ways to receive their input systematically, be willing to accept advice, and provide a rationale when suggestions are not accepted. Provide systematic user- friendly data on evaluation of ACS pilot and institutionalized programs.
- Establish some protocols or Memoranda of Understanding at the top levels with other interested City Agencies (e.g. Department of Education; NYCHA; NYPD, etc.) Communicate any progress made on the concept paper: “The Neighborhood Integration- ‘One City’ Proposal” (2004), or other multi-city agency relationships that have been established outside the NNs. The better the NY City agencies coordinate specific functions centrally and formally, the easier the NNs will be able to develop collaborative relationships at the neighborhood level.

DIRECTED TO THE CH & BENY NETWORKS WITH ACS SUPPORT

- Complete the Resource Directory projects immediately—on-line as well as in hard copy. Explore with ACS the resources that were already allocated and are still needed. Assure that the Directory is designed to meet needs not already addressed. Solicit member agencies to contribute to its production and distribution.
- Request training in the collaboration model. Certain principles of collaboration practice should guide future activities. For example, it is difficult for any inter-organizational collaboration to reach out and include its grassroots constituency directly. It is important that representation from selected consumer and other community-based organizations be sought, rather locating individual parents. Outreach in general should be strategic and targeted, rather than casting the net wide; otherwise the NNs run the risk of “coming up short.”

- Recognize that contributions to the NN are more than dues, attendance at meetings or participation in sub-committees. All collaborations have different levels of commitment and different kinds of contributions that members make. Assess and value what each member does and could bring to the table. Prioritize and identify time-limited tasks to increase member involvement.
- Request technical assistance in infrastructure development, including ways to improve the important NN meetings. There are several specific suggestions that can be offered in terms of improving the structure, agenda, and process of meetings without losing their vitality. Specific attention should be paid to orienting “newcomers” and reaching out to Executive Directors. The role of the “representatives” to the NN, no matter at what level, needs to be articulated clearly. That role should include an obligation to provide feedback and input between the NN and the member organizations. While maintaining openness and fluidity of NN meetings to attract a range of participants, at the same time there needs to be a protocol for expectations and follow up between meetings.
- Recognize, with respect to level of membership participation and contributions, that there is no one right way to “do it;” the NN needs to decide more consciously, what members can contribute, and conversely, what they should expect from involvement in the NN. Understand that it is much more complex to have multi-levels participation from EDs, supervisors, line staff, clients, board members, etc. all at the table at the same time, every time. Establish a different combination of purposes and participants for different meeting agendas.
- Plan targeted outreach to the Hispanic/Latino service providers and residents, given that 17-38% of Hispanic/Latino residents live, respectively, in the CH and BENY SPAs.

DIRECTED TO ACS AND CONTRACTED AGENCIES

- Develop greater incentives for participation and leadership by contracted agencies—both formal and informal. Number one is to include NN participation in EQUIP or other

performance evaluations. There are many ways to document various levels of contributions and support by service providers to the NNs.

- Build participation into job descriptions and develop accountability measures for effective functioning. Document and calculate in-kind contributions by the agencies more systematically.
- Establish periodic ways to communicate the commitment of agency EDs and higher echelon ACS personnel (e.g. semi-annual Breakfast; community event, etc.) Include a means for EDs to communicate “top down” to and receive feedback “bottom up” from their staff involved in the NNs. It is through the participating CBOs and service-providing agencies that the NN primarily can reach the consumers and the grassroots residents.
- Address the issue of confidentiality—with respect to consumer, staff, and agency issues. Establish mechanisms that allow “cases” to be discussed and information shared sensitively, but forthrightly. Build in a means to use the NN to communicate consistent problems at the agency level (perhaps using “closed sessions with Executive Board/Steering Committee leadership only).
- Showcase “best practices” and programs from different NNs across the City, with an awareness of the constraints that agencies and CBOs face today. Become familiar with other non-ACS collaborations going on within and outside NYC, which may have lessons to be learned.

In conclusion, ACS should be proud of what has been accomplished in the last five-six years, at least with respect to these two NNs. More than anything they have obtained a “buy in” from the communities. There is overall a solid partnership, and even a sense of “ownership” of the NNs on the part of many who live and work in CH and BENY. There are many programs and practices on which to build.

