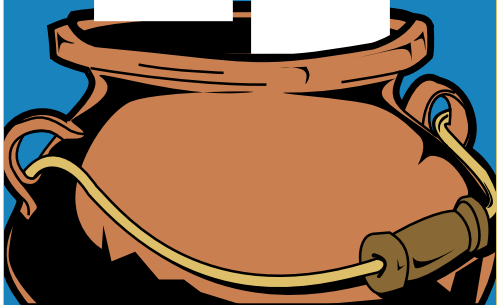# "Soup's On!"

CDI

LEARNING EXCHANGE

Celebrating Contributions of CDI Grantees to Building Our Community Knowledge Fund

June 16, 2006

"Soup's On!"

Celebrating the Contributions of CDI Grantees to the Building of Our Community Knowledge Fund

This booklet, compiled by Semics for you — the CDI grantees — offers a small sampling of the tips, tales, and tools that we have created together, working and learning as peers through the CDI Learning Exchange. Condensed and spiced with a dash of insight and hindsight, it highlights best practice approaches that comprise the essence of the community knowledge fund you helped develop in the CDI Learning Exchange. As guardians of this unique community asset, you and First 5 LA will be able to mine the fund for all the wisdom it can offer decision-makers and grantees in your ongoing efforts to improve the lives of young children and their families in Los Angeles County.

We invite you to savor this material, use it, and pass it on. We hope that the Learning Exchange experience continues to nourish your agencies, programs and communities for years to come. It has been a pleasure working with you!

The Purpose of the CDI Learning Exchange

Learning Exchange (LE) gatherings were designed to achieve both aims of the CDI evaluation — grantee support and data gathering. These were accomplished by linking providers, encouraging peer assistance, learning from and reflecting on other grantees' experiences, and collecting data on how CDI funding has changed the children's services infrastructure in our diverse communities.

The Learning Exchange experience was egalitarian. Grantees and researchers—participating as equals— came together to examine project challenges, brainstorm on solutions, validate successes, and make connections. By engaging as peer-learners, we all benefited from membership in this *community of practice*. LE gatherings provided a safe haven for discussion, action, and validation of the important work CDI grantees were doing. A place to find strength and assurance. The perspectives, experiences, ideas, and stories that you shared provided an enormous store of data for the initiative-wide evaluation, and have contributed to an enduring fund of community knowledge that can be applied to new project experiences by your agencies.

CDI Learning Exchange 1
Finding Common Ground
March 19, 2004

The Learning Exchange opened with the dramatic telling of **Stone Soup,** a story that embodied the essence of the Learning Exchange — everybody adding something to the pot and everybody partaking of and being nourished by what's in it. All the ingredients you contributed — your stories, experience, and expertise, your concerns and challenges — enriched the experience and provided sustenance. You shared possible solutions to similar challenges and found assurance from peers dealing with like issues.

Community knowledge fund highlights

- **Everyone has something of value to contribute!**
- **Stories of transformation in communities matter just as much as data about activities.**
- **Storytelling validates the importance of our CDI projects.**
- **Sharing stories across projects inspires and confirms the good work we do.**
- **Network, network, network!**

The Story of Stone Soup

This fable was written down by Marcia Brown in 1947. Many variations exist throughout the world therefore it is not copyrighted. Some say it is an old French story, others say its origin is Russian. All versions convey the message that when everybody contributes just a little something of their skills or talents to a project, the result is totally amazing and everyone benefits! Here is one version of this enduring tale:

Three weary travelers come to a village, carrying nothing more than an empty pot. Upon their arrival, the wary villagers are unwilling to share any of their food with the hungry travelers. The travelers fill the pot with water, drop a large smooth stone in it, and place it over a fire in the village square. One of the villagers becomes curious and asks what they are doing. The travelers answer that they are making "stone soup," which tastes wonderful, although it is missing something. "This stone soup would be fit for king's table if only we had a little beef, potatoes, or fresh garden vegetables to add to it." With these words, and some patience, the travelers convince each of the wary villagers to contribute whatever ingredient they have to the soup pot. Their efforts turn a pot of water and a rock into a hearty meal, plentiful enough for the entire town to enjoy.

CDI Learning Exchange 2
Building Common Ground

June 10, 2004

L E 2 offered content and activities designed to deepen the level of connection between participants. In the "Show and Tell" presentation and Q&A session that followed, you expressed commonly shared challenges and concerns you were facing in setting up your CDI-funded projects. As peer learners, we explored issues surrounding project implementation and brainstormed on outreach strategies to attract program participants. In networking opportunities before and after lunch, and in the topical forums that followed, grantees actively pursued linkages around common concerns and services. By clustering participants based on affinity of services or interests, you found multiple opportunities to connect and share strategies and solutions.

Your feedback on LE 2 confirmed that it was empowering to tell your stories, and it was especially powerful to have your stories heard. The focus on dialog, conversation and connection seemed to lessen your sense of working in isolation and strengthen the "fabric of community." It was a relief to many to learn that other organizations were experiencing the same challenges because it provided assurance "that we are in this process together."

The Learning Exchange gave one participant the "sense that we are 'one team,' doing what we believe in." It was satisfying for another grantee to "be able to work with people who share my same passion and vision."

Community Knowledge Fund highlights

- Cultivate cultural sensitivity. Hire and train bi-cultural staff.

- Use phone surveys, focus groups, community forums, and door-to-door canvassing to assess and understand local community needs before creating an intervention.

- Build on the community's culture, respecting differences in relation to time.

- Use incentives to overcome barriers to participation in literacy, health, and education programs.

- Reward participants for their efforts, find ways to highlight their contributions.

- Engage in active listening and practices that promote dialogue.

- Make personal connections, be accessible.

- Maintain personal contact in response to attrition.

- Do the necessary follow-up.

- Involve the community in identifying its assets.

- Plan for change so your program evolves along with the community.

- Help communities establish new norms and values regarding health and safety.

- Grow your agency's infrastructure as you expand services.

- Broaden your organizational vision, reach out to partner and form alliances.

- Study the political landscape, acknowledge the *powers that be*, know who is going to say "yes."

CDI Learning Exchange 3
Navigating Common Ground
October 1, 2004

Le 3 was an open invitation to "roll up our sleeves" and get down to the real "meat and potatoes" of project implementation. Semics encouraged you to reflect on the operational challenges you encountered in the first year of CDI funding, share your stories, and listen to peers who could help identify creative solutions to those challenges. From an evaluation perspective, these discussions generated much purposeful data about how CDI grantees as organizations were problem solving, learning, and adapting to changing conditions.

After some fun team-building activities, we launched "CDI to Eye," a simulated talk show featuring Harbor-UCLA (Breastfeeding Peer Counseling Program), St. Mary Medical Center Foundation (Long Beach Child Care Empowerment Project), and Friends of the Family (Project Good Start). These three grantees presented their projects, described their implementation issues, and shared creative ways they had adapted to address those challenges. Their contributions set the stage for dynamic problem-solving on a range of issues in the small, round-table discussions that followed.

Community Knowledge Fund highlights

- **Building trust takes time — make the time.**
- **Invest in relationships to help overcome institutional and cultural resistance.**
- **Work on winning advocates outside the program or agency.**
- **Harness the power of peer group motivation.**
- **Program participation and completion depends not only on provider/client relationships, but on the dynamic between participants themselves.**
- **Be pro-active around issues (such as transportation) that can impede program participation.**
- **Reward staff with training and incentives to minimize turnover.**

CDI Learning Exchange 4
Uncovering Hidden Stories
March 4, 2005

LE 4 was all about adjusting your perspective to discover hidden truths, about looking for reasons not readily apparent, about getting unstuck from old ways. Semics presented several stories to get you *thinking about thinking.* Remember the story of the obstinate sea captain whose refusal to accept and process new information caused him to almost run his ship aground? This fateful tale can be used to stimulate new ways of organizational thinking. When you take time to uncover hidden factors and understand the reality you face, you can take more effective action.

Communities can outgrow old ways of doing things. Active questioning keeps programs relevant and meaningful as community needs evolve. When faced with an impasse or stubborn problem, remember the story of the young girl questioning her mother's cooking habits, or the tale of Billibonk, the elephant. Both these fables illustrate the tenets of *systems thinking*. When you understand how systems are interdependent, you see that there is never just one right answer to any question. Instead, the discipline reveals a variety of potential actions, each of which produces some desired results and, almost certainly, some unintended consequences somewhere else in the system. The art of systems thinking includes learning to recognize the ramifications and tradeoffs of each action.

The Captain's Dilemma

One night at sea, a ship's captain saw what looked like the lights of another ship heading toward him. He had his signaler blink to the other ship: "Change your course 10 degrees south." The reply came back: "Change your course 10 degrees north." The ship's captain answered: "I am a captain. Change your course south." To which the reply was, "Well, I am a seaman first class. Change your course north." This infuriated the captain, so he signaled back: "Attention! I say change your course south. I'm on a battleship!" To which the reply came back: "And I say change your course north. I'm in a lighthouse."

Fish Fry

A young girl once asked her mother why she always cut off the head and tail of the fish she prepared for dinner. The mother replied that this was the way her mother — the girl's grandmother — had taught her to cook fish. The girl then asked her grandmother, "Grandma, why do you cut the head and tail off the fish before you cook it for dinner?"
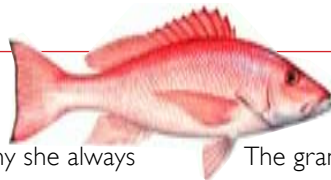
The grandmother replied that this was the way her mother — the child's great-grandmother — had taught her to cook fish. Finally, the little girl approached her great-grandmother and asked her the same question. Great-grandmother replied, "Because the baking pan that I used to cook fish was too small. The fish wouldn't fit in it unless I cut off the head and tail!"

Billibonk and the Big Itch

Billibonk, a young elephant living in the jungle of Knith, wakes up one morning plagued by an itchy back that he must continually scratch against nearby trees. Unfortunately, sometimes Billibonk scratches a bit too hard, toppling trees and leaving angry birds without nests in which to raise their young.

Billibonk soon discovers that other elephants in the forest are also itching unbearably and knocking over trees, and he consults his friend, Frankl the mouse, to see if together they can discover the reason for all this itching. Frankl asks a series of questions, beginning with "Why are the elephants itching?" He soon discovers that Billibonk is itching because there are hundreds of bugs all over his back.

Next, Frankl asks, "Why are there so many bugs all of a sudden?" This question is answered when Frankl discovers another elephant, Honka, who does not have many bugs on his back; Honka's bugs are being eaten by a bird named Rork. So Frankl asks, "Why aren't birds eating the bugs from other elephants'
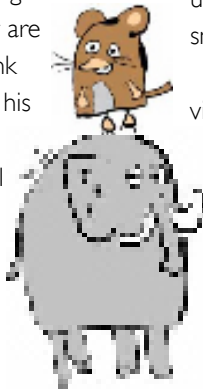
backs?" After talking with Rork, he realizes that the other bug-eating birds have left the jungle.

Of course, Frankl's next question is, "Why have the bug-eating birds left?" Rork tells him that the other birds left when ants invaded their nests, climbing all over their newborn chicks. Scrunching up his tiny face, Rork says, "Yuck. Bird families go."

Frankl asks, "Why do you think the ants took over the other birds' nests and not yours?" Rork replies that the other birds built their nests out of flowers and herbs because they smell better than the odiferous elephant hairs that Rork used to build his family's nest; the problem is, the sweet smell of the flowers and herbs also attract ants.

Armed with this information, Frankl and Billibonk visit the neighboring valley where the birds have migrated, show them the plentiful bugs on Billibonk's back and convince them to line their nests with elephant hairs that don't attract bugs. The birds return, rebuild their nests with elephant hair, and soon the jungle echoes with the clamor of bug-eating chicks and the sighs of contented elephants relieved of their itchy bugs.

LE 4 activities sought to build on the common ground of shared struggles and successes you had established with peers during the prior Learning Exchange gatherings. After Semics presented first year findings of the CDI initiative-wide evaluation, and challenged your thinking with stimulating tales, you rolled up your sleeves and dug into the "5 Whys" exercise. In this activity, you applied *systems thinking* to an impasse within your own organizational context by asking a series of "why" questions to get to the root of the problem. Then, Dr. Gabriel Gutierrez of Cal State Northridge laid the groundwork for table discussions on evaluation by sharing his views on methods for gathering qualitative data.

In small groups you focused your efforts on tracking, measuring, and evaluating the outcomes of your diverse CDI projects. As peer learners, you helped each other gauge the effectiveness of the evaluation methods you had chosen and explore alternatives that might be more useful or appropriate.

Evaluation Resources on The Web

- **Evaluation Assistance – Project Star**

  www.projectstar.org/star/ AmeriCorps/ea_home.htm

- **W.K. Kellogg Foundation Evaluation Handbook**

  www.wkkf.org/documents/ wkkf/evaluationhandbook/

- **Basic Guide to Program Evaluation for Nonprofit Organizations with Limited Resources**

  www.mapnp.org/library/ evaluatn/outcomes.htm

Tied together by common themes (e.g., balancing child care quality and capacity, service mobility, cultural fluency), you took maximum advantage of the time to trade stories, brainstorm, and adapt ideas to fit your community's context. There was much purposeful discussion about defining outcomes, data collection tools, and using evaluation findings in project planning, decision-making, and management. Semics gathered very useful data during these discussions on how grantees were connecting with project participants and managing organizational change.

Community Knowledge Fund highlights

Effective tools for gathering quantitative benchmarks include:

Surveys	Measure changes in parent attitude, knowledge levels; degree of satisfaction with services provided; amount of contact time between parent and child.
Pre- and post-tests	Conduct using same instrument to determine range of knowledge gained or competency acquired.
Compare baseline and exit reports	Describe practices, conditions, or competencies before the intervention, midway through the intervention, and at the conclusion of the project.
Exit exams	Measure learning upon successful completion of an intervention.
Desired Results Profiles	Use to assess participants status, competencies, and needs and at the same time gauge where the individual is within a specific developmental stage.
Other types (e.g., spreadsheets, databases)	Capture and track data on attendance, home visits, site and participant characteristics, services provided.

Effective methods for gathering qualitative data include:

Observation	Make regular notation of changes in specific aspects of participant's attitude, behavior, ability, relationships, surroundings.
Focus groups	Convene participants and elicit (record) their feedback on specific aspects of an intervention.
Testimonials	Participants write first-person accounts on impact of the intervention. Conduct participant interviews, write up the account and obtain participant signature.
Project logs	Record chronology of activities, participant contributions, and expected outcomes.
Individual training and service plan	Described by one grantee operating a program for homeless families as a plan in which the families set goals for themselves with a case manager monitoring and providing guidance.

CDI Learning Exchange 5
Building a Continuing Story
July 29, 2005

Sustainability was selected as the theme for LE 5, given the inevitable expiration of funding, and your expressed interest in exploring strategic options to sustain your organizations and programs. We designed content and activities to highlight ways evaluation can support your efforts to carry on the good work you are doing — with or without First 5 LA funding.

To strengthen skills and knowledge in this arena, discussions focused on new approaches, tools, and strategies. We explored facets of organizational planning that could buttress your efforts, and analyzed elements that contribute to successful sustainability of programs and results.

To get the creative juices flowing, we explored the meaning of sustainability through the use of artifacts. You were invited to reach back into your agency's past and identify a situation or series of events that reflected your experience or understanding of sustainability in the context of your work. In sharing these stories, we drew upon our collective experience to create a platform for learning, generating insights and cultivating ideas that would sustain our future work.

Following the artifacts activity, four panelists with a wealth of experience between them offered their insights on the challenge of sustainability: Nina Hernandez of South Central LA Ministry Project (LAMP), First 5 LA's Grants Management Director Lisa Brabo, Shari Weaver of Harbor Interfaith Services, and Marlon Fuentes of Two2B Associates who shared best practice advice for non-profits.

Community Knowledge Fund highlights

- Incorporate an organizational feedback mechanism to ensure your agency's vision and the people who run it are "in sync."

- Create a method of analysis to identify the agency's unique value to its community.

- Use evaluation as a tool to identify strengths and shortcomings.

- Use evaluation to guide program development and improvement.

- Get the board more involved.

- Diversify funding sources.

- Explore business ventures.

- Embrace an entrepreneurial spirit.

- Invest in a marketing strategy.

- Increase community buy-in.

- Promote your success stories.

- Make your agency visible (speaking engagements, broadcast and social events).

In the "Open Space," small-group activity, you listed your pressing questions and concerns on sustainability in light of the material covered by the panelists. At round tables grouped around topics of interest, grantees brainstormed on these challenges and generated the seeds for possible solutions.

These opportunities to connect and help each other tackle a tough issue shared widely across CDI served to reenergize many grantees, according to your written feedback. By focusing the combined resources and expertise of the CDI grantee community on the challenge of how to sustain our work, we returned to the task with renewed vigor. Semics hoped that *every* grantee left LE 5 replete with new tools, ideas, and encouragement in striving to build our continuing story.

- **Maintain fluid lines of communication with community and political leaders.**

- **Collaborate with other agencies to plan and deliver services will help you leverage outcomes.**

- **Redefine and review agency goals, objectives, and accomplishments in a timely manner.**

- **The formula for success lies not in what you know, but in who knows what you know.**

CDI Learning Exchange 6
Connecting to a Larger Family

December 2, 2005

LE 6 focused on visually representing the connections and relationships among programs, projects and services within specific geographic service areas in LA County. Semics welcomed grantees funded by First 5 LA's other Family Literacy and School Readiness initiatives into the community of grantees funded through CDI. The addition of the "newcomers" allowed testing of this format as a prospective model for a First 5 LA resource network, as described in the Next 5 plan. In this congenial venue, CDI grantees mingled and exchanged ideas with agencies involved in the same work that were visiting that day. Inviting First 5 LA's other grantees into "the mix" proved fruitful in terms of networking and enriching our growing Community Knowledge Fund.

LE 6 activities were more abstract and representational than those in past Learning Exchange gatherings. In the first activity, CDI grantees were grouped with agencies representing First 5 LA's funding initiatives for family literacy and school readiness according to Service Planning Area served. Supplied with varied arts and craft materials, you explored the intersecting relationships between individual services and projects by constructing community trees to symbolize current and/or potential connections among projects/services for children 0-5 in your geographic area. The second activity called on you to explore how you want your work with children 0-5 and families to be remembered by creating family albums using images and words cut out from magazines.

Both activities were purposefully left open to interpretation, which stimulated each group to embrace these tasks in uniquely different ways. As you explored, questioned and assigned symbols to concepts and relationships, your creative interactions with peers solidified the CDI as a community of practice. Although some grantee feedback expressed frustration with the "artsy craftsy" nature of these activities; the community trees and family albums you presented to the whole gathering succeeded in capturing the essence of the important work you do. Time spent with scissors, paper, and glue creating a collective, symbolic *something* did facilitate the exchange of useful information and lead to collaboration and pooling of resources among a number of participants.

CDI Learning Exchange 7
Reflecting On Our Results
April 7, 2006

Through the Learning Exchange experience, grantees contributed unique ingredients to the making of our *soup*, just as the villagers did in the "Stone Soup" tale told in LE 1. We have used the *soup pot* throughout the Learning Exchange experience as a metaphor for the enduring Community Knowledge Fund and to convey how important your role—as CDI grantees—has been in developing it. All your stories, struggles, ideas, and best practices have truly created and enriched a substantial fund of wisdom that will nourish our communities and inform First 5 LA decision makers. Learning Exchange 7 invited you to partake of these results by reporting on your CDI project evaluation outcomes.

"What's In The Soup?"

We kicked off by asking you to reflect on the emerging impact you've seen on children 0-5, families, and providers as a result of your CDI-funded interventions. You wrote your thoughts on cards and tacked them onto a big, paper *soup pot* on the wall. As we stood around the symbolic pot, it was clear to all how the positive outcomes and improvements overlap, intertwine, and support each other. Here's just a small sampling of that hearty *soup*.

Children 0 to 5
- More children are being breastfed resulting in long-term health benefits.
- Early detection and disease prevention is improving children's overall health status.
- Low-income children are getting more opportunities that ready them for academic success.
- Children are being provided with materials that promote literacy, resulting in increased school readiness.
- Children are testing at or above national norms for cognitive and motor development.

Community Knowledge Fund highlights

- **When you understand the target population's values, it is easier to build relationships of trust.**
- **Empower the teachers and providers.**
- **Embrace the team and teamwork.**
- **Collaborate with outside agencies.**
- **Document and promote your success stories.**
- **Low staff turnover correlates to more efficient operations and less participant attrition.**
- **Train, support, invest in, and reward staff to prevent high turnover.**
- **CDI project staff find inspiration and gratification through interactions with program participants and in receiving positive feedback about their work.**

- Children are participating in enjoyable, learning activities with parents.
- Children are benefiting from more quality time with parents.
- Children are feeling more nurtured and safe.
- Children are safer around physical areas that are high risk for injury.

Families

- Parents are learning new, practical child-rearing skills.
- Parents are learning how to advocate for their children and navigate the system.
- Parents are becoming more literate so they can read to their children.
- Projects help families bond and create *buy-in* to the community's common goals.
- Projects help parents acquire degrees and sustain employment, contributing to self-sufficiency.

Other

- Programs help providers become licensed and improve quality of child care services.
- Programs help providers increase their professionalism and networking opportunities.
- Organizations are collaborating to leverage service delivery and outcomes.
- Cultural sensitivity is improving.
- Capacity for community outreach on health and education issues has increased.
- Access to activities and facilities that promote learning is increasing.

Following this broad, reflective exercise, participants broke into small groups (according to the category of participants served by their CDI project) to discuss "Measures that Matter." The experience and insights you shared on your evaluation results at the participant level revealed how well you had put evaluation to work for you. The second discussion activity was designed to give context to those benchmarks and measures. We asked for real stories illustrating how CDI projects had improved the lives of individual program participants. Your shared stories revealed that participants were experiencing a well-spring of hope and confidence, empowering them to embrace new attitudes, new skills, and new opportunities.

Parting Thoughts

"A mind once stretched by a new idea never regains its original dimension."
--Oliver Wendell Holmes

"Where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, and many opinions; for opinion in good people is but knowledge in the making."
--John Milton

"As great scientists have said, and as all children know, it is above all by the imagination that we achieve perception, learning, compassion, and hope."
--Ursula K. LeGuin

Researched and written by
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CDI-funded Organizations

1736 Family Crisis Center
Asian Pacific Health Care Venture, Inc.
Bundle of Joy, Inc.
Center for the Pacific-Asian Family, Inc.
Child & Family Guidance Center
Child Care Information Service
Child Educational Center, Caltech/JPL Community
Children's Hospital L.A.
Citrus Valley Health Partners
Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment
Connections for Children
Crystal Stairs, Inc.
Eisner Pediatric & Family Medical Center
El Proyecto del Barrio, Inc.
Excel Family Intervention Program
Frank D. Lanterman Regional Center
Friends of the Family
Happy Bear School
Harbor Interfaith Services
Huntington Memorial Hospital (Pasadena Hospital Association)
Kaiser Permanente Baldwin Park, Dept. of Pediatrics
King/Drew Medical Foundation
Korean Youth & Community Center
L.A. Biomedical Research Institute @ Harbor-UCLA Medical Center
L.A. Child Guidance Clinic
L.A. Conservation Corps
L.A. Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center
Long Beach Memorial Medical Center
Monrovia Unified School District
New Economics for Women
New Horizons Family Center
North Valley Caring Services
Our Saviour Center/Cleaver Family Wellness Clinic
Pasadena Public Health Department
PHFE-WIC
Santa Monica College, Professional Development Institute
SHIELDS for Families Project, Inc.
South Central L.A. Ministry Project (LAMP)
Southern California Association for the Education of Young Children (SCAEYC)
St. Mary Medical Center Foundation/Families in Good Health
The Heart Touch Project
The HELP Group/Child and Family Center
Toddlin' Time Preschool
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church/Bethany Lutheran Child Care Center
UCLA Neuropsychiatric Institute
University of Southern California
Union Station Foundation
USC Center for Religion & Civic Culture (formerly California Council of Churches)
Watts Labor Community Action Committee
Wilmington Community Clinic
YMCA of Greater Long Beach

FIRST 5
LA

Champions For Our Children