



**National Homecomers Academy
Year 1 Evaluation Report
November 2010**

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National Homecomers Academy Year 1 Evaluation Report

This document is an evaluation of Year 1 (2009-2010) of the National Homecomers Academy (NHA). 2009-2010 is the first year of a three-year grant awarded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to NHA.

Background

Evaluator

This evaluation report was completed by Ayo Atterberry of Atterberry Consulting. Ms. Atterberry has expertise in program evaluation and has a Master of Public Health degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In addition, Ms. Atterberry has provided technical assistance, as a fieldworker and project design specialist for evaluations and strategic planning of two W.K. Kellogg Foundation-funded Community Voices Projects: Vision for Health, Sandtown-Winchester, Baltimore, MD; and, Community Voices, Washington, DC.

Methodology

Data for this evaluation were drawn from:

- Interviews with the core cohort of Homecomers;
- Time Banking tracking forms;
- Outreach event tracking forms; and,
- Feedback surveys.

Introduction

The National Homecomers Academy (NHA) empowers ex-offenders by facilitating and providing resources to assist in a journey of personal transformation; knowledge gain; and, community service that builds on individual strengths. NHA is operated by Homecomers who are Community Change Agents emphasizing self reliance, self responsibility, personal accountability, and community service.

This is done by:

1. Creating a peer to peer networking where Homecomers assist one another; and,
2. Supporting Homecomers, their families and their friends (ex-offenders, women and youth) to succeed, and rebuild family and community networks of mutual support that includes Time Banking as an incentive program.

NHA has the following Co-Production Five Core Principles:

- Operate from an assets or strength based perspective
- Value real work
- Reciprocity or paying it forward
- Community
- Respect

During Year 1, the primary focus of NHA was on developing a core group of Homecomers to operate NHA by developing relationships with communities, neighborhoods, organizations, agencies, and political groups.

Community Change Agents

Seven Homecomers assembled with NHA Director, Curtis Watkins, establishing a foundation of Community Change Agents operating NHA events during Year 1. For the purpose of the report, the seven Community Change Agents are referred to as the core group or core cohort. The core cohort represents the foundation and driving force of NHA.

The Core Homecomers are primarily responsible for developing and executing NHA programs and activities. In their work with NHA, Homecomers often share their experiences with other Homecomers and community residents. However, the core cohort is not new to sharing their experiences with a wide variety of audiences. Several of the men have been actively speaking about their experience in community settings, academic settings, and political settings prior to formally joining NHA. Nevertheless, NHA has provided an opportunity to speak about their experiences within a network of like minded individuals who share the same values and beliefs. In addition, NHA is allowing the Homecomers to take action steps beyond merely speaking, but allowing them to provide tangible support to others.

The Core Cohort:

- Are in their mid 30s to mid 50s;
- On average, have each spent at least 20 years in the prison system;
- Were addicted to or sold drugs;
- Are employed elsewhere or are currently seeking employment opportunities;

- Have a belief system strongly rooted in religious ideologies which they attribute to assisting in their life change, but do not impose this system on others they serve;
- Believe their previous criminal lifestyles contributed to the problems that plague their communities;
- Believe they have a responsibility to work for improving their communities; and,
- Strongly believe and emphasize personal responsibility and accountability.

[I want to be a] helpful hand in the community. I have done so many things to make the community like it is. So, it is my goal to work double time to change it.

Homecomer, Donald Zimmerman

In general, NHA does not conform to organizational and agency hierarchal structures and formalities. The NHA governance concept includes a Network of Affiliates, Board of Regents, and Grants and Fellowship segments that are different entities intended to operate for the overall management of NHA. Currently, NHA has a Council of Homecomers that is primarily responsible for community-based program implementation.

NHA intends to ensure that every participant is an equally valued member.

As Homecomers interact with residents within the various communities, they make themselves available through the following major activities:

- Community Outreach
- Mentoring
- Linking Homecomers and other community residents to needed resources.

Although NHA members are readily available to community residents by providing their cell phone numbers, the majority of NHA activities are conducted after work hours, (5 pm and later). Currently, Homecomers are employed or seeking employment in addition to the work that they do with NHA.

The core cohort describes themselves as a group of like minded men who came together to build upon their collective strengths and work together to create positive change in their communities.

The core group of NHA believes that the criminal activity that they engaged in, which led to their incarceration, was detrimental to their communities.

“The work I have done has failed my community and I understand that I need to undo that”.
Homecomer, Cortez McDaniel

This cohort has a true understanding of the issues that ex-offenders face. They are authentic in their sentiment and are passionate about improving their community. Most importantly, they know that ex-offenders often return to their communities the way they went into prison: lacking adequate education; with little or no access to adequate employment; and, with minimum access to positive social support networks.

Homecomers are likely to experience addiction, mental illness, domestic violence, and a myriad of other challenges that can contribute to an increased likelihood of return to criminal activity, arrest, and re-incarceration.

National Homecomers Academy Council

The NHA has a Council that acts as a governing body, managing program aspects of NHA. The organization meets regularly to discuss NHA programs, Homecomers, and

community residents. During the Council meetings discourse about community residents and Homecomers, as well as, discussion about the core cohort, takes place. These meetings resemble case management meetings with the unique aspect of discussing matters involving the core cohort members who are actually present at the meeting. More specifically, they discuss the situations of the Homecomers and residents that they interact with and they determine Time Banking Incentives, which will be discussed in more detail later in the report.

National Homecomers Academy Outreach

The National Homecomers Academy conducted outreach events titled Real People Who Care Community Outreach, which allowed Homecomers to be a presence within different communities in Washington, DC.

The NHA has marketing materials that primarily consist of flyers which include the following information:

- The locations and dates of their upcoming outreach events.
- The activities to take place-good food, music and real action talk.
- Includes names and cell phone numbers of Homecomers for community members to contact when in need of services.

It is advertised clearly on the flyers that they distribute, which include:

- Nothing for us without us
- We are committed to our community to make a difference
- We are committed to educating our community through:
 - Real relationships
 - Real voices for change

- Ban the Box Bill
- Employment Realities
- Housing Concerns

Findings and Results

The following took place during Year 1:

- NHA enrolled the first cohort of Homecomers that are operating as Community Change Agents. There were a total of 16 new Homecomers who joined through the outreach efforts.
- NHA held 11 outreach events throughout Wards 6, 7 and 8 of Washington, DC. During June, July and August outreach events, Homecomers registered 13 individuals to vote.
- NHA held the Ballou High School Men's Rap which is Homecomers bi-monthly mentor session with youth ages 17 – 29 years old attending night school.
- NHA presented on outreach efforts to DC City Council twice during this period to make them aware of our outreach efforts.
- NHA presented and held discussions with 4th through 6th graders at the Dorothy Heights Public Charter School.
- Homecomers held monthly sessions with individuals in the Central Treatment Facility, a 6 month drug treatment program.
- NHA held bi-monthly meetings with Homecomers prior to returning to the community after a 90 day stay at the Federal City Transitional House.
- 4 - 5 Homecomers are conducting Safe Passage Outreach patrols on Mondays and Wednesdays in Lincoln Heights and Clay Terrace

communities from 7:30 am to 9:00 am to ensure youth are arriving to school safely.

- NHA trained 6 Homecomers on the use of the Flip Video equipment for Goldpitt Film Company.

NHA estimates that between 650 and 850 community residents were in attendance at their 11 outreach events.

Outreach Feedback Surveys

Surveys were distributed to attendees of NHA outreach events. 147 attendees completed the survey with an approximate survey response rate of 17% to 22%.

Of the outreach event attendees surveyed:

- 97% indicated that they wanted the group to return to their community in the future.
- 95% reported that the information given at the event was useful.
- 77% reported that the Homecomers could assist them on the day of the event.
- 76% reported that they wanted the Homecomers to reach out directly to them.

At this time, NHA has not used this survey data to contact residents. However, they are building the foundation for future networking and relationship development.

Overall, the feedback provided by outreach attendees was positive. Some of the comments on the surveys demonstrate that the community recognizes the need for what NHA offers and attendees indicated the desire to help:

“I would love to become a big sister so I can pass my knowledge on to someone younger than me”.

“Please continue to help our youth”!

“If you need help, I am willing to help anyway I can”.

“Thank God for this group of people. We need you! Bad”!

Sharing Stories of Support

- One Homecomer described when he received a call from a young man he met at an outreach event. The young man called him at 10 pm reminding him that at the outreach event he told him to call at anytime. They talked almost an hour. The young man called asking for advice as he was planning to go out and retaliate against someone he thought had wronged him. Fortunately, the Homecomer was able to talk him out of it.
- Another Homecomer explained that a woman he met at an outreach event contacted him. They had one conversation where he provided her advice on steps she needed to take to move her life in the right direction. He told her that she needed to stop smoking; that she needed to have a better relationship with the father of her child; and, told her steps that the father of her child should take. He instructed her to call him back in a few weeks to check in. He was sure that she was not going to call him again and was very pleasantly surprised when she did.

The primary work of Homecomers happens after business hours. After leaving their place of business, they come to NHA to provide customized social support, which is done informally.

"I feel giving back. I feel giving love".
Homecomer, Elvin Johnson

Homecomers report providing the following forms of social support:

- Emotional Support: This type of support often includes demonstrating physical comfort such as hugs or pats on the back, while listening and empathizing. One example of emotional support is that the Homecomers listen to and can relate to resident's problems. They are able to express understanding and provide assurance by sharing that they have felt similarly.
- Esteem Support: This type of social support is shown in expressions of confidence or encouragement. Homecomers offering esteem support identify strengths that community residents aren't aware of and encourage them by affirming belief in their ability to achieve.
- Informational Support: In this type of support, Homecomers provide referrals, advice, and linkages to other services that may benefit the residents they are working with.
- Tangible Support: Tangible support includes Homecomers taking an active stance to help residents manage a problem they're experiencing. One example of tangible support is the Time Banking program. (Scott, Elizabeth, M.S., How Do Different Types of Social Support Work?, March 2010)

In order for the core Homecomers to assist other Homecomers in redefining themselves as learners, contributors, and guides to those who follow them in making the

transformational journey, it is imperative that they build trust and honest rapport.

Emotional and Esteem Support lay the foundation for Homecomers to provide information and tangible support.

Much of their social support work is done through informal interactions with residents, which presents a challenge to developing outcomes and measuring achievement.

Video Project

One Homecomer has started a video in which he interviews community residents and Homecomers. It is a provocative portrayal of the communities and individuals that they serve. One of his interviews captured several teenagers engaging in the use of illegal drugs. The teenagers further discuss understanding the detriments of such drug usage, but state that they have a death wish. The teenager commented, “We are killing ourselves”.

Policy Issues

NHA actively supports the Ban the box legislation to eliminate questions about prior convictions on employment and housing applications. NHA members made a presentation on this matter before the DC Democratic Caucus. As a result, the legislation was adopted at the City Council office in the District of Columbia.

National Homecomers Academy Partners

Over the course of Year 1, NHA has formed partnerships with various organizations to augment NHA efforts. NHA developed collaborations with the following organizations:

- *DC Court Services and Offenders Supervision Agency (CSOSA) and LifeSTARTS Youth & Family Services*

NHA provides social support to the CSOSA Violence Reduction Program (VRP). The VRP is an intervention program for men ages 18-25 on probation or supervised released

with a history of weapons, violence or drug distribution charges. NHA provides mentoring to these young men. In addition, Cortez McDaniel, who is a one of the Core Homecomers, created a recurrent 6-week recidivism workshop, “The Journey Within”, that is facilitated in partnership with CSOSA. Ten Homecomers enrolled in the program during Year 1. Eight Homecomers completed this program over the course of the year.

- *The Father McKenna Center*

NHA is partnering with the Father McKenna Center to more comprehensively provide linkages to Homecomers. The organizations will refer Homecomers to one another based on an assessment of the Homecomers’ needs.

- *Community Services Agency of the Metropolitan Washington Council, AFL-CIO*

NHA has partnered with the Community Services Agency of the Metropolitan Washington Council, AFL-CIO to provide three phases of services.

During Phase I, NHA will assess the organization’s building and trade apprenticeship program and messages to identify appropriateness for their target populations-community residents and Homecomers. They will assess the degree to which the message, marketing, and programs match the community needs. In the end, the NHA will identify gaps and provide recommendations to improve the program.

During Phase II, NHA will refer Homecomers to the program based on their education and employment needs.

During Phase III, NHA will engage in outreach to recruit participants for the program.

- *University of the District of Columbia (UDC) Law School*

UDC Law School provides training to Homecomers enabling them to educate parents and youth on the educational rights of youth who have been incarcerated or who are currently in the juvenile justice system.

- Hope House

Hope House is an organization that provides support services within the prison system.

Hope House will provide data to NHA on the results of the programming that they are providing. Hope House has access to 7 or 8 prisons where DC inmates are located. Hope House will refer Homecomers to NHA once they are released from the prison in the winter.

Communication Plan

NHA is in the process of hiring a consultant to create a communication plan.

Time Banking

“Compassion without expectation is enabling”.
Homecomer, Cortez McDaniel

Fourteen (14) Homecomers received Time Banks rewards in October 2010. A total of 35 gift certificates were given out in the amount of \$875 to the 14 Homecomers. Gas station, mass transit, grocery store, and superstore (such as Wal-Mart, Target, etc) gift certificates were distributed.

Although NHA Council conceptualized implementation of the Time Banking concept for the greater part of Year 1, they collected data on attendance at events in preparation for distribution of rewards. NHA distributed incentives during the last quarter of Year 1.

NHA has a council that determines which Homecomers receive \$25 gift certificates for

each Time Banks credit that they earn. The Council holds meetings where they discuss each Homecomer and determine whether or not they will receive a Time Banks credit. NHA records an explanation of why each Homecomer is receiving the incentives and provides a copy of the gift cards distributed.

The Council appears to use the following criteria to determine the Time Banks rewards:

- Effort to work with NHA demonstrated by contact and attendance at NHA Events such as outreach events.
- General interest and potential observed by Homecomers.
- The type of gift card/reward is based on the Council's assessment of the Homecomer's needs.

The core groups' primary apprehension regarding this system was ensuring that this was not used as a sole incentive for the Homecomers, but a system for NHA to demonstrate appreciation and provide recognition for work and effort. The group wants Time Banking to be seen as a complimentary incentive and not the sole focus for Homecomer involvement.

The Council has determined that Homecomers can earn no more than 1 Time Banks credit per month (3 per quarter or maximum of 12 per year). At this time, each credit translates into a \$25 gift certificate. The Council is clear that the type of incentives they offer may change in the future.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations for strengthening the National Homecomers Academy operational and programmatic infrastructures.

Strengthen the overall organizational framework

The NHA governance concept includes a Network of Affiliates, Board of Regents, and Grants and Fellowship segments. However, these aspects were not implemented in Year 1. The overall NHA program and services require increased organizational structure for long term sustainability. NHA resists the rigidity of formal organization structures. The NHA philosophy is generally that these structures create a bureaucratic hindrance to true community change. The Council is currently acting as a governing body specifically focused on implementing NHA programs and working with community residents and Homecomers. Currently fundraising and other organizational aspects are conducted by the NHA Director.

The most appealing aspect of the Council is that it allows every Homecomer to have a voice, which is absolutely paramount and highly valued by NHA. Because it is currently a small number of members, the Council is effective. However, it is unclear how the Council will adjust as the numbers of Homecomers increase and how the role of the Council will impact the governance concepts currently outlined for NHA.

Strengthen data collection strategies

NHA has conceived a feedback loop to assist with data collection and evaluation. However, attendance data and related process measures were captured during Year 1. Outcome data was not. NHA must develop data collection instruments, procedures and protocols for outcome data to be collected. More specifically, NHA needs to record the

types of social support they provide and the results or impact. Currently, support is provided informally, without being recorded, which presents a challenge to developing and measuring outcomes.

Identity Resources

The NHA Council noted that their primary challenge was identifying resources that are appropriate, timely and sensitive to the needs of Homecomers and community residents.

One member of the core cohort stated, “We want to be real people dealing with real problems trying to find real solutions in a positive way on that day”!

The core group discussed their frustration with not having the resources to support Homecomers with what they may need. The primary needs being employment; substance abuse treatment; and, housing.

NHA plans to strengthen their pool of resources through continued partnership development.

Conclusion

During Year 1, the National Homecomers Academy assembled Homecomers to operate program events within Washington, DC communities through relationship building with communities, neighborhoods, organizations, agencies, and political groups.

During the interviews, core Homecomers talked about their motivation and passion to improve poor neighborhoods and communities. Their primary focus is on supporting ex-offenders, women and youth. The Homecomers provided several stories about how they assisted ex-offenders, youth and women throughout Year 1. What was clear is that these men work non business hours and informally with the Homecomers and residents with whom they mentor and collaborate.

In Year 1, NHA was successful in developing and implementing activities that align with the organizations core values. NHA successfully:

- Made a presence within Wards 6, 7 and 8 communities of the Washington, DC area through various outreach events;
- Created a strong foundation made up of the core Homecomers who are actively operating NHA programs and events;
- Implemented Time Banking Incentives;
- Recruited an additional 14 Homecomers to be a part of the NHA movement;
- Created partnerships with DC Court Services and Offenders Supervision Agency (CSOSA) Violence Reduction Program; LifeSTARTS Youth & Family Services; The Father McKenna Center; Community Services

Agency of the Metropolitan Washington Council, AFL-CIO; The University of the District of Columbia (UDC) David A. Clarke School of Law; and, Hope House to support NHA efforts; and,

- Held numerous presentations and outreach events both in political settings and in communities.

While the partnerships formed during Year 1 are significant for the support of NHA, the partnership with CSOSA is important because it is collaboration between a governmental entity and a community based organization.

Based on feedback from the outreach surveys, NHA events were well received by community residents, who identified NHA support as much needed.

As NHA moves into Year 2, the organization has to strengthen its data collection efforts to measure impact on Homecomers and community residents. NHA support is highly individualized and very informal. However, during Year 2, the organization will work with an evaluator to help develop strategies for recording and measuring Homecomers' efforts, successes, and the overall impact of those community residents and Homecomers with whom they are mentoring and collaborating.

NHA must strengthen their organizational framework to support the overall sustainability of the organization. This includes clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the Network of Affiliates, Board of Regents, and Grants and Fellowship segments.

Finally, NHA must continue to develop partnerships for resource development to support Homecomers and community residents.