

Connections

Transferring knowledge

Atlanta yields lessons in fighting urban poverty

A broad-based anti-poverty program in Atlanta is ready to share its experience in promoting grassroots leadership and creating effective corporate partnerships.

By MERRILL WOLF

Atlanta

The Atlanta Project, a program to empower the city's urban poor that many consider a model of public-private partnership, has spawned a new initiative, called The America Project, to help other cities mount similar efforts.

Leaders of the new program, which was launched in January 1995, say requests for guidance started pouring in soon after former President Jimmy Carter announced the creation of the Atlanta Project in October 1991. Four years later, they say, the grassroots project in Atlanta's poorest neighborhoods is still evolving but has much to offer other communities.

"We originally thought the Atlanta Project would be a model project in the sense of being replicated," says Elise Eplan, program administrator for the America Project. "But we realized it's not what we can do best

[because] ... the dynamic in each community is so different.

"Instead, we say, 'Here are some of the lessons we've learned. You need to develop something that works for your community.'"

Under the leadership of Dan Sweat - a former foundation official who was the original director of the Atlanta Project - the America Project makes these lessons accessible to other communities through publications and consultations, and by inviting delegations from other cities to view the Atlanta Project first-hand.

Already, more than 100 communities in the U.S. and abroad - including Charlotte and Greensboro in North Carolina - have tapped this resource, Eplan says, finding both its successes and challenges instructive.

UPS AND DOWNS

One of the Atlanta Project's most notable contributions to anti-poverty work is its practical experience with community empowerment, a philosophical linchpin of the project that, Eplan says, has taken some time to yield results.

The Atlanta Project operates in 20 "clusters" - defined as the neighborhoods served by public high schools - with a combined population of about half-a-million.

In each cluster, the project hires a



An Atlanta child has her blood pressure checked during the Atlanta Project's 1993 city-wide immunization drive.

Photo courtesy of the America Project

full-time coordinator and assistant - both cluster residents - who work with their neighbors and corporate partners to develop strategies for identifying and responding to that particular community's needs. Programs run the gamut of social-change activities - from financial-management training, to low-income housing development and anti-violence programs.

Organizers say the Atlanta

Project is a catalyst rather than a service-provider or funder, and that its overriding goal is to help connect cluster residents with resources that typically are out of their reach. A central office provides support functions - such as research, training and technology - but most initiatives are cluster-driven.

This insistence on letting clusters direct their own activities led to some early charges that the high-profile

project was cutting out existing non-profits, which were eager to collaborate and in some cases felt threatened.

Eplan says it wasn't that the non-profits were being excluded but that it took some clusters considerable time to define strategies. In the beginning, she says, "There was nothing to include [existing service-providers] in."

She advises teams from other cities to avoid fanfare in a project's early stages: "Build your house a little bit before you invite everyone over."

But now, as the Atlanta Project nears the end of its first five-year phase, community organizers are coming into their own, Eplan says. Emerging plans for Phase Two, which begins in August 1996, reflect a clear mandate from the clusters to focus on children and youth, rather than on the seven issues originally identified by the project's central staff, and a readiness to work more closely with other nonprofits.

It also appears likely that central resources will be shifted into the communities and that some geographical boundaries will be eliminated. Now that individual clusters have devel-

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Managed care

Hospice groups form network

A new health-care alliance will contract with managed-care providers to offer hospice coverage to their customers.

By TODD COHEN

The 10 largest hospices in North Carolina have created a network to help more terminally ill patients secure hospice services through a managed-care system.

The new venture, Hospice Provider Network Inc., will create a one-stop hospice referral center for the state, contracting with health maintenance organizations and other managed-care providers to offer hospice coverage to people enrolled in their plans.

The network also aims to work with other hospice providers in the Carolinas.

HEALTH

Hospices provide health care, counseling and other services for terminally ill people and their families. While they generally contract individually with managed-care organizations, two members of the new network - Hospice of Wake County and Triangle Hospice, which serves Durham, Granville and Orange counties - recently formed a limited joint venture that will contract with managed-care providers.

Like the Triangle alliance, which is known as the Central Carolina Hospice Alliance, the statewide network will connect managed-care providers with patients and will set up uniform guidelines for admission to hospice programs and for delivery of hospice services.

The statewide network, which is governed by a board consisting of the chief executives of the member hospices, will have no full-time staff. But the network, through a bidding process, will select one or more member hospices to act as a service bureau for the network, handling the

intake of patients, their referral to individual hospices, and billing. A member also will be selected to handle quality control for the alliance.

"We hope to make it easier and convenient for managed-care organizations to be able to arrange for hospice services for their members wherever they may be in North and South Carolina," says Janet Fortner, president and chief executive officer of Hospice at Charlotte and chair of the network's board.

In addition to the hospices in Charlotte, Wake and the Triangle, other members of the network are in Alamance County, Asheville, Asheboro, Greensboro, High Point, Wilmington and Winston-Salem/Forsyth County.



Janet Fortner



Caregivers at Hospice of Wake County discuss how to help their clients.

Photo by Jim Strickland

At the helm

Children's groups have new leaders

Two key advocacy groups for North Carolina children have hired new leaders with backgrounds in nonprofit organizing.

David Walker, who for 13 years headed Child Abuse Prevention Services in Chicago, has been hired as executive director of the North Carolina Partnership for Children. The group oversees the state's Smart Start program for early childhood development.

Jonathan Sher, a former chief adviser to the Annenberg Rural Challenge and visiting scholar at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has been hired as president of the North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute in Raleigh.

Walker succeeds Walter Shepherd, who resigned from the Smart Start program over the summer after disagreements over a legislative compromise on state funding for the initiative. He will have the task of raising private money for Smart Start programs to meet new matching requirements adopted by state lawmakers.

In Chicago, Walker helped Child Abuse Prevention Services increase its budget to \$1.2 million from \$200,000. He says he plans to work closely with the Smart Start board on

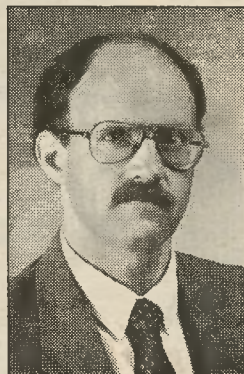
strategic planning and to hire more staff to help coordinate local Smart Start projects.

Sher, who has a doctorate from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, helped found REAL Enterprises, a national nonprofit based in Durham that has been invited to be part of a \$50 million school reform initiative launched by philanthropist Walter H. Annenberg.

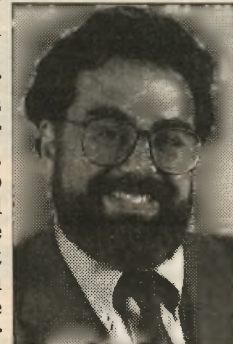
He was hired to replace John Niblock, founder of the North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute, who was asked to resign after the board elected new officers last summer.

Sher says his first priority will be starting a dialogue with the Institute's staff, board and key supporters to reexamine the organization's priorities.

"What the institute needs to do is figure out how it can best function as an effective advocate for kids," he says. "Unlike 12 years ago, when John Niblock founded it, there are now a number of agencies and groups that are focused on particular aspects of the needs of children. The institute needs to figure out where it fits in the broader picture and to identify the things it can do exceedingly well that nobody else can do."



David F. Walker



Jonathan Sher

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