

# we grow



# PEOPLE

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## Profiles of Extension Educators

**CORNELL UNIVERSITY COOPERATIVE EXTENSION—NEW YORK CITY**

Edited by Scott J. Peters and Margo Hittleman, Department of Education, Cornell University

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Scott J. Peters  
Margo Hittleman

*Ithaca, New York  
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# preface

## Ideas for Using this Book

BY SCOTT J. PETERS AND MICHAEL W. DUTTWEILER

For the past few years, we have been experimenting with an approach to staff development in extension education that is centered on the development and discussion of “practitioner profiles.”<sup>1</sup> Practitioner profiles, simply put, are first-person accounts of what educators do, feel, and experience in specific examples of their work (what we call “practice stories”), crafted from the transcripts of tape-recorded interviews. A good practitioner profile can help us to see and understand the shape and significance of an educator’s real work, in all its wonderful messiness and complexity. By “real” work, we mean the work that educators actually do, rather than the neat and tidy descriptions of what they are supposed to do that are typically found in position descriptions.

This book is a collection of practitioner profiles that graduate students at Cornell University developed of extension educators working for Cornell University Cooperative Extension in New York City. Our goal in sharing these profiles is to provide extension educators and administrators, as well as interested students, with an engaging, inspiring, and substantive resource for stimulating individual and collective reflection, learning, growth and change. In this preface, we’d like to suggest a few ideas for how the profiles contained in this book might be used, along with some of the possible learning outcomes their use might generate.

Even casual review of the profes-

sional development literature makes it clear that instructors and participants alike are seeking innovative, practice-based approaches that create job-relevant learning.<sup>2</sup> We believe that first-person practitioner profiles are highly adaptable and effective teaching tools that offer exciting opportunities to promote such learning. These profiles can be used as the basis for either individual or group reflection and learning activities. Individuals might review profile excerpts as part of recruitment materials or during orientation to a new role to gain a fuller sense of the work of community-based extension education. Established educators might review fully developed practitioner profiles as a means for gaining insight on their own work and extend that even further by creating their own profiles as a reflection aid.

From our experience, we believe that the use of profiles in collaborative learning settings offers even greater potential for learning. Profiles might be infused in technical training to promote exploration of how technical content translates to specific local contexts and to illustrate the varied ways educators employ such content in their work. Guided “practice circles” could be established in which educators review

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and discuss profiles — and eventually contribute profiles of their own — with the purposes of greater role awareness and practice improvement. Over time, there is opportunity for team or even system-level learning as a body of profiles is developed and employed to promote current understanding of the true work and competency needs throughout the organization.

In our work at Cornell, we have used profiles as readings for graduate courses and staff development workshops. In these settings, we have found that profiles are powerful tools for shedding light on innovative practices and methods in adult and extension education, and for stimulating critical reflection on the ethical and political dimensions of such work. But just as importantly, we have found that profiles can also be used as tools for helping students and educators glimpse the larger meanings and significance of non-formal, community-based educational work. In this regard, profiles serve not as “how to do it” blueprints or roadmaps, but as meaningful stories that offer considerable inspirational value.

The ways to use profiles are not limited to what we have suggested and tried ourselves. We have only begun learning about how we can learn from them. We encourage you to experiment, and we invite you to share with us what you have learned. You are likely to find that you will read the same story differently at different times and in different contexts; we did. Often, we found ourselves putting a profile aside thinking it didn’t have much to teach,

# preface

## Ideas for Using this Book

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only to take another look at some other time and see all sorts of things we didn't see before. Or we would listen to someone else's response and see an aspect of the story that had been hidden before.

Learning outcomes made possible through creative use of practice stories range from modest, individual insights to a fundamental review of organization mission and direction. Possible learnings include:

- Improved recognition of the breadth and depth of roles assumed by extension educators
- Increased awareness among prospective and new employees of the range of knowledge and skills required to create successful extension programs
- Improved ability to understand the basis of and lessons from one's own practice
- Appreciation for the influences of personal bias and learning style on program involvements and methods choices
- Analysis of the situational strengths and limitations of methods preferred by educators and improved identification of opportunities for improvement
- Greater appreciation for the context-sensitive nature of extension programming
- Illustration of the interdependence of formal and non-formal extension methods
- Improved understanding of the roles of power and influence in program efforts
- Improved ability to articulate requisite knowledge, skills, and program philosophy for recruitment and professional development purposes

- Better understanding of the richness of the "real work" of local extension programming
- Opportunity to reflect fundamentally on the priority outcomes of extension work and better articulate the benefits it generates at the individual, team, and system levels

We hope that you will find this book to be helpful in stimulating reflection and learning. We also hope that it will inspire and encourage you to create your own profiles to add to the growing body of profiles from which we can all learn. In the appendix, you'll find guidelines for developing your own profiles.

There's one final point we'd like to make. As the essay that follows this preface shows, the profiles included in this book help to reveal the essence of extension education as it is practiced in the urban context of New York City. But despite their urban focus and context, we are convinced that educators in all settings will find something in these profiles to learn from and relate to. We invite you to read them and see for yourselves.

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Practitioner profiles are a research tool developed by John Forester, a professor in Cornell's Department of City and Regional Planning, that aims to illuminate "theory – through the lived experiences of [practitioners]." They are described in more depth in his book, *The Deliberative Practitioner: Encouraging Participatory Planning Processes* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Mott, V.F. (2002). The Development of Professional Expertise in the Workplace. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* No. 86 (Summer 2000) pp. 23-31.

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# It's Not About the Rice: Naming the Work of Extension Education

BY MARGO HITTLEMAN AND SCOTT J. PETERS

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**THIS BOOK IS A COLLECTION OF CONVERSATIONS, STORIES TOLD BY EXTENSION EDUCATORS AT CORNELL UNIVERSITY COOPERATIVE EXTENSION IN NEW YORK CITY (CUCE-NYC) THAT SEEK TO CAPTURE THE ESSENCE OF THEIR WORK. IT SEEMS ONLY FITTING, THEREFORE, THAT WE BEGIN THE COLLECTION WITH OUR OWN STORY ABOUT HOW THESE CONVERSATIONS CAME TO BE AND WHY WE THOUGHT THEY MIGHT BE OF INTEREST TO A WIDER AUDIENCE.**

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**W**e begin our story on a summer afternoon several years back, in the courtyard of a large public housing project in the Bronx, a small fenced garden off to one side. On the fence was a sign naming the gardening project, followed by the words, “Technical assistance provided by Cornell University Cooperative Extension-NYC.” Scott, who had been invited to New York City to learn about CUCE-NYC’s work, had spent the day driving with Gretchen Ferenz, Environmental Revitalization and Management issues area leader, through Bronx neighborhoods, visiting community projects in which CUCE had been involved: a thrift shop, a recycling center, a teen hydroponics program, community gardens. He had heard story after story about the extension educators’ connections with community organizations, a web of relationships built and nurtured over many years.

Struck by the stark contrast between the flat, rather uninspiring description on the sign in front of him and

the rich, human-centered stories that had infused the day, Scott turned to Gretchen with a question: “Does that sign — ‘providing technical assistance’ — capture what you really do?”

Her answer surprised him. “Pretty much,” she responded.

Already concerned that little serious research existed on extension practice, particularly the civic dimensions of that practice<sup>1</sup>, Scott decided to offer an experimental course that would bring together Cornell graduate students and CUCE-NYC extension educators to both study and critically reflect on that work. The course, “Community-University Partnerships in Urban Extension Work,” had several agendas: to provide an opportunity for extension educators to reflect on, and thus, enhance, their civic work outside of the hectic pace of the day-to-day delivery of educational programs, to enable graduate students interested in community education to learn directly from experienced practitioners, and to contribute to broader, research-based understandings of extension’s civic mission and work in a way that might enhance the social impact of the system as a whole.

Thus, in February 2001, we — a group of thirteen Cornell graduate students and one professor — found ourselves in New York City, this time in the community center of the Grant Houses, a housing project in Harlem.

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About a dozen CUCE-NYC staff members waited to greet us enthusiastically. For weeks now, the two of us had repeatedly asked ourselves a series of questions with a sense of both anxiety and anticipation: Would this experiment in a collaborative class work? Could we simultaneously meet the learning needs of university graduate students and community practitioners? What would we learn about the work of extension education, and how? Would this work have any real value to extension educators — on campus or in the field? Would the answer to the question: “Does ‘technical assistance’ capture what you really do?” turn out to be “pretty much” after all?

We would continue to wrestle with many of these questions throughout the semester. But an answer to the last question began to take shape almost immediately.

A few minutes into the introductions, Madie McLean, a community nutrition educator with more than thirty years of cooperative extension experience, stood up to take her turn. After telling us a bit about her life and how she came to work with extension, she launched into a story about a young woman in one of her basic nutrition classes who didn’t know how to cook rice. She recounted how they practiced together — two cups water, one cup rice; two cups water; one cup rice. The following week, the young woman came back to class beaming with a new-found pride and confidence; she had made rice for her family’s dinner. At this point, Madie stopped and looked at us pointedly: “If you want to understand what we do here,” she said, “you have to understand, it’s not about the rice.”

It was a refrain we were to hear again and again — in the introductions, over lunch, throughout our class sessions, and in the profiles we have collected here. Extension education is not about the rice — or the resume, or the

garden. Or at least, not completely. “Food is a vehicle ...,” the nutrition educators told us. “Agriculture and horticulture was the entrée,” Gretchen said.

At the same time, the CUCE-NYC educators told us something else. “We have a hard time explaining what we do,” they said. As Gretchen notes in her profile in this collection, “My son hasn’t figured out what I do because I

**We are not just doing education, we are doing something else ... [People] want to know, what is it? .... It’s hard to define. We are building people, families, communities.”**

haven’t been able to tell him. I’m being honest here. I am seriously looking for help finding concise words in English that says what it is we do. We say our work is rewarding. We say we help people through non-formal education strategies or approaches or something to address critical needs. It just sounds like jargon. ... No one [else] has a clue because we are not able to articulate what it is we do.” Carol Parker-Duncanson, regional coordinator for CUCE’s nutrition programs, put it this way in our meeting at the Grant Houses: “We are not just doing education, we are doing something else ... [People] want to know, what is it? ... It’s hard to define. We are building people, families, communities.”

## Learning from stories

Thus, two related questions — the CUCE-NYC educators’ question: how do we define what we do? and our question: how do we create an organized space for reflection that will surface for discussion the richer civic practice we believed was embedded in many extension educators’ work—became the fo-

cus of the class. Together, we set out to try to answer them. To do so, we created a series of practitioner profiles.<sup>2</sup> These profiles, which constitute the bulk of this book, are written in the voices of the educators themselves. They were constructed in collaboration with Cornell graduate students who asked questions, recorded and transcribed the interviews, and edited the conversations into the profiles collected

here. In those interviews, the students asked the educators to tell us about a specific project, focusing on the challenges that they faced and what they did as they responded to them. We specifically encouraged the educators to tell the stories informally, as they would to

a friend, rather than in their “professional” voices. This presents a storytelling voice that is rich in human detail, but can sound unexpected to those used to more formal descriptions of educational programs. (We provide a more detailed description of how we created practitioners profiles, along with a list of the kinds of questions we asked, in Appendix A).

We chose the profile approach because we believe that stories are an excellent tool for helping people learn and that people’s lived experience is an excellent starting point for reflection. Stories about those experiences, in their specific particularity, do something that a summary, job description, bulleted list of themes or competencies, and abstracted theory can never do. These profiles are complex, nuanced. They allow readers to learn not just what people say (usually in vague generalizations) about their work, but to draw an even richer picture from people’s tales of what they actually do. They contain the mix of insight and ambivalence, frustration and hope that most experienced practitioners, in any field,



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bring to their work. They draw attention to the values, skills, strategies, and roles that educators employ everyday. As Rosalyn McMullin, a CUCE-NYC educator who currently works in the environmental issues unit told us: “The profiles ... reflect like a mirror. When I look at the profiles ... I’m not just looking at it as a profile about a specific place or a specific program. You can always find something in anybody’s profile that can be you. I take it very personally.”

### **If it’s not about rice, then what?**

What is reflected in a mirror depends on the one who is looking into the glass. So, too, with these profiles. In this section, we want to share with you part of the reflection that we saw, a reflection arising from conversations with the CUCE-NYC educators, with the Cornell graduate students who participated in the class, and with each other — about how to more fully describe what extension educators do. If extension education is “not about the rice,” then what is it about? We believe that many answers to that question can be found in the profiles collected here. In this section, we want to discuss some of the answers that we found.

We do not present these as research “findings,” at least not in the way that academic publications are often expected to do, some sort of final “truth” about what Cornell researchers have found to be the essence of extension education. Rather, we see this as the continuation of a conversation in which we have been trying to construct a richer way to understand this work. We hope it will spark further conversations, helping those invested in extension education — in New York State communities, on the Cornell University campus, and through the extension system nationwide — to reflect on this work in ways that are both familiar and fresh, and, in doing so, to deepen not only the understanding of what exten-

sion education is, but the potential for what it can be as well.

To begin to answer the question of the elusive “something else” to which Carol Parker-Duncanson alluded, let us turn to the profiles themselves, to the NYC extension educators’ description of their work, day-to-day. We start with John Ameroso, an agronomist working in the Community and Economic Development issue area. John tells of his work with the New Farmers/New Markets urban agriculture program in which he assisted community organizations to start new farmers markets and helped people, often immigrants who had once farmed in their home communities, to access land in the areas just outside New York City to grow produce which would then be sold in the urban markets. He says:

**The profiles ... reflect like a mirror. ... You can always find something in anybody’s profile that can be you.**

*[People in the community] rely on me for the whole technical piece, stuff like, “What are we going to plant? How is it going to be planted? What is the time frame? Where do we get the stuff?” I’m doing site visits all the time ... I don’t see myself as organizing. I leave that up to other groups. They do the organizing and then I come in as a technician — the why and what: what can work and can’t work.*

As the garden sign said, “Technical assistance provided by CUCE-NYC.” And yet, John immediately follows that comment by noting: “A lot of times, I put myself in the role of cheerleader. I always have an up attitude toward things.” And, in describing what makes him effective at what he does, he says:

*You keep yourself looking at people, go visiting, keep yourself out there, know what’s*

*going on ... I could never have developed the Urban Agriculture Program in the office. I couldn’t sit here and write down that we were going to do urban agriculture — this is what we are going to do; we’re going to invite these groups over and we are going to tell them exactly how they are going to do this. It doesn’t work that way.*

*You have to really just work with people for a long period of time ... You’ve got to be out talking to people, attending other people’s meetings, making yourself known, doing workshops for people. Basically, you have to be always responding to people, attend a lot of different things that are revolving around what you are doing, like going to conferences for community gardens or anything that has to do with growing stuff. This is basically what I’ve done for the last twenty-five years...*

*My role has been to do the training and, basically, the schmoozing for many years.*

*Schmoozing means always being out there, not looking at something and asking, “Is this meeting going to be important for me and my program, or is this going to be a waste of time?” ... [You have to be] always talking to people, always being there. ...*

*You can not formulate programs to do out there; everything comes from out there*

And so, clearly, technical assistance, while a component of John’s work, will not suffice to describe what it is he does. He does not just go on site visits, answering people’s questions about what and when to plant. Nor, he tells us, was developing the Urban Agriculture Program a technical proposition, based on transferring research-based expertise, something that could be written in the office and then handed to community members who needed it. As he says, “You can not formulate programs to do out there; everything comes from out there.” To do that work, he “schmoozes,” visiting people, talking to people, making himself known.

To further develop this picture, let’s turn our mirror to Linda Nessel,

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issue area leader for Workforce Development, who describes the work of developing Youth-to-Youth Literacy, a summer program matching Cornell students with young people in New York City. Linda was initially approached by Scott McMillan, a faculty member in Cornell's English department who had received a small grant from the university to create a community service project for his students. Together with Bill Saunders, director of the Grant Houses, they developed what is now a well-established program. She says:

*I do not see myself as a teacher in this program. I see myself more as the strategic planner, pulling the pieces together and bringing resources together. ... I would call myself more of an organizer. ...*

*This program ... confirms part of why I came to extension, which was to bring university resources to the city. ... I'm not even sure if extension has put any resources into this [program]. But it's the faculty fellows. It's the work-study students. It's the Public Service Center. And it is access to people who provided funding for us, who we never would have come into contact with. ... I see my work as brokering, bringing together people who wouldn't typically come together. My colleague, John Nettleton, often talks about our approach to Cornell being like a scavenger hunt. We go up there and see if there's anyone interesting who wants to work with us, even though it's not in their job description. I do think what extension does best is the brokering, especially if we bring together people who normally wouldn't come in contact with each other. Bringing together the usual people is fine, but it doesn't seem like it's going to produce anything but the usual programs.*

Whereas John Ameroso describes himself as a schmoozer and cheerleader, Linda says she works as a broker, organizer, strategic planner, partner, and scavenger. These words describe relationships far more complex than that of the technical expert responding to those in need of assistance. They describe relationships that are long-term,

familiar and reciprocal; relationships that involve talking and listening to the expressed needs of the community; relationships that involve bringing people together to do things that they could not do on their own; relationships that require finding and accessing resources and negotiating interests; relationships that cheer people on to try new things. There is much more that could be gleaned from John and Linda's stories. But for the moment, let us turn to another profile.

Lucinda Randolph Benjamin, an extension educator with workforce and 4-H youth development created the 4-H College Interview Program following a conversation with teenagers about their interests and unmet needs. Again, there is clearly a technical component to Lucinda's work. She teaches the young people to write stronger college application essays and resumes, conducts mock interviews, and arranges for information sessions on college life, financial aid, etc. But to limit Lucinda's work to the transfer of technical knowledge misses much of what is most important in what she does. As she says:

*Living in the community where we work has given CUCE-NYC and our staff validity in the community we serve. It definitely gives you commitment. You go beyond just your job title, or what your job description says. We're bound to the community because we also want to see a change in the neighborhoods we've been in. People know us. We have name identification and credibility. The people trust us. It takes a long time to develop that trust. You have to keep showing up, keep going back, and prove what you say you're going to deliver. You have to deliver.*

*When you're working with people — and this is the key — you can't come in heavy-handed as if "We're Cornell, we're the end-all-be-all." Because when you look at our mission statement, it's take the learning from campus, all the research, and then apply it to the community. But CUCE-NYC*

*can't come off that way, because when you look at all the other colleges here in NYC — CUNY, Columbia, NYU, etc. — people ask, "Why Cornell?" Cornell has to come in more as a community friend. We're helping enhance your knowledge and skills and advance you to another level. We're not coming in saying, "This is how you should do it." We're saying is "These are things you seem to be doing right. Let's build on that." That's a different spin. ...*

*You need people skills. You have to be a people person. You have to have some tenacity about you. ... Initially, they see me as the 4-H lady or the Cornell lady. By the end, they see me as Lucinda, Sister Lucinda, whatever they want to see me as. I think all extension people go through that. It depends on who you are and who you are talking to. Some people wonder if they are buying into you or buying into Cornell. It depends. I think initially I go out and I represent Cornell, but when you look at the time you put in, eventually your spirit pours out and then they buy into you. That's when the trust comes in. ...*

*I'm an excellent motivator. People seem to do positive things when I'm with them. ... I raise the bar of expectation and what they're capable of. ... I listen, but I also highlight the things that you have done well and then show you where you can do that and move it to something else. I'm very into showing you options. I'm helping you discover. And I'm a person you can trust to share your dream with. I won't laugh at your dream. A lot of communities are like that too. They have dreams and hopes, but they shoot themselves in the foot even before they get started by telling themselves, "No, I can not." No! Don't tell yourself that. Try it, do it, do something. I think the saying goes, "If you shoot for the moon and fail, at least you'll fall among the stars. But if you never shoot for it, you never reach anything." I'm like Jesse: "Keep hope alive. I keep hope alive; that's it. I want folks to dream, and I'm trying to tell them, "Baby, you can do this!"*

Lucinda's story enriches the conversation further, adding to our growing list community friend, motivator,

the Cornell lady, Sister Lucinda, and encourager of dreams. She tells us about long-term relationships that involve deep listening, massive doses of encouragement, and an unwavering belief in people's knowledge, skills and strengths. She describes extension educators as a bridge — they are of the community, and they are Cornell. But it is not a bridge across which educators simply transport technical knowledge. "When you look at our mission statement," Lucinda notes, "it's take the learning from campus ... and then apply it to the community. But we can't come off that way... We ... come in more as a community friend. We're not coming in saying, 'This is how you should do it.' What we're saying is 'There are the things you seem to be doing right. Let's build on that.' But that's a different spin." Through her work, she shows us a particular kind of community building, one which focuses not just on bringing knowledge to the community, but on standing with the community, as a "community friend," where "your spirit pours out and then they buy into you." It's an educator's job, she says, to encourage people to dream and "keep hope alive."

Finally, we turn to two profiles of community nutrition educators. Madie McLean began working with cooperative extension in 1971, when the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) first began in East Harlem, where she lived. Like the other extension educators, Madie describes the technical, research-based component of her work:

*We were well-trained to do the group. We would go to Cornell for the workshops, and they would come down here to us. ... We still get information from Cornell that helps us do our jobs. ... [The last workshop] we had, he talked about the [new] dietary guidelines, and he was fantastic. ... We will incorporate that with the food guide pyramid and other lessons.*

Further, she notes:

*[In my classes], I will present research information as it relates to the health problems of high blood pressure, heart diseases, and cancer. ... The nutrition and health sessions promote and help motivate people to learn and make changes that will benefit them and their families.*

But once again, the transfer of technical knowledge paints only a partial picture of the work. As Madie continues:

*The more people know about us, the longer we can continue helping build and change families and communities. The things we do — eating, playing, being together —*

**In these profiles, we have educators describing their work as organizers and brokers; schmoozers and scavengers; cheerleaders and encouragers of dreams; strategic planners and community builders; partners, friends and mothers.**

*it's a combination. Food, by itself, is not going to get it — it's a combination of things. When people ... feel nothing is going right, nutrition and health isn't as important to them as "how do I get out of this rut? How do I get some shoes for the kids? How do I get a coat or jacket or whatever that child needs? How about me? How do I get the help that I need? And you have to know the difference at that point about whether you are going to talk about nutrition or listen to whatever it is that is on their mind at the moment. That is part of building families, because they will think, "She cares about me as an individual."*

*In terms of community building ... I am meeting people who were the children in the home-based families [I worked with twenty years ago]. These children are now twenty-five, twenty-eight, and they remember me. And they remember their moms are still doing the things that they learned from*

*the program than twenty-five years ago. That is amazing feedback. It's always surprising to me because I don't remember, but they do. ... I met somebody at the manicure place, and she leaned over and said, "I know you, I remember you." That happens often because I am still in the same community, and I do often run into people who say, "I remember you at my Mom's house." ... So we must have made some big impression on them...*

*I think EFNEP is all about sharing, sharing information that is relevant to the audience that we are working with, building community, making them stronger, giving them the tools to do things for themselves — simple, everyday things that they can relate to that are going to make their life a little easier and a little better. It is about doing that through people they can relate to and respect, who can say, "Yeah, I've been there, that happened to me and look, I came from there to here." ... It's about encouraging, building people up, helping people to succeed, helping people to just think, "I can do it," to be independent and not dependent.*

Madie describes herself not only as an educator, but as a listener, and perhaps more importantly, as a community-builder. Such community-building, she tells, us is rooted in a particular kind of education. It is carried out by teachers with a life-long passion for learning, whose lives are embedded in the communities in which they work, and whose intent is not just to transfer technical information, but to build capacity — to foster both confidence and competency — in the people with whom they work. It is "all about sharing information" but also about "building people up ... helping people to think, 'I can do it' ..."

Marilyn Waters, another CUCE nutrition educator, opens the window

on this kind of education even further. On one hand, she talks about the different techniques and lesson plans that she uses when she teaches — how to shop most cost effectively, how to prepare a plate of food that looks enticing, how to give children serving sizes that are appropriate, how to prepare salads and low-fat meals. At the same time, she says:

*I'm just like their mother. I'm the mother of all of them because I cry for all of them when they graduate. When you first go in [to a new group of teen mothers], it's "I don't want a nutrition class. I don't need that. I don't need that parenting. I know how to raise my child." They get very arrogant and irritable when they first come in. But you talk to them on their level, like you don't know it all. You understand. You're willing to listen to them. You're going to listen to their problems. Sometimes when you walk in, this isn't the time that they want to hear about nutrition. They want somebody to give them some good advice. Or they just want to know that I care about them, that I care what they're going to do with their life. ... They become your children.*

*I think the most important thing about being a community educator is loving people and being compassionate. ... If you're not compassionate — "No, no no. You need to know this right now!" — if it's all about teaching this at that moment, you will turn them off. ... It's a whole lot of love and compassion. ... You have to be willing to give of yourself. People say, "No, your job is not that. But your job is that. You have to give of yourself. It gets personal to me. It really does.*

At this point, we've come a long way from that stark, dry, uninspiring phrase on the Bronx community garden fence, "Technical assistance provided by Cornell University Cooperative Extension." We have educators describing their work as organizers and brokers; schmoozers and scavengers; cheerleaders and encouragers of dreams; strategic planners and community builders;

partners, friends and mothers. We have Lucinda telling us that "your spirit pours out and then they buy into you" and Marilyn insisting that the work is "a whole lot of love and compassion."

### **A developmental leadership tradition**

After reading these profiles and listening to the stories, we brought to the CUCE educators excerpts from a wonderful book by Mary Belenky, Lynne Bond, and Jacqueline Weinstock, called *A Tradition That Has No Name: Nurturing the Development of People, Families, and Communities*. We thought it might provide a lens that could help focus this "hard-to-define" practice. Belenky and her colleagues studied successful organizations that helped people, particularly people who previously hadn't taken active roles in the life of their community, to exercise leadership and come to have a real say in the way their lives, families and communities are run. Through their research, they identified a tradition they call "developmental leadership."

The language we heard in the stories of some of the NYC extension educators — language evoking nurturing, growth, caring, family ties, and the creating of community — echoes the tradition of "developmental leadership" described by Belenky and her colleagues. Developmental leaders, they write:

*... are intensely interested in the development of each individual, of the group as a whole, and of a more democratic society. These leaders want to know each person, what they care about, and where they are trying to go. They also work to articulate the goals that people in the group have in common. They look for each person's strong points, for the things already in place upon which the people could build. They also look for the strengths in the people's culture as a building foundation for the whole community. They ask good questions and draw out people's thinking. They listen with care. To*

*better understand what they are hearing they try to step into the people's shoes and see the world through their eyes. Then they look for ways to mirror what they have seen, giving people a chance to take a new look at themselves and see the strengths that have not been well recognized or articulated. Because these leaders open themselves so fully to others, we think of them as connected leaders. We also talk about them as midwife leaders because they enable the community to give birth to fledgling ideas and nurture the ideas along until they have become powerful ways of knowing. ... [T]his tradition puts forth a model of public leadership dedicated to "drawing out," "raising up" and "lifting up" people and communities. (Belenky et. al 1997: 14–15, 17).*

It is a model of public leadership that has been most typically (although not exclusively) practiced by women, and that often (although not exclusively) has been rooted in African and African-American communities.

We asked the CUCE educators whether they saw themselves in this description. Many of them answered with a resounding "yes." We then began to ask — both them and ourselves — what would it mean to view the work of the NYC extension educators as part of this tradition of developmental leadership? How might this change our understanding of what extension educators do? How might it change the parts of their work that are seen and valued?

These questions led us to still more questions, most yet unanswered: to what extent is this practice of developmental leadership central to the work of extension educators elsewhere? What can we learn from it that might expand our understanding of the role of extension, in particular, and universities, in general, as we try to more effectively partner with communities? What would it mean to understand the work of community development in terms of the decidedly unflashy, often

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mundane, day-to-day work of nurturing people? What can it teach those of us in campus-based positions about the ways we can best support capacity-building in communities? How might it foster stronger, more reciprocal partnerships between campus and community extension offices? What assumptions about “program development,” “outcomes” and measurements of “effectiveness” would need to be questioned and changed?

To view the work of extension educators as part of a developmental leadership tradition is not to view it in some radically new way. Rather, it takes us right back to extension’s historical roots. Seaman A. Knapp, often described as the “father” of the extension movement (Martin 1921/1941; Rasmussen 1989), was known to argue that the real yardstick for measuring the success of extension teaching was contained in the phrase: “And the man grew faster than the crop” (Willard 1929: 413).

We find the same perspective in the following two quotations. The first is taken from a national survey of land-grant institutions, a comprehensive two-volume study published in 1930 by the federal Office of Education:

*The ultimate objective was not more and better food, clothing, and housing. These were merely means and conditions prerequisite to improvement of human relationships, of intellectual and spiritual outlook. Apparent preoccupation with economic interests must be interpreted in terms of the purposes that material welfare is intended to serve. The fundamental function of Smith-Lever extension education is the development of rural people themselves. This is accomplished by fostering attitudes of mind and capacities which will enable them to better meet the individual and civic problems with which they are confronted. Unless economic attainment and independence are regarded chiefly as means for advancing the social and cultural life of those living in the open country, the*

*most important purpose of extension education will not be achieved (Klein 1930, 442).*

The second excerpt is taken from a paper that A. E. Bowman, director of extension in Wyoming, wrote in 1934 in connection with the twentieth anniversary of the Smith-Lever Act, which created the national Cooperative Extension Service:

*The Extension Service, while seeming to deal chiefly with the economic problems involved in helping the producer secure a greater income from his farm, and his wife to manage the home with greater economy and less effort, has contributed to rural soci-*

**To view the work of extension educators as part of a long tradition of developmental leadership is not to try to view it in some radically new way. Rather, it is to view it in the oldest possible way, one that takes us right back to extension’s historical roots.**

*ety something vastly more important than a knowledge of improved practices and greater income. To induce men and women and boys and girls to come together to think collectively, plan collectively, and then act collectively to bring about desired conditions, does something to the individual. It gives opportunity, the greatest boon to mankind, for self-expression and development. It is not the acquisition of more lands or more cattle or more home equipment that brings greater happiness. It is the “finding of one’s self,” the development of leadership, improved skills, increased knowledge, broadened understanding, and greater appreciation attained by the individual taking part in community activities set afoot by the Extension Service that measures its value to rural people. (Bowman 1934: 88–89)*

Both of these passages remind us, in an almost eerily precise way, of the

central lesson we learned from the CUCE-NYC educators: it’s not about the rice.

If a developmental leadership tradition is deeply rooted in extension history, what explains the predominance of the narrow “technical assistance” language used to describe extension’s mission and work? To answer this question, we need to confront the fact that a broad human and community development centered understanding of extension’s mission and work is — and has always been — in tension with a narrower technical understanding. In

part, this tension is rooted in genuine disagreements among educators and administrators about how human and community development can or should be pursued. Some believe that human and community development are by-products of economic development; from this perspective, extension’s main emphasis should be placed on developing and

disseminating the technical skills and knowledge that can help enhance economic efficiency and productivity. Others disagree, believing that human and community development must be prioritized and fostered directly, or risk becoming devalued and lost.

However, the tension extends beyond disagreements about strategy and tactics. The emphasis on a narrow technical view of extension’s mission and work was — and is — also shaped by powerful political and economic forces and actors that have tried to mold universities’ activities, including their extension activities, to a particular set of values and interests. These include prioritizing national economic growth, “competitiveness” and private corporate agendas, without serious regard to what the consequences may be with re-

spect to human and community development (Hightower 1973/1978; Neth 1995; McDowell 2001; Peters 2002).

The profiles contained in this book show us that an understanding of the developmental tradition is alive and well in contemporary extension practice. Many of them provide us with valuable insight into how a group of spirited, creative, and dedicated educators are navigating the tension between human and technical understandings of extension's mission and work in ways that integrate them rather than pit them against each other, while leaving the central focus and emphasis on the human side of the work.

A few months after our collaborative course ended, most of the campus-based class members returned to New York City one more time, this time for a retreat in the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens where we used four of these profiles to reflect with the entire CUCE-NYC staff (eighty people in all) about the essence of their work. It was, some of them told us, the first time they had publicly discussed with each other what many had privately known. At that meeting, Patti Thayer, a resource educator with Workforce Development, put it this way: "We grow people in New York City." And Evalina Irish Spencer, regional coordinator for CUCE's nutrition programs, observed: "You can never give people from here [points to her head] what you can give them from here [points to her heart]. You can give all you want from your head, but unless your heart is there, you've missed it. And you better not be missing it."

As these profiles make abundantly clear, the official institutional language of "technical assistance," and "putting knowledge to work" — by itself —

"misses it." It is far too narrow and flat to capture the rich, varied, nuanced practice of extension education. Yes, there is a technical assistance component to nearly every extension educator's job. And yes, the transfer of research-based knowledge from university to community is embedded in nearly every extension program. But to see only that misses so much of what these educators do. It leaves the "something else" unnamed, vague, undefined, and all too often, misunderstood.

We believe that if this tradition of promoting human and community

**The official language of "technical assistance," and "putting knowledge to work" — by itself — is far too narrow and flat to capture the rich, varied, nuanced practice of extension education.**

development is not only to survive, but to thrive within extension practice, it is essential to define that "something else." As Mary Belenky and her colleagues note, there is a danger to leaving important traditions unnamed:

*When a tradition has no name people will not have a rich shared language for articulating and reflecting on their experiences with the tradition. Poorly articulated traditions are likely to be fragile. Without a common language the tradition will not become part of a well-established, ongoing dialogue in the larger society. Institutional supports to develop and refine the tradition's philosophy and practices will not be developed. Leaders' efforts to pass the tradition on to the next generation will be poorly supported. Existing educational institutions will not hire faculty who are experts in the tradition;*

*appropriate curriculum and apprenticeships will not be developed (Belenky et. al 1997: 293–294).*

The work of developing a richer language that better captures the entire tradition of extension education remains. But it can only evolve from continued conversation among those who believe in the power of the extension partnership to help build the capacity of people and communities. So now, we invite you to engage with these profiles yourselves. What does the mirror show you? What do you see that we have not seen? In what way do these

profiles reflect back aspects of your own work? What parts of your experience do you not find here? What language would you use to describe what it is that extension educators do?

Of course, changing an institutional language, while an important step, will not by itself change an institution or its practices. As we noted earlier, institutional priorities and practices have been shaped, in part, by powerful political and economic interests and goals. Thus, to go further, we must also ask why the work of extension education tends to be described in one type of language and not another, and what we might do about it. What would it take to develop an organizational culture that embraced not just a richer language, but supported educators actively putting it into practice? Where do such practices already exist? What supports for them are already in place? What barriers must still be overcome? What role do you want to play? We invite you to join us in helping the conversation continue.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The phrase “civic dimensions of practice” is meant to point to those aspects of practice that have to do with community development, leadership development, public deliberation and problem solving, and capacity building in the skills needed for active citizenship.

<sup>2</sup> Practitioner profiles are a research tool developed by John Forester, a professor in Cornell’s Department of City and Regional Planning to illuminate “theory ... through the lived experiences of [practitioners].” They are described in more depth in his book, *The Deliberative Practitioner: Encouraging Participatory Planning Processes*.

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# profile

## Lucinda Randolph Benjamin

RESOURCE EDUCATOR, WORKFORCE & 4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT



Cornell University Cooperative Extension (CUCE-NYC) has been in NYC since the late sixties, seventies. Most of the NYC staff were hired to work in the neighborhoods that they lived in. There was a link between Cornell programs and the neighborhoods they served. That was one of the things that drew me to Cornell, the ability to serve my community.

I've been in this position for three or four years. I've been with Cornell since 1988. I was the volunteer administrator from '93 to '97 and coordinator of 4-H youth development between '88 and '92. I was recruited from Community of Caring/Project Bridge, an intergenerational program, where I developed programs that bridged the gap between youth, grandparents and adults at Catholic Charities. Two CUCE-NYC Nutrition & Health staffers who were familiar with my work recruited me for the position of 4-H program assistant. One of the reasons I took the job is because the work I was doing at Catholic Charities wasn't in the neighborhoods that I wanted to work in. Cornell targeted neighborhoods such as Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brownsville and Harlem where I wanted to work. That was a big pull.

In 1993, cooperative extension went through a major overhaul. We were going through our plan of work process. Every four or five years, the scope of work changes for Cornell. What that means is the organization rethinks its programs. Is CUCE-NYC

meeting the needs of its clients? We had roundtable discussions with clergy, legislators, agencies that we've worked with for years, and volunteers in every borough except for Staten Island. We had a volunteer roundtable where we had volunteers come in and just hash out issues. Youth were also involved. We couldn't get as many youth as we wanted involved, because when the adults were available, the kids were in school. But we did have a 4-H Youth Council, and we were able to run ideas and get their input. CUCE-NYC came up with a listing of different needs for the neighborhoods, and programs were designed from that. At that particular time, we became issue area focused. CUCE-NYC programs shifted to parallel the needs of the neighborhoods it serviced.

For example, we still had Nutrition and Health, but it changed. Instead of just focusing on basic food, we were looking at food safety issues, jobs in nutritional and health careers and management. There was a big push in workforce development. Everywhere we went, people wanted to know about jobs. Are you creating jobs? Are you training people for jobs? Etc. So that's how the workforce development area was formed. Community development was the same thing, focusing on jobs and developing new skills. We were doing things around utility management, how to save money, how to use what you have better, that sort of thing. With environmental education, it was how to make your neighborhood more hospitable and humane. They also had

**Profile developed by Stephanie Li and  
Lucinda Randolph Benjamin**



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a youth development component looking at how to get youth to be stewards of communities and neighborhoods.

It wasn't a matter of us coming in with a list of "This is what we want to do, what do you think?" This was more of a call to ask, "What are the needs in your neighborhood?" Then we were able to go back and say "All right, we are really going to address issues of NYC neighborhoods." We readjusted our staffing and our programs to accommodate those issues. In other counties, it was more of a name change, but we went through a real critical overhaul. Many community issues were identified, but CUCE-NYC staff was limited. We needed more volunteers; we needed more manpower. So there was a need internally for somebody to coordinate that. There wasn't a centralized volunteer system. That became my job. It was a need that became a job. We all had to reapply for positions, and that was one of the areas I applied for. Since I had been working with 4-H and working with volunteers here and in my previous position, I was right for the task.

When CUCE-NYC reorganized, it became a very stressful place. Many staffers had been in extension for a number of years and were grounded in their positions. Now it was as if the rug had been pulled from under them, and they were told, "You're not going to lose your job, but you are going to have to apply for something different." They had to start all over again. For my particular position, volunteer administrator, I knew that was what I wanted, but unexpectedly 4-H came along with me as well. So whereas before, there had been a program leader, an administrative assistant, plus three to four program assistants to support that one program, now it was just me. I was responsible for developing a centralized volunteer system for the whole of CUCE-NYC plus run the 4-H Youth Development Program, and all I had was myself and

an administrative assistant. That's it. I was essentially running two programs, one that originally took five people to run it and one that was brand new. That was not a happy time. It was stressful because you had to prove yourself. Everyone was on new ground. There was no predecessor for the volunteer administrator position. It was all new. I had to develop a brand new program and continue 4-H. That was a heavy load.

I learned the hard way that Lucinda has to take care of Lucinda. But it took me a number of years to get there.

**When you look at our mission statement ... it's take the learning from campus, all the research, and then apply it to the community. But CUCE-NYC can't come off that way ... [We have] to come in more as a community friend.**

I got very sick. I learned to create my time, to take my vacations, to do what I have to do. I don't feel guilty about it anymore. At one time, I did feel guilty, because if you're not here, something isn't happening.

One challenge for me was learning to work as part of a team. For a long time, out of necessity, I operated as an independent unit. There was only me, the volunteers and the administrative person. Staff changed often, so I learned to depend on myself for most things. Before I could hand off an assignment or share a project, I had to be able to trust that my colleagues would share a similar commitment to program excellence and be around long enough to make an impact. Sometimes, I wound up spending a lot of time training and sharing, and then the colleague was gone. I learned to keep my most important projects close. Eventually, keeping everything on your plate like that

makes you sick. Continuity, experience and the need for help allowed me to be a little more trusting and to share my workload with others. We all began to work as a team.

We had to work cooperatively, but it was hard. Some people were split up, 80 percent time there, 20 percent time there. It became very difficult for staff to work together because things were so complex. And since we all felt that we had to prove ourselves, things didn't always lend themselves toward collaboration. We work more collaboratively now. This office (at 34th street) is the result of a change in staffing and the consolidation of five offices into one. Many staff were meeting and working with each other for the first time. It has taken time. There were growing pains, but that's how organizations and teams develop.

There's a thing I say when I'm teaching team development. It's called "forming, storming, norming, reforming and performing." Teams form around issues or problems. Then they go through a storm period, and they have to storm. Storming helps teams/staff find out the personalities of their teammates. What they don't agree on, they act out. It's the growing pains of team development. But afterwards, you start the "norming" process. And then teams say "Let's agree, and agree to disagree. Let's learn what strategies we can work on." Once CUCE-NYC got to that period, it became a little easier, because it wasn't about turf issues. It was about "If we're going to survive and float, we need to stroke this boat together." Then we went through a period of reforming. Some of us changed position. There was a mass staff exodus from CUCE-NYC. But by that point, the people who had resolved to stay and

to make it work did. Those are the folks who have history with Cornell and were able to train the next group to come in without all the stress of before. We had bonded and learned to trust through those stages. Now we're performing!

Living in the communities where we work has given staff and CUCE-NYC validity in the communities we serve. It definitely gives you commitment. You go beyond just your job title, or what your job description says. We're bound to the community because we also want to see a change in the neighborhoods we've been in. People know us. We have name identification and credibility. The people trust us. It takes a long time to develop that trust. You have to keep showing up, keep going back, and deliver what you say you're going to deliver. You have to deliver. When you're working with people — and this is the key — you can't come in heavy-handed as if "We're Cornell; we're the end-all-be-all." Because when you look at our mission statement, or the mission of Cornell, it's take the learning from campus, all the research, and then apply it to the community. But CUCE-NYC can't come off that way because when you look at all the other credible universities and colleges here in New York City — CUNY, Columbia, NYU, etc. — people ask, "why Cornell?" Cornell has to come in more as a community friend. We're helping to enhance your knowledge and skills and advance you to another level. We're not coming in saying, "This is how you should do it." We're saying, "These are the things you seem to be doing right. Let's build on that." That's a different spin.

CUCE-NYC puts knowledge to work. We're adaptable, flexible, and we meet the needs of communities. Extension work is not set in stone. At least, New York City's extension work is not set in stone. We are responsive to the

needs of our clientele. We come in with a package, but the package changes to meet the needs of the clientele. And the package is always changing.

The 4-H College Interview Program (CIP) started through a conversation with teenagers. Increasingly, the teens I worked with asked, "Ms. Lucinda, how do you get into college? We're not getting any help from guidance counselors." I began questioning the students about college, and they were saying, "We didn't even think about Cornell." The students somehow didn't equate 4-H with Cornell, the university. So actually the program was need-based from youth.

Orange County 4-H Youth Development had piloted a college interview program, and they shared some of their materials with Jackie Davis-Manigaulte, the original NYC 4-H program leader. So we tried it. After the reorganization, I continued the program, and it has taken on a life of its own. The College Interview Program is a series of workshops developed to help youth juniors and seniors navigate the college admissions process. Students participate in sessions twice per year to learn about college admissions, essays, financial aid, careers exploration, etc. The program culminates in the mock college interview. One-on-one interviews are scheduled so that students can receive final feedback on their admissions package (essay, interview skills, applications, etc.). In the spring, we offer a program entitled "College 101," held at Teachers' College, Columbia University. Students learn the soft skills of college survival: dealing with roommates, money management, financial aid, living on your own, etc. Students get the information that we all wish we had been given when we were going through the college admissions process.

Over the years, I have partnered with many colleges and agencies to develop the program. We network with

colleges like CUNY, SUNY, and private colleges. Teachers' College, Columbia University co-sponsors the spring program. The original intent of the program was to offer additional assistance to 4-H youth who were thinking about college. The program is now offered to high school students citywide. The focus is not "how to get into Cornell," but rather "let's explore choices and options for your future."

Staffing has been a challenge. I need additional resources. One of the things I've always wanted to do is to have scholarships available from this office for students who are successful, who have gone through every single bit of it and have successfully gone through the interview itself. There should be some type of incentive. Maybe we could offer bus trips to Cornell or to other colleges. I'd like to expand additional resources because as you do this and you become more comfortable with the students, they come back and say, "Wow, Ms. Lucinda, this really worked." They also tell you, "You know what else would be good, if you had this..." So I've got a list of if-you-had-this, but definitely, we need additional resources.

In addition, the College Interview Program needs more manpower. As the program grows, you need more people to actually coordinate everything. I could use help with answering email requests from students and other follow-up services. It would also be great to have college students to take students under their wing and help them for that first year because then another window is opened up. The students may be emailing me, saying, "I'm having trouble with this." I have to say, "Well, my job was to get to you to college; now, once you're in there, you've got to find who is your resource, your support." There are other opportunities out there, and there are other struggles that we're dealing with here. And our staff hasn't grown. So you want to continue, but

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there's a point where you have to stop because you physically can't do it.

As the students go through, there are evaluations that they complete after each workshop. After the whole program is over, we usually have talks with the students who have gone through the final interview. There's a discussion about what was the impact, what was the thing that really got you through, what are you going to take away? There's a discussion with the volunteers who participated in the program, and they give us their feedback: how to enhance it and how they would have liked us to approach them. We pull from all of those.

One of the things that's nice is that students who have gone to career expos or college expos have told us that the difference with us is that you get more of a one-to-one conversation here over a period of time versus going to a big expo and just asking questions. So we really make an impact that way.

This last time, we had one of the deans from the New School who served as an evaluator. He was impressed with what we were doing because he would like to see it done more often. He suggested that we have the prep for the interview taken out of an office space and done at an actual college so the kids get more of a sense of what a college is like. We already do the interview at a college, but the workshops are all done here, which is more of an office atmosphere. He also suggested that we give them more tours of colleges so they get a mindset that they need to act a little more adult.

For some students, they come in with that attitude already. For others, it's more than just a fine tuning of their writing. It's more how do you self-market yourself from the time you walk in the door. That self-marketing piece is something we've been told we need to hone up a little more. When you have to market yourself, we're looking at or-

ganization and what you do. A lot of kids have problems with their self-esteem so maybe on paper they look good, but they don't necessarily come across that way at the interview.

One of the biggest things that has come out this last time around has been writing. The writing is really getting worse with some of the students; their writing skills are poor, grammatical errors, that sort of thing. I've had suggestions from a number of people that we really need to have a course on basic writing. We do essay writing, but essay writing is more about how do you get your thoughts across, how do you come

**For a lot of students in NYC, even around the world, dreams are diminished.**

**... As a family continues on and on, the dreams get smaller and smaller. ...So that's my joy: going beyond the paradigm they set up for themselves, learning that there is stuff out beyond the 'hood that is attainable.**

up with a topic that you want to work on. What they're talking about, the volunteers and the evaluators, is that we need courses on grammar: how do you write, spelling, just basic things that seem to get in the way. As the project goes on, we're developing.

Most of the kids are going on to college. For some of the students, they get what they need and they're gone, but for the ones who actually finish, who go through the interviews and are not just coming for the financial aid information, those are the students we wind up tracking the most. That's where we keep most of our energies. We have an intern now who is following up with the students to find out where all the students are so we can say that 100 percent of the students who have

gone through the total program are in college. Now we want to go back and see the students who might have gotten one session here or there. We want to know where they are.

I want the kids to know that one, you have options because a lot of the schools where they are, or even parents, tell them, "You only have this or that." So one is to know you have options. Two, I want them to dream big. Because the other thing that comes along with narrowed options is "Oh, don't try for such and such a school because you're not going to make it." So options, and dream big. Three, apply yourself. Applying yourself means do what you have to, but know that you have a network. Develop a network, talk to people, because everyone around you knows at least five other people who can serve as a resource to you. And do your research.

I like linking people to each other. I like the one-on-one. During the last session, we always have a panel discussion on alternatives to college or careers. This time, we had a young lady who was into art. She thought she wanted to go into photography, but her teacher who was a photography major really discouraged her and told her there was no money in it. But we had someone here who was in advertising and was working for *Forbes* magazine. She was here as a lecturer. She was sharing how, when she was in college, her photography was able to get her layout jobs and print issues. And now, with all the work on the web, photographers are really in demand because people who are advertising on the web are looking for photographers to bring their visuals to life. So there's a whole new realm. She also talked about opportunities for jobs while you're in col-

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lege, when you're developing your portfolio, your internships and that sort of thing. She opened up a wealth of opportunities right here in New York City. People are hiring high school and college students. This young woman went from, "I'm not even going to think about photography, I'm just going to try something else" to, by the end of that session, having a contact, a name, a whole wealth of things. It's the linkages. You have options, but you never know them if you never go out and explore and you don't apply. And you've got to dream.

For a lot of students in New York City, even around the world, dreams are diminished. You are discouraged from dreaming. It's like, "Get your head out of the clouds." Kids say, "I want to be a fireman, president" and adults tell you, "Forget about that. Get something else. Do something practical." That's the way folks are raised because no one told them to dream. As a family continues on and on, the dreams get smaller and smaller. The expectations get lower and lower. I have families that are happy if their kids just make it home from school alive. When you're dealing with basics like that, dreams are not that big and if they are dreaming, they're dreaming what I call ghetto dreams — I'm gonna be a rapstar — but they don't break out of that shell. So that's my joy: going beyond the paradigm they set up for themselves, learning that there is stuff out beyond the 'hood that is attainable.

I'm open and available to parents. For the club program, parents are volunteers; they're right there in the neighborhood. So when I go out to the meetings and I'm talking to them, that's when I come in contact with parents. If there's a program that's housed right here, I may come in more direct contact with parents because I have kids calling home. Parents want to know where their kids are. It depends on the program. I have good relationships with

parents. Some volunteer, and they like the programs that we do. Sometimes parents use the program as something over their children's head. So if the child really loves the program, but they're messing up at home, they'll pull that kid from this even though this is the thing that is enhancing them. They take it away as a punishment. So you have to work with parents to find other ways for them to work around discipline issues.

As far as growth and expansion for CIP, there are some things I'd like to do. We are going to start reaching out to younger people. Eventually I'd like to go as far as middle school and bridge from middle school. What do you need to be looking at in high school and college? What do you need to be doing in high school to prepare for college or a career? That is the direction I would like to see. As far as what would happen on the other end, once they got to college: I would envision having linkages or partnerships with colleges where I could have college students who are cyber-mentors or cyber-buddies through email who could link up with students in my program. The older students could take them under their wing and help them in their first year. Then, hopefully, that whole group of students who have gone through CIP would sign on to be cyber-buddies for a new group. That would be their payoff, their service for the work that's been done for them. I would also like to see specific funding channeled to this program.

For awhile, we've been surviving off standard funds that have come in for a number of years. We've been guaranteed that, but things are becoming a bit competitive now so we have to go out and find more funding. Just for viability of programming, you need to know people, you need to network. Funds and grants that are coming down the pike are looking for programs that involve partnerships. It's the collabo-

orative units that are getting funded. Funders want to reduce duplication of services and maximize quality. If I'm doing this, and you're doing something different, and we complement each other, we're in a better position to get funding because there's a partnership there. There's more than one agency getting all of the money. It means more services can be provided to more people, more cohesively. So it's important for how we do business, how we keep business going and how we service our communities.

You need people skills. You have to be a people person. You have to have some tenacity about you. The people who have been most successful are people who don't give up. If you keep playing the game, you eventually get through. If you are a person who needs to see quick results, this is not the place for you. You have to have a love for people. You have to be committed to what you do.

Initially they see me as the 4-H lady or the Cornell lady. By the end, they see me as Lucinda, Sister Lucinda, whatever they want to see me as. I think all extension people go through that. It depends on who you are and who you are talking to. Some people wonder if they are buying into you or buying into Cornell. It depends. I think initially I go out and I represent Cornell, but when you look at the time you put in, eventually your spirit pours out and then they buy into you. That's when the trust comes in. We are a representative of extension, and the trust that the individual builds also brings back a trust in Cornell because then they know that the people that Cornell sends out are reputable, knowledgeable. There's a time when I put on my Cornell hat and I speak my Cornellese. In that official capacity, there's a whole other language that comes out. But then depending on the neighborhoods that you're in, you don't want to talk that

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Cornellose because that can put people off. Sometimes you have to become real to them and relate on their level, and that's when they relate to Lucinda. You listen, and then you know how to switch. It's a feeling, an intuition, a discernment. That's the key. You listen.

Every community that I go into has the same situation although some communities are a little more affluent than others. Some think of themselves more as volunteers than as clientele with needs. But when you get to it, they still have needs. It is a plus when you can identify with people, but as you work with extension you come to realize that identity is beyond socio-economics and color. We're people. I think my skill is that I'm open, I listen. I keep getting back to that. You have to listen to people and hear how they identify themselves, how they see themselves. And then you package your program around that because everyone doesn't perceive things the same way, and so you market your program accordingly.

For example, if I am marketing the CIP to Bronx High School of Science, a specialized high school, the name Cornell University goes a long way. So I'll beef up the Cornell name because people identify it as Ivy League, and there's a prestige that goes along with that. If I'm looking at another high school, another inner-city area, I may not boost the Cornell name. But I'll talk about essay writing skills. I may boost the career alternatives to college aspect because the guidance counselor may perceive that their students are not going to get into college. Or I may talk about essay writing skills that will prepare you for your SAT or for the Regents English test. So I may market it differently to different students. But once they get to the class, they all get the same information. There's a different spin on the outreach because the students at Bronx High School of Science are definitely looking at the name

and the legitimacy of the program. They're thinking, "Can this get me in the door?" A lot of those students ask me, "Can I write you down as a reference?" They're definitely on another level. My other students are looking at, "Wow, I really need some help with my writing. I really need to know how to talk to people, how to interview and sell myself a little better." When both groups get to CUCENY, I have found out that both groups have strengths and

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weaknesses. Bronx High School of Science students often have the book knowledge, but lack the interview skills. Some of them haven't had any type of service experience. My students from the other schools have had a wealth of other experiences, but their grades are bad, and they don't know that they can beef up their presentation by saying how well-rounded a student they are. A place like Cornell wants a well-rounded student. They want to know that there's more to you than the books, that there's a person who can survive, who can offer something to the school beyond their academics. And they're like, "Oh, I didn't think of it like that." Then the students who didn't think

they had a chance are like, "Yeah, I have a little more to me." So I market the programs differently, but when the students come, they realize that they can learn from each other.

Sometimes you can come to a session or program with the most explicit lesson, and you get there and some major incident has happened. Maybe the school is in an uproar. I had a situation like that, someone was shot outside of the school I was working in. The students and teachers were dealing with something totally different than what I was coming to do. I had to be flexible enough to realize what was most needed from me at that moment. Is it needed for me to come out and teach the Cornell lesson to the letter? Or can I incorporate some of what they're going through? Because my audience may need to deal with their emotions or just let go of some steam. My audience isn't able to get what I'm teaching because they're dealing with other baggage. So I may have to just

step aside and let them vent a bit and then get to my subject, or just deal with what they're going through and use that as the focus of my subject matter.

I believe there is always something positive. If you get a group mad, but they become organized, you've done your job. They've come together. I try not to give up. There are some places where I have found that people weren't ready. During my earlier years at Cornell, people would call and say, "I'm interested in 4-H and I want to start a club." So I went out and talked to them. Then you get to the point where people have to commit, where they have to say, "We're willing to be volunteers for this." Some groups will say, "No, I thought

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you were going to run it.” And I say, “No, this is volunteer-based. That means I come out. I train you, but you have the responsibility to run the weekly meetings with your kids. I come out to assist as you need me. But as time goes on, it’s your group. You plan, I plan with you.” But when the time came for them to run the meeting, they’re not running the meeting. You call up, and they’re not following through. Sometimes, there are personal challenges that adults go through that just prevent them from doing things, or they realize they’ve bitten off more than they can chew. In that situation, I just stop and send a letter which says, “It seems that at this time you’re not able to do this, but that’s okay. These are other options for you and your kids.” Their kids could join another club that is operating someplace else, or I refer them back to their local school or community board. But they have tried something, and there are other options. Some people would say that’s a failure because I didn’t start a group. I look at it as they’ve gotten information, and they’re learning a little more about themselves, and they’re trained. I also might have found

a linkage through that group for a referral for somewhere else. There might be someone in that group who is willing to assist another club or willing to teach something to another group for one or two sessions. And maybe those same people will call me a year or two later. “I was thinking about you, Ms. Lucinda. Now we’re living at such and such project, and you know, we have a community center, and we could sure use that 4-H program.” So even though it looks at that moment that it may be dead, it usually resurfaces and something comes out of it.

I’m an excellent motivator. People seem to do positive things when I’m with them. I had an intern who came in and thought, “I’m just going to a local school.” I raise the bar of expectation for what they’re capable of. I’m available for them to talk about things beyond the workplace. I think that’s a little different. Some people just stick to the protocol: I’m your supervisor and that’s it. But for me, I’m a little more flexible on that. By the time we finished the internship, the student now knew that she wanted to go beyond. She’s in Hunter College right now doing work

on sociology and is going on to other internships. She’s come back several times to talk to me, to tell me “You really helped me. You let me know I could do more than what I was just doing.” I listen, but I also highlight the things that you have done well and then show you where you can do that and move it to something else. I’m very into showing you options. I’m helping you to discover. And I’m a person you can trust to share your dream with. I won’t laugh at your dream. A lot of communities are like that too. They have dreams and hopes, but they shoot themselves in the foot even before they get started by telling themselves, “No, I can not.” No! Don’t tell yourself that. Try it, do it, do something. I think the saying goes, “If you shoot for the moon and fail, at least you’ll fall among the stars. But if you never shoot for it, you never reach anything.”

I’m like Jessie: “Keep hope alive.” I keep hope alive, that’s it. I want folks to dream, and I’m trying to tell them, “Baby, you can do this! Don’t let it die. Keep hope alive. With God, all things are possible!”

# profile

## John Ameroso

EXTENSION ASSOCIATE, COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

I have been working with cooperative extension for twenty-five years. After I graduated from the University of Georgia in 1968, I applied to the Peace Corps and the International Voluntary Services (IVS). Unlike the Peace Corps, whose volunteers were all Americans, the IVS took in volunteers from all over the world. IVS concentrated on agriculture, community development and education. This was the 1960s; the Vietnam War was going on and also the Civil Rights movement. At that period, the moment you were out of college, you looked to the Peace Corps, and so that's what I did to use my agricultural degree for the betterment of others.

I worked in South Vietnam with farmers who had small acreage on which they grew vegetables. They used to break down a hectare into 10 units and would grow so many units of a hectare, one-tenth or two-tenths of vegetable crops, in the dry season for market and during the wet season, floating rice. But then I got involved in the real need for them. They wanted to grow the new varieties of rice that needed irrigation, the floating varieties to grow during the dry season. So I worked with them to form growers' cooperatives so they could buy pumps and stuff like that. Basically, they all operated as family units, so a coop would have five or six guys, but they were all relatives. We got the newer varieties of rice going. With the money, we then developed a farmers' buying cooperative. Most of the projects I currently

work on are similar to the work I did in my days as a volunteer; the approach was the same.

I started with Cornell Cooperative Extension in 1976. Until 1994, we were doing the Urban Gardening Program. We later changed its name to the Urban Horticulture Program. This program had to deal with home horticulture and community gardens. People were getting organized around community gardens to grow food for themselves, not particularly to grow lots of food, and also to have social activities and health activities. But by 1994, we had lost our federal funding for the program so a lot of the people who were working in that program are no longer here. Also I was getting tired of dealing with people's same old garden questions, of coming out to talk to a group of people about gardening where nobody showed up or showed up one hour late. Community gardens were getting to be old hat. It is no big brainer to do a community garden if you have an organized group, and I did not see a role for me in that any more.

I was getting more interested in the movement that was going on with more local food growing, "sustainable agriculture," which then, in a few years, evolved into exactly what I wanted to do, what they call urban agriculture. This is based on what you have in a lot of Third World cities where a good deal of their vegetables and some animal production is done within the city limits. So I got more interested in doing that. Also, a lot of the community gardens were losing people who had been



**Profile developed by Isatou Jack and John Ameroso**

in these gardens for a long time. A lot of gardens were dying off, and many of these areas were not being utilized. Or maybe you'd have just one or two people working in it. As compared to the seventies and eighties, when a lot of people wanted to get into gardening, there was not that great demand.

I was always looking for opportunities to use some of these abandoned spots with interested people who were also getting into the same mood. Instead of just growing food to give away, they were looking at growing food because people want it. It can be sold, it meets the need of neighborhoods where you don't have produce, and you can earn money. Before, gardening was thought of as just a little pastime. You could grow so much to give to your neighbors. But urban agriculture revolves around intensive use of the land, meaning that you can get a lot out of a small area if done properly, if you build up the soil and things like that. So there was an interest in people growing not to give away but to do something with it, to market it because there was an outlet for the produce. There was a farmers' market around that was looking for other growers, and community organizations that were interested in setting up farmers' markets. This fed in perfectly with what I wanted to do.

A lot of the projects that we are doing now are based upon community groups outside of the city's Council of the Environment that sets up these green markets which have been around for a long time. These were local community groups in lower-income areas that wanted to do something about food accessibility. This meant having farmers' markets, bringing farmers in, growing their own food, and making it available in their area, which is perfect for what I wanted to do. There are a lot of groups I work with outside of the city; I guess you'd call it the fringe, or periurban, areas. I have projects in

Westchester county, Dutchess county, possibly Rockland county this year, and also Staten Island. I guess you can call Staten Island on the fringes of the city, although it's part of the city. We have a large farm out there, couple of acres. It is an old farm from the 1800s owned by the historical society in Staten Island. We will develop a new farm project there that we are going to use as a demonstration site to train the new immigrants involved in the classes we are giving to get them back into farming.

Getting back to how I got more involved in these projects, for example, with the East New York Farms program... This was a long-range project. You use the same philosophy you use when you educate farmers in the Third World. A lot of things take time to develop so you have to have a real sense of patience. Things don't happen instantaneously. You cannot hold together people in a meeting like you'd do in a normal business world and get outcomes and expectations as to what's going to happen the next week, the next year. It just cannot happen. You have to really just work with people for a long period of time, meaning that as an extension person, you have to be out in the field. You've got to be out talking to people, attending other people's meetings, making yourself known, doing workshops for people, always responding to people. You have to respond to everybody, just get yourself out, attend a lot of different things that are revolving around what you are doing, like going to conferences for community gardens, or anything that has to do with growing stuff. This is basically what I've done for the last twenty-five years.

This work wasn't hard, not for me. Remember, I'm using a philosophy I got from working overseas. When you are working with Third World nations, things don't happen just like that. There are other concerns. Everything

goes on at a different pace. To do things takes time, and you have to know that it's going to take time. You approach it the same way here in the city because in a good deal of the city, in this type of a project, you're dealing with a Third World mentality. In some of the lower-income areas, where there are other pressing problems, things will take time to develop. So you keep yourself involved with people, go visiting, keep yourself out there, know what's going on as compared to trying to sit here in the office as an extension person. I could never have developed the Urban Agriculture Program in the office. I couldn't sit here and *write* down we going to do urban agriculture — *this* is what we are going to do; we're going to *invite* these groups over and we are going to *tell* them exactly how they are going to do this. It doesn't work that way. You have got to be able to feed off what people's interests are. And it takes a while to evolve in it.

Now getting back to the example, East New York, that started back in 1996–97. There was a meeting in Brooklyn with an organization called East New York Urban Youth Corps. This was a group that was used to getting big money to develop gardens. They would just plop a garden in an area and tell the people who live there that this is for them and going to do them all some good, instead of doing some grassroots stuff, letting the people develop. They invited a whole bunch of "green" groups out there, me included, and other groups in the city, the Horticulture Society, for example. We thought that they were inviting us for our expertise, but they gave us a song and dance about how they can develop this garden here, and this garden there, and they have \$50,000 for this one, \$70,000 for that one. We are sitting down there looking at each like "Huh?"

But out of that meeting, one of the guys from the Local Development Cor-



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poration of East New York (LDCENY) brought up a question about the value to this land, and we came up with this figure. On a square foot of land in the city, if you just threw seeds on the ground, walked away and hoped it rained, you could harvest what's going to be on that square foot of land and sell it for at least \$2. So we have figures of anywhere of \$2 to \$40 per square foot by growing certain crops as the value of the land itself. From there, we started having meetings with players who were there from East New York, like the LDCENY, private institutes, and a couple of other organizations. They had gardens and saw the interest in it and said, "Gee, you can do that and we could put these food farms in place. Maybe we could develop markets." So one or two years went by having meetings talking about this. The grant was put in by one of the organizations to Hitachi, to talk about urban agriculture, set up a market, get jobs for youth; the program got \$200,000. So that meant these organizations could continue on to hire someone to do this stuff. I worked with them on that.

The first year — maybe two years ago — of the market, we got some local growers selling. It was shaky. My role was getting the growers to sell, to try to track the farmer to come to the farmers' market, and also being at the meetings for my expertise on how you present at markets, that kind of thing. So you continue to work slowly with the groups, attending meetings with them, hashing out stuff like changing the site of the market. The Local Development Corporation got half of the city block under their jurisdiction that we could slowly work on to eventually become a permanent market with a structure that would be covered, where people would sell at it and also use it for other activities. My role there is still working with the groups, training the growers like I've been doing now every

Thursday night for the last couple weeks.

In the past, I never let the slow movement of project development discourage me from the project. As time goes by, the players will slowly buy into it once they see the benefit. But in the case of East New York, it was a different story. That project involved a grant to do the project, all collaborators getting a piece of the pie. In our case, we received \$6,600 for educational training, but the other members received much more, in particular to support staff

**You have got to be able to feed off what people's interests are ... You can not sit here and try to formulate programs to do out there; everything comes from out there.**

involved (except Pratt Institute, which received \$10,000 for consultation and design). One of the partners, East New York Urban Youth Corps (which in reality was a housing organization) was supposed to do all the organizing of the gardens, supervise youth, and assist in market set-up. They were getting the equivalent of a two-thirds horticulturist (who was on their staff), somewhere in the range of \$25,000 for the two-year project. Trouble is, the horticulturist would never come to the meetings. On market days, he would show up late, discouraging everyone. We managed to get him fired, and the organization hired someone else.

In the meantime, the East New York Urban Youth Corps (remember, a housing organization) was negotiating behind our backs to take over the market site land to build a juvenile court house. In effect, they were forcing us — through local politics — to have the market in another location not suited for best sales. They tried to have some other players come there to take access

of the site at the local market using politics. The partners voted them out (not paying the final grant payment to them as the money was in the account of the Local Development Corporation), and hired Aley (my previous summer student intern) to work out of one of the partner's offices, the United Community Center, to run the program. Through local politics pulled by the Local Development Corp, we got site control and as a result, a successful market season in 2000. This whole incident reminded me of Third World type problems, but in the end it worked out. This shows you how all players are necessary to the success of a project, particularly with extension, as our ability and time is very limited.

As for the politics involved in coordinating a lot of different groups, my part is that I have nothing to do with the politics of it. Other people have to take on those other roles that we cannot do anything about. So to get this site in East New York, the Local Development Corporation was at the high politic end since they have to deal with land and money. They were partners in this project and the conduit for the grant. I don't care about the politics of it. If it doesn't work, that's the way it goes. I go on to something else. If it is a problem within the groups themselves, say about this problem or that concern, that's okay; we can deal with that. Maybe it's just issues about who is doing what or where. That's different and that's something we hash out through meetings. But there are certain parts that require something over and above us, and as an extension educator I have nothing to do with it. Let an organization that has people on their board of directors who are all politically connected see the value of a certain program, then let them fight for it.

My role has been to do the training and, basically, the *schmoozing* for many years, to be the uplift person who says, "Yes, this can be done. You can make \$1,000 on that small spot for extra cash money." Schmoozing means always being out there, not looking at something and asking, is this meeting is going to be important for me and my program, or is this going to be a waste of time. You should not attend to everything, but you should be available for the public. You should always see what's going on, which also means spending a lot of time on the job. You're always ready to do more than the regular forty hours a week, plus a lot of weekends, and nighttime. That's schmoozing: always talking to people, always being there saying, "Yes, you can do this. Look, this is possible here. No, this isn't possible." But the only way to do that is to be out there. You can not sit here and try to formulate programs to do out there; everything *comes* from out there. That is why when urban agriculture, sustainable agriculture, and now, small scale farming came about around 1995, I was so happy. I needed something a little different. Like I said, I just couldn't deal with the garden thing. It was over with. There were other groups of people who could handle that. It was time to go to that next step.

People want food, and also people want organically grown food. In most cases, people want to eat locally. There is renewed interest in produce grown nearby. Also, if you look at produce prices, they have changed a little bit in ten years. Quality-wise, it's gone down, especially in some of these neighborhoods. If you can get a farmer in there, the quality goes up. You grow it yourself and market it, the quality goes up. People are more quality conscious for the money that they pay for food. So there was this big interest in doing this which was great for me. Otherwise, I

probably wouldn't be here. I'd either go into landscaping or into private business. Or I'd probably go straight into small-scale farming, a couple of acres. I'd find land somewhere and do a farmers' market, because I did do that once about fifteen years ago as a hobby. Urban agriculture kept me here. Otherwise, I would have gone nuts.

We started the program that we are doing now, this New Farmers/New Markets program, because there was need for more farmers in some of the farmers' markets. I worked with the state Ag and Markets and the Greenmarket program. Their need was to extend the farmers' markets, but they had maxed out the number of farmers who came in. So we decided that maybe we should try and get people to farm. That's what kept me going. Also, it started gaining attention. In the past five years, we've won three different awards, one out of CaRDI [Community and Rural Development Institute] at Cornell for new and innovative programs, another from the Northeast Directors of Cooperative Extension States, and something else. These awards made us visible here and made more reason for me to hang around, as compared to me getting my walking ticket.

As I see the future for urban agriculture in New York City, some of the gardens are being lost, which is fine. Housing is needed, and gardens can move to the periurban areas. We have plenty of land outside the city, and there's a trend toward farmland protection; all land doesn't have to be developed. Sure, we are going to be growing in the city as long as there is land available. Some places can become greenhouse businesses on small lots, which means buying a piece of land and developing a greenhouse to do different things. But more often, especially with this training that we're doing now with the new immigrants, people are going

to be farming outside the city on smaller plots, perhaps a couple of acres, within a 100- to 150-mile range of one of the biggest markets here. An acre if you do real well can gross you \$10,000 in some of the markets.

There is a lot of farmland available, and there are lots of changes in agriculture. Some of the dairy farms have gone out of business and sold out their land. When I studied agriculture, we used to think dairy land was dairy land and couldn't be anything else. But it could be for other type of crops. Also, I see a lot of people who originated from urban areas starting to farm outside the city with the idea of bringing that stuff into the city to farmers' markets or other ways of marketing. So it's a change from farmers who are growing and wholesaling or dealing with other outlets. There will be a trend toward new farmers, too. Most of the smaller farmers will probably be Central Americans, or of other Hispanic backgrounds, who have some farming background. Sure, you'll always have big farms and families. But then you have new farms established, particularly a number of smaller farms established, and I think those are the ones that are going to be farming.

These changes will surely bring challenges: getting started, which means having access to some of these areas and being able to get a mortgage, getting some upfront money to start, not great amounts because we are not talking big heavy equipments, coordinating those pieces together. You can get a piece of land and get it plowed for \$300 and then go plant it and build up that way. But you'd like to have some of these people get started sooner. We have a lot of immigrants in the city nowadays, and many of them want to get back into farming. How do you get them back into farming before they lose that interest in it? So we work with other organizations like New York State

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Ag and Markets, Farm Home Administration, and maybe Soil and Water to get them started.

We've got another program with the Little Sisters of the Assumption in Harlem, which started out of, again, schmoozing and going out to meetings. There is an organization called ROAR, Religious Organizations Along the River, mostly Catholic institutions up and down the Hudson. Like most religions, they own a lot of land. Somehow we got invited to a meeting just to talk about whether there was a potential to farm some of these areas. Compared to a lot of other religious organizations that were selling off their lands just to get money, they were interested in preserving that land back into harmony with nature. We said that outside of keeping the land as a preserve, there was good use of land in farming.

So after our meeting with them, one or two years down the road, the Little Sisters in Harlem put together a program with some of the family life organizations. They said to us, "We deal with all these Mexican ladies, and it would be nice if they could get into community gardens. We have land up in Ulster county where there's a nuns' retirement home, and it would be really nice if they grow crops there, but it's too far for them to go back and forth." Could we do a program making connections? I said, "Yes, we could have them start transplants here using a cold frame in a very small area and then send these plants up to Walden where they could be planted in a small-acre plot." But the question was, who's going to do all this? So they put together a small project, and we got volunteers to work with them in the first year.

Later, they got a grant from their ministries to hire a master gardener in Walden to run the little half-acre plot up there, someone just to keep it going. Fortunately about two years ago,

we ran into an abandoned community garden two blocks from them. So we got site possession of that community garden for the Little Sisters, and we went in right away in June with some summer students and got things going. We put some soil over there, some beds over there, and we were going to grow crops. This was two years ago. When I say "we," it means me, some of my summer students, the Little Sisters had a guy there who could build beds (he was a carpenter) and a couple of other people who do volunteer stuff for Catholic reasons. So we had a group of six ladies, and now they have their own place to grow crops, not just do trans-

**My role has been to do the training and ... the *schmoozing* for many years, to be the uplift person who says, "Yes, this can be done."**

plants that get sent up to Walden. That first year, they grew a lot, and we got them involved in a little marketing program selling stuff in front of a thrift shop run by the organization. They made maybe \$500 that they put aside. We had that money sit there for about a year.

In the second year of the project, which would have been last year (2000), the Little Sisters put together a proposal to the United Fund. My summer intern, Aley, continued with them and wrote the proposal for them. They got \$20,000 to hire someone half-time to work with these ladies. Luckily, we got a young girl in her twenties who speaks Spanish and comes from out west. Since she doesn't have a horticulture background, I trained her in that. Also, I come out other times to see how they are doing, bring them and the group out to Staten Island where we have a farm, to see what's going on. They also grew something up in

Walden, and they would take trips up there because there's money in the budget to use a van to go visit where the other stuff is growing. At the same time, while they're growing here they also use the extra money to buy produce from the Bronx Terminal Market, which is a farmers' wholesale market. So this program leveraged their money to hire somebody to run it because the volunteers couldn't do it anymore. This past year, I didn't need any of my summer people there because they had this other person.

The first year of the program, my presence and my summer people's presence was very important just to get everything going. But then, with paid staff, it's better because I just give directions to that paid person. Now I attend monthly meetings as a partner group, and I started doing some workshops with the ladies again, visit them

when they're in the fields and bring them to Staten Island to look out there. And we look at what their next steps are. Last year, the program actually had to give back \$5,000 to the United Fund, which is terrible. The grant stipulated that any unused portion in a fiscal year has to be returned, but can get granted for next year. The money earmarked for local travel and events for the ladies was overestimated.

But this year we got another grant, and we will be able to hire somebody half-time and expand the program. That means we'll grow more here in the city and continue to do what they are doing up in Walden on the other piece of land. We'll then look at doing a full coop where they can buy from New York State farmers.

Last year I got a similar program going with the MaryKnolls in Westchester County. The MaryKnolls are Brothers and Fathers who do mis-

sonary work overseas. They have a whole bunch of acres in Ossining, and we started the same thing as with the Little Sisters, but on a low budget. They also had connection with Ossining, a town where there are many low-income people who need food. A couple of priests followed it up and plowed an acre of land last year which we planted and grew a ton of stuff. Last fall, we plowed up three more acres, and we put together a proposal as a group — that's me, the MaryKnolls, and another volunteer from Ossining who's interested in doing this. So we put together a proposal for \$6,000 that we were going to submit to the Food Pantry program. But we would have to give them reports so the MaryKnolls said, "We'll just give you the money." So they just put up the \$6,000 to buy stuff that we needed to get things going. We also hired someone part-time to do the physical work because the priests could not do it. Although I had my summer people up there and some volunteers, it's always good to have a hired person responsible to get something done.

I'm involved with a lot of projects, but they all overlap. Most have hired people so I back off, but I still attend meetings to give guidance. They rely on me for the whole technical piece, stuff like what are we going to plant? How is it going to be planted? What are the time frames? Where do we get the stuff? Also, I'm always doing site visits and yelling at people, "Look at what you're doing. You're messing around here." But I do it with a sense of humor. Now that's shmoozing.

How would I describe what I do? I'd throw it back to days working overseas, where you have to have *patience*, *tolerance* or something like that. My role is not in rural development, but you can call it development work. You could call it food accessibility development type work. When you use the word "development," it means a long process. Com-

munity development is a long process. Urban development is a long process. Rural development is a long process. I guess you call what I do food accessibility. We're supporting New York and other local farmers in Connecticut, Long Island, New Jersey, anything that's grown in the Northeast to keep farms going because it's a viable occupation for people and because New York City needs a lot of food.

I don't see myself as organizing. I leave that up to other groups. They do the organizing, and then I come in as a technician — the why's and what's: what can work and can't work. A lot of times I put myself in the role of a cheerleader. I always have an up attitude toward things. There are certain things that you know make it work from the beginning. For example, someone comes up and says, "We have this problem. We have need a greenhouse, and I know we can grow this thing." And I say, "Forget about it. Greenhouse? That's gone twenty, thirty years ago. You want to do a greenhouse, then you've got to put a lot of money in the thing. You're talking big business. You are not going to make a greenhouse that's going to train people to do this. It's too damn cold here. In December, January, February, it's shut down because it is a waste of energy. But there are things you can use, an unheated frame that can bring you lots of cash. You have something set up in March, you can start a lot of transplants and grow them out of there until the end of May. Then everything shuts down because it's too damn hot." There are things you know can work and can not work. Therefore, I call myself a cheerleader.

I hear from people who want to do something about food accessibility issues. It could be a food coop, it could be growing, it could be marketing. Particularly if they start talking about wanting to do farmers' markets, then I

really cheerlead. But I also give them the bad news that if they expect that they are going to have ten or fifteen farmers coming willy-nilly, it just doesn't happen because there are just not that many farmers. Plus, you've got to be able to guarantee the income to the farmers, which is why the WIC program is so great. So I look at that all those issues, and my cheerleader role is to say "Okay, we can do this. But let's do it step by step, a little slower. We can set up a market this year. Let's see how the response is. Then let's work on getting WIC coupons in the area, after which I know you can get a farmer here because of the money."

Even in the sixties and seventies, as an extension agent, your role was to visit farmers; to work with them to improve the production, improve the monies coming in; to take the knowledge from the university out to the farmers. That role hasn't changed. But it's changed a little bit in the sense that I don't think we have to work with big-time farmers because they can find themselves the resources through consultants, or through direct contact with the university. The changes with extension agents are that there other needs out there. And the way you find out about those are still doing what you do: making your farm visits or community organization visits, finding what their needs are, and working with them as far as how to resolve these issues. That could be anything — from the watershed program, how to deal with water pollution from runoff, to anything based around the land and around agricultural issues. But you're approaching it differently. You are not giving individual advice to people anymore; you're working with groups and organizations. You're providing your expertise and background, whether it is organizing or some other things. But you're always out there working with the needs of people, with what they are talking about.

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This means that if you are in a situation in a county and you don't know what to do, the county extension association will have certain program areas that you work in. Those program areas can be opened up to you, for example, if they want to have a home horticulture program. Now, a lot of the counties are moving toward what we call agriculture development programs. Some of the counties actually hire what they call agriculture development specialists outside of the Cornell system to get things going again in agriculture, whether it is production or the use of products for canning or something like that.

So the role of an extension person is going out and working in these counties, looking at what those needs are in a long-range fashion. You need a positive attitude when working with whatever the groups and organizations in your particular county need. The last thing I want to hear at a meeting is, "We cannot do this because of this and that." That's negative. I see that in extension all these years... who comes into extension and who leaves extension. It has a lot to do with your personality; you have to be able to tolerate a lot of stuff. You have to have *patience* and also you've got to be able to *like* people, work with people.

I've been a part of the New York State Association of County Agricultural Agents for many, many years. To me, everybody who is in that is neat. We used to get together and have a lot of fun. Unfortunately, we don't get together as much anymore because of the nature of the people who are in it and travel time. They have nice personalities, the type of personalities that like to deal with people, deal with a lot of frustration. You run into a lot of frustration because things don't happen right away. I don't have to deal with the frustration now. I'm oblivious to that kind of thing because I've been

around too long. The frustration could be going somewhere and having people keep at the negatives of why you can't do something. Those are the frustrations, but to me, those are just humps you try to get over. If you're going to be negative, you aren't going to get something done.

If you're in extension for three years, there's a good chance you'll stay five; if you're in for five, you'll probably stay longer. I've done twenty-five. But there are a couple of reasons for ones who come in and leave right away. One is the economic factor; there's more money in other jobs, even in teaching.

**You start off with a project and ... you make a billion contacts from that project, which opens up a million other things. ... You can't involve yourself in just one small project and close off everything else. You have to be open to a bunch of stuff because that's how things happen.**

The other one is that people are not suited to the position; they don't have that personality. They don't have the drive to go deal with people all the time and that's key: you have got to be able to deal with people all the time. Also, some people like to be in jobs where there is complete direction with noted goals and outcomes. In this job, there aren't those noted goals and outcomes, meaning that you will never be saying to yourself, "This is what am I doing next week," or "I really need something more packaged and formula." Here you don't have that.

Those who don't last in extension need those packaged directions because otherwise they feel out of place. Sometimes they really don't like the lack of

direction in what they are doing. Oh yes, there's a lot of stuff written up in extension about goals. When you evaluate a program, you look at what were the outcomes. You could write up a program saying, "We are going to have a hundred people growing food," so on and so forth. You can write those kinds of goals, but whether or not they happen, you cannot say until after the time. Then you say, "Our goals were we'd have this many farmers, but we did have thirty people" or "The whole thing just fell apart." So you have got to look at the unknown piece, meaning that you could develop a program, write up a program, but whether it's going to happen or not, you don't know.

So you have to have that perseverance about things like that. It may happen or it may not be happen. But I cannot run myself nutty trying to make it happen and doing pretend work about making that happen. You have to be above that and just say, "Well, this thing maybe didn't work," but if you are doing some

other projects, then that's good.

Another reason why some don't last in extension is that they don't really like to be dealing with lots of different things. We do a lot of different things. So those people leave right away and generally seek a job that has one specific role, which is more easily controlled and also better for your well-being, that is, it pays more money. But in this job, you can't focus on one thing. What happens if that one thing screws up? Then where does that leave you? So we deal with a lot of different things and if you're doing the job right, if you're not just making it a job, then good things come about.

In extension, you've got to have that tolerance factor because you run

# profile

## John Ameroso

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up against a lot of obstacles when dealing with different people, organizations, the university, association boards, this and this and that. Basically, you start off with a project and that project will develop and you make a billion contacts from that project, which opens up a million other things. So you have to open your ears and eyes. You can't involve yourself in just one small project and close off everything else. You have to be open to a bunch of stuff because that's how things happen. As a person working in extension, your role is to deal with the public. We are not a Fortune 21 company where my role is to make sure that a one hundred people are farming and so much money is made. It's a little different.

In extension, we always worry about funding. For example, in the urban garden program, we always worried about funding because we are so dependent upon federal funds. Right now, we have some federal funds, but we also have university funds, so finally I don't worry about that anymore. I guess what

I really worry about is the use of time. All of a sudden, you have got to start setting some rules about time. I don't do things on Sundays because in this job you could do things every day of the week. You have got to put a limit on certain things. So what you worry about is your time factor because the job requires more than just running around. It also requires some documentation, office stuff, dealing with the phone, dealing with other things. So if there's anything that I actually worry about, it's the time issue.

Surprises in this work? Dealing with a lot of people really opens up your world. That's a pleasant surprise, especially in the city where you can be alone and only have a small amount of friends. This job opens you up to anybody who's involved in horticulture, plants or agriculture. You have that whole realm of people who know you, you know them, and that is interesting because it opens up all kinds of stuff. A long time ago, it opened up to parties. Nowadays, it just opens up to people.

Your scope of friends just increases even though you cannot spend time with all your friends. But to me, that's great. It's a pleasant surprise.

I've always been involved with people with the same kind of goals and mission in life. I started off as a young volunteer, and I wanted to do this agriculture thing. Here in the city, the groups that you work want to get something done and they have a particular interest in the field. It is the same working with the agriculture agents and state associations all over the state. This is nice because now I can say I know somebody in every county statewide and can call up somebody just like that. Also, it is national because we have a lot of people that we see yearly at national annual meetings. So what's best about extension is that whole world of people that you're opened up to: people who are dealing with the same field that you're dealing with at your grassroots level, and also your professional *compadres* within extension, both statewide and national.

# profile

## Phyllis Morgenlander

COMMUNITY EDUCATOR, NUTRITION AND HEALTH

**W**e're going to talk about my work with EFNEP [Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program] and the Community and Families Head Start Program in Far Rockaway.

I've been with Cooperative Extension forever. Actually, what happened was when my eldest son started school, they were trying out this program; it was called the Family Room. It was a precursor to what they have now with the Family Assistance, dealing with different problems that the parents might have and helping them to communicate with the school. Because I was thoroughly embarrassed, I finally decided to go down and participate. And I was so happy I did, because I met such nice people there.

My son was going to P.S. 38, at the time, in Brooklyn. I had gone into the center, and I was talking to the person who was in charge — Vivian; I don't remember her last name. And she asked me, had I gotten a call from Cornell? And I said, "What?" And she said, Yes, they're starting a program and they had asked her if there were any parents who would be good as family assistants, that's what they were called at the time. She had recommended me. In the interview, they asked me what I would do if I won a million dollars, and I told them that after I woke up from the coma, I would probably decide something. That started my career, back in 1969.

It was called OEO — Office of

Economic Opportunity. We did consumer education, and we also dealt with welfare. And it was a blast. I had some fantastic experiences; Cornell has really been very good to me. I mean, I really, really never pictured myself as someone who could get up in front of people and actually talk.

It's been 31 years. My daughter was born in February of '69, and I started working in July of '69. I wasn't used to really doing anything like that. My previous jobs had been some book-keeping. I worked for the Coca-Cola Bottling Company, in their main office, when I decided I wasn't going to go to college. That was very different. It was just a small group of people that I had to interact with. It wasn't going down to an agency and talking to people and finding out why things aren't being done for this person, or whatever. I worked right in my neighborhood. We had a lot of people who were having problems going down to Social Security, because they had no one there who spoke Spanish. Not that I could speak Spanish, but at least I understood English. And, it helped people to realize that just because you don't speak English doesn't mean you're stupid. It just means you don't speak English. I found it fascinating that I never realized how many problems people could actually have. Or that just by saying something to the right person, how things could go along very smoothly.

Because I worked for Cornell, people listened, which to me was very unusual. I found that to be very refreshing, that they were actually listening to



**Profile developed by Margo Hittleman and Phyllis Morgenlander**

what the problems were. They couldn't always do something. But at least, I felt they tried, or they explained why they couldn't do anything, or the proper person to go to, or the proper agency. So I found that very, very enlightening, and it made me feel very grateful for what I had.

I started working for EFNEP in 1980. In between, I worked in a lot of other programs. They had something called South Brooklyn Community something or other, that I worked in. I also worked in a pilot program with Brooklyn TB and Cornell. We did some follow-up on people who had been identified as having TB, and why they weren't going to the hospitals to get their medication. And here again, it was a very caring type program, where it wasn't just people with numbers. They were people who had problems. So I enjoyed that. There was also a garden program that I was in, which I thoroughly enjoyed. And then when they had a scare that the federal money was going to be discontinued in the garden program, I was switched to EFNEP. So that's how that all came about.

I work with a lot of different EFNEP groups. This particular group that I'm singling out for this story are the pre-K parents. A lot of them have older children. Some of them, their oldest child is in pre-K, and they are pregnant or they have a younger child.

Through all the experiences that I've had in working for Cornell, I find that one of the biggest strengths of any program in Cooperative Extension is the fact that we have in-services, and that we're asked what kind of in-services we want. It's not just nutrition, although the nutrition is very important, because that's the basis for every program that I'm doing now. But it's bringing, I guess, a part of yourself.

What makes it special to me is that it's a challenge. There are some people who feel they know everything.

There are some people — like me — who feel they know very little and they need to learn more. And not just from one person; we pick up from each other. We learn from each other. A good example: there was a lady from the Middle East, and she kept telling me she didn't think she could come. And I asked her why. She said, "I don't speak English." I said "That's funny. I understand you." And she looked at me, and she saw I wasn't joking; I was very serious. And she said, "No, my English isn't good." And I said, "Well, let's see." So I asked someone else, and the other person agreed, yes, she understood her. She came. At the end of the program, she brought a dish that they eat in her country, and she gave everyone the recipe in English. Basically, what her problem was, she didn't have the confidence in her English. She thought that no one could understand her because she had an accent.

The groups are generally very, very mixed. There are people from the Islands, from Haiti or St. Thomas, or Puerto Rico. There are also American Blacks. There are also other Spanish-speaking people. Sometimes they're from South America — from all over, really. But that's generally the mix of the group. And everybody brings something very special to the group.

The agency itself is extremely helpful in making the programs there very successful. The agency is called Community and Families Head Start Program, Inc. They also have a group in Brooklyn, and when I worked in Brooklyn, I worked there. Soon after they opened this other branch, they called me and asked me if I would please do some work in Far Rockaway.

If you came to see one of my groups, you might say, "What is she doing?" And I mean that. My style of teaching really reflects a lot about me as a person. I don't like tons of paper. I realize that there are some people who

don't feel right unless they get something, so I also deal with those needs. But I'm very laid-back. What I do try to do is find out what they are interested in, what are their problems. Is it that the children aren't eating vegetables? And I tell them: "Sometimes, it's the way it's prepared. Not that you're not preparing it right. But everyone has different tastes. Some people like crunchy food. Some people don't. Some people like mushy food. Some people like food that's in-between. And sometimes the best thing to do is just experiment." Also, it can work to get the pre-K children, if they're not eating, to help. I'm not talking about using knives or anything. But they certainly can wash a lettuce leaf and tear it into little pieces. They can certainly put some napkins down on a table and do other things.

At the Center, they let the children take their own food. I'm very heavy into portion sizes for children, because most adults try to feed their children the way they feed themselves, as far as amounts go. And I saw something, and I really had to smile. The children were eating lunch. Part of the lunch was macaroni. And this little boy wanted, really, only one elbow macaroni. But it was stuck together. So he took the four pieces of macaroni and put it on his plate. And he sat there, and he did pull it apart. He was eating, and I went into the kitchen to get ready for the group. When I came out, he was chewing the last piece. He was taking his bowl, and I had to see how much more he was going to take. He took four more pieces.

When I was telling this to the parents, they were looking at me like "What is she, crazy?" I said, "That said a lot to me. The children had little bowls or a little plate. To him, that was plenty, because he could have more." And they said, "You know, I didn't think about that." I said, "Maybe that's the way to



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look at it. Children will eat as much as they need to. But if we keep piling a lot of food on their plates, they're going to think that's normal, and it's not, because their portion sizes are different."

I don't like to make people feel as though what they're doing for their children isn't good, because I know that's not true. I do know that things change. When my children had chicken pox, the doctor told me to give them aspirin. When they came out with that report that said giving children aspirins with high fevers when they have chicken pox is not good, I said, "Oh my God, I could have killed my kids." But I thought about it. The pediatrician — of course, I thought he was the best in the world — he gave me the best knowledge that he had for that time. Things change.

And when people tell me, "My mother said to put some cereal in a bottle," I tell them "Listen, my mother told me a lot of things. But when I found out this was not the thing to do, I called my mother up. She always defrosted meat out on the counter. So did I. So did my sister. Then some people from Cornell did a workshop on food safety. And I said, 'Oh my God, I'm killing my babies. What am I doing?' I didn't know. But once I did know, I changed what I did." And that's what I say to them: things are always changing. I'm not saying what a parent is telling their child to do for their grandchild is awful. I am telling them what the research has found. And that's exactly how I put it to them. I never want someone to feel that they're inadequate as a parent, because that's not my role. My role is to build up confidence in them, and let them know we all make mistakes.

I tell them, "If you don't understand something, ask the doctor. Don't necessarily rely upon people around you. You might know more than they do." So I always try to encourage them

to write down information before they go to the doctor. I had to do that having four children. I used to get nutsy. I couldn't remember who was doing what. And I would get everybody's names screwed up also. So this was my way of trying to keep things straight. And I tell them, this is what I would have to do. When I would go to the doctor, I had a sheet for this one, for that one, and went down the list. He's sneezing, coughing, whatever the heck it was.

I'll deal with an actual lesson that I do. A lot of the ladies were saying their children don't like to eat vegetables. I

**My theory is people have a lot of information. ... Sometimes it's just in our brain, and we don't attach it to anything. I look at it as it's my job to help them attach it to something so they'll say, "Oh wow, I knew that!"**

made stir-fry vegetables with chicken; they couldn't believe how quick it was ready. In the beginning, I let them feel very relaxed, but then I make everybody work. I will help them if they don't know how to do something. I will show them. But I really like for them to do it. And I've never had too much of a problem getting people to do things. I'm the world's worst cutter. When I cut vegetables, you would think a baby did it, with their teeth. I don't have the patience to stand there. And I tell them the truth — this is not one of my best things that I do. I generally find someone who does cut very nicely, and I always say, "Wow, I wish I could do that."

In the beginning, sometimes they don't know each other that well. So it's a matter of them getting to know each other and feeling comfortable. Once that's established, I talk over with

Renee (I forget her title) about different things that we could make. I also ask the ladies; what are they interested in? We have a cookbook, and I let them look through the cookbook. What is it would you like to try? And I tell them, "This is a great way of trying something without spending a lot of money. How do you know if your family is going to like it? You don't. If you taste it and you like it, then at least you know one person's going to eat it." That's what I always tell them. I tell them, "Don't make too much either. When you're trying something new, make a small amount. See who likes it."

I find one of the best ways of getting a child to taste something is telling them that they can't have it. I did that with my own children. "That smells so good. What is that?" "Oh, you're not going to like it. Go away." Go eat whatever I made for them. And they would come back, "No, no, no, no. Could I have a

little bit?" And I would give them just a little bit to taste. We talk about different techniques on getting children to eat things, on trying new foods.

Some of them have problems with their husbands, because to them, dinner is rice and beans and meat. They don't want to know about anything else. Salad is alright. But that's basic. So we talk about what they can do without spending a whole lot of money. How can they make a variety of things and keep their husbands happy. We also talk about cutting down on fats. Any time I do a food demonstration, I use Pam; I don't fry anything. So that's introducing them to something different. We talk about it. We talk about the calories. We talk about all sorts of things. And it generally is something that can come up as easily as someone saying "Gee, I never ate zucchini. What is it?"

So we start talking about “Who has eaten it? Would you like to try it?” And the next week we make zucchini salad, instead of cucumber salad. Or sometimes I put both cucumbers and zucchini in, and they find they like the zucchini better. People aren’t going to eat things they can’t identify. They just won’t do that. So that’s my style. I always ask them if they have anything that they really need some information on.

Food safety is another big topic. So that’s something that I always incorporate in all the lessons. And here again, I play a lot of games with them. I made up a game. It’s called “You Bet Your Life Food Safety Game.” And we play with fake money. And let me tell you, they get very loud. We have Jeopardy games — with fruits and vegetables. They love them. There’s nothing like having fun and learning. It’s really the best of both worlds.

Actually, I like to play more games and do very little talking as such. My theory is people have a lot of information. Sometimes we forget it. Sometimes it’s just in our brain, and we don’t attach it to anything. I look at it as it’s my job to help them attach it to something so they’ll say, “Oh wow, I knew that.” Of course you knew it. Because unless you use it, you tend to lose it. So that’s another strategy that I like to use with adults.

There are puzzles that we’ll do. I like the rebus — I’m a puzzle person. Doing the protein lesson, I have a warm-up that I do for the meats and stuff, because most people do not equate fish and eggs with beef and chicken, or nuts. They think you’re a little nutty when you’re talking about it. But I play a game with them. What I do is scramble a whole bunch of words, and I put them on a board, and I ask them to unscramble them as a group. And what I’ve tried to do is have enough of a variety of foods so that it covers a lot

of different ethnic groups. For instance, I have goat; a lot of people from the Islands use goat, so I include that. Red snapper is another. Crabs — most people eat that. And then the beans, the chick peas. They call them garbanzo, they call them chick peas. But I want them to know what it is, and that it’s part of this whole protein thing. Sunflower seeds. Goose, duck. Now, some people only eat turkey and chicken. But there are a lot of people who eat duck and goose. With the nuts I have walnuts and pecans. And of course, my favorite, tofu.

When I do something like this, I try to have the tofu there to show them, and we make something with it, so that they can actually taste it. To me, it’s a way of getting things together so they can really get a clearer picture of all these foods. And I tell them, there are more. These are only a few. Otherwise, I’d be there the whole year, thinking of all these different kinds of protein foods. But that’s sort of it. I like the games, I like the puzzles. There are some people who have very low literacy. That’s why I do it as a group, so that nobody gets embarrassed or has to feel funny or anything like that.

If they want to talk about budgeting, saving some money, there are generally people in the groups who are very good at math. And I will ask them, “What do you do when you go food shopping? What’s the first thing you do when you get to the store? What do you do before you go?” It’s really information that they have. And I look at myself as someone to fill in the blanks.

To do this job, you’ve got to like people. You must. If you don’t, you’re going to get annoyed and ticked off at everything. You need to realize that people’s lifestyles are very, very different. And though I’ve not experienced some of the things that they have, there are a lot of things I have experienced that are the same kinds of problems that

they’re having now. And that’s what I try to build on — not the differences, but the similarities.

And acknowledging that things don’t always go as planned. You go into a supermarket and you make the mistake of bringing your children with you. But you don’t have any place to put them. What are some of the things you can do to make it less stressful? Because that I know; I used to wind up with dog food and bird seed in the cart. We don’t have any pets. So there are certain things I would do if I had to take my children shopping. First, they had to eat. That was number one. So did I. And then I had to explain to them, no one touches anything unless I ask them to, and also I wrote things down.

But really, the main thing is letting people know that they do have knowledge. And knowledge is power. And the best thing to do with knowledge is to share it, because then you’re going to get knowledge from someone else also.

Either you like people or you don’t. Actually, I’m going to take it a step further. Either you love people or you don’t. It’s not even liking. If anyone told me before I worked for Cornell that I would go out in a blizzard because I made a commitment to do this group in a school, I would say, “What are you, crazy?” The principal of the school recently said “What are you doing here?” He took me to the auditorium. There were 30 children sitting and watching a movie. He said, “That’s all the children that showed up.” I looked at him and said, “I guess I’m going to go home.” I can laugh at it now. But at the time, and even now, I take very seriously my commitment to do things. I know that it’s not life or death. But I know that many times people are told things and disappointed because people don’t follow through. I don’t like that. I don’t want people to do that to me, therefore I’m not going to do it to them —

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unless something happens that I have no control over.

But you really do need to love people. You also need to be a good listener. And for some people, that's hard. I would say for most people it's hard; we just listen with what I call half an ear. And it's a type of job that if you're bored, you're not doing it right.

I've never been bored on this job, except doing paperwork. But never doing groups because people are different. Every group I do is different — every week, depending upon what kind of week they had, how they're going to relate to me. One lady, she has a little baby — the baby is eight months old. She is so cute; she's always saying something. And I'm always talking to her, and she smiles. Her brother is in the pre-K program. And he said to me, "Why are you answering her? She's not talking." I said, "Well, she is to her. She's saying something. Only I'm not smart enough. I don't know what she's saying." And he looked at me like "Whoa." And the mother was laughing. She said to me "This baby is constantly talking." I said: "She's very alert. She's always looking around." She's one of those babies that you just want to hug and kiss. Well, I think that with all the babies. But she's delicious. That's what I tell her. She is a delicious child.

The mother is a young woman, and she was sitting there, and she said to me: "You know, I didn't want to come because I have to bring the baby." I said, "So what. The baby will listen too." So she got over that. We had some cheese tasting. She had never eaten muenster cheese. And she said, "Oh, I like that cheese so much. It was so good." She comes from Haiti. She said, "I am so tired of eating Haitian food" That's what she was telling me. And I said to her, "Well, maybe you can start introducing other kinds of things." She said, "Oh, I am. I don't know about my husband." But I know that her little boy

ate the cheese. She enjoyed it. She said, "I'm going to buy it." I said, "Good for you."

Sometimes we talk about how I got my job. Before the summer, we are asked to look around in the groups and see if there's anyone there we feel might make a good community educator assistant. And I tell them that, because a lot of the ladies will ask, "Can I get a job?" And I tell them, "Well, it looks nice that you got a certificate from Cornell. It certainly can't hurt you in any way to have a certificate from our program." And it's true. There are a lot of ladies who have gotten jobs as food handlers in the schools, in the cafete-

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rias, some of them as home health attendants. And some went on to college. They did these kinds of jobs and decided that college was the way to go. So you don't know how you touch someone's life. You never know.

You can tell someone will make a good community educator assistant by the way that they deal with other people. To me, you can learn about nutrition. You can read a script — you know, "My name is \_\_\_\_\_, I'm from Cornell Cooperative Extension. We are part of Cornell, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." You can read a script. But really having a feel for people, having a genuine concern, wanting to do something for your community, because actually they start off working in their community ...that can't be taught. Sometimes people have not had any experience working, so it's given them some experience and also some confidence in themselves. "Hey, I can do

this. It was kind of hard getting up, getting the kids the ready, and blah, blah, blah." But they can do it. To me, it's the people factor that's extremely important because the rest, you can learn.

I learned to talk in front of groups by doing it. It really was through my job. We worked at that time basically on a one-to-one basis. But there were times when there were in-services. It wasn't just the people that I worked with; there were people who came down from Cornell. There were times when I went up to Cornell. The opportunity was there, and there wasn't anything else I could do. But I guess people saw in me something that I didn't see in myself. And I guess that's it too — part of it. Sometimes we think we have accomplished most of what we are going to accomplish, but then we're limiting ourselves. You never know what you can accomplish unless you try.

So that's my words of wisdom on that one.

I've had numerous experiences just dealing with things, like explaining what I do. Many years ago, I was asked to talk to a class up in Ithaca. I said, "Whoa. What kind of questions are they going to ask me?" And then it became fun, and a challenge. And I guess because I like puzzles, I like challenges.

The highest compliment I ever got was about four years ago. A homemaker who had graduated from EFNEP and I were just talking, and I had mentioned something about all those buses I took. She said, "What are you talking about? You live out here." I said, "No." She said, "You're kidding." I said, "No, I'm not kidding. I don't live in Rockaway. I live in Brooklyn." She was shocked. She said, "I really thought that you lived out here. You don't act like you don't." And I said, "I don't know

what that means, but thank you.”

Afterwards I gave it some thought. And then I realized what she was actually saying: I didn’t come as an outsider into her community. I came there as me, and people accepted me for being me. I’ve worked in EFNEP in a lot of different communities, and most of the communities are poor communities. I’ve worked in Brownsville, East New York, Williamsburg, Cypress Hills, and on and on and on and on. I never thought about going into these various communities, because to me, it was just a place where people live. I live in a community, too. It might be different than theirs. But it’s still a community.

I try not to think of people as being so very different from me, because they’re not. Now there are places that have bad reputations. It’s not the people ... Well, I shouldn’t say it’s not the people. There are some people who are just mean-spirited, who cause problems. But for the most part, the people that I have come in contact with are generally people who want the best for their children, just the way I want the best. They have the same hopes and dreams that I do. So I don’t look at it as being foreign or being that difficult.

What’s most satisfying about the work is actually doing it, actually doing the workshops. I had this very special group of people, ESL [English-as-a-Second-Language]. In the beginning, no one would really speak. And I knew why, because they all felt that they didn’t speak English well, and that I’m not going to understand them, and all this other stuff. It was really difficult. When I tried doing a puzzle with another ESL class that I had, who really were tough, and it worked, I decided to do it with this class. And it was such a big hit. We had so much fun doing the puzzles that that’s what I did with them. Of course, they were all nutrition-related, and we talked about fruits and vegetables, because most of

their diets—with the exception of the Asians; Asian people eat a lot of vegetables—they were lacking in vegetables. But once we got past the difficulties, I really didn’t want to give the group up, because I learned so much from them. I had people from various parts of the world, and it was very, very interesting because they told me about things that they made, and they made it, and I felt like I was learning, which I did.

I learned so much about people, from Asia, from Japan, from Korea, from China, from Taiwan. I mean, you don’t necessarily have a relationship with people from that part of the world. But I’m lucky because I did. And also some people from Russia, the Ukraine, India, Haiti, four or five different countries from South America. And to me, every time I go to a group, it’s like I don’t know what’s going to happen.

Every group is a challenge. I try various things, because there isn’t one thing that works. People are different. Once you start getting too smug and you say, “Oh, wow, I got this down pat,” a group comes along and destroys that. And then you say, “Wait a second. That was supposed to work.” And it didn’t. And that’s why I like this job. Because it’s not pat. If you’re doing exactly the same things all the time, you’re not doing your job. There’s something really wrong. So, at least I recognize that. I can’t always do something about it. But I try. I do try.

I deal with the challenges by just being myself and not thinking that I know everything because I don’t. Still you can get very side-tracked very easily, for example, because they called me “professor.” And I kept saying to them, “No, I’m not a professor.”

“Yes, you are. You’re a teacher.”

“Well, OK, but I’m not a professor.” Because I started thinking about that, and I said, “Nah, things can really get out of hand with that. What if

someone walks in and thinks that I presented myself as a professor.” You can get kind of silly with things. But I realized that that’s the way that they perceived anyone who teaches them. So I said, “OK, then I have to think of it on a different level.” That was their way of showing respect. And I had to learn to live with it.

And of course, I think you need to have a good sense of humor, because if anything can go wrong, it does. You know, they call it Murphy’s law. It’s not. It’s Phyllis’ law. I mean, I’ve had some really weird things happen. But here again, you need a good sense of humor. You need to be able to do your job in a way that people are going to get something from it. A good example: I went to this group and I had said that I would show them how to make chicken nuggets, using the thigh and also using the breast, how to cut the chicken off the bone. When I got there, I took everything out. I had the knife and the cutting board and the pot, and I was looking for the chicken. They said, “What happened?” And I said, “I forgot the chicken.” So one of the ladies went out and got a chicken, and I cut the chicken up. But we must have laughed for ten minutes. I mean, it was really funny. So, you know, it happens. What can you do?

What’s most important is that people are learning about nutrition. They are, for the most part, trying different foods. I think they’re getting a different perspective on how much food their children need to eat, and even for themselves. Someone lost 15 pounds, because she started measuring her food. She said, “I didn’t realize it was that easy.”

Whatever is important to them, that is what they’re going to get out of the program. And hopefully, maybe they’ll start thinking of things a little bit different. And that’s OK. We’re not looking for huge changes, because that’s

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not the human spirit. It doesn't work that way. It's really taking little steps toward a larger goal which is that they're able to include more fruits and vegetables into their family's diet, because it is so important. Or maybe using more whole grains, for the fiber.

What do people mean when they say we're doing something else besides education? That "something else" is really tender love and care. That's really what it is. It's showing, maybe, the mother who's trying to raise two children all by herself that she doesn't have to be by herself, that people understand how hard it is. They know; they've been there. That it's all right to get angry. That nobody's perfect. That we're all human.

At that graduation in Queens, my group from Community and Families came — all the way from Far Rockaway, which is really quite a trip. A lot of them took their children with them. I was just so chocked up because they were there — and I know what it entails for them to get there. I knew what they had to go through. I knew what time they had to leave to get there. And they were there. They gave back to me what I tried to give to them, by showing up. When I come to do a group, I don't have little kids with me. I'm not bringing anybody except myself. But they brought their children too. And most of them came by bus, and the bus ride is about an hour.

I think part of what made them come is that some people have never gotten a certificate. And I also like to think that, maybe, I had a small part in making them feel very proud of what they accomplished. I know that I felt very proud for them, and I would tell them. Feeling something and letting somebody know are two different things. We don't always tell people how we feel. We just assume, "Oh, they know." No, they don't, not unless you tell them. I'm a huggy-kissy type of per-

son, too. And I tell them, "Listen, if you're not huggy-kissy, don't worry about it. I understand. But I am."

To me, that's very important. Not just for a child, but in some ways, even more so for an adult, especially if they're going through some hard times. And some of these ladies are. And it's a way of just getting together and doing something that maybe will spark an idea. 'Oh well, I'm going to try this or that.' And sometimes they'll say to me, 'You know, I made that dish that we made here. Everybody liked it.' Terrific.

I had someone who couldn't read, a young woman. And every week when I demonstrated something, she went

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home and made it. And she would tell me, 'You know, Phyllis, I made this, but I put in...' whatever it was. And I'd say to her, "OK. That's fine." She'd ask: "That's alright?" And I'd say, "Sure. If that's the way your family likes to eat something, that's terrific. Some people don't like garlic. Some people like garlic. Some people don't like onions. Some people do. That's fine. You can take out what your family doesn't like and put in what they do like." I can't tell you how much it meant to her that she and I would just talk, sometimes before class, sometimes after the class. That's all we would do, just talk. She would tell me about what she made and what she did when she went food shopping. And I would tell her, "You need

to share this with the class." "Oh, well, I don't know..." "No, that's very important. You really do some great things before you go shopping. You need to tell them." And she did. I don't know what you call that.

The main work of an extension educator in EFNEP is to broaden people's outlook on nutrition, on foods, getting them to try new foods. Other extension educators teach other things. But that basically, I think, is what we try to do: get people to try something, and I always tell them, something a little different.

I would tell new educators to never, never promise anything you can't deliver. And always be yourself. Because if you're not, people see right through you, whether they're adults or children. They see right through you. So you need to be yourself. You need to be honest with people. If you don't know something, you don't know it. And if you don't, there have been many times where I have gone and asked other people. Now that we have the computers, if I have the time, I'll go on the computer and see what kinds of information I can get for them. Sometimes I make suggestions: "Go to the library; they have computers there. By the time I come back next week, you might have forgotten what it is. But you can possibly find out right there and then." It's hard, but I would say the best thing to be is truthful and to be yourself, because anything else doesn't work. It really doesn't.

One of my trademarks is I wear dungarees. I've always worn them. Always. And I know that there are some people who feel that I'm not properly attired. But I don't feel very comfortable getting very dressed to go into a

community to work with people. So I wear what I'm comfortable with, and every so often I will wear a skirt or a dress, and everyone laughs.

You also need a good sense of humor. I mean, there have been times where we were talking about something, and my mind just races ahead, and all of a sudden I'm answering about something that nobody asked me. I tell them, "Oh well, here we go again." And we laugh. It's no big deal. And making mistakes is learning. Nobody's perfect. And if someone wants to become a community educator and they feel that perfection is the way to go, they're not going to be very successful.

Of course, I'm only giving you my perspective. Now, when you speak to someone else, their perspective might be similar. But it might be completely different. I think you need to actually see people work, in order to understand what they do. To actually know what someone means, you have to see it. You have to see what they're talking about. When we hire new people, Carol will ask me to take them when I do youth groups, or adult groups, or whatever. And I have. And they'll say to me, "My goodness. I had so much fun." And I tell them, "If I'm not having fun, there's something wrong. If I'm bored, then the audience is bored, and I've got to do something else." Nobody wants to be

bored. You can always back up and do something else. You really can. Sometimes lessons are really bombing, and I'll stop whatever I'm doing and we'll do something else. And that's what I tell them: "I'm not here to put you to sleep." So we laugh, and then we go on to something else.

I guess there are a lot of different nuances to things. I know when I've observed people doing lessons, I'm always in awe of the way they do things because it's different from the way that I do it. But it's exciting, and they're doing it. And when I tell them afterwards, they look at me: "I did that?" "What do you mean — of course you did that!" But you're not even aware, sometimes, of what you're doing. You just do it, because it's a part of you. That's why I said it's really important for a person to be themselves. You don't have to do things my way. You've got to find what is your way. What do you feel comfortable with? Sounds simple, right?

I find the simplest things are the most complex. When you try to explain something that basically is very simple, it takes you days. If it's complex — this little thing or whatever — you can get away with it, maybe in a half hour. But real simple things are very, very difficult.

I've come to a lot of different crossroads in my life, and I had to make

choices, and I chose to stay with extension. And the reason I did is because I thought about it, and I said, "Wow, they're not going to allow me teach this way in public schools." I can do it in extension, though. Even now, there are times where, when I first walk into a classroom, the teacher will hear me, and say "Oh my, what is she talking about?" But as the weeks go on, they sort of see what's happening. It's just a different way of teaching. It's not that no one teaches this way. There are a lot of people who do. But I find that teaching really should be fun. If it's a drudge, who wants to learn?

Babies learn by touching everything and looking and examining. Right? You think that they have a billion fingers. But that's what true learning is — it's exploring. And if you don't have that fun of exploration, you're not really learning. I have my issues with the Board of Ed, as you can tell. I really do. Just teaching children how to take a test is stupid. They need to teach them things that are life.

I have a bachelor's in elementary education that I got while I was working for Cornell. I should have gone on for my master's. But anyway, that was a conscious decision that I made not to go into the public school system and to stay in extension. It has worked out well for me.

# profile

## Linda Nessel

ISSUE AREA LEADER, WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

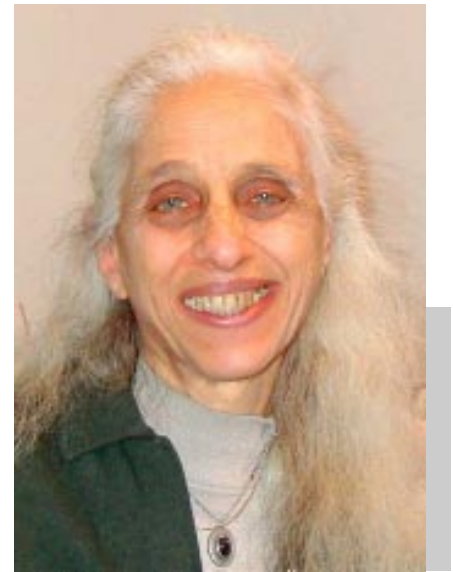
**M**y background is probably not typical in extension, if there is a typical one. I had worked in New York City for probably twenty years in youth development and youth empowerment. My background is actually social work, although I had not been working specifically as a social worker; I had been doing advocacy and public affairs at the YWCA, developing programs. Although I ran coalitions in New York City, I actually had never heard of extension, never heard of 4-H. I just happened to see an ad for this job in the *New York Times*. I applied for a job that was developing a strategic plan and implementing a new plan for youth development in New York City that included 4-H, but was not limited to 4-H. That, as I recall, was my interpretation of the job, which may have been very different from what anyone else had in mind. I thought it would be an interesting way to go, but I had literally never heard of extension. I was even a Cornell graduate and had still never heard of it, so that was part of what was interesting to me.

It was also interesting because there were resources I thought I could bring to youth development groups (community-based organizations) in New York City, which was part of what interested me. I've been here for about twelve years. There probably isn't, even in New York City, a traditional path for how people get to extension; you'll find most of us are odd. With the exception

of Lucinda, who has a very wonderful extension background, the rest of my staff does not come from a traditional extension background. Most of them didn't come to extension in a typical way.

After I graduated from Cornell, I didn't stay connected with Cornell at all until I got this job. I did a lot. I did directories of resources for youth. I did a lot with teen pregnancy and women's issues advocacy. It never occurred to me to look into 4-H. When I looked into it in terms of exploring the job, I was very interested in what they had and what I thought they could have. I think one of Ruth's strengths as director is her interest in pulling in people with non-traditional backgrounds. That's not necessarily what you would want in other places, but you need that approach to respond to the challenges of New York City.

Very soon after I got here, we were running 4-H programs and trying to make them better. I had brought two concerns with me from twenty-five years of working in the city. One was how to build literacy skills so that youth could have choices about careers and higher education. I was especially interested in bringing new resources that didn't involve taking resources from other cbo's [community-based organizations]. The other was how to design programs for the older youth (14- to 16-year-olds). We knew how to involve them when they were young, but didn't know what to do with them when they got older. You have to realize this was also a time of no resources, no summer



**Profile developed by Jessica Yancey and Linda Nessel**

jobs for youth, no programs for youth, and of very tight resources.

I had been doing a lot of work with literacy before I came to Cornell. One of the things that enticed me most about Cornell were the community educators. I thought that was the greatest resource, people from the community who were going to be giving back to the community. When I was doing the exploratory job search, I had said how wonderful it was that while they were doing nutrition education, they could also be promoting literacy. So I had a tiny grant from someone I knew from before to train the community educators in our Harlem office to incorporate literacy into the nutrition work they were doing. It made perfect sense, and it was terrific. That was probably my first year here. Also in that first year, in the course of meeting with people who were interested in extension in New York City, I met a very interesting man named Joe Holland. He was a Cornell University and Law School graduate and a trustee of the university who was living and working in Harlem. He had gotten connected to extension and was interested in what we did.

Then I got a phone call from Scott McMillan. Scott is a wonderful man; he's on campus and teaches Shakespearean literature. This was the serendipity piece. This didn't come together in a coherent program planning way. It was more of a series of opportunities that happened. Scott had been at Cornell for a very long time in the English department, but he had the strongest commitment that I had encountered to inner-city youth and to getting Cornell students to do something in the community. He applied for and got this tiny faculty fellows grant, which was \$4,000, for Cornell students to teach literacy over the summer.

Scott is a very interesting man; he had gotten involved in the whole di-

vestiture issue. There were a group of people at Cornell who felt that Cornell should not be putting its resources into companies that were doing business in South Africa. He was the one who had taught Joe Holland, so it's a funny combination. Joe is African-American, and Scott had encouraged Joe to run as a trustee on the divestiture issue and had run his whole campaign. So when Scott got this small grant, he called Joe and said, "What should we do in Harlem?" Joe, to his credit, with incredible sanity, wanted to call in extension and see what we might do because we have an office and existing programs in Harlem. At that point, we had a large and very good staff delivering programs in central Harlem.

Scott, like many people, had the idea that if we said that Cornell students were going to teach pregnant mothers to read to their children, then the pregnant mothers would come. I had a conversation with Scott and said that it's not that the mothers don't want to come, it's that they're incredibly distracted. They've got a hundred things going on, so we've got to incorporate it into something that's already going on or they won't come. Scott's a brilliant man who knows all sorts of things, but to his credit, he also knows what he doesn't know and how to listen to it. So he said, "Okay, what do you think makes sense?" We talked about doing something with four Cornell students strongly linked to our nutrition and literacy approaches in central Harlem. So we agreed to do that, and we did a whole planning piece with Joe Holland. We worked with several people, including Bill Saunders, director of after-school programs at Grant Houses [a community center in Harlem], because he was one of our partners up there. So we started, eleven summers ago, with four students, one of whom is still very connected to us.

Each of the four students got

\$1,000. They each worked closely with community educators and others in various settings in Harlem. The community educators would be doing workshops for parents, and the students would read to the children while the workshops were going on. We had a variety of approaches, and by the end of the summer, we could plan with the students and partners (Bill Saunders and others) what we could do and how we could expand it. We have continued from that to refine and expand it to where we usually have about fourteen students every summer. This is a very unusual university-community partnership, but in many ways, I think it's excellent because Scott, as a tenured professor, could do things for us that many of our extension partners have not been able to do. He could get a vice-president (Susan Murphy) to agree that work-study funds could be used. We could get things that I can't get in other ways, and it became a wonderful model. By now, it is pretty solidly structured. With a huge amount of help from the university, we have the program institutionalized. There was a combination of good people in place who got these things going in a way that was so solid that when these good people left, it continued. But it still takes a huge amount of work.

Now, we recruit and hire twelve to fourteen Cornell students. We start with Ujamaa and the Latino Living Center (two residential programs). We don't specifically say that it's minorities we want. It's people who have the interest and ability to work with the community. We do take, for the most part, only those who are work-study eligible because work-study pays half of their salary. In the course of this, we discovered that there was a Presidential Reading Fund that came out of the Clinton administration, where if the president of the university agreed, then money could go to match the work-study, so



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that students get their whole salaries paid. But the deal is that the students have to do work on literacy that targets youth below the age of twelve. We used to do more with teens; now we focus on the younger youth, although we still find other ways to involve the teens.

So we have a relationship with the work-study office. We advertise the jobs. Edwin Román, resource educator with workforce development, goes up to campus the first week in April and usually sees about fifty students who apply. Of those, we usually choose fourteen, and we place them in literacy-promoting jobs over the summer in Brooklyn, Manhattan and the Bronx, and even some in Queens. These are all neighborhoods that we're working with, groups that we're working with. Some are in 4-H programs, but most are in summer day camps and housing projects where we have strong commitments and relationships.

We train the students for two weeks, together with community partners, people like Bill Saunders. Then they work in the settings four days a week. On Fridays, they're in our office and we do a series of problem solving and reflection with them. The students keep reflective journals that we review too. And we do professional development for them, because as students they still need help figuring out both what they want to do next and how they can incorporate some public service in their lives. We don't try to push them into public service; the students are going to do what they're going to do. But we try to help them see that even if they go into the corporate setting, there are still ways in which they can be informed voters, they can leverage resources for our issue and commit to our programs in some ways, at least know the issues. We actually stay involved with a lot of them. Many of them go into teaching and law, but many of them go work for

Soloman Smith Barney and make more than the rest of us together. They have to do that to pay back their student loans, so it's complicated.

The main purpose of starting this program was to improve the reading and writing skills of younger youth in New York City who were not getting a lot of help and who were not getting help in ways that were fun. Over the summer, they were getting what they were not getting in school. They often had been so put down by the traditional approaches that we tried to train them in

**Extension education ... is a way of bringing the resources of a university to the community and making sure that it's a real two-way street where communities who know their needs and have done a lot of their own research can get it to the university people. Whether or not the university people listen is another story.**

reading, writing and other literacy-promoting techniques. We also tried to use their energy to come up with things that were fun and exciting, and demonstrate that reading and writing and critical thinking are fun and important. We wanted to specifically use role models from similar backgrounds who left the neighborhood, but could come back and give back. That was a huge dilemma then and remains a dilemma. It's the issue of people feeling, "If I go ahead and I get my college degree, will everyone say that I'm getting too good for my neighborhood to do anything?" So seeing these attractive, energetic, wonderful young people who were getting the benefits of college was really important. So our goal was to promote reading and writing in the younger youth. Our second goal was also to bring in

the resource of role models who were from similar backgrounds. The third goal was to help the Cornell students understand more about the needs of the communities for reading and writing and literacy promoting programs and to be able to use that in their future careers. We also had a goal of improving literacy in the community, but that's not realistic — given our finite resources and the enormity and complexity of the issue. We do what we can do considering the needs. The thought that having two students there for six weeks over the summer is going to change the way services go on is unrealistic.

Whether or not we work with the same kids every summer is part of the challenge. It depends on the setting we're working in. In Grant Houses, often they're able to follow the same kids because the same kids come back. But in some of our other settings, they have new groups of youth every summer. Edwin is already meeting with our partners to ask, "Where do you need our students? What's the best use of them?" It's really up to them. So sometimes, even though we would like for them to be in the same class so they can follow the same kids, the community partner will say, "We really need you with the four-year-olds." When they can follow the same youth, it's great. We have tried to bring back some of the Cornell students. We don't say it's a requirement, but some of them have been with us three summers. You find that when a student has the opportunity, even not to teach the same kids again, but to interact with them, it helps both the Cornell student and the younger youth who often feel that everyone abandons them. One of the students who had been at Grant Houses several times told this wonderful story

of sitting on the train; one of the kids came up to him and said, “I remember two years ago when we were going to the zoo and you showed me how to read that sign. It made such a difference to me.” Sometimes it takes time to see a difference; the frustration is that we can’t always guarantee that you can follow the same kids, which would be better programmatically if we could.

The program has evolved over the past twelve years; it’s very different today. Every year, we do a lot of exit interviews and ongoing interviews with the students as well as with our community partners and try to retool and refine it for the next summer based on what we heard the summer before. It’s probably a bit more structured than it was in its earlier years. In the earlier years, we treated the Cornell students as total pioneers. It’s a bit more organized, although there are always surprises. The biggest difference is the interest in continuing during the year. The Cornell students, who are totally committed, are willing to stay involved online, which is the best way for students 250 long miles away. We had this approach going with other places like Marist College, where students could connect online with teens in the community. A Marist faculty person is overseeing the project. The Cornell students want to do the same thing, but it has been challenging because we need a Cornell faculty person supervising the Cornell student reflection sessions. John Ford, the former dean of students, did it last semester, but then he got lured away to Emory University. Then we couldn’t find anyone who felt they had the time, and it’s exhausting. This is my huge frustration. There’s no process for linking with someone, and I’ve spent two years trying to get someone to agree to do it. At least Cornell students could have a community connection with the older teens, instead of just parachuting in for the summer and then

leaving. And if we could do it with the younger students, that would be even better.

The program has definitely changed; it’s gotten more solid. We have had Grant Houses and Phipps Community Development Corporation with us as partners from the start. New Settlement Apartments in the Bronx have also been with us from almost the start. But we have added more of the 4-H programs through connections with churches and libraries. That is a newer piece that works very well as long as we have Cornell students who are a little bit older and more comfortable with ambiguity, because it’s a little less structured in many ways. We have different partners depending on who approaches us and what they need and want. I think that it’s become more institutionalized on campus with Work Study and other resources. We have a good connection with the Public Service Center up on campus, and they’ve been wonderful, too. I think they’ve been without a permanent director, so things are always a little fuzzy up there. We have the right players, but things that should be easy are frequently never easy.

We talk to the parents of the kids we’re working with, and we would like to do even more with parents. That has been a big thrust of ours. We always have at least one event where we invite the parents in to see the work of the children. Last year, when we did the newsletter, we did a page of resources for parents. We would like to do even more with them. It’s hard because the parents aren’t there during the day; but it is something we very consciously want to do more and more. With literacy — and anything else — it’s layer after layer. If you can’t help the parents see the importance, it’s very hard to sustain it. The best approaches are where you help parents help their children. And we have other programs

through which we try to do that, and we’ve tried to do that with this one. Because of our approach of working through host settings, it depends more on the approach of the host setting too. That’s one of the things the Cornell students always have to balance with our help. One of the things that is very hard for the Cornell students is that they’re our employees, but they are placed in community settings and have to go with all the different rules and regulations and the corporate culture. So if they’re in a setting that isn’t parent friendly, they can’t say, “I’m a Cornell student and I want to invite the parents in.” It’s a dilemma, but one that we care about a great deal. We’re doing other approaches with parents, too, because we know we need to. We’re trying to do a whole digital scholars piece with ninth graders through college, helping them prepare. We want to add a parent component to that, too. With Cornell, you have this patchwork quilt of programs; wherever you have some resources, you try to plug it in.

Evaluation is always one of the trickiest things. We have used a variety of approaches. One year Merrill Ewert, then a professor in the Education department and later the director of Cornell Cooperative Extension, and Dave Deshler, then a professor in the Education department, trained the students in participatory research techniques. Then Merrill and Dave did the evaluation. But it was very resource intensive. We also try to count things like the number of youth we impact and the products that come out of it. I have never thought that it made sense to say that youth would improve their reading skills by X amount. It’s just not going to happen, and I wouldn’t want us to be judged in that way. What we want to measure is that the youth like reading and writing, see its relevance to their current and future lives, and see other ways that they can go about it.

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We also do a newsletter every year, we incorporate both the Cornell students' work and the work of the students in the community. We distribute that. It's not a perfect evaluation, but we do try to at least document the impact — numbers reached, products they develop — at some level. The Cornell students also keep reflective journals that tell us different things about impact.

The most challenging part, really, was matching up resources with an immense, immense need. Especially twelve years ago, there were no resources around; there were thousands of needs. How could you best focus four students? We said we would only do central Harlem. The challenge is that sometimes funding dictates where you go and what you do. One of the pieces that we built in after the first year, which I had always done and loved, was training and hiring teens to work along with the Cornell students. It would be their summer job. They would learn literacy, and they would learn peer education approaches. That was a really interesting piece. As the funds became more and more targeted to the younger youth, we didn't have the funds to hire these teens ourselves. We sometimes were able to get outside funds and do it that way. There are challenges to having college students work with teenagers and younger youth simultaneously. It works really well if you have good teens, but there was this tension when we say "youth to youth." What youth are we talking about in a multi-layered program? Interestingly, the Cornell students were much more comfortable working with younger youth than with the teens. The teens were closer in age, but they were also often very challenging. The younger ones adored them; the teens could be, "What the hell do you know?" For the Cornell students, there's so much ambivalence about setting rules, the teens don't arrive on time, etc.

There was a huge tension handling those near-age issues. So it's figuring out what to do with your resources and keeping the program vibrant as needs and resources change in the community. And the biggest challenge to me is what happens the rest of the year. That's where we have tried to do the Youth Net approach as an outgrowth, but that's been quite challenging in terms of university-community partnerships.

One really important lesson I've learned from this program is that the Cornell students have wonderful priorities, wonderful energy. It's much more difficult to get faculty involved than to get the students involved. So that was our most challenging lesson. The stu-

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dents were wonderful; they had all sorts of things they wanted to do in the future. This is not meant as a criticism. I'm trying to be very philosophical. Because the program was conceptualized and designed in a very non-traditional way, faculty — at least extension faculty — didn't see it as their program. Scott McMillin has always been interested, but he's a Shakespearean literature professor. A very smart woman who was the director of Cornell Cooperative Extension two directors before, Cindy Nobel, had said to me, "Linda, you're never going to get any place with this unless somebody on campus takes it on and sees it as something they want to write about. Universities don't believe it unless it's written in their journals. It can be written up in other

things, but they don't pay attention to that." Because it's not a traditional extension program (and it's not a traditional anything else program), everybody loves it, but nobody on campus takes it on in some ways. That's challenging, which is why I'm glad you're profiling it. Part of my agenda is to get people to take it on because it's not enough to have me pushing from my end. You want it to be solid enough that even if we all disappear tomorrow, it will continue. That, I think, is the real challenge.

I do not see myself as a teacher in this program. I see myself more as the strategic planner, pulling the pieces together and bringing resources together. I am not a teacher. I do teach in other settings, but that is not what I came to extension to do. So, for instance, in the very first year, I used the little bit of funds that I had to hire some colleagues from a literacy assistance center to come in and do the teaching and training. We also had others from a service learning group do a manual.

I have hired people to do the teaching. Edwin and Lucinda do some of the direct teaching of the Cornell students. That is not a role I see as mine. I would call myself more of an organizer.

Defining extension education is a difficult thing to do. I think what works is to say that it's a way of bringing the resources of a university to the community and making sure that it's a real two-way street where communities who know their needs and have done a lot of their own research can get it to university people. Whether or not the university people listen is another story. Some listen and incorporate both the research and needs into their work and bring resources that help communities do what they need to get done. That was my hope of what extension should

be. I'm not saying that's what I think it is, but if I want to talk about what I think is good about extension, it is that there are these people out there in the community who really know what their neighborhood needs. The community educators and others can tell us. My staff goes out and works in the community everyday. They know what the needs are, they know what the resources are, and if it really is a two-way channel, they can get university resources to respond to this. I think that's what extension should be.

There are some downsides to extension. I think that many people in leadership roles in extension, although they talk the talk of it being a two-way channel, really only see it as a one-way channel. Programs and research are developed on the campus and then given to extension to implement. And there are places where that may work beautifully, but it just doesn't work in New York City. I'm sure that people are tired of us saying that New York City is different, but other places are different too. I don't think it's just New York City; I'm sure rural Texas is different too. There are some wonderful programs that are developed, and we certainly use them, but every one of them has to be modified. The only staff that I hire are those I believe can really modify and tailor things knowing what's needed here. The pitfall is that I think academics spend an incredible amount of time talking and thinking about strategic and long-range plans and much less time acting. I am, good or bad, very action-oriented. There are lots of needs out there, and I don't think it's so terrible to do something. And if it doesn't work, you do it differently rather than stopping. I think the traditional extension model, which is a very good model, is that you plan it, you get every piece in place, you don't launch it until you have everything conceptualized and have everything dotted. Sometimes by

the time you finish it, all of the needs of the community have shifted. So that's my personal frustration.

When I hire people, I look for a real commitment to and caring for the community. I'm much more interested in that than anything. When I was hired, my unit was the youth development unit. Over a long evolution, it became workforce development, including youth. But those are both areas where you don't go and get your master's in that. And I found it makes absolutely no difference what educational major someone pursued; it's much more their ability to see, to hear, to listen and care.

**My colleague, John Nettleton, often talks about our approach to Cornell being like a scavenger hunt. We go up there and see if there's anyone interesting who wants to work with us, even though it's not in their job description.**

And the other thing that I look for a lot is people who can focus because it's such a scattering sort of place. There are some wonderful people whom I've worked with in other settings, but I wouldn't bring them in to this because they would be out of their minds. You need people who can say, "There's this possibility and this possibility, but this is what I can do and by this time." I look for diversity, not because it's the right thing to do, but because it enriches our programs. We really need it across all lines. I wish I could bring in more having to do with disability, which is another strong commitment. I think there are lots and lots of issues, and I don't think one person should have to represent women's issues, or gay issues, or this, that, or the other. I think if you have a staff with a lot of different perspectives and the ability to speak out

and say what they think, you can have a rich program. I don't want a robot that says "Yes, that's right." That doesn't do me any good. Maybe this is not traditionally how one hires, but it is how I hire. We always hire by committee and try to include community representatives as well as staff from all issue areas and levels. We look for somebody who won't race out of here screaming after a week.

Where we get our resources vastly controls what we do with the programs, but not totally, because we have a commitment to it. The resources are pretty much in place on this one, although we

have gotten outside funding. We have one person whose daughter and husband went to Cornell. She has a tremendous interest in literacy. The person at Cornell's College of Human Ecology who dealt with funding asked if this woman could come down and meet with us. She did, and she loved our program. She has set up a small

fund where the interest on it goes to support a staff person; part of Edwin's salary is paid from that. We need that because this is in addition to the traditional extension work. We've found that in order for the program to work, we have to have someone focusing on it. It wasn't enough to bring in someone to run it over the summer. So we really needed the commitment to some funding for a staff person to incorporate this into their year-round work. And we have gotten a little bit of funding — not enough, but a little bit of funding — from Cornell, and that helps a great deal. So without the resources for part of someone's salary, who is focused on this program, I think we would have a very difficult time having a quality program, even though many of the pieces are in place.

If I could change one thing about

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this program, I would make it year-round. I would build on the impact. I think we do wonderful things over the summer. I would actually like to have students from local colleges who were getting work-study who could continue working with these youth during the year. It's a very sane thing to do if you could just get the sun, the moon and the stars to line up. But it takes a huge amount of time to do that sort of planning, even though it's very simple and very sane. You're dealing with bureaucracies, and who will work with whom, who's focusing on what.

This program has helped me personally evolve as an extension employee. It's the one that confirms part of why I came to extension, which was to bring university resources to the city. I had always worked in small community-based organizations. And my fantasy in going to Cornell was I didn't want to be competing against these groups and these coalitions I had built. I didn't want to be going after the same grants they were. So I thought, "This is wonderful. I'll have a new way to bring a new pool of resources and different resources where they weren't before." It's not that I can write a better proposal than the YWCA, it's that I can bring something different there. This one is the one that really makes me feel good because it really has brought the resources from the university that never

would have been in place without it. They are not extension resources; I'm not even sure whether extension has put any resources into this one. But it's the faculty fellows. It's the work-study students. It's the Public Service Center, and it is access to people who did provide funding for us whom we never would have come into contact with. So it's one that has confirmed the notion that you can get resources from the university that really are willing to respond to what the community needs. But in all the programs we do, when you ask people what they want, it's better education for their kids and better jobs. This one has managed to confirm that there are university resources that are appropriate in the community and that work and that really make lives a little better.

So in some ways, the Youth-to-Youth Literacy Program has been one of the more satisfying programs. It also has been a way of using really good staff. Lucinda has done the most amazing job of teaching literacy. Again, faculty would say she wasn't taught and trained in "literacy-teaching," but she's a much better teacher than your traditional faculty. Edwin is just wonderful, and he takes teaching very seriously. So it's a wonderful program where people with a variety of different backgrounds really are making a difference. It makes me feel a little better about the possi-

bility. It then can be very frustrating that you can't get other people to do other similarly sane things, but at least something gets done. And I think it's very good for the university; they love to talk about it.

I see my work as brokering, bringing together people who wouldn't typically come together. My colleague, John Nettleton, often talks about our approach to Cornell being like a scavenger hunt. We go up there and see if there's anyone interesting who wants to work with us, even though it's not in their job description. I do think what extension does best is the brokering, especially if we bring together people who normally wouldn't come in contact with each other. Bringing together the usual people is fine, but it doesn't seem like it's going to produce anything but the usual programs. I have strong feelings that we're still in a huge amount of trouble in many of our NYC communities. I'm deeply concerned. Skipping the economy, which is only going to get worse, and the fact that nobody we work with benefited from it anyway, and the growing stratification which I think is really scary for our society. I think there are real things that the university and extension could do about it. I think we need to be doing a great deal more rather than revitalizing ourselves or just talking about it.

# profile

## Rosalyn McMullin

COMMUNITY EDUCATOR, ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES



**B**efore coming to Cornell Cooperative Extension, sixteen years ago, I was a parent volunteer, doing outreach within my community. I was working with other parents to help support our community and our children through different vehicles via fundraising, raising money for trips for our children and getting resources in our community. I had a young child in preschool at the time. I worked in various jobs (Bronx Zoo, Country Music Maz, etc.). Some of my past work is what led me to where I'm at now. My professional background is in the areas of gardening, horticulture, recruiting volunteers, and teaching adults and youth through environmental issues education.

When Garden Mosaics got started, I was working with Cornell extension implementing environmental issues education programs. I was teaching or interacting with youth or volunteers to make sure the program was being delivered properly. One of the main goals of Garden Mosaics was to engage the youth and community gardeners to learn about gardening from diverse cultures, including learning about sustainable practices that could be of use. A personal objective I had was bringing the university faculty, staff, and students who are part of Cornell University to New York City to interact with the gardeners, youth, and volunteers, to see how we could all interact together for a common goal. I personally wanted to see that happen.

My role in the process has been as an educator for the youth, doing recruitment of volunteers and providing some community support. I was fortunate enough to live in one of the communities where the project was being conducted. I've done marketing and recruiting in my role as a community educator. My title is community educator in Environmental Issues and in Nutrition and Health for NYC programs. I think it matches what I do whether I'm delivering programs of nutrition and health or whether I'm delivering environmental issues programs to the community for the youth, volunteers, and participants. My role is to go out, recruit and bring into whatever project we're doing some volunteers, adult participants, and youth to see how we can all work together.

This has a lot to do with program marketing, too. Maybe there's some kind of community outreach program out there that we have to network with so we can make sure that we're really reaching the right audiences in order to deliver the program that's needed. It's a form of marketing. You're selling yourself. You want people to buy into what you have. That's how I look at it. The program's location and funds set the criteria for the audiences. It can be youth of a certain age, adult participants or volunteers who live in an area where we need to be delivering programs.

Both Veronique and I were doing outreach community support. She might have touched base with the community board person to find out what kind of support people they have in the

**Profile developed by H el ene Gr egoire and Rosalyn McMullin**

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community. I, in turn, having a youth background, would recruit and find out what youth programs are in the community. I'd tap into that youth program and return the information back to Veronique and see how we could best pick the one that was most appropriate for what we needed to do. We needed to think about things like: are there going to be children in this summer program? Is it close to the area that the Garden Mosaics project is in? All of that is a big help.

As an educator, I was teaching the youth and working with the gardeners. I'll talk about the youth first. I was trying to bring awareness to some city youth about what it is that we expect to come out of a project, because this was all very new to them. The youth are from various communities that have gardens, but a lot of them don't know they have gardens in their communities. There are youth who are in some of the communities who don't have any experience with gardens or open space. I was trying to bring this awareness to them. I'd tell them, "We're going to an open space." I'd ask, "What is open space? Do you know of any in your area? Have you experienced gardening before? Has your mom?" Just to get some awareness of what's going on. "What do you feel about gardening? Have you grown anything? Have you done any science activities with plants or bean sprouting?"

In order to make a program work, you've got to find out where they're at and where they came from in order to know how to get to where they need to go. We assess who knows a little more, who knows a little less or who's already there. It has to be on the youths' level. If many of them didn't know as much pertaining to gardening, you would have to spend more time with them because they're so used to doing educational activities indoors. This is an outdoor project. So we have to start

indoors in order to go outdoors.

I start by breaking the ice, first of all. I'm also a community educator in Nutrition and Health, and I teach youth food-related issues for their health. A lot of the food preparations are basically plant foods that we make recipes for. It was fun doing icebreakers about different foods, talking about the characteristics of foods, playing a game with them about foods, getting them started. We play a game called "Who am I?" I say, "It's green, and people dip it" or "It looks like a tree." They can then start to get this whole process in their head. I integrated the subjects because it helped the educational activities process go smoother.

Garden Mosaics was educational for the youth because it was different than what they're doing in the regular classroom setting. You're outdoors, and the majority of them didn't have outdoor experience with gardening. This is new exposure for them. They're learning about tools, how to plan and design their garden bed, how to plant in their garden plot, what the gardeners are growing. They're looking at the gardeners' work and growing a little something for themselves. The gardeners, in turn, can show them some practices that they're doing for their plants. That's engaging the youth. I can show them safety rules and how to use the tools pertaining to working in the garden. I also made sure they respect each other's space and the gardeners' space, not stepping in any beds. The youth learn about seeds, how to plant and use water holes, watering plants. All of these things were educational for them.

Respect was established in the beginning before we got the youth and the volunteers to come out to the gardens. We knew that learning how to be respectful needed to come before learning gardening practices. You would talk about interviewing — about how we respect each other, about how

people are different, sometimes we eat different things and we have different backgrounds, but we could all be part of sharing and helping each other and learning from each other. Just keeping that awareness going. In the Manhattan garden, we had gardeners from Bangladesh, Puerto Rico, and Alabama. Some of them come from different cultural backgrounds. The gardeners are educators as well as learners, so we are all learning and educating. The children needed to know that.

The gardeners learned that there are Cornell Cooperative Extension staff people who can come out and help them with their community garden. They may not know about us. But I would say "Oh! I live right around the corner!" And then I'd come at another time with volunteers to see how we could share with each other. The gardeners were able to draw on the fact that there is some care and concern for them. And I'd ask, "What plant is this that you're growing in this plot here?" They tell you what the plant is and how they use it. It could be related to us in Spanish or English. So they're educating us because most of the time we have no knowledge about its use until they tell us how it's used. Maybe these are things that we didn't know the practices for, but we found out that this is a plant that they use for salad or a vegetable. And this plant is used for good luck. It could be a spiritual practice or an edible reason why the gardeners use their plants. These were things that we were learning about. We'd ask, "Why do you put this plant leaf behind the ear?" or "Why do you put it on the person's clothes before they leave the house?" And they'd say, "It has good luck for you" or "It will keep the evil away from you."

In a specific plot, there was a plant called papalou. It has a beautiful fragrance; it's edible and they use it in salads. This was something that I was not

familiar with. I never ate the papalou plant; I didn't know what papalou was. But it has a nice small green leaf. I tasted it, and it was edible. That was something I learned about. And the plant kalalou. There was only one kalalou plant that I knew of. I didn't know there were three different spinach plants. I knew of the kalalou plant in the Trinidad and in the Jamaican cultural background. Then I learned that there were two other kinds of kalalou plants. I was really amazed at learning about different plant species, which ones were edible, which ones were spiritual, and where they come from. That opened up and expanded my horizons a little bit more about what's going on in the community garden space. We were learning new and different things about garden plants and how some practices with plants really got started.

Garden Mosaics is a diverse educational project. By that, I mean that it involves youth, community gardeners and the Cornell University faculty and staff. Some faculty and staff came down from the university to help with the interaction with the gardeners and youth. That was the dynamic of the whole Mosaics situation to me: to see the university faculty and staff down here interacting with youth and community people, partnering with us. That's a whole different level of community outreach education that I'm not used to seeing. I hope faculty involvement in urban community educational outreach will be more ongoing. There's something more than just saying "Let's reach out to them in the city from up on the campus because we are needed." If they are tangible at times, then it's visible in your mind. You will know that you're really involved in a program which is a part of a bigger picture. You can now see the whole picture of Cornell University Cooperative Extension-NYC Programs.

It would be very helpful if Cornell University faculty and staff could be more accessible for the people here in the city. I started here sixteen years ago, and it was helpful for me to connect with the Cornell University faculty and staff. I also think that "community educators" are perceived as "aides to deliver a program" at Cornell University itself. That is why after thirty years we are still labelled as "program aides" up on the campus. So I have to stop and think about the people that I have met on the campus in the years that I've been going. It's nice to meet and work with people who have some common goals in life: sharing knowledge with each other. I personally need to know that there's some connection between the university staff and me. I would explain to the people in the community that there are university staff people who study nutrition and health science, environmental educational activities. That's what keeps my momentum going. Can you imagine working for a company that you don't feel the connection to as a person?

It was nice to see that everybody learned something, especially Cornell University faculty and staff up on the campus. I like to see when everyone is learning. It's always perceived that once people get to a certain level of education they know it all. But that's not the reality. People from all walks of life need to understand that people who never receive an education to the level of PhD — or even BA, BS — can still teach someone. There are a lot of people who are beginning to learn how to speak English, how to get started in life. Some people are just learning how to deal with getting in the mainstream of basic skills. But to know that we are all learning and sharing, now that's beautiful. You never stop learning. It's a never-ending thing. There's always something that a person can show you at any level of life. Even a child can

teach an adult. Sometimes we forget, and we don't look at life that way. We have to change our way of how we perceive learning in our life.

Good extension education is everybody working together in a diverse way, in all different levels of knowledge, to share with each other. I like going to Cornell University campus classes to learn subject matter for program delivery. And I like when Cornell staff come down here and see what we are doing here in the city. We can bring them to the field area we're working at. I like to know that when we're standing at this end of extension and say, "I'm from Cornell University Cooperative Extension," people can really feel just that. "That's where I go sometimes to get the information to bring back to you. And yes, we do care about your life." You want the information that you're giving them to be true, and you want it to be something they believe in so they make some behavioral changes for themselves. People know that politicians are not always telling the truth about people's concerns. People get discouraged and feel helpless at times, because they don't believe in each other any more. You want people to believe in some things. You want them to know that there are people who really care about their life.

It was so educational for the gardeners to share information in their community about the Garden Mosaics project and to celebrate what's going on in the other local gardens in the community. They closed the street off and opened the garden for the people to see the work of gardeners and to celebrate. They had people come in the garden and sit and partake of food and show pictures of their different gardening activities. I got involved with that. It was right around the corner from me. I walked around the corner and played games with the children and interacted with the adults. It was beautiful. I took



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pictures and let them know, by bringing my Cornell Cooperative Extension poster banner, that extension is in their neighborhood. And then my face becomes familiar because I live in the neighborhood.

I think that in any neighborhood, it's nice to see people who give you a friendly smile, or people who say "good morning" to you. You get support from people if they know you're willing to come into their community to help them and share. There are a lot of people who never work in their community; they always work outside their community. I was one of them. It was a good feeling to work in my community and to know that I'm from an organization that's about helping people. Now that's a great feeling. I take pride in it. I feel good about that.

In terms of the challenges that we might have come up against, with the Garden Mosaic project, some children didn't remember to have their parents sign the forms that we need signed for field trips. When that happened, you had to leave that child; they couldn't go into the garden. That's very discouraging. Now, when we do programs like this, we can mail forms to the parents instead of giving them to the children. The youth had journals, and they did the best they could with the journals. These children are younger, and they weren't the savviest kids, in terms of articulating their ideas in a journal book. I think they needed more support with writing skills, on how to articulate information on paper. Other challenges: the gardener didn't show up, or we didn't have the key to the garden. I have to take the kids back to the center, when they were looking forward to being outdoors.

The project with the gardeners and the youth program weren't far away from each other. We always looked for a garden within walking distance from a youth program. We have to make sure

that some things are falling in some kind of order so it can go steadily. If gardeners were not in that day, we just turned around and walked our three blocks back to the youth center. Location was important, and so was the support volunteers gave at the youth program. We know good community supports from centers are very important.

At one point, a conflict came up pertaining to the gardeners. There was a gardener in Manhattan who was like a head honcho. Everybody was basically seen like they were submissive unto him, and they were all glad that we were there. We were all sharing with each other. The Bangladeshi gardener was showing Veronique something in the

**The gardeners ... may not know about us. But I would say, "Oh! I live right around the corner!" My face becomes familiar because I live in the neighborhood.**

lot. They were actually growing something in rubble from a building that was torn down. The president of the garden was saying, "Get out of there now." It was some issue going on that we walked into that day. We are an organization from the outside. We have to look at what's going on within their garden environment, not get into personal issues, and still be within the circle. We respected the head gardener's wishes and came out of that area; he said they were going to be labelled as doing something illegal because there were plants growing in rubble. On the other hand, the Bangladeshi gardener was not familiar with Green Thumb's gardening rules regarding allowable areas for planting. Some gardeners are more familiar with the Green Thumb rules. The Bangladeshi gardeners didn't realize the importance of where food is

grown so that it is safe to eat and not dangerous to your health. Even though they were told not to grow in that area, it looked so rich, so why not grow there? It may not be the safest place to grow, but they had results. They, in turn, wanted us to see their results. It was right outside the garden. And that was the issue. We apologized for going outside the garden. We didn't have to do that, but we wanted to because we didn't want the person to feel uneasy. So what we did was get the other gardener to go back inside with us. They realized that this president of the garden was very uneasy. So they also came back inside the garden. The gardener said, "It's not safe. It's not adequate.

And it's not appropriate to grow stuff there." But like I said, we're talking about different cultural backgrounds and some language barriers, too. This has a lot to do with how we come across to people.

Sometimes the Bangladeshi woman couldn't understand me and I couldn't understand her, but she would point things out to me. I would look surprised so she would know that I'm getting something. Sometimes, body language, expressions, a smile, a gentle look, all of these things, can help. It can help a lot because she sure showed me things that she couldn't tell me. I'd say "Oh! She's growing this, and she's growing this!" But she didn't say "Oh! I'm growing this, and oh! I'm growing that." She would signal me, "Come, come!" and take me by my hand to the plants — cucumber, or yellow squash. When the person is very sincere about something, they give you something. Then you know the caring is there. That has a lot to do with how we interact with people. Before language, people used expression and body signals.

Another barrier is time. Time is

always a barrier! The youth ask you all sorts of questions. You want to get the program delivered, and you've got to do it in a certain period of time. You know that you have to keep up with the time schedule. You try to answer some questions and get back on track with the program.

The other big challenge had to do with having the youth in the after-school program, which was in the fall. We needed to make them aware of what's going on before spring arrives, when the weather breaks and we can be outside with the gardeners. These might not be the same students that you had in the springtime, because in the summer program, students can change. We had to recruit new students again. That means re-interviewing and getting new youth to understand this Garden Mosaics project all over again so that you can get them to point needed in order to work with the gardeners for the summer. Veronique and I worked very well together so we managed to do it in time. Everything went into the report, even the downfalls or the issues that hindered progress, because it is all educational for the next educator. That's a way of being supportive for the next person who may have to deliver the same program.

A key skill of a good extension educator is to believe in oneself as capable of sharing some information and receiving some information. For example, if I have a class of seventeen people, I can stand there with them and say, "I'm giving you this information and asking if there are some things you would like to share with each other." Supporting each other is so important in a group setting. You know you're on the right track when you're constantly educating yourself for program delivery. Before we did the Garden Mosaics project, Veronique and I took some horticultural classes at the 4-H science

conference. Some of this information she knew, some I knew, and some we didn't know. Training provides the foundation for teaching, before we go out and deliver a program.

Being a good extension educator has a lot to do with the person and their self-worth. It tells us how we feel and what we think when we convey something across to someone else. Are they really getting it? Do you feel comfort-

**To see the university faculty and staff down here interacting with youth and community people [is] a whole different level of community outreach education that I'm not used to seeing. There's something more than just saying, "Let's reach out to them in the city from up on the campus because we are needed." —**

able or inadequate? Do you feel that the person is getting the concept of what you're talking about? When you see that they understand what you are saying, then you have confidence that you're able to teach what you need to teach. But you always have to take inventory of yourself. Sometimes I ask my audience, "What do you feel we need more support on?" I just can't go by my own judgement all the time; I like to get other people's input. I'm also a people person. I love people and that's a totally different asset. I'm an outdoor person, too; I think that really helps me a lot.

We can not really measure how we all interacted in the Garden Mosaics project. We can't measure how the youth, Cornell faculty and staff, volunteers, and gardeners shared with each other because everyone had something that they brought to the table. Where's the measurement for this? It's not mea-

sured, but it happened. The chemistry was there, and everybody was able to do what they had to do. Everyone was interacting and sharing with each other, but there is no measurement for that. It's chemistry. You put these groups of people together with the young people, and then you get the most beautiful mosaic of people that you'd ever want to see.

Knowing that these people believe enough to be here is chemistry in itself. We have something that's diverse, beautiful and educational. I felt that I was a part of this beautiful people chemistry. It is beautiful being in the garden. Some of the gardeners have language barriers, but it's important to make them feel comfortable enough to know that their ideas are really valued. We're willing to listen.

We're willing to be a part of their world and be there to see what they have been a part of for however long they've been gardening in that garden.

One of my favorite memories was the day that project members all met at the garden. The youth were there and the gardeners were sharing some of their knowledge with them. The project staff were watching and listening. We set up the table with the paper so the gardeners could draw the garden map. I had pencils, crayons and markers. That sparks up things. Everybody's eyes got big; they were excited about drawing. Everybody's talking about the plants and flowers and feeling comfortable. There's a nice cool refreshing drink ready for everyone — the perfect environment to make the day work well.

If I had to sum up what my work was all about in only three words, I would say: "share with people." That's the three words exactly.

# profile

## Madie McLean

COMMUNITY EDUCATOR/SUPERVISOR, NUTRITION AND HEALTH

I came to work for extension in 1971 when they started the first EFNEP [Expanded Food and Nutrition Education] program in East Harlem. I was recruited by a neighbor. She heard about the job through the community agency, and she asked me would I like to work in my community? I said, “Doing what?” I knew nothing at all about extension before coming to work for them. She explained that there was a new program starting in East Harlem. It was a three-year project to work with low-income families in East Harlem communities. You needed to be a mother and live in East Harlem and be willing to go out and share information that we, hopefully, already knew. She explained what it was, and I said, “Sure.”

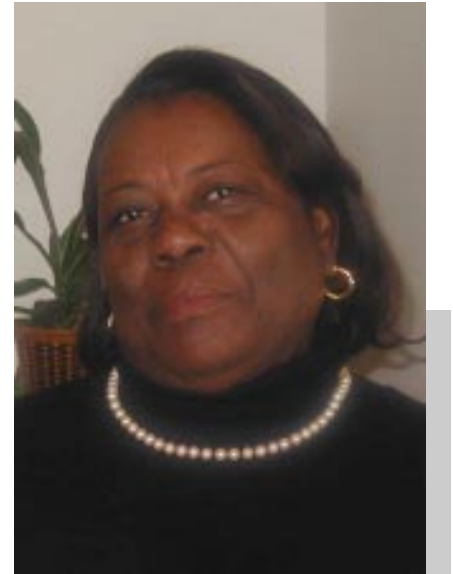
When we first started, we were trained for three weeks, and then we went out into the community. Sometimes we knocked on doors. Sometimes we got referrals from Metropolitan Hospital or other community agencies to go follow-up on these particular young moms or grandmoms who were taking care of the children. We had some special parents that we worked with — moms over thirty-five-years-old who were having their first child. They were referred from Metropolitan Hospital also.

The families we worked with were on welfare at that time, and they were getting very little money. And, believe me, that little money they got did not last from one check to the next. So part of our job was to help them stay within that budget so they would have a decent

diet and food to last until the next check.

I never in a million years would have thought I could go to somebody’s house, knock on their door, just tell them my name and about the program, and have them say “Come on in.” It was easier with the ones who had already heard about us or had been referred from Metropolitan or a doctor. But we also had the ones who were not referred and would open their doors and let us in. That amazes me to this day. There was just something about the times, I guess, and us, that they just let us in. I think being from the community helped 99 percent of the time. It was the foot in the door. So I think — actually I don’t think — I *know* that was a big part of it. Living in the community, identifying with them. We, too, have children; we come from the same community and similar background. They could identify in that particular way with us.

A typical day for me then was I would get up probably around 7 o’clock because I had two young children. I’d have to feed my two children, think about what I was going to have for dinner. Feed them, get them dressed or see that they got dressed properly because they were old enough to dress themselves. Get myself dressed, get out the door, and be over at 106th street and Lexington Avenue by 9:30. I only worked until 1:30. It was part-time — about four and half hours in the beginning. I would sign in. If it wasn’t an in-service day, or some new training, or somebody coming from the outside to train us, I would get my assignment, know how



**Profile developed by Lynn M. Ross and Madie McLean**

many families to see that day and what I would teach. Then my partner and I would hop on the bus or walk to do the home visits. Usually we'd be in the same area, sometimes the same buildings.

If we had not made appointments with the homemakers, we would call and make sure they were home and expecting us. Sometimes their schedule would change. I always tried to show a lot of respect for that because just because you're in this position, or predicament, or whatever you want to call it, and living in this place doesn't give me the right to not respect your time and your space that you were giving me. So, I would try to call them if it was possible. Many times, they did not have phones so you would just have to take your chances and go there. Hopefully, they would be home and remember that you were coming. If they didn't or their plans had changed, I would leave a note under the door to say "I'll come back later on" or "I'll come back next week."

Now, we've moved from doing one-on-ones to doing group work. Most of the group work is done in agencies, churches and schools. We are working with a new audience. It is similar in that they have limited resources still, but a new emphasis in that we are working with the ESL, GED programs, Welfare-to-Work, homeless people and people living in shelters. We're doing some work with children and people who are in mental institutions. I am working with some five-year-olds, which at that time we were not doing. We've just now started to work with the five-year-olds. Five and up to nineteen years old.

We were well-trained to do group work. We would go to Cornell for the workshops, and they would come down here to us. Most of the training, we got here in the city, at our site, and new information that they thought beneficial comes from Cornell. We used to go up maybe a couple times a year, but we haven't been up in awhile. But I

thought the things we learned up there were helpful toward what we were doing and what we were trying to do. We still get information from Cornell that helps us do our job.

We do set up some workshops from time to time. We have the Pictel teleconference, in-services, conferences, and speakers. The last one we had talked about the dietary guidelines, and he was fantastic. We were all so excited. We were in the afternoon session. Fabulous, fabulous! The new dietary guidelines are coming out so that's what he was talking to us about. We will incorporate that with the food guide pyramid, and other lessons. I think these guidelines may be little more relevant to the audience that we are working with.

The more people know about us, the longer we can continue helping build and change families and communities. The things we do — eating, playing, being together — it's a combination. Food, by itself, is not going to get it; it's a combination of things. When people are in a situation and they feel nothing is going right, nutrition and health is not as important to them as how do I get out of this rut? How do I get some shoes for the kids? How do I get a coat or a jacket or whatever that child needs? How about me? How do I get the help that I need? You have to know the difference at that point about whether you are going to talk about nutrition or listen to whatever it is that is on their mind at the moment. That is part of building families because they will think "She cares about me as an individual." I think being a good listener is very important. I try not to give solutions unless I really know what I am talking about. We refer families all the time to other agencies if necessary.

I think one of the keys for motivating a person to learn and to change is that, first, the person wants to change. They want to learn, they want to

change, and they want to be healthy. I think you have to set yourself as a bit of an example and share a bit about yourself. Maybe I've been there and gone through some of those things and changes. Explain that you understand that change is not easy, but it's very important. We're talking about health and children. Most families want to be healthy and want their children to be healthy.

I stress the benefits, rewards and consequences hoping to motivate the desire to learn and make changes. I will present research information as it relates to the health problems of high blood pressure, heart disease, and cancer. They may not be doing the things that are going to help them stay healthy, but they will do the things that are going to help their children be healthy. The nutrition and health sessions promote and help motivate people to learn and make changes that will benefit them and their families. So I try to talk about the children and how hard it is to change, but that one step at a time, we can change things.

In terms of community building, I think the home-based program might have been better because you were doing the one-on-one. But the problem with that is that we didn't get much feedback on how much community building happened. It takes time, but there certainly was success. I am meeting people who were the children in the home-based families. These children are now twenty-five, twenty-eight, and they remember me, and they remember their moms are still doing the things that she learned from the program more than twenty-five years ago. That is amazing feedback. It's always surprising to me because I don't remember, but they do: "Oh, Ms. McLean you haven't changed. You used to come to my Mom's house and talk about nutrition. You had that recipe, and she's still doing it twenty years later." I met some-

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body at the manicure place, and she leaned over and said, “I know you, I remember you.” That happens often now because I am still in the same community. I do often run into people who say, “I remember you at my mom’s house.” That, to me, is pretty amazing; it’s great feedback. I usually come back and talk to the ladies about that and say, “You know, I’m still bumping into people who we worked with twenty years ago, twenty-five years ago, and they remember the program. So we must have made some big impression on them.”

I think it’s working with the groups, too. You know you can’t reach everybody, but there are some people you will reach and see change in eight to ten weeks. It may seem very simple and not important, but if somebody comes and they don’t know basic cooking skills, but they want to learn, that’s the key thing — they want to learn. They go home and come back within those ten weeks and show you or tell you that they have done it, to me, you’ve made some impact on those people. You have reached other people, also. Some will come back and say it, and others will keep quiet, but you know they have learned something that is going to be very useful to them.

I was teaching a group last week, and we were talking about food safety. I have this one young man who really likes to impress that he knows everything. I gave a short food safety quiz done in a non-threatening way. It turns out he really didn’t know what he thought he knew, but I thought he was so brave and open. And I appreciated it because he shared with the person he was sitting next to that he changed his wrong answers; he admitted that he changed them. When it came his time to read, he read it the way he answered them. He wasn’t embarrassed or ashamed to say, “Hey, I didn’t know that.” So I think you can make an im-

pact with the groups. I *know* it’s happening. We make a difference.

We won’t know the full impact that it has on the community building, but the people we work with go out and tell other agencies, or somebody else in the community, and they struggle to come to the groups after they find out about what we do. That means a lot. I think that says a lot about community building. You never see that person again, but you know you made an impression, and they are telling somebody else about EFNEP. I’m always reminding them to share with your neighbor, share with your friend, share with the children,

**I think that we have encouraged and gotten people going and doing things that they probably never thought they could.**

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and have the children share with somebody else. I may not get that feedback, but you see down the line maybe ten or fifteen years from now that the children from that audience will be healthier and have better food practices than what people are doing now. Like I said, it’s not easy to change adults or change our behavior because you’ve had those habits for so long, but maybe one little thing will happen to change that person. And to me, if they don’t change themselves, but do pass it on to the family and there’s some kind of change in the family, it’s fine with me. I think that’s good; I think that’s important.

One of the challenges of this work is when people have a problem with reading and understanding what they are reading. Remember, the audience is still from the same area, but this audience is different. Let’s take the GED audience. Many of them have gone to school, but they are not really function-

ing at the level that they should be. You don’t know that until you are there for a few weeks. Even though they might have gone to sixth, seventh, or eighth grade, they really can’t read or do not understand the materials or the recipes. So that’s a little different. I’m not saying that we didn’t work with an audience that had this same problem before, but it didn’t come out then the way it’s coming out now because we are in a group setting, and there is a different kind of interaction with the group.

Somebody who cannot read will try in a group of other adults — that happened last week. I always tell my co-workers that it takes a lot to blow my mind, but that really did. This woman sat next to me for three weeks or more being very quiet. When you have ten people or more in a group, you don’t always notice everybody, but I remember she was very quiet. She had a

problem tasting the recipe when we did food prep, but that’s not unusual. A lot of people are raised not to eat other people’s cooking, but usually, when they do food prep themselves, they are at least willing to taste it. If they don’t like it, I tell them, “You don’t have to eat it. But you shouldn’t say you don’t like something unless you taste it.” And she would say, every week, “No, no,” and I’d say “Okay” and just leave her alone. Last week I found out what the problem was.

I asked, “Who would like to read,” and everybody took turns around the table. When it got to her, she didn’t say she couldn’t, she tried. When she started and she couldn’t get the three- and four-letter words, I realized that she could not read. So I just moved close to her, and I helped her through it. She did not stop, she stumbled, but she did the whole sentence. To me, that’s a big challenge, and that moved me to tears.

Every time I think I am going to retire because I've been here long enough — it's time for me to travel the USA — something like this happens. I know that I'm still needed because I don't know if she would have done that with somebody else, or if she would have ever have done it. Was it the way it was handled? What was going on in the room? She just did it. I could see ten people saying, "Oh, I left my glasses" or "I really can't see," but she didn't bail out. And I thought "Yes! She is really part of this group now." I don't how many people would have done that or could have done that. She was very brave, and I told her that afterwards. I was proud of her.

I think she would be willing to do this every time because nobody said a word, nobody snickered. They just waited for her to finish, and I thought that was good of the group. That's what keeps me wanting to stay with this job, this program. Because every group is different, but I've touched one person today. Now I can ask her if she would maybe go back to school. This woman is not a GED; she's just in my regular parents morning group. So it wasn't like she's already in the program. I have her for three more weeks. So now, I'll find a way to maybe see if she would like to do another program. I would ask her if maybe she's in one of those programs, because if not, I'm sure we could get somebody who would want to tutor her. In other years, we had students come down and tutor other people and tutor the children. I'll find someone who may want to tutor her. Maybe someone in another group who she doesn't know will want to do that with her. I'm thinking about doing that with this one person who loves to read and has her hand up all the time. To me, those are the things that make this program worthwhile.

Another challenge is when somebody is very shy and quiet in the group, and you want to bring them in to be a

part of the group activities. I love that challenge. When I see that person change within three to four weeks that they are there, I know, at that moment, that I've made a little difference because you have got somebody speaking up for the first time, asking a question for the first time, being a part of a group and sharing with them what she has learned from the nutrition lesson. They may know something or have some great thing that they do at home or something they can contribute to the group. I love that kind of challenge: get them to come back and say, "Gee, I did it. What are we doing next week?"

When we have the graduations, I learn that some people have never got any kind of certificate or any recognition their whole life. The pleasure and the joy that the people show tells you that it was all worth it — even going up those five or ten flights of steps, finding them not home, and having to go back many times. That was in the early days. Even now, it was all worth it to see those people's reactions, their faces, and to know that they genuinely are thrilled. This is the first time they've received any recognition. Even though it's a ten-week or twelve-week series, that certificate means a lot to them. Sometimes, I think it encourages people to want to go back to school. If you don't have your GED or your college degree, go back; go back and do it. They've got that one accomplishment; they think, "Gee, I can do this. It wasn't that painful sitting in a group, listening, participating in the discussion, or getting up to do some activity." I think that we have encouraged and gotten people going and doing things that they probably never thought they could. I just know it happens.

I would describe the work of a community educator as just that: an educator who works in the community and shares information that is important to all of us. We have common

goals: healthy families and a better life. We all need to have certain things in life just to function, just to get along, just to exist — food, water, shelter, clothing, and good health. We all need that. So we are not all that different; we are more alike than we are different.

The community educators have different personalities. They all have different styles, different levels of education and teaching experience. Some came from different cultures, but we're pretty much all doing the same thing. Maybe we have a different style, but the goal is the same. They are mothers, grandmothers who care about people and their communities.

I think most of the community educators — and I can especially speak for myself — have had great personal growth. It's not just helping other people, it's helping us too. When I started, I had never thought about working this closely with people. I never even knew that I could do this sort of work — go out and teach just like that. You think of teachers as having a degree and training. You go to school and learn a lot of stuff you never have to use again, but everything that we share with the people, they are able to use somewhere along the way. It did a lot for me because I was learning for myself along the way. I needed to know about health benefits, nutrition, teaching children, and parenting because my children were growing up at the same time.

When I came in, I didn't know that much. I did know how to cook, but I wasn't a great cook; I am now. I was able to share, and that's all they asked. You go out and share what you know as a mom. That's all they asked. Shopping, cooking, stretching your food dollar, and meal planning — that was it. From that time to now, I can't even tell you what I've learned as a person. I share it with my family, my daughter, my daugh-

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ter-in-law, my grandchildren. So it went on down the line; it didn't just stay with me. I found out that I had a lot of good things going that I could communicate with someone else. I just feel that it was a great thing.

I try to be just me. I don't try to put on airs. I don't try to be above anybody else. I think that I am able to relate to any kind of audience — to children, to adults, even the sophisticated ones, the educated ones or the ones who feel like they are on a different level. I try to make it fun. I have a sense of humor, and I think that can get you through many situations. I am a resident of Harlem, mother of two adult children, four grans, have thirty years experience of community work with families and children sharing real life experience. I'm a good listener, I'm dependable, and I'd like to think that I am very good at what I do. I am very proud of the fact that I have lived and worked in Harlem most of my life. I come from a family of ten children and, by the grace of God, they all turned out to be good people. I love helping people. I'm crazy for sharing information. Anything that I have learned that worked for me, I come back and share with my co-workers.

I get very excited when something that happens in the group moves me or moves the other people, and you see some change going on. Somebody comes back and tell me "Oh, I tried that recipe," or "I planned a balanced meal." That's very important if what you're trying to do is to get somebody to move from negative to positive habits. It's one step, and it's something that is going to be helpful to that person. If you say you can't cook beans or rice, and you come back within that two weeks or three weeks and say, "Yes, I cooked those beans, I cooked that rice" or "I used that coupon" or "I made a shopping list"... Whatever the little change you made, I think it's great. I think it's important.

I always try to stay up on the current events of what's going on in the nutrition world and health and share that with other people and encourage them to do the same.

It can be done; I did it. It wasn't hard. I always said I had great fun. I don't talk about family too much because I'm not there to talk about me, I'm there to listen to them. But once in a while, I would make a joke about my husband. He was a man who worked in the evening, and when I did the part-time, he would want me to come home and warm up his food. So I would say to them, "You imagine that? I'm working, and I had to come home and warm

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his food. But as soon as I got smarter, I would say, 'Gee whiz, I cook it. You can warm it up!' You know, sometimes you have to retrain them." And they just thought that was great. I try to make it fun, and I have a great time too. It's no big deal, maybe, to someone from the outside, but it's a big deal to us and to the people we work with. It really is.

If someone was going to start this job tomorrow, I'd tell them be in good health — physically and mentally — because you are going to come in contact with different personalities and different kinds of people that you probably never thought about or know anything about. That is great. Have good feet and good knees. Make sure you have good comfortable shoes and a great personality. Don't be too serious, and make it fun. If other people see you having fun, it makes things lighter. Life is too short

to be too serious about everything. And be willing to listen, be willing to be a good listener. Don't be too free with the advice. Even if you think you know the answer, sometimes the advice that you give might not be received the way that you intended it to be. So sometimes, it's just better to listen and say, "You know, I really don't know how to answer that, but I'll try to see what I can find out." That works every time. You will survive as a community educator if you are willing to go out in any kind of weather, in any kind of community, and be ready for the surprises because you don't know who you are going to encounter in that day's work.

I think EFNEP is all about sharing, sharing information that is relevant to the audience that we are working with. Building community, making them stronger. Giving them the tools to do things for themselves. Simple, everyday things that they can relate to that is going to make

their life a little easier and a little better. Doing that through people that you can relate to and respect and can say "Yeah, I've been there. That happened to me and look, I came from there to here." I often tell them about how I raised my two children. I lived in Harlem all their lives until they went off to college, and I went back to school. It was a struggle, but I did it because I wanted to do better. I wanted to set an example for my children and for the community, for the people that I'm working with. I'm not there to look down on you, to make you feel any smaller. We're on the same level here, and if I did it, you can do it if you want to and you feel like you need to. It's about encouraging, building people up, helping people to succeed. Helping people to just think, "You can do it." To be independent and not dependent.

# profile

## John Nettleton

ISSUE AREA LEADER, COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



I came to this position in 1988. A friend forwarded the position description to me, saying, “This might be interesting to you.” So I found it out through a personal contact. I knew about extension and how it was structured, as my father had taught at a land-grant — Colorado State, and my grandfather had graduated from Iowa State. So even though in New York City people aren’t usually familiar with extension, I understood what it was. Before I came to Cornell, I’d been directing homeless housing programs for Westchester County’s Department of Social Services. That was an interesting, but basically “band-aid” approach to the structural problem of housing; you really weren’t doing anything but keeping your fingers in the dike. I assumed that my job was to structure responses and solutions to a basic problem, when actually the real job was to keep the problem and issue off the streets and out of the newspapers.

The extension position seemed interesting, and I wanted to get back to working in New York City. I don’t see my work and approach here as all that different from my professional outlook or previous experience. Planners come out of two basic traditions, the geographic tradition or the sociological tradition, which usually means either the design (urban design, physical design) traditions or the social sciences. I agree with Patrick Geddes: there really isn’t — or shouldn’t be — a distinction between the geographical and the sociological traditions. I’ve worked

at various physical scales, from the neighborhood scale to the small city scale to regional government (in Ontario, Canada) and a state government (New Jersey, on the original Pineland Plan, a regional preservation strategy). There are some differences, but there is more in common, so the physical scale really doesn’t matter much.

Before working in Westchester, I worked for a number of non-profits, one in NYC working with housing and neighborhood groups. I also worked with a close friend, a fellow Penn graduate, in a consulting firm doing advocacy planning. We were successful, in great demand and involved in a great number of projects around the country, practicing equity planning, which comes out of a tradition from Paul Davidoff, starting early in the sixties. That was great, as long as it lasted, which was until Ronald Reagan was first elected; then all programs were taken out, disappeared, cut, excised. I’ve been in the New York region or Philadelphia since I graduated from planning school, a period of roughly half of my life.

Our emphasis at extension in NYC is on community and economic development at a district or neighborhood scale. A number of the other programs, like nutrition, are household or family-based. They work with groupings of families brought together by different social service organizations, such as Head Start. We’re looking, not necessarily more holistically, but with more of an overview toward what’s happening throughout a given community. Within

**Profile developed by Saori Kitajima and John Nettleton**



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a community, programs can take a variety of forms, from working on food security, such as farmers' market programs or value-added food production (which has an economic development component) to housing programs and land-use issues that relate to re-use of vacant or deteriorated space.

Housing programs have changed, just as the city's program environment has changed. Ten years ago, when Edward Koch was mayor, a great deal of housing rehabilitation was going on, and New York City was spending 250 to 300 million dollars a year on rehabbing vacant or abandoned city-held buildings. They've pretty much gone through that stock, and now it's a question of management, maintaining the existing housing stock, and improving its livability in terms of health issues. There is a growing awareness and sensitivity toward indoor environmental issues, the air quality, materials use, etc. Most people, particularly the population we are working with, single-parent households, poor working families, don't have or haven't had opportunities to develop a lot of independent living skills. Single moms come from other transitional or emergency housing environments, or double up with family or friends, so they don't have the kind of skills people get in multi-generational families. The approach to improving their housing is really part of looking at a local community.

Poor communities aren't poor because there isn't any money floating around, but because they operate like a "leaky bucket." The money, whether from wages or support payments, comes in and goes right back out. It becomes a question of everything from ownership and control of the housing stock, ownership of commercial establishment, and of opportunities to save, to reinvest, and to redirect those capital flows to the benefit of the entire community.

Looking at it in this way, our programs can take a range of forms, depending upon our dialogue with the organizations that we are working with. It's really a dialogue in the sense of either their expression of needs or our discussion with them to come up with a common understanding of what the actual need is. Then there is also an expectation issue. We (Cornell) have a track record in certain areas. That means groups will come to us for certain things that they know we're involved in and do well. I get emails from people upstate who have marketing questions, from cranberry growers from Massachusetts, etc. They found something in the Farming Alternatives journal about us and responded with, "That sounds interesting." I'm not going to work with them on a direct basis, but I can refer them to somebody who can.

Our work comes down to making an assessment of what the critical issues are in the community. Some of the staff have been working with gardening and related groups for twenty-plus years, so there literally isn't a gardening organization or organization working on food issues that doesn't know who we are and what we do, and that role is very well understood. Similarly in the housing area, though that has had its ups and downs. We refer to other non-profits, and they refer groups to us. For example, if it's a group that wants to do something not really directly linked to what we are working on at the moment, we'd say, "Call so-and-so." So there's a very good organization of networks throughout the city.

In Community & Economic Development, we most closely work with the Workforce Development issue area because they are working on the same issues from a different perspective. We are developing new farmers' markets, expanding the existing farmers' markets, and helping to recruit farmers for markets that don't have enough pro-

ducers. We are getting community-based organizations involved, basically to rebuild a system that was here up until World War II, then dormant for fifteen to thirty years, and then came back in the seventies.

We are working in the food area for a couple of reasons. One, there are more resources for food issues at Cornell than there are for a lot of other things, especially since we don't really have access to folks in the endowed side of campus.\* I know most of folks in the Department of City and Regional Planning, but they don't do extension work — that's just the way the game is played. So we are working on food-related issues because there are a great number of resources at Cornell that we can tap into. In that sense, it's opportunistic. It also ties in with the program emphasis. Half of the staff in New York City works in nutrition education, so we work closely with them as they bring the community educators to the farmers' markets in summer.

I think the program we are developing here is going to stay pretty much the same, as I don't think we can attract and maintain staff to build the programs to another level. There is too much turnover in staffing and too much competition for the staff we need. I hope we can do some very good work in terms of demonstrating potential, but I don't see a real opportunity to substantially change how we work in New York City. It's not that there isn't interest in doing more. I just don't think there is an organizational capacity for us to be able to go to the next step. It is really an institutional lack of infrastructure or resolve for us to begin to develop programs. That's not a very positive vi-

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\* Cornell University has both private (endowed) and public (statutory) units. Few faculty members in the endowed units are involved in extension activities.

sion, but that's the experience that I encountered. We work in spite of that lack of resources, but I'm not sure that the model — taking university resources and applying them at a community level to deal with problems or to resolve issues — works here. To work would imply that there is a willingness or interest on the part of university resources to really get involved. There are examples of faculty who can and would do that, but it is not widespread.

I can see community development best reflected through demonstration projects. People, particularly Americans, don't deal too well with the abstract. So the idea of having a local market is much more relevant, and generates much more impact, than talking in the abstract about how local resources might be retained in theory.

The other aspect of community development work that I see is regional in nature. There is a symbiotic relationship between the urban dweller and the surrounding region in terms of environment, in terms of watershed, air shed, natural resources, commuting and communication in the community, etc. We are trying to reinforce that understanding and awareness. Some people call it a bioregion; that's the term used in the Pacific Northwest. But by and large, we are doing that in a political environment in which most people operate in a very parochial fashion. For example in New York, the state doesn't provide regional tourist dollars. They don't provide support for Hudson River Valley as a destination. They provide money for this county or that county, which makes it difficult to develop a regional awareness or understanding of what you are doing. We're also working regionally because, politically, the New York City program is somewhat atypical. We don't have a local association, and we don't get money from the local government. We are really "one off" in the statewide structure.

That regional work with other extension programs gives us a lot of tie-ins with other people and helps to make us more a part of the system. It's the ecological argument; variety or diversity means stability. So we are trying to be diverse as possible in the connections we have with other programs.

We started the farmers' market program from scratch six or seven years ago when Congress cut the urban horticultural program from the federal budget, which left us with staff who possessed decades of work experience and no present program rationale. The Urban Horticulture/Urban Gardening program had operated for a number of years in twelve to fifteen cities. When Congress cut out the budgets, several other "greening" organizations in the city came to me, and asked, "Can we make an economic development argument for continuing this work?" I said, "Of course, absolutely. Let's do that." So we redirected our emphasis from working with groups that were doing community gardens to working with groups that were doing gardens for market-related production. To some of the same groups that we'd been working with before, we said, "We'll work with you, but we'll work only if you're interested in doing farmers' markets." You want to have community gardens, that's fine. There are a couple of other groups that can work with you. We are going to focus on this." So we changed our focus to keep it under the umbrella of programs in community and economic development.

The farmers' market coverage is primarily determined by the producers' decisions, what they are willing to do, what kind of transportation costs and time costs they will bear. It's really a question of their operation, their resources in terms of people, transport, and the time they can be away from their farms. A majority of the producers in the farmers' market system are

within an hour and a half up to two hours away. So you see farmers coming to market in New York City from Kinderhook; some are from Connecticut or New Jersey. It's a straight economic issue — the congestion factor versus their net income from their operation — and what fellow producers are doing, whether they're in an area where a number are coming to a farmers' market. So it's an economic decision by producers as to what they are willing to bear in relation to how much they take home. We'll try to recruit from up to the Hudson River for the Bronx and Manhattan markets. In north Jersey, Long Island, they tend to go to the Brooklyn market to reduce sitting around in city traffic as much as possible.

Each year, we were starting or initiating a market in a neighborhood that was underserved, working with groups that expressed interest in adding that to the program. The first one we did could be a good illustration. It is in HighBridge in the Bronx, just above Yankee Stadium. Workforce Development had been working on a neighborhood capacity building program there to respond to drug issues, via an umbrella group of six to eight organizations. One of those organizations began to develop a farmers' market in front of their storefront operation. They had a rural retreat center in Orange County, so the retreat site could be used for production. The residents in the urban program would go out and work in Orange County, and then the stuff would be brought back and sold at the farmers' market that we helped them to start. Out of that, they made the decision that they wanted to develop their own marketing to restaurants and do their own community supported agriculture out in Orange County.

Our role changes depending upon where the group is in the development process. In the first year, it's a question

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of getting them to look at how a market operates, how to display, how to arrange for people to just move about in front of the market if it's a sidewalk operation. Simple things. "Well, what day of the week are you going to have the market? Is that the day of the week when the parking is on this side or the other side of the street?" Very simple, nuts-and-bolts kind of things. Then they think about issues as the marketers: "Is it in the best place that would have the greatest number of people walking by?" For example, in Williamsburgh in Brooklyn, we helped to start a market at a really nice site, two and a half blocks from the major bus and subway stop, but business remained slow: when we and the groups decided to move it two blocks, business expanded threefold. For an organization, it becomes a question of thinking differently than they would think as a social service organization. They are still doing their social service mission, but they're also keeping an eye on how they are selling, what they are selling, what they are selling it for. All of that is a different mindset. You'd get in a discussion with somebody, let's say a staff person who would be behind the counter. People would be looking around and maybe sitting in a chair reading a book. That's nice, but they are not really tending the business. It's good to read, but now you're working, so you have to think about some of those things, talk about them and see how to make it work out for them.

After a while those start-up questions are no longer pertinent, and you get into questions of growth. How do you want this market to develop? What do you want to add to it? What different members of the community do you want to be involved? Do you want to have more youth involved? Do you want to have some of the older members of the community involved? Then those become the relevant questions,

at that stage of development.

In the food growing stage, the organization may already be involved in growing food perhaps for an educational purpose, a youth science or environmental group. Or, they may have been part of their project at a site outside this city where they have a conference or several programs. So it's really a question of how to get it to fit in their program. There is no real set design method. We are not going in with pre-cooked, off-the-shelf plans, a menu you can choose, A, B, C, or D. Our approach is that we are going to help you to make food part of your program. Now let's decide how you want to do that. It sounds messy, but it's actually much,

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much simpler than saying, "OK, this is a program now of seventeen steps. We are at step two." People really need to be engaged in making things work.

For example, in Orange County, people are not bringing stuff into the farmers' market anymore. They are growing stuff out there. Some of that is going to the kitchen because they have a summer program for kids from city. Some of it has been sold to local restaurants in the Middletown area. They also set up a couple of community supported agriculture projects; families subscribe and buy their food. They are on their own. They still have a market, which they sponsor and coordinate in their neighborhood in Bronx. But farmers who are there are doing their food things for themselves. So it's changed

in that sense. In those situations, we are sometimes involved in helping them make those decisions. Sometimes, we just find out that they decided to go and do this. The important thing is they made that part of their program and they are doing it in ways that suit their situation and conditions.

We usually pay regular visits to project sites. It would probably not be me; it would probably be an agronomist, John Ameroso. In the summer, we recruit summer interns, college students, graduate students, preferably those who know what plants look like. But it's more important that they know how to work in a neighborhood site. We've been very lucky. We've been able to get

people who have a background in agriculture and horticulture. So in the summer, there are anywhere between four to six interns working with staff and with neighborhood organizations.

I really have a coordinating role, a networking role, and also a resource development role in a sense of being primarily responsible for fundraising for additional grants and project dollars. We have some research money from SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education) to look at ethnic markets. I was directly involved in that, and I help coordinate how interns and the other staff work. Part of that is getting a sense of how many people we need and how to find them. For example, at a conference at Penn State a few weeks ago, I went for three days. It wasn't that I necessarily wanted to be away from home for three days, but it gave me a chance to talk about the program, give out some position descriptions, advertise for interns, get the word out that we are looking for some people for summer. So we all do that. As there are very few program

staff, we have to wear a lot of different hats. We have an outline of what we are doing over the year, and it's flexible in a sense that the groups that we are working with have real expectations of what they want.

We are in an environment in New York City where there are a lot of other organizations doing similar work, even on the same issues. So we have to define the niche that we are working with and how we are working with other organizations. In that sense, there may be some competition at funding times. That's not really a big issue; because since we have to pay a university overhead, we are not really competitive, and we're also not going for the small grants that other organizations need to survive. It makes no sense for us to take in \$6,000 so that we end up with \$2,000, especially since that creates an antagonistic relationship with organizations in the community. Instead, we jointly look for funding resources for some projects. Most of the funds and grants that we are looking for were going in co-venture with another organization. It's very rare, at least in our issue area, that we would go out and say, "We need this so that we can do this." We are looking for some funds so that we can do this program with these two organizations and their neighborhoods. It's always very specific in that sense. There is no kind of random, "Oh, I think we'll go out and see ways to handle half a million dollars this year. Let's think about what we can do with it." We don't operate that way.

There are several important things for people to fully understand in doing this work. First, you need a clear respect for local people's concerns and issues. If you are to do it extremely well, you have to be able to drop your ego. You don't have to be practicing Buddhist, but I'm sure it would help.

You must also be able to be what I call an active listener, in the sense that

you are not bringing your agenda to convince someone else. You're really working with other organizations and groups of residents to get their involvement, so there's some mutual involvement in working on a particular issue or problem. I have several staff vacancies right now, and I'm looking at lots and lots of resumes of people with doctoral degrees, people with international experience, all of which are very nice. The question, at some point, becomes "Have they had some involvement, even at a research level, with communities, with residents and local issues, so that they have an understanding of people?" If someone has been a policy or data analyst, that's not the kind of person that you want in an extension educator role. It makes no sense; they have way too much baggage. It's hard to find people with the required academic background who can also interact well with people, because as they become more and more academic in their approach, they become less and less interactive. They go up on a didactic scale and down on an interactive scale. So that's the most difficult part of what we do in securing and retaining staff.

It's also difficult in a good economic environment because the skilled unemployment rate is very low. There is a lot of competition for people who can do a good job. A great amount of time is spent orienting new staff, which provides a lot of variety but drives you nuts. That's a system-wide problem in extension, but it is especially chronic in New York City and within one hundred miles of here.

It's also critical to have some vision. People must have a vision, at the very least, of how they want to move their issue or those concerns they feel most strongly about. These folk have a set of interests they want to see become real, and they can share that and generate enthusiasm by the fact that they

are really involved in this more than the "nine-to-five." It's the dedication, but it's more a question whether they have some real interest.

I look for people who are able to enter the community and be part of the discussion without bringing out a lot of baggage with them. That either takes experience, or in many cases involves a political outlook, which is more small 'd' democratic in terms of how you work with organizations. Because they are community-based organizations doesn't always mean that they know what's going on, that they have it all figured it out, or they are traveling in the right direction. The fact that they are locally based often doesn't give them the answers to what's happening, because in many cases there's conflict within a community from competing agendas, both between organizations and within organizations.

In one neighborhood in the Bronx, there are two community groups several blocks apart that are fighting over the best place to put a farmers' market. Neither disagrees that they want to have the farmers' market. They just want their site to be the one that is picked. Everybody agrees that a farmers' market is a good thing for the neighborhood. It is just that group A has its site, and group B has its site. Are they willing to compromise on the one side or the other? No. It sounds hilarious, but the question becomes how can they figure out what they are doing and stop stepping on each other's toes.

There is conflict resolution in certain settings, either between organizations or within an organization in terms of what they are working with on their board of directors, trying to get them to develop an understanding of where they want to go. It's incredibly messy to get them to develop a common vision. How do you do that? You have to get at what's most important to them, get them to explain what is not

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the most important to them, and try to get their agendas out to the open, so that everybody can see what everybody else sees. It's like poker when you've got to show all your cards. We try doing it in a way that we do not become part of the agenda. In another words, the one advantage that extension educators can have, if they do it properly, is that they are not vested with any particular groups in a given community. We are not a community-based organization, which means we won't get those local funds that go to community-based organizations. It also means that we can work in a community between groups, in an environment in which there is a lot of push and pulls without having to take sides. That doesn't mean to be unbiased or not to have an opinion, but it just means that we don't have to see it from the point of view of any given organizational audience. Then you can say, "If you don't want me to be part of the discussion, you could handle it on your own. That's fine. I've got twelve other groups that I can work with." If you are at a point where the organization is telling you that, or somebody at the organization is telling you, "We don't want you here," you can say, "Well, fine, that's ok." But that's usually not what's happening. We are not there to take resources away from them, but to hopefully bring resources, even if it's just people.

One downside to this approach is that since we are not charging for services (which is good from an access or an equity point of view), it also means that organizations and residents who have taken on the culture's market mentality tend to discount extension education. If I'm providing you with free assistance, the fact that I have a master's degree from an Ivy League university and a quarter century of experience as a city planner and neighborhood organizational developer may not be apparent to you. That's the coun-

sel that I'm providing. If I were a private development consultant, I would be charging you three-figures an hour for that advice, and it would be exactly the same advice, the same discussion, and I'd be doing exactly the same workshop on, say, strategic planning for a board of directors. But I'm not charging that. So in that sense, they have to understand that it has value for its own sake rather than for its dollar or exchange value.

That creates the situation where you won't get a quorum for a session with board members. You need to take that up ahead of time, "Look, this is valuable to you in terms of your time and my time. So there are eleven of you,

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and we are going to have a workshop, and anytime we have a session scheduled, at least seven or eight of you will be there. If we get there and there are six of you, we've all just wasted our time getting here, and we'll will try harder to get the rest of your friends together next time." Of course, if you are in the Rockaways, it's an hour and a half by subway; you've just blown half the day getting there and coming back. But the point is you are not doing it to be hard-hearted. You are doing it because you value their time as much as you value your own. That's the approach you have to take. As long as you understand what you are doing, I think that you can get that across. The Monday Morning Memo that Merrill Ewert, former director of Cornell cooperative extension

sent out this week said, "It ain't bragging if he can do it." Basically that means that if one can really deliver the goods, then people will understand that.

I think that it's very difficult for small community-based organizations to operate because they have hard time choosing the things they want to work on. It makes goal-setting really difficult. Also in typical, traditional extension approaches, you used to do it on evenings and weekends. People don't have evenings and weekends now. Folks are working two jobs. Everybody is doing something every moment of the day. With such competition from a lot of different directions, it is very hard to get people in a setting where they can work together on the common issues. It's hard to bring people together. It's harder than it was a generation ago, and it's harder in urban neighborhoods.

Let's take a look at an organization in Brooklyn where we worked with lots of immigrant groups.

There is a new group from Cambodia living in downtown Brooklyn. They are not coming out for any workshops. They are scared to death. Once it gets dark, they go home and lock the door. You have to think what time of the day you can reach them. We work with organizations that are working with immigrant groups. We're not going into the community saying, "Hi, we are from Cornell. This is Mr. Smith and Mr. Lever, and let me tell you about the land-grant university, Abraham Lincoln and Liberty Hyde Bailey." No. We are working with organizations that already have trust with the community, which gives you an entree into the community because of that gatekeeper. You use existing social infrastructure and, in most cases, work on issues where your

involvement is well known. You work in a neighborhood where you've been working for x-period of time. In New York City, out of the fifty-nine community boards, each with between 105 and 140,000 people, we work in only ten to twelve boards, or one out of every five communities in New York City. We are really focused in that sense, both in terms of where we already have a track record and don't have to explain who we are, and also in those neighborhoods interested in what we are already doing. For example, we are doing a great deal of work in East New York. There is a lot of vacant land, and there are a lot of groups that have been doing community gardening and raising stuff in the side yard next to them since the 1950's. So that's very fertile ground in the sense that those groups are already interested and doing it. We jointly work with those folks, the developers of farmers' markets, and help additional people grow for that farmers' market.

Twenty years ago, we were doing youth environmental education in Thomas Jefferson high school there in East New York. Ten years ago, we did a summer program at that same high school, teaching kids to do a neighborhood survey looking at street trees and vacant lots. Merrill Ewert came out in 1990-91, and did a PAR [participatory action research] project on it. So we've been working in that neighborhood for a long time. It may be different people, but when we go back out on an issue, somebody will come up and say, "I remember when you were here working on so and so." So there is some continuity in the sense of some of the work we were doing. In relative terms, we have a citywide staff of seventy-five for eight million people. That's what, about one per 100,000?

These are skills that you gain if you work in a number of different settings. If you are in a setting where you are dealing with homeless issues, and

they are politically charged, you learn how to deal with press and media. I don't particularly need those skills right now, but if somebody calls me up, it won't be the first time that I talk to a newspaper reporter. In each setting, you gain something that is useful and something you will forget and never see again. But mostly, you just try to connect those useful skills together and hang on to them and improve them so that they get better. For example, when the students came here to Harlem, I started my talk by asking "how much time do I have?" There are a certain number of us doing the presentation: the worst thing you can do in that setting where five or six people have to talk is for everybody to go over by five or more minutes. You just respect that, because if you do go over, and you are the first person or the second person who was over five or ten minutes, by the time you get done, the last person gets up and they have one minute to do their thing. You're doing it both to help out your colleague and also to keep the people in the room, who are sitting there and putting up with you, from getting bored and falling asleep. You're not just doing it to watch the clock, but as a sign of respect for everyone there.

A similar conflict I have to work with staff on, particularly new staff, is when do you start your meeting. You are working with an organization; the meeting is scheduled at 7:00. You are in a neighborhood where people are walking in 7:15, or 7:45. So do you wait until everyone is there? What's everyone? Does that penalize the people who actually came on time? Yes. If you're working with a group at a meeting scheduled for 7:00, but all come at a quarter to 8:00, then you might as well schedule it for quarter to 8:00. If you do that, and it's in a far-away neighborhood, you're going to have to take a car service home. You are out in the middle of Queens at 10 o'clock at night, trying

to get a cab. It's not a minor thing or even the most important thing you are working on, but it's something that people need to address.

The first organizational group we worked with was up in HighBridge, in the Bronx. They were taking the kids out there to work on their production site at 9:00 in the morning. They all get together by 9:30, and they get up there by about quarter to 11:00. So they'd be getting out there in the field at 11 o'clock. It's summer, and it's hot. Farmers don't start working at 11:00; they're coming in for lunch at 11:00. And you don't bring kids, put them in a van with the windows down and drive up there, and put them out in the field. It's 85 degrees; they would stroke out. So you have to then turn around and say, "Well, maybe I should just create a program for the kids who are staying there during the week." You have to think of it in real time, as you're dealing with the real world. What happens if there is a thunderstorm? Is this something you have to plan to do during the day? Or is everybody going to sit around and listen to rap music for four hours 'til the clouds go by? Those are all things that have to be factored into the kind of programs you are helping to put together. And in doing that, you have to be aware of, particularly, the cultural issues as well.

I think there is the opportunity to make a difference here. But I'm not sure that it's in the present structure of the extension system so that we can make a difference as well as we ought to. Developing markets and working with groups to do actual projects, that's the easy part, because that's something that they are interested in doing. You can help them with that, and there will be a great of respect and support. I'm talking more about what you have to do to bring resources from the system or from the university to the project or the program. That's the most difficult part of

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the problem. It's not working in the community. It's getting everything else out of the way so you have time to work in the community. We are an NGO in a sense. We are sort of a hybrid, not really the university in the sense that we're not in the tenure situation, even though we have academic appointments. There's no real academic responsibility except to do extension work.

I think that there has to be a common vision of issues that you are working on with people. My colleagues are people who I've worked with in various organizations who have changed organizations and jobs, as I have. We've been working together on common issues for decades in different settings. We are still working on them in same way, part of which is a political outlook. I don't think this kind of work can be abstracted from how communities and how residents are treated if they lack access to power, politically and economically. We're part of a publicly supported university, and resources are being allocated in a particular way, with decisions constantly being made between commitments to community-based public service and commitments to corporate-funded international research. Some of these decisions about resources are useful to us; many aren't. I understand how these decisions are made, but much of what is going on at the university is not really having any direct impact on peoples' lives, either in urban neighborhoods or in communities in the surrounding region. If it is a public

university and if they are not doing that, then sooner or later, people will raise the question, "Well, why are we supporting a university that isn't involved in or concerned with our issues?" This doesn't just concern New York City City; Upstate New York is an absolute mess. It took the last Senate campaign for people actually to wake up and say,

**We're part of a public university, and resources are being allocated in a particular way, with decisions constantly being made between commitments to community-based public service and ... to corporate-funded international research. Some of these decisions about resources are useful to us; many aren't. Much of what is going on at the university is not really having any direct impact on people's lives.**

"Wow, nothing has happened up here in the last thirty-five years. Towns build prisons as an economic development tool. New York's literacy rate is 49th in the U.S. Etc. Why is that?" And there's still nothing happening. Why is that, and what role can extension play to clarify some of these critical issues and respond to them?

The current issue of city limits, for example, analyzes New York City's approach to giving massive tax abate-

ments to giant corporations to generate economic activities in good times in New York City. They found that, from a performance point of view, they are getting squat for the dollar, and are giving scores of millions of dollars to companies who are hanging out for five years and then moving to North Carolina. So, basically, the city is giving away the store. In working with youth in high schools or at any level, you quickly find that they're not angry because they are stupid. They're angry because they know that they are being given a really bad deal; they have been educated for jobs that no longer exist and prepared for careers that disappeared years ago. Their chances of getting meaningful employment and opportunities for growth or dreams are on the low side of nil. That's why there is that level of anger and that level of anxiety and distrust at the community level. It's because people have been told that they would be helped for a very long time, and they see that it's just not happening. This means you have to be very, very careful in looking at organizations to be critical and tough-minded, and you have to talk about something you can actually do with them, instead of something you think you would like to do for them.

# profile

## Raquel Rios

COMMUNITY EDUCATOR/SUPERVISOR, NUTRITION AND HEALTH



I've been working with Cornell for twenty-eight years. On May 10, it will be twenty-eight. When I came from Puerto Rico, I decided to stay in New York because I saw a lot of opportunity to do something different. I was working as a nurse in Puerto Rico. My sister-in-law told me about Cornell. They were looking for CE's [Community Educators]. Now we call them CE's, but before, they were called "program aides." I decided to apply. For me, that was a big challenge because when I applied for this job, the supervisor said maybe I couldn't get the job because I was so highly qualified. But I said, "I need the job" because of the bills, from Puerto Rico to New York. I needed money. So they said, "okay," and then I applied for a job.

The name of this program was Upacatips. It was a working group for low-income families. There was a series of workshops, six or seven lessons. I was teaching them about budgeting, food shopping, how to stretch their money when they go to the supermarket. I used to go to the supermarket and teach the parents about unit pricing, how to compare prices with the labels. That program lasted maybe for three years. When the program finished because of funding, they transferred me to this program, EFNEP [Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program].

Compare 1974 to now, and there's a big difference from when I started at EFNEP. We used to do home visits. We used to go to different houses and teach

basic nutrition. So it was with only one person, the homemaker. Now we do it in a group setting. We need six to seven participants in order to do a group. We used to do seven to eight home visits a day, everyday. Now we only do two to three groups per day because we need time to travel and do records. We use the same materials, and we tell them that was a lot of knowledge and a lot of information for only one person. So for me, now it's better.

We teach basic nutrition according to participant needs and interests. Ten to twelve lessons. Just basic nutrition — and food shopping, food safety and information about parenting. They learn more about fruit and vegetables according to their needs and interests. I use a lot of visuals because some people don't know how to read and maybe write. So we use a lot of visuals: models, comparison cards, everything depends on the group. Some agencies we go to are English as a Second Language beginning programs. They're learning how to read and write. Their reading level is low, so we need to adapt whatever material it is we're going to use to that group.

When we go to the first class — that's the introduction to our program — we look around. Sometimes, according to the contact person of the agency, the group is going to need more visuals or more writing. They need to learn to write because they need to complete a twenty-four hour recall of their diet. We have to involve the participants in our program. It's not easy. So when my supervisor, Evalina, gets a request for a

**Profile developed by Shana Herron and Raquel Rios**



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group, the contact person writes something about that particular group, what strategies we need to use to teach them basic nutrition. When we get to these agencies, some people there are willing to learn, and we can't say, "No we can't work with that group of people." So we need to adapt whatever we have according to their needs.

Sometimes, I teach some of the lesson only in English and maybe in Spanish. They need a person who speaks Spanish, I teach in Spanish. They need a person in English, I do it in English. Sometimes we have an English speaker and a Spanish speaker who doesn't speak English in the same group. I have to combine the group and do the lesson in two languages. Now I'm doing this group at P.S. 57, a Pre-K group. Evalina said, "This group is only Spanish." When I went to a parents' meeting, there were ten Spanish speakers and three English speakers, only three. The family assistant said, "Ms. Rios, please. They want to be in the program, I'll help you." I said, "Don't worry about it. Let them stay." So now I'm doing the class in two languages because the English speakers are hungry to learn about nutrition and behave so nice. Now the Spanish speakers are learning English. Whatever I say in English, they listen, and they say it back to me. And they say, "Ms. Rios, bring me the material in English because we would like to learn English also." And the English speakers like it because they would like to learn about Spanish food habits, about the fruits and vegetables. They would like to know the names in Spanish, because when they go to the supermarket they would like to try and buy things like platano (green plantain) and maybe yuca (cassava in English). All because of the group. But it's a big challenge. You have to be ready.

In some groups, the English speakers don't like to wait. When we're translating something in Spanish, they're

telling the Spanish group more than whatever you said in English. So that's a problem we have. Some groups are good. Some participants are willing to be in the group and help with the Spanish speaking. Right now, my supervisor is doing some changes in how to plan this group because when we have a translator, English into Spanish, it takes time. The class is only one and a half or two hours. We need one-half hour to clean and plan for the next lesson. We do the lesson, do the food preparation plus activities.

Because I've been in this program for many, many years, I'm ready for just

**Some of the participants have knowledge, but they are afraid. They say, "She knows more than me." I say "We are here. I am here to learn from you, and you're going to learn from me." I never put myself higher up. We're going to learn together.**

about anything. Right now, I go to this rehab agency, Lucha Vida. The participants have had problems, like alcohol problems, and a lot of mental impairments. They have needs because their eating habits were very, very bad. They want to learn. So I used a lot of visuals, like magazines, comparison cards, and a lot of activities so that they can learn the lesson without writing or reading. We have a lot of activities: the concentration game and "Who am I?" A lot of games. You can learn in different ways. It's not easy to teach that particular group. But they learn. It's only ten lessons, but by the third lesson, I notice that they are changing, some progress.

Some groups have knowledge. When they come to us, they gain more knowledge. Now I have this group at

P.S. 57. This group is a nice group. I have some participants who have knowledge. When I review the previous lesson, I let them come to the front and teach back whatever happened last week. And then, the individuals who don't like to stand in the front and talk, the next week say, "Oh, Miss Rios, can I review the previous lesson?" And I give them the opportunity to come to the front and talk also. Some of the participants have knowledge, but they are afraid. They say, "She knows more than me." I say "We are here. I am here to learn from you, and you're going to learn from me." I never put myself higher up. We're going to learn together.

The big challenge in the team nutrition program is to go to school and motivate the children to eat more fruits and vegetables. I went to P.S. 161 and P.S. 126 in the Bronx. The children were eating, it must have been lunch time. I came in and told them how important it is to have vegetables in our diet. Some children take the vegetables and throw them in the garbage. But I say, "No." I took my time and said, "You know, vegetables are good for you. Broccoli gives us vitamin A and vitamin C." And they say, "Why do we need vitamin A and vitamin C?" So I have to explain something about vitamin A and C in a way they'll understand. Then they'll eat the vegetable. They like fruit, but vegetables are harder. Part of team nutrition was doing nutrition with the parents. By doing, by showing them how to cook vegetables properly, we get parents who go home and try the recipe. Not only vegetables, other food that maybe they didn't like. Doing the preparation is the key to motivating people.

Every lesson, we teach how to

cook a meal. We teach about safety. We look at the recipes. If they need to use meat, we tell them about how to defrost meat properly, about germs, bacteria. When we do the lesson, I ask for volunteers to come to the front. One is going to cut the onion, and the other, the green pepper. Another combines the ingredients. So hands-on activity is another way we teach. Then they say, "Ms. Rios, I went home and tried the recipe, and my family liked it." If they don't drink milk, they say, "Ms. Rios, now I'm drinking more milk," just because I explained The Food Guide Pyramid and gave them some handouts that I use.

If they don't like the vegetable, I don't try to force them the first time. Maybe by the third or fourth time, I'll combine that vegetable that they don't like with one that they'll like. We have a lot of vegetables, and some people have likes and dislikes, so we can change people's eating habits. Some people like soda, so I can't say, "Don't drink soda." It's better to start changing their eating habits little by little.

By the ninth lesson, they come to us, and they tell us about how this program changed their life. Like reducing weight. I have some parents who are overweight, so they start cutting down on sugar, salt, fat because we explain the percentage they need daily. Sometimes, they used to put three or four teaspoons of sugar in their coffee. They cut it down maybe to two, and then to one, or sometimes none. They come to us, and they tell us the progress. And it is not only them, but the family, how the family has changed their eating habits. When we enroll a family in the program, we have a questionnaire that they complete. The first one is at the introduction, and the last one is when they're going to graduate. We compare the entry and the exit. By the third or fourth lesson, they write the changes — how often they include bread in

their meals, how they're cooking the vegetables. They're drinking more 1%, lowfat milk, or maybe 2%, and they used to drink whole milk.

I don't know what it is that makes people change. We just start teaching about cooking something simple, like Chinese fried rice. They like that recipe. They used to buy Chinese fried rice and spend a lot of money. But when we do the Chinese fried rice homemade, and when they see the ingredients — how we're going to cut the onions and green peppers and also help each other cooking... I don't know what it is. They cook, then we sit down, and we eat whatever we prepared, and we talk. We share and we pray before we eat whatever they prepared. With the other programs and the nutrition program, all together, they make big, big changes.

We give a certificate to the homemakers when they graduate from the program. Most of these participants have never received a certificate in their lives. When we present the certificate, they are so happy, not only because of the certificate, but because they've learned in those ten lessons, and they deserve that certificate.

These parents are coming to learn nutrition, but we do more than that. When they need the WIC program, we refer them to the WIC program. When they need public assistance, we refer them to the public assistance program. This program has been in the community for so many years because we work together with the community. And not only with the community, but with the agencies. Public assistance knows that we're trying to get these parents ready to go back to work, back to school, and stop taking public assistance. They know that basic nutrition prepares them for deciding what they're going to do for the future, to go back to school, to do something.

Sometimes, they have problems in

their families. We try to motivate them to go to another place that would help them do better in their lives. If their baby has asthma, we can't do anything about that, but we can refer them to another agency.

We listen. When they come to us with problems, we listen. We take time. Remember we teach only nutrition, but we take a few minutes to listen to them. Before class starts, they come to us, "I'd like to be in the program, but I have this problem..." They say it with confidence. They know whatever they say to us, we're going to keep it to ourselves. We look for some help for them, and then we teach about nutrition. But we've found a lot of problems. Marriage problems, husband, wives, their children, teenagers. They like our program, so they stay. But we have to listen first.

I'm very sentimental, or flexible. When I see the people with problems, I like to help them. I don't know what it is. It's something inside myself. Years back, I went to the Metropolitan Hospital, and I was doing basic nutrition for pregnant women. This teenager, she was pregnant. She told me that she was going to have an abortion. So I took time to talk to her and convince her to do the best for her and her family, but that it was not a good idea to have an abortion. That was her problem, but I was still thinking, when I saw her, about what would happen later. It's better to talk to her family, talk to her father and her mother. And you know what happened? She did it. She talked to her mother and her father, and she had the baby. That was years back. Once she called me and said, "Miss Rios, thank you. Because of my baby, I'm really happy. I got married." So she's in a happy family. It's difficult to explain how you feel. I had the nursing background, and I saw a lot of problems. People came to me asking for help. I've tried to combine and apply whatever I know to their problem.

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At places like the rehab program, you need to be strong. Working with people with problems, like drug problems, alcohol problems, you need to be very, very strong. So those programs, they need you, and they come to you, “I have this problem.” You have to find a way to explain to them, “Think about yourself. You need to go to a social worker, also. You need to talk to them. Please go back to school. Think about your family.” They break your heart. That’s only the rehab program. It’s hard to work with them. Sometimes I feel like crying.

I remember at Lucha Vida, I had this homemaker who was a grandmother, sixty-five years old. Guess what happened. She needed money for something, and she started selling drugs. A sixty-five-year-old grandmother! She came to me, and she told me her problem. My God! She was part of that program, Lucha Vida, which means, fight for your life. Do something about your life, even though you are going down the drain. Do something. Stay alive. With this grandmother, I just listened to her. I gave her good advice. “Now, think about your life. You’re sixty-five years old, but you’re still alive. Do the best thing. Forget about what happened.” But she came to me, and she started crying about what happened in her life that she went to rehab for nine months.

I’ve been with the program for many, many years. So many things have happened. Some of my homemakers who, in 1985, were migrant workers went back to college, and now, they are maybe studying nursing, or they’re social workers. One homemaker, in 1989, took just ten classes, and then, she decided to go back to school. Now, she’s a social worker. Our program motivated her to go back to school and finish college. Not only her; I have had many, many participants who went back to school. When they graduate from the

program they ask about college, where we recommend for them to go. So then I come to Evalina, my supervisor, and she gives some suggestions about how we’re going to motivate this person to go back to school. They need a GED, and then they go to college. It’s very expensive, but they work. They go to work during the day and then to college during the night.

Many of the CE’s have been in the program before as a participant. They graduated and became a CE, and then they get the job because they have the knowledge. They’ve been through the same lessons, so they have the knowl-

**We can’t say, “No, we can’t work with that group of people. So we need to adapt whatever we have according to their needs. ... It’s a big challenge. You have to be ready.**

edge. We have Carida Maldonado in the Farmers’ Market Program. She was my homemaker. She worked for the farmers’ market last year as a community educator assistant, and now we need a CE, and she would like to apply. She graduated from this program last year.

My son, Reynaldo, he’s in college now. In high school, he did a biography about me. The teacher was so surprised. “Why did your mother stay working as a community educator? Why doesn’t she work at the hospital?” My son said, “My mother likes Cornell, so she stays at Cornell.”

I used to go to Metropolitan Hospital to teach basic nutrition to the pregnant women. I almost stayed in that hospital and worked with the WIC program. But I liked this program so much that I stayed. I like communication. When I realized that the job was talking and teaching, I liked my job,

and so I stayed. I could make more money as a nurse, but they gave me so many merit raises. I stayed because I liked what I was doing: teaching in the community. I combine my knowledge with the basic nutrition. When I go to this school and they ask me questions about high blood pressure or cholesterol, I apply that knowledge. Whatever I learned in Puerto Rico about nursing, I apply that knowledge to this program.

I’m a “Community Educator III.” “Three” because I’ve been in this program many, many years. I do so many things. When students come from

Cornell, I do some training. I take them outside to see how we do at different agencies. When we have new coworkers, I give them training. When people from the farmers’ market come, I have to get involved in training to some of the employees of

the farmers’ market. I do the schedule when Evalina’s not here. I schedule my co-workers. Plus, I’m going myself. I teach at least six or seven groups. That’s part of my job description. Sometimes I have to write a grade on co-workers, and then let Evalina know how they’re doing. When it’s time for the performance appraisals, I have to give some feedback to Evalina about my co-workers. I combine my knowledge with community education and supervising.

We community educators are “paraprofessionals.” I have co-workers who have been here so many years — twenty years, seventeen years — just as community educators. They have the knowledge. They go to the school or agency; they teach basic nutrition. But at the end, when they retire, they’re going to have only the money, their pension. That’s it. There’s no credit for them. They’re a community educator. That’s it — and maybe a “program

aide.” We don’t have a title like “nutritionist.” When I compare my profession with this, the community educator, it would have better for me to go back to Puerto Rico and keep on working as a nurse there, making more money. Or maybe stay here in New York and take the test and have my license and go back to the hospital. But I stayed with this job because I like what I’m doing. I’m working with low-income families, very poor, poor people. People who need us. That’s why I stayed. And then I compare a “community educator” with other people who have a master’s degree. Sometimes, my co-workers feel that they are nothing, just a community educator. But I often motivate them, “No. We are doing great.” One of our site coordinators always says that without the community educator, EFNEP would go down the drain.

This program is thirty-one years old. When we go out and teach basic nutrition, the community is eating the best that they know, and they’re healthier. They apply whatever they learn. They go home and apply this knowledge in their family. They call and request our programs. At the end of the three months, we graduate people, and then we start another quarter again. In April, we’ll start a new quarter because every three months, we go to these different agencies and do the program. We have a lot of agencies pending now for April.

Some agencies, because of the good job we’re doing, call back again for the next quarter. But we need new agencies; we can’t stay in the same agencies all the time. We need to spread the program. This program has been in the community for many, many years because we don’t stay in the same place; we try to search for other agencies.

Something I am proud of is that every time Evalina sends me to another

agency, the agencies I worked at before call her and ask, “Where’s Ms. Rios?” They miss me. Like the Boys Club. I was working at the Boys Club for eleven years, but my co-worker is doing that now because I’m doing another group. So they call; “What happened? The children ask for you. When are you coming back?” I say, “I don’t know, maybe in the fall I’ll be going back.” That made me cry because she called me at home, “Ms. Rios, what happened?”

**Whenever we have a new community educator, my advice to them is, “Be Honest. Be yourself. Try to do your best. Be flexible. Don’t try to put yourself up high.” If they follow my advice, they’re going to be a good community educator because working with people is not easy.**

Last Friday, I went to a new agency. Evalina said, “Raquel, this agency needs you to go and do the introduction to this program and do only one lesson, the food guide pyramid.” So I went last Friday. Guess what happened. The agency wants our program. It’s a new agency. They already called Evalina back. We’re going to work with them starting in April.

When my co-workers have some questions about nutrition or health, they come to me and say “Raquel, I need this information.” They ask me questions. So I say, “Okay, this is the answer.” They go back to the agency and explain to the participants. I had a big challenge last year. I went to immigration, and I did a presentation for the officers. I said, “I don’t know about this,” because it was in English, and I’m a Spanish speaker, and I have my accent. But when I explained the program and

asked them for any questions, they were so proud. They liked the program, and they wrote Evalina. She showed me the letter. Wherever I’ve gone, I’ve tried to do my best. Always.

Whenever we have a new community educator, my advice to them is, “Be honest. Be yourself. Try to do your best. Be flexible. Don’t try to put yourself up high.” If they follow my advice, they’re going to be a good community educator because working with people

is not easy. When you go to this agency and you have twenty people waiting for you, you don’t know what’s going to happen — if they’re going to like you, if they’re going to call Evalina and say, “Please, I don’t want her. She’s not going good. People don’t like her.” Some agencies, when they don’t like a community educator, when they think the educator needs more training, they call.

Sometimes, I take my tape recorder, and I tape myself to see the mistakes that I’m making because nobody’s perfect. I come home, and then I listen and think, “I need to do this differently.” Even now, I’m still doing it. I know the food guide pyramid, but always, I go back to my lesson plan, and I try to read again. You never know the participants who are waiting for you.

Right now, I give the community educators in my group a lot of training, like how to do a presentation and how to communicate with the participants. They’re doing a good job. Some people get nervous, so I say, “When there are twenty-four people in front of you, imagine that it’s only one. You have knowledge. You have confidence in yourself. Forget it.” That’s what I do. I have confidence in myself, so I go and I try to do my best.

# profile

## Gretchen Ferenz

LEADER, ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AREA

I've always had a passion for people, education, plants and the outdoors. I guess it goes back to when I was thirteen and was working in a commercial greenhouse. I just loved it, although I missed having people around. There were a couple other workers and occasionally clients. Then, while I was a sophomore in college, I was studying horticulture. I worked for a commercial landscaping operation. I had to get the job myself so I could obtain credit through a cooperative education program at the college. Through that experience, I met an extension educator from Rutgers who served as my sponsor. At the time, she was one of only five female agriculture agents in New Jersey. Her work was very inspiring to me. It was through this relationship that I learned about cooperative extension. I knew then that that was what I wanted to pursue as a career. So I went on to get my master's in environmental horticulture at the University of California–Davis to become better prepared for an extension profession. It was not so much a route to community education as it was to nurture and educate in the context of plants and the outdoors. Agriculture and horticulture was the entrée.

I started working with Cornell University Cooperative Extension–New York City (CUCE-NYC) programs over fifteen years ago. I was hired as its first commercial horticulture specialist which was really a terrific opportunity in that I could develop some new education programs. I was working with

professionals throughout the city who came from different fields. They were involved in different sectors of business and government. I helped them address business management needs, landscape plant design and management needs. There were many other staff involved in consumer horticulture, primarily doing community horticulture work with individuals and community gardens and schools. We were all part of the Urban Horticulture Program. I worked primarily with professionals, and they were working more with community residents. Again, that was a unique experience to me.

As I was working with the professionals on business management needs and commercial production, their priority needs began to focus on issues related to the environment. My work began to shift and, at the same time, I was fortunate to be part of a team here that provided leadership to the organization in a reorganization of CUCE-NYC as an issues-focused, team-based organization. Our intent was that we would be more problem-oriented and more responsive to needs. At the same time, we were trying to focus on very relevant issues and on delivery methods so that we could have the greatest impact using the limited resources we had available. Community horticulture had been a part of our history, and we had a great deal of credibility in this area. The needs remained, so as part of the reorganization, the staff resources and the successful approaches we'd used in our urban horticulture work became part of the larger environmental issues



**Profile developed by Nancy Franz and Gretchen Ferenz**

umbrella. It is what we now refer to as the Environmental Revitalization & Management Issues Area that I provide leadership for.

Every four years, we go through an intensive needs assessment process, and we determine what our long-term strategic goals and objectives are for the entire organization, including our issues area. Needs get assessed, and objectives are revised and updated on an ongoing basis. Primarily, the two areas of focus in environmental issues are natural resources and environmental management and science education, technology and environmental health. When the opportunity to collaborate in the Garden Mosaics project was presented to us, we considered our involvement. We saw links through community horticulture to sustainable methods of improving environmental quality at the community level and educating youth and adult participants in some of the ecological and science-based practices that had sustainable value. That also helped to address individual and community needs through urban gardening such as wanting to come together for social purposes, wanting to grow food for their own use, improving their local neighborhood environment through urban gardening. This project tied into the work that we were doing in our plan of work. It fit in very nicely.

The implementation of Garden Mosaics didn't begin until October of 1999. But it started a long time before that. At least a year before that, my colleague Marianne Krasny, who is an associate professor in the Department of Natural Resources at Cornell, first conceptualized Garden Mosaics and developed a proposal to the National Science Foundation (NSF). It was an integrated research and education proposal. She had done an excellent literature review. She was particularly interested in practices of urban garden-

ers who were using sustainable ag techniques that were brought with them here to the U.S. from their home countries or from the south. She saw the opportunity for children to learn from the elder immigrants as they were practicing their garden methods here in inner-city neighborhoods and also to record and to learn the history of cultural practices that have been passed down through generations.

When Marianne was waiting to hear back from NSF — or shortly after she received a rejection notice, I'm not sure which came first — she contacted us in the city to see if we had an interest in working with her in modifying the program proposal and resubmitting it to NSF. This is how we first got involved. We considered our mutual interest. We considered our collective expertise and available resources as well as other resources we might tap. We considered how a project like this might support our broader objectives in the Environmental Issues Area. When we are deciding which projects to get involved in or to develop, we also think about how it might strengthen our capacity for the future. This related back to our history with the Urban Horticulture Program, but also, as we were moving towards sustainable environmental management at the community level, we had an interest in the relationship of this project to meeting those objectives. We're always trying to better examine what might come up because it is important to be relevant, to be prepared and to be responsive.

From this point on, we were engaged in ongoing conversations and program development with Marianne. We formulated objectives, outcomes, methods and educational strategies. We began considering our potential partners, both campus faculty and extension educators located in other cities throughout the country. Also, particular to NYC, we began considering po-

tential community partners. We worked on targeting the audience, considering how they would benefit, how they would be involved in shaping the program, what our research and our extension objectives might be and how results would be applied with our audience. Then we began thinking about PAR [participatory action research] as a major component. We considered where we would get funding and other support, program duration, our roles, and the roles of others.

Marianne learned from NSF that the original proposal had not actually been reviewed by the NSF granting program to which she had submitted it, so it wasn't selected for funding support. She learned from a program officer there that it would be better to submit to an alternate granting program. I think it had originally been submitted to the informal science education program; they suggested that it would be best to submit to a professional development program at NSF with modification to the proposal. We were on a mission to redevelop the proposal and secure funding. Marianne had been working on it for a very long time. Now we'd been engaged in working on it for a long time with her. We were still considering NSF as a potential funding source, but at the same time we learned of some program objectives and funding support that was being made available through Sustainable Agriculture Research Education (SARE). We decided to target that source since it seemed to clearly align with our objectives. SARE's objectives focused on professional development of extension educators and others. This district was the northeast. We tailored our program to this audience — extension educators and others, which was my preference — working closely with extension educators in other cities.

Marianne asked us to be involved in two primary ways: first to collabo-

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rate in the overall program proposal development, including my serving as a co-principal investigator along with her, conducting recruitment for cooperators from multiple cities in the northeast, contributing to the program planning and the evaluation, and collaboratively planning and conducting a primary training session for all of the cooperators from the northeastern cities who would be involved in the project which would be held in our offices in NYC. That was all in the program development realm. The second was to have NYC serve as a site for project implementation. We agreed that we would have two project sites within the city, and that we would ask the other cities that would be involved to each conduct one project.

Shortly after we submitted the proposal to SARE, we also submitted a version of the proposed program to the directors of CCE and the Ag Experiment Station through a funding mechanism involving the SPC's [Statewide Program Committees]. The Request for Proposals was for integrated research and extension education. We felt very strongly again that our proposed project met this criteria. At that time, we didn't have a clue as to where the proposal stood with the SARE review process. After three years of really hard work, especially Marianne's diligence working on this project, we were all very enthusiastic about it. We thought it was a strong program. We thought it addressed important needs of extension and community educators and youth and adults in urban communities. We also thought that it would help to address the needs of residents and communities in utilizing sustainable approaches to environmental management as well as to engage youth in civic responsibilities to be good stewards in their neighborhoods and the environment.

The staffing structure that we use

is that Caroline Tse, who is our program associate, Barbara Smits, who is our executive staff assistant, and I comprise an administrative team. Caroline works very closely with me on long-term strategic planning, program development, and fund development. I provide overall visioning, leadership and support to all of the professional staff in the area. Also, we have program work teams. The teams vary in their composition, what types of positions comprise the teams, and which specific individuals and what expertise they bring to the table. The staff that comprise project teams are program staff; they implement

**When we are deciding which projects to get involved in, we also think about how it might strengthen our capacity for the future. ... We're always trying to better examine what might come up because it is important to be relevant, to be prepared and to be responsive.**

the projects. When Caroline and I are doing program development and developing a proposal, it is very broad. It is a conceptual plan, a framework. It has parameters and, hopefully, it will have funding attached to it. Once a project is selected for funding, it primarily becomes the responsibility of one of our team coordinators to provide that day-to-day leadership in project implementation. They guide the other team members through delivery of the program, and they do all the fine-tune planning of a project, the delivery of the project and evaluation of it. It is rare that I get out of the office and have the opportunity to do teaching. On occasion, I will visit a community site. The opportunity to teach comes up every once in a blue moon, and it's a great reward.

About three years ago, we put out about eight proposals — nothing, nothing, nothing. I hired a new team coordinator; he comes on board, and I said, "You'll be great providing leadership to this and that (which is now pending), if it comes through. This area will further develop your strengths or interests that you have," and so forth. Then we waited, and we waited, and we waited. Two months passed, three months passed, four months passed — nothing. Entire proposal review processes were getting postponed to the point that he came and said, "You've got to give me something else to do while I'm waiting."

I said, "Believe me, if and when they happen, you are going to be swamped." Just knowing that we have these kinds of experiences, that these things happen, adds an important perspective to planning.

It turned out that after that person left, Ainsley filled that position. Ainsley started with us in July. We'd been working on the Garden Mosaics program development for three years at that point. It must have been May, June, or July that we learned from SARE that it was funded. It was selected for funding by SARE and by SPC for a project start date of October 1. The timing with Ainsley's start date was perfect. That just never happens! It just fell into place. With Ainsley on board, he could become familiar with the history and the work and have extra planning time, as well as visit communities to get a sense of their interest to be engaged in the project. We weren't rushed, and he just fit right into it. It was fabulous.

Also, we had some staffing changes going on here in the office. To meet an organizational need, I had to give up four community educators who were each working in the Environmen-

tal Issues Area either at 20 or 40 percent of their time. That totaled a full FTE. Then, I was given the approval to create a new position for a full FTE, and I created a resource educator position focusing on community horticulture hoping, indeed, that this project would be supported, along with supporting other related initiatives that were either on board or pending. That got approved. That person had just started in February and was working on some other projects. When this project got approved, Ainsley came on board. So here we had Veronique, Roz (who was already on board), and Ainsley all geared up and ready to go. What makes me happy? When those things work. It doesn't always happen that way.

Projects are indeed the great learning that happens under the direction of great people on staff who are very competent, very talented and very resourceful. They carry out the project within the parameters to meet the broad objectives and intended outcomes of proposed program proposals, but they're doing day-to-day tweaking. They need to be because you can't determine any situation clearly in advance, and we're always trying to be responsive. There are always unanticipated things that come up. My role, and the roles of others here who work closely with me, is very much a supportive role. We are back in the office. We're helping to do the program marketing. We're helping to get resources that weren't otherwise anticipated. We're helping to troubleshoot problems (although the staff are great at doing that on their feet anyhow). It's a leadership role that is long-term leadership and planning and then very much a support role. It's not any different for this project than for any others.

Since the SARE-funded proposal was targeted to the northeast, we were recruiting extension educators as potential partners from Philadelphia to Bos-

ton. Caroline did all the recruiting work. I gave her some suggestions of folks to contact, either individuals whom I'd worked with or extension programs I was familiar with. She would contact them and promote the opportunity to get involved and gauge their interest and their potential to be effectively involved in the project. There was the recruitment of potential partners in the cities. We fleshed out some criteria for what kind of partner and project site and participants would be needed to address the objectives and be suitable to the project such as the level of capacity they would need to have for the experience. I think that was a good guide for Caroline, as she did much of the recruitment effort on the telephone. I don't know how many cities we started with, maybe ten or twelve.

We ended up selecting five cities besides NYC. Four months into the funded project term, we held the big training session. At that session, we got a sense that the city partners — extension educators and community partners — were in different places on the board. Even though we had fleshed out the criteria, we soon realized that they didn't meet all of the criteria, and so we were unable to move forward. We learned through that interaction. There's nothing negative about it. We're constantly learning, and we love learning, making mistakes and learning from them. But we learned at that point that we should have taken — and will in the future take — additional steps to make sure that they fit the criteria and that they understand why the criteria is important, that they take certain measures to meet the criteria prior to getting to what would have been stage two. For example, one or two groups from cities came there not having a clue who their community partner would have been. It was intended to be a collaborative effort at the city level — both the extension educators

and the community organization with its community educators, its gardeners, its gardening site and its youth. They came to the training session unprepared. It could take four to six months to make the progress needed. These are the kinds of things we learn day-to-day in the projects. Sometimes you can apply it from one project to another, and sometimes you can't.

What would we do differently? We would be more specific, more definitive about the criteria and ensure that people were on board. Sometimes, you can look at this approach and it seems kind of negative. But on the other hand, we are accountable for external funds. We've got our own resources that we've got to be accountable for how we're applying them. We have a limited timeframe with a job to do, and a bunch of other people who are involved and want to accomplish the outcomes within the timeframe. It's very difficult to bring another group to the point you need them at if they are lagging behind that much.

Marianne also had identified a couple of individuals and groups that she thought would be good to be involved in the project, and she made those contacts. One of these was a non-profit organization here in the city that had a good reputation for its work and was already collaborating with CUCENYC on another project, working with another staff member here in the office.

There was quite an unexpected outcome that resulted in working with this partner. We had asked this organization to be involved in planning for and participating in this big training session to be held here in the NYC office. It was one of the first major tasks of the Garden Mosaics project. It was intended to involve extension educators and community partners from all the six cities. In responding to a suggestion that the participants learn how to be sensitive to and use appropriate



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strategies with cultural audiences, we asked this organization to conduct a presentation for the session participants on this topic. They were intent on using an appropriate approach to present this topic and insisted that they do it and that they involve city gardeners in the presentation. We were thrilled about that. We said great! It would be a double benefit in that we would have at least some gardeners in attendance at the workshop since it was going to be held during regular working hours when most gardeners would be working at jobs. They are usually gardening in their spare time and would likely be unavailable and unable to participate in the workshop. We were thrilled about that. We also asked them if they would be willing to serve on the NYC team, addressing the implementation aspects of the project, contributing to the planning and the implementation of the two projects at the two sites that were yet to be selected in the city. We asked them if they could help identify potential sites that met our criteria through an existing network that they had in place, and they agreed to do that as well. They asked for funds to cover their costs for delivering on those tasks. Marianne and I agreed to contract with them based on a scope of work.

Well, talk about unmet expectations! Their presence during the training was so minimal. Two staff members were there for only a short time during one of the two and a half days of the workshop, and they did not bring any gardeners to participate in the workshop or to help in the presentation. The presentation was very clearly not well prepared and did not focus on the topic of cultural communication that we had agreed to, but rather focused on what the organization's work entailed. It was so canned that we were shocked. Marianne and I were standing at opposite ends of the room. I was in the back corner because I was running in and out

to take care of errands. She was up near the front, and I kept trying to catch her glance to signal to her that we needed to intervene and get them on track with the presentation. That didn't work.

It was a real loss. It was clear that the participants saw no relevance of the presentation to the agenda topic. Our workshop was so tightly packed that we didn't even have the opportunity to address the topic at a later time in the remaining day. Afterwards, we went to a group dinner. Marianne and I spoke privately, and she agreed with me that we thought the contract was clearly written and understood by this organization. She was so upset by the circum-

**We saw relationships being further developed in the community between an individual who was from the community center and a gardener at the garden, and among the gardeners themselves.**

stances that she went right over to the director who had also joined us for dinner and told her that they would not be compensated as intended. I think it was the right thing to do.

A positive aspect of our teamwork was that we could effectively provide each other feedback and support. Marianne has said that she values that. We could put our heads together and say, what did you understand? Did we clearly reflect what the intention was? Were we sure that they understood? I think if you work together, you have a certain level of understanding with each other and give gut reaction feedback. This has happened in different circumstances on projects that we have worked on together. I think we have a great deal of respect for each other. We've learned a lot working together. I think it is because we are very outright honest with each other. We don't

beat around the bush. I tend to be very direct. I say what I'm thinking and what I feel. I trust Marianne very much so that I am comfortable doing so, and I think she is comfortable with that. It took a few years before we got to this level of comfort. I think it is all part of relationship building. I'm comfortable stretching limits, taking risks and trying things for the first time. I think Marianne's and my experiences and expertise are so different that we get each other going, inspiring each other. We learn a lot from each other. We get excited about a project, and then it's a go. We do it very quickly and productively, and we have lots of fun. I think

we are working on four projects right now.

Clearly, the strategies that we chose to use in the delivery of the program are extremely educational. We are still developing the program. We wanted to be sure through integrated research and education that

there were real valued and direct benefits for the audiences that we were going to target, particularly community residents, as well as extension educators and community educators. So we decided to use a PAR approach to ensure that they were involved in shaping the agenda of the program, planning the specific delivery of the program, and the application of whatever was collectively learned in the program to meet some of their needs and the needs of the community. Using a PAR approach was very educational.

In most of the cities, the youth who were involved in our project were slightly younger than we think would be beneficial. For the PAR technique, we think the project would best be delivered with a slightly older audience. However we do think that the kids who were involved gained a great deal in learning basic research techniques —

making observations and interviewing to gain information from the elders who were practicing these gardening practices that had some cultural relationship and ecological significance. Even though the kids were young, they understood that. They understood that you generate a research question and how you simply go about gaining information to help you draw conclusions related to that question. They developed skills in doing it as well, like communication skills, teamwork, who would do what?, which question to ask of which gardener?, for what purpose? and so forth. That was highly educational. Also, the self-esteem that develops through educational processes like this is just insurmountable.

The community partners or community educators would be the facilitator or leader of the community group. They would bring the youth to the garden. Sometimes, there was also a head of a garden as well as the gardeners. The project is educational for them as well. We saw relationships being further developed in the community between an individual who was from the community center and a gardener at the garden, and among gardeners themselves. The project was looking at cultural gardening practices with diverse ethnic backgrounds, and so that's what we had. We had this flavor of gardeners from different areas in a garden who hadn't necessarily gardened together in the same space. So we also saw them coming together for the purpose of educating the kids and supporting the kids' research efforts. That was educational for them.

Regarding the educators from the six cities, we all practice extension differently everywhere, yet we have such commonality in our philosophies, some of the methodologies, and certainly, in our commitment and dedication to our work. I think the issues are the same everywhere; it's just the context that is

different. But every project is unique. Every audience and every situation is unique. Educational strategies and so forth that you use are unique. Each extension educator's background and their experiences and their expertise are unique. We all learn from each other as well. We had a workshop in November of 2000 (following one year of project implementation) where we did sharing. A few youth and gardeners came to the workshop, as did the extension educators from all the six cities. That was very enlightening. We learned how things were done differently for different areas, what were the benefits, what were the obstacles. It's

**My son hasn't figured out what I do because I haven't been able to tell him! ... We say our work is rewarding. We say we help people through non-formal education strategies ... to address critical needs. It just sounds like jargon.**

just wonderful sharing amongst each other because it helps to enhance our efforts if we're going to replicate the same program. Often it is also very relevant toward applying what's been learned to another project. Organizationally, that is what we learned as educators.

We learn over and over again through our collaborative efforts with faculty and staff on the campus. I think we find that we very much value what each other has to bring to a program. Each experience is different. Each faculty member and each department has resources that are different, and expertise that is different, and perspectives that are different, as are ours. That's always educational, and that is so much of what I do. So I'm always learning, and I just love it.

We have phenomenal working relationships with faculty throughout the university for all of our different projects. Each one is positive. Some don't always go as smoothly as you'd like. The progress is not what you'd like it to be, but there is always something educational about it. We're always learning from the relationships and experiences we have working collaboratively both with the university collaborators and extension educators in other regions or other counties and certainly, with our community partners.

Now that we're in the second year of the two-year project term, we're in the process of developing an educators'

guide or manual for the program so that we can share this broadly around the country with others who may be interested in doing Garden Mosaics. This is where we have a lot of work to do. We need to incorporate what we've learned. We've got to be sure that we suggest what we think is the right criteria for a potential

partner or strongly recommend that the project directors ensure that that criteria is met before confirming the selection of a partner.

My role is focused on providing a long-term vision for where the Environmental Issues Area is going and a strategic plan for how we will get there — which staff positions we need to have to do it, what configuration of staff and work teams are needed, what fiscal resources, and so forth. I do the long-term planning and strategic resource generation — funds and people and other needed things. I think the major parts of my work are in long-term strategic planning, program development and fund development.

My son hasn't figured out what I do because I haven't been able to tell him! I'm being honest here. I am seri-

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ously looking for help finding concise words in English that says what it is we do. We say our work is rewarding, we say we help people through non-formal education strategies or approaches or something to address critical needs. It just sounds like jargon you know. We work with people, we help with their non-formal learning.

My husband and I have these really close friends. We are social friends and also do some volunteer work together. They had a vague understanding of what I did in cooperative extension. About five years ago, they were at my house and saw on the coffee table a copy of an extension newsletter. That particular issue had lots of articles relating to the Environmental Issues Area and our projects here in the city. I was in one of the photographs and quoted in different articles. They asked for the copy and took it home. The next time we spoke, they said, "Oh my God, now I know what you do! Great work!" It reminds you that no one has a clue because we are not able to articulate what it is we do.

Extension people are caring, passionate, committed people, willing to give of themselves for the good of others — people persons, from an interpersonal perspective. They have good communication skills, verbal and written skills, a willingness to listen and to learn what people's needs are, and particularly, to be sensitive to and interested in helping people who have the

greatest needs.

I feel very strongly about extension staff having strong competencies. There are many people in the nonprofit sector who do fabulous work, such as caring individuals. They are so committed and dedicated, and they make things happen. They are right there on the front lines. What I think distinguishes us in extension is our relationship to the land-grant university, the research university, and our role as educators in higher education. We are community educators working in a profession related to higher education, and I believe very strongly in having and maintaining strong competencies in the technical and in the process areas.

I think it's so hard to recruit people because I'm always looking for so many things. I'm looking for the person who has it in their heart. I'm looking for the person who has strong competencies, has talent, is resourceful, can apply what they've learned and are committed to continuously learning through their work. I'm also looking for the person who is committed to the organization, who has an understanding of the broad organizational philosophies and goals (meaning cooperative extension, the land-grant, the university), who has the research and education background and is committed to people and communities and helping those who are less fortunate learn and thrive. It's a lot. It's very challenging. Recruitment and retention of

quality staff is one of the things that I value most of the work that I do. It is certainly one of the most challenging. I think we have the best staff here at the Environmental Issues Area in NYC, and I'm really proud of it. It is a big challenge to find them and keep them, but they just do phenomenal work.

Where extension educators get their skills relates a lot to different things. Their parents, home and neighborhood environments help to shape who they are. Their past experiences, their life experiences. Their academic training is a very important component. It certainly is not enough, but it is a very important component in ensuring that what we do is grounded, real, cutting edge, innovative and so forth.

Sometimes, folks are coming in more at the learning level, like an intern or program assistant. They gain experience working in communities and addressing problems that are perceived by residents as being of critical importance. They gain skills through experience, and sometimes, from working with other organizations. That's good too. The combination of bringing that, and what is learned here, is wonderful. Like me — being here over fifteen years, I gained most of my professional work experience right here on the job.

Extension is helping others help themselves. Helping others to care and improve their quality of life. It is very difficult to tell the tale of extension and what it is.

# profile

## Marilyn Waters

COMMUNITY EDUCATOR, NUTRITION AND HEALTH



I've lived out in Far Rockaway for thirty-five years, and I simply love the Rockaways. I have been working for Cornell Cooperative Extension for fifteen years and enjoy every minute, helping people empower themselves with new knowledge that will keep them healthy. The traveling gets a little hard at times, for we go from agency to agency and school to school, giving nutrition workshops so that parents, young adults, teen mothers and children will learn how to prepare and select well-balanced meals.

Right now, I'm doing fourteen classes. I have eight youth groups, five adult groups and one teen-mothers group. Two of my youth groups are done in the afternoon from 3:30 pm to 5:30 pm. It's called the Virtual-Y, an after-school program that is located in Far Rockaway at P.S. 197. On Fridays, I work at P.S. 99 in Kew Gardens, which takes me about an hour and a half to get to by train. There, I work with six second-grade classes. They enjoy learning the Food Guide Pyramid, how to plan a well-balanced meal, how to wash their hand for twenty seconds by singing a song, and trying new types of snacks. They also enjoy doing the Food Guide Pyramid puzzle, word-search crossword puzzles and playing "Food Jeopardy."

All the groups that I teach are special, but my favorite is New Beginnings, a teen mothers' G.E.D. and parenting program in Jamaica, Queens. The program is set up where these young mothers, thirteen through eighteen years old,

are allowed to bring their babies and toddlers with them to school. They receive a Metro [subway] card and also a well-balanced lunch as long as they stay in the program. As a community educator, my job is to give them parenting and nutrition workshops for twelve to eighteen weeks.

To me, when you have seen these young ladies struggle to get up early in the morning, get themselves dressed and then dress their children, struggle on the crowded bus and train with strollers, baby bags and book bags, through the rain, sleet and snow and work hard to get their G.E.D, it's so rewarding, you can't do anything but cry. You have to be at one of their graduations to know what I'm talking about. To see how beautiful they are on their graduation day, all dressed up in their caps and gowns, and the babies are in their caps and gowns, and they're marching in on "Ain't no Stopping Us Now," you can't do anything but cry.

They allow me to speak and also give out the Nutrition and Health certificate. I let them and their parents know that this is not only rewarding for them, but it's also rewarding for their teachers, the director and the other staff members. It really is a joyful time for all of us. Just like they struggle, we also struggled along with them, hoping and praying that they would make it — and they did it. I let their parents know that they came to school upset and crying because it was snowing, and they dropped their books; it was raining, and they got soaked trying to keep the baby dry. It was a struggle, but they made it.

**Profile developed by Margo Hittleman and Marilyn Waters**

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And it's so rewarding.

I have been teaching at this agency for fourteen years, and the years of working with them are so rewarding. I get very attached to these young mothers who have had so many problems. First of all, just being thirteen and having a baby is a problem all by itself. Most of them are stressed out most of the time. Maybe the baby's father left them. Some of them are living in shelters or foster care. Others may not be getting along with their parents, and many of them do not have anyone to help them with their child.

Most of the workshops are held in a large conference area. The daycare provider is across the hall with the children. Each one gets enough time to express how she feels. I try not to have one person doing all the talking; we set up a limited time. We discuss different topics such as how did you feel this morning getting up and getting to school on time? How long did it take you to get to school this morning and how could you have made things easier for yourself? Did you feed the baby, or did you get a chance to eat before you left home? Did you do your homework or pack your baby's bag last night? How could you change some of the problems at home?

They learn not to put cereal in the baby's bottle or that it's easier to fix the baby's bottles at night. They also learn that the baby's bag could be done at night with Pampers and a jar of food or a plastic bag with cereal in it. I tell them to make a list so that they will not leave important items out. We discuss how breakfast is your most important meal in the morning, and that breakfast is not only bacon and eggs, cereal, or a bagel. Breakfast could be a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, or leftover beans and rice. It's anything you have leftover or feel like making the night before. The school has milk in the morning, so why not try putting cereal in a plas-

tic bag and bring that along to school with you.

We discuss how to change a diaper, spending quality time with your child and breastfeeding for the pregnant mothers. We also discuss things like "Why did you decide to have a child at your age?" and "If you had to do it all over again, would you do it the same way? Do you have any regrets?" Last week, I asked them, "If anything happened to you, who would take care of your child? Think about saying someone else beside my mother or grandmother because this day and age, they're working too." They sat there, and they thought about it. You hear answers like,

**Sometimes when you walk in, this isn't the time that they want to hear about nutrition. They want somebody to give them some good advice. Or they just want to know that I care about them, that I care what they're going to do with their life. They become your children. \_\_\_\_**

"I don't know, I don't have anyone else" or "The daddy will; my sister will." Then, when you hear four or five young ladies say, "I don't have anyone," it's a teachable moment for me to get back to asking, "Are you eating healthy or are you eating at McDonalds? Are you taking care of yourself by planning your meals, or are you introducing your child to McDonalds? Are you telling me your child eats vegetables, but you don't eat your vegetables? Do you drink milk? You are not being a good role model when you tell them to eat this and that, and you are not doing it. What kind of an example are you setting in front of them?"

We talk about the importance of breastfeeding, how to breastfeed, the bonding, the importance of not laying

the baby down and giving it a bottle. The baby needs to know that you care about him. He needs to feel that love. So that's your and the baby's time.

Some of them might have children in day care. I talk to them about bonding with the child. Do you hang the pictures up, because the child's proud of the pictures? Do you sit down and have your private moment with the child? Or is it always "Stop, I'm not ready for that. Go sit down." How about you talking on the phone? Does the child like you talking on the phone? What about the way you talk to the child, the bad language that you're using? When the child picks up that curse word, don't hit the child, hit yourself, because that child learned it from you or from somebody in that household. So you have to learn to be a good role model. We talk about all these things. We do parenting with them.

I'm just like their mother. I'm the mother of all of them because I cry for all of them when they graduate. When you first go in there, it's "I don't want a nutrition class. I don't need that. I don't need that parenting. I know how to raise my child." They get very arrogant and very irritable when they first come in. But you talk to them on their level, like you don't know it all. You understand. You're willing to listen to them. You're going to listen to their problems. Sometimes when you walk in, this isn't the time that they want to hear about nutrition. They want somebody to give them some good advice. Or they just want to know that I care about them, that I care what they're going to do with their life. They become like your children. They become your children.

And then they graduate. I have some who have graduated, and they've

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gone on to college. One young lady graduated from New Beginnings; she went to college and she moved to Virginia. She opened up a day care center and named it New Beginnings. One young lady now is working on Wall Street; I'm teaching her child at P.S. 197 in the after-school program. Some have become directors of day care centers, or they're working in day care centers. Some become teachers. They're moving on with their lives. We all make mistakes, and I teach them that. We all make mistakes. None of us are perfect. But you do not have to wallow in your mistakes. You grow from your mistakes. You go on.

I have a young lady now, her name is Joy. Joy was having problems with the baby's father. She moved out. She came back last week, and she gave me the biggest hug. She got married. And she said: "Ms. Waters, I learned what you said: I am important, and I don't have to let anybody abuse me. I let him know that you're supposed to be for your children and that I'm just not one of your girlfriends. You're going to respect me." She said, "I walked out. I took my children. I left." She said, "He came back to apologize. He brought me a ring. And he realized that he wanted me to be his wife."

I said, "Good for you." Now he's helping her take care of the children while she's in school, because she's determined to get her GED. And one other thing she's doing: she's my teaching assistant now. She helps me out a lot in class. I have three young ladies in class who are pregnant. We talk about bottle feeding and breastfeeding. They were saying "Nah, I'm not going to breastfeed." Joy was just expressing what she did with her first child, and what she did with her second child, and how different it was. She admits that "When I had the first child, I did everything wrong. I put the cereal in the bottle. He cried a lot. He was irritable.

I was stressed out a lot."

But this time, she said, "I breast-feed and it's so much easier. I don't have to get up at night to make a bottle." The milk was always ready. She said she enjoyed that time, sharing with her child. One young lady said: "I tried it, and I only could do it for two weeks because I was so sore." I explained to her that she was not holding the baby right, because after a week it should have become easier, not harder. And I expressed that even though you're bottle feeding, you can still talk to your child and feed your child.

They ask me, "Did you breast-feed?" No. I'm honest with them. That honesty also is very important for them. I let them know, "I'm a mother. I'm a grandmother. I've made mistakes with my children." But I also say that my daughter breastfed and the child has progressed so in school. Ayani's six, and she's very smart. I explain to the young mothers how she has progressed and how I can see the progress in her more than I can see in one of my grandchildren who was not breastfed. They do listen. We demonstrate at the breast. I also have a doll, and I show them how to hold the baby. Like I said, it's really rewarding.

We talk about helping one another out, calling one another. We haven't seen somebody, maybe they're stressed out. Maybe they're having problems at home. I have two young ladies who were in foster care, one young lady who was living in a homeless shelter. One young lady, even though she had the baby, had to work. We talk about that. They open to you after a while. When they learn that you care, then they open up. And they'll let you know, "It didn't feel so good getting up this morning. I was yelling and screaming. And my mother was yelling and screaming. And I'm trying to get ready for school, and I didn't want to go. I missed the bus. I missed the train."

Some of them come a long way

— from Far Rockaway, Long Island City. I had a young lady who was coming all the way from Brooklyn, with two kids early in the morning. It's not easy. Some of them say, "If I had to do it all over again, it's not that I don't love my child, but I would have waited." I let them know: "He's your man, now. Whose man is he when he leaves you? Do you know for sure that he's your man? He's your man while he's there with you. But who's he sleeping with while you're in school, if he's not working? And why isn't he working? You're better than that. You need somebody who's going to be stable. If he's already had a baby by another young lady and he didn't take care of her, then why do you think he's going to take care of you? Why would you even put yourself in that predicament?"

I was a foster child myself, and my goal was to be a teacher. But I wanted to be a gym teacher. I coached double-dutch. I had many of the young ladies go on to coach statewide champions. I also had a track team of 250 students.

I lived in the projects. To take children to the roller skating rink, or to take them to the movies, cost a lot. I got involved in taking groups of children. I started off with my building. We were going roller skating. I had called the roller skating rink, and they would allow us to come in for a dollar. We had a bus company across the street, and he said he would take the children and all they had to do was pay a dollar. So we were one bus on a Friday night. The next week, I ended up with a thousand children! They came from all over Rockaway. We had ten buses. I would never do it again! At that time, children listened to you. I spoke to each one of them. I got on each bus, and I spoke to them: "I'm the only adult." I let them know that one person could spoil it for the whole bunch. They went out, and all the parents would be there when I'd bring the children home,

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twelve o'clock at night. All the cars would be lined up. We did that until the roller skating rink closed down. I took 250 children on the train to a track meet.

Children just want someone to care about them. If you put that time and effort in, it becomes so rewarding. They love you unconditionally. You're the person that they could knock on the door and tell you, "I have a problem." I guess that's why teaching has become very easy for me. Because if you love people, and someone takes the time out for you, just to listen ... I didn't have that when I was growing up.

You're having problems, and there's nobody there to listen to you. Or you hear that you're never going to be anything. A lot of these children come from that: "You're not going to be anything." And so, you just learn how to listen to people, and things become rewarding. You see a teen mother get her GED after struggling with her baby. You know the hard time that you had when you were coming along, and nobody was there to help you.

I guess it's just the God in me. God is love, and He's compassionate, and He cares about people. And I know that all these years, that's who has been watching over me. And so, I know that just a helping hand would be very rewarding. People don't realize: it's a gift to help someone. It's a gift. That's what you're doing. And so, I guess, by coming up the way I came up, and my husband walking out on me, and not being the father that he should have been, I struggled. I went through some terrible times. Hard times. And my children went through some hard times, because at that time, I didn't know how to say "I love you." Why? Because it was never told to me. Now my children and I, we're able to say "I love you. I care about you." And like I said, it's a gift from God. You learn, after all the knocks and bruises that you go through, you learn

that there's somebody out there who truly loves you. And you learn that there's a God out there who looks after your children. And He looks after you. So basically, that's what it is.

I was always very community-orientated, caring about the children and the neighborhood. A lot of the parents who lived in the projects had four, five, six children. Some husbands left. Some husbands came home, and they were too tired to take the children. They elected me Tenant League President. I was out there fighting for them. In the summer-time, the city would leave our garbage outside for two or three weeks and wouldn't pick it up. The children and I would get together. We'd clean

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up our neighborhood, and we'd put the garbage in the street. We'd block off the main drive; nobody could get through. A lot of people who used that road worked for the Mayor's office, and they sent the Sanitation Department out there.

I walked in the real estate office one day, and this Jewish lady said to me, "Marilyn, Marilyn. Are you looking for a job?" I said "Yeah." She says, "I've got just the job for you." I said "What?" She said "Working for Cornell University Cooperative Extension. Teaching nutrition." I said, "I don't know anything about nutrition." She said, "But they'll train you. You're family oriented. You love people. You love to talk to people. You just love being around people. They need this program to work in the Rockaways. It will work for you."

I went home, and I started studying about nutrition. I went in for classes. I was volunteering, going in to the office in Queens. We had an office in Jamaica Station then. Two weeks before Thanksgiving, I told Maria, "I can't do this any more. I need a job. Christmas-time is coming, and I have to get some gifts for my children."

I went to Times Square, and I was sitting behind a desk, as a receptionist, paging people, interviewing people for jobs, giving out applications — and I'll never forget. Three boys walked in the office, and they wanted jobs. They had to take a little pad and fill out an application. They must have come in about 9 o'clock that morning. A lot of people came in, did their applications, went in for their interviews. These three boys were still sitting there. I asked them: "Do you want this job?" And they said "Yes." I said, "So what's taking you so long? You've been here for hours filling out that application. Bring that application to me." I came to find that they couldn't read. Because it was Christmas, and they told me they had children and they wanted to buy their children something, I filled out those applications for them. They got the job. But they had to promise me that they would go back to school and learn how to read. That night I went home — it was December 1 — and Maria called me and said, "Listen, if you're not here by tomorrow to fill out these applications and go take your picture, they're going to give someone else the job." She said that she had been calling me, but I had teenagers, so I didn't get the messages. I called Times Square and let them know, because I don't believe in just walking off one job and not giving them notice, and they told me to go ahead. I went, and I've been with Cornell ever since: Decem-

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ber 2, 1987. I'll never forget it because I think it was a blessing from God. If I didn't help those three children, how could I help people change their eating habits or change their habits through Cornell?

When I teach, I use different techniques; I have lesson sheets on them, like how to shop. I have advertisements. I tell them: "You spend \$25 at McDonalds. So take that advertisement and shop for me. Show me what you can buy for \$25." They may see that they can buy five pounds of sugar, a gallon of milk, five pounds of potatoes. They can buy a whole chicken. They can buy vegetables. They might have frozen vegetables there 2/\$1. They realize the food that they can buy for \$25, and they see that the \$25 they spent at McDonalds could have been used better.

Another lesson: how should we set up the plate? First of all, you make the plate look good. I tell them, "You look at a Big Mac that McDonalds is advertising, and it looks good. Why does it look good?" We talk about it. The colors make it look good, so what about setting up your plate like that? If you have a sweet potato with some broccoli; the meat is brown, the rice is white. Does your plate look good? Would you want to eat that plate? Then they say "Yes," and we talk about that.

We also talk about the size plate that you give your children. The child does not need the same size plate that you have because that plate looks big to that child. Even though you don't put that much food on it, the plate looks big. So give the child a salad plate, and give her a spoonful. It's better for her to ask you for more than for you to sit there and stress yourself out, "Eat this. Eat that. You aren't finished. You don't get dessert."

Also, what about taking the soda off the table and putting water on there, or putting milk on there? We talk about how advertising plays an important role

in what we buy. In menu planning: if you make a list, if you eat before you go shopping, it's much easier. You're not going to spend as much money. How do you shop? Do you go to the vegetable over to the meat aisle, over to the dairy aisle, and go down the aisles picking up the rest of the food? We talk about how your meat, as you get to the checkout counter, is dripping all over everything else, the contamination of that. They do learn from that.

And we do food preps. We make a vegetable salad. I broke my legs carrying a lot of stuff, so how does it become easier? Three people will bring in tomatoes. Two people will bring in lettuce, shredded already. Two people will bring in some cheese. Two or three people will bring in some tacos. We'll sit there, and we'll make the tacos.

I'll talk about how we don't recommend diets, but if you eat right then you will lose weight. And if you want to cut down on what you're eating, don't cut down rapidly. If you're eating a cup of rice, then eat three-quarters of a cup for maybe two weeks, then go down to half a cup for two weeks. Those kind of things.

I think that the most important thing about being a community educator is loving people and being compassionate. To be a good community educator, first of all, you have to be compassionate. You're going to find people who don't know how to read. They don't know how to express themselves. Sometimes you have to put yourself in their shoes. I have worn their shoes, so I know that I'm no better than them. You never put people down. You always have to be encouraging. If you're loving and compassionate, you can help anybody. But if you go in like you know it all, or "I'm better than you because I have forty degrees," you're never going to make it out there. People are not going for that. They're looking for people who will listen to their problems.

Like I said, you might walk in on my teen mothers, and they don't want to hear about how to feed the child. One of them might have a problem, and you're there. They've been in class all day long; my time might be the time that they want to express that "I have that problem. I'm homeless. I have nobody to help me with my child." One of the girls might say, "I'll come over, and we can sit there. Or we can go out together and take our children with us." So that's what they might need to hear. They might need to hear that "Maybe you need to go to the beauty parlor." They might need to hear that "Maybe if you lay the baby down early one night, you could get in the bathtub with some Dawn liquid; make some bubbles and just sit there. Just clear your mind." Sometimes they need to hear that. And if you're not compassionate, if you say, "No, no, no, you need to know this right now!" ... if it's all about teaching this at that moment, you will turn them off.

They want to know that you're not perfect, that you've been through some problems yourself. If they know that you're not perfect, that you've made mistakes, then they don't mind talking to you. You have to be compassionate and loving to be a good community educator. With that, the teaching skills will come, and you will know how to relate to a class.

If you look at some of these records and the way some of the people have spelled some of the foods, then you have to help them out with it. Look at the way they spelled "chickenkin." Do I make fun of a person like that? Or do I just code the record and help them to learn that better. If I'm talking about bread, cereal, rice and pasta, do I also in my GED class help them to learn to spell these words? If I'm talking about your major nutrients, do I help you to learn how to spell "nutrient" or "carbohydrate," or do I sit there and say "You don't know how to spell that?" So



you have to be compassionate. So many things that are happening in the schools today are because people are not compassionate.

I've got a English as a Second Language class, and they're all Russian. I explained the food pyramid to them, and I talked about good eating habits. I asked them, "What do you eat?" I have fifteen people in that class. And I told Carol Parker-Duncanson, my supervisor, it's too hard for them to fill out the family record. I really was going to drop them. But they said to me: "Oh no, no, no. You come back." I can't do records on them. But because of that first impression, that I thank God that I gave, they don't want me to stop teaching their class. So I told Carol, "I can't do family records on them. But I'm going to do a six-week workshop for them." I get off work at 4 o'clock. And even though that class is 4 to 5:30, I don't mind because they have accepted me. Their regular teacher didn't come in last week, so I figured that we didn't have to have a class. But they said: "No, you teach the class. You teach us foods. You teach us how to eat." And it was rewarding.

Love, compassion. Understanding. Basically that's it.

The work that you do, it's not easy. You've got to love your job. You travel from one agency to the next agency. You have to take public transportation, back and forth on trains and buses. Rain, shine, sleet and snow, you're out here traveling on the bus or on the train. It takes thirty-five to forty minutes to get from Rockaway to the office in Queens, depending on the traffic. From the office here to the main office in Manhattan is an hour and twenty-five minutes. I've learned now to catch an express bus from Rockaway to Manhattan. That's much easier. You don't have to go up all those stairs and down the elevator, because that's what I dread going home. Especially when the eleva-

tors are broken. I catch the E, F, Q, B, whatever to West 4th St., and then I walk upstairs and get the A train to Rockaway home. If I leave the office at 4, I get off the train at 5:30. It's a long ride.

Sometimes you think, "I'm not getting up this morning." But then you think about the classes you have, and say "I've got to get up, because, you know what, you might miss teaching somebody something that day." And it's worth it. When they do graduate, and they know the food pyramid, and the serving sizes, and how to shop, and they come back and tell you, "I saved \$25 shopping" or "The money that I've

**It's a whole lot of love and compassion. A whole lot of love. You have to be willing to give of yourself. People say, "No, your job is not that." But your job is that. ... It gets personal to me. It really does. \_\_\_\_\_**

been spending at McDonalds, I've been putting it in the bank," it's worth it.

I have one lady — every Friday, she would spend \$18 in Burger King because she felt that she works hard during the week. This is the time that she wants to treat her child. So that's \$72 a month. I told her, "You know what. Let's start saving that." I taught her how to make tacos. We made pizzas, fruit salad, chicken salad. And she said, "You know what. I have saved \$154." I tell them, "You put this money away for a rainy day. If anything happens to you, can you maintain that home? The car? The lifestyle that you're living now? That little extra money that you're spending at Burger King, why don't you put it away for a rainy day?"

With my teen mothers, I tell them "If anything happens to you, do you have insurance on yourselves so nobody will have to beg for you to be buried?"

They're taking this into consideration. "What will you leave your child if anything happens to you? But still, you're spending money in the fast food restaurant every day." That makes a difference. They listen. You've got to really put yourself in their shoes, and wear some of your shoes too.

What's hard about doing community education is the tremendous paperwork. I had a class last night. Now all these records have to be coded. This is just one class, [shows evaluation forms] and we have to code everybody. I could teach all day; I just need a secretary to do my paperwork.

Besides that, you've got to go in and put your time in on the computer. It gets to be very, very hectic. I went out and bought a computer. I can't afford it. But I bought a computer so I can really learn the computer at home. Because some nights, if you don't do paperwork at home, you will never stay caught up. Never. That's the hardest thing. But you get through it.

It's worth it because you're making an impression on people's lives — whether they're eating right, whether they're saving money, whether they're doing precautions not to cross-contaminate food, whether they're going back to school getting their education, whether they're going to finish getting their GED. You're making an impression on people's lives. And you can either leave a good impression, or you can leave a bad one.

So that compassion, that love for them, will help them grow, will help them finish getting their diploma and go on. Sometimes, I'm now teaching the child of one of the young ladies I taught how to take care of himself, how to eat right. I can't go anywhere without somebody saying, "Ms. Waters" — whether it's from my older group, my

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teen mothers, my children. The impression that you leave on them is very, very important. When you go back to a class and you hear children say, “Ms. Waters. I ate all my vegetables for lunch” or “I drank all my milk” or “I’m drinking three cups of water a day,” it makes you feel good because you’ve left an impression on that child. You’ve left an impression on that adult or that teen mother.

It’s a whole lot of love and compassion. A whole lot of love. You have to be willing to give of yourself. People say, “No, your job is not that.” But your job is that. You have to give of yourself. It gets personal to me. It really does.

My community didn’t know anything about nutrition and health. Most people ate a lot of meat. If they had one vegetable a day, it was fine. People ask, “What food is killing us?” I say, “Church food.” We do a lot of frying, and we overcook our things. We’ve got the salt pork, the ham, bacon, fried chicken. Or we’re cooking collard greens for two hours. We say it’s good. On top of that, they don’t feel that they matter.

Even I started to eat better. I might

develop diabetes if I keep eating the same way, or develop cancer. I might have a heart attack. And so, I’ve learned to eat better. I’m eating more fruits and vegetables. I’m eating my biggest meal at lunch time and going home and having a salad or a yogurt. I’m drinking more water. I’m taking the juice off the table, and I’m putting milk on the table. I let them know, running from agency to agency and school to school, we go to McDonalds because we can’t carry our sandwich with us. So we go into McDonalds, and we say, “Well, we’re going to have a nice salad.” But the salad costs \$3.99 and the Big Mac is \$ .99. All this weight starts jumping on you. I can’t afford to go out and buy more clothes. Cornell doesn’t pay enough for that.

In one of my classes, we agreed — no fried foods and no sodas, for the whole eight weeks that I’m teaching there. And if we did eat those things, we had to pay a quarter. We’re doing well. I haven’t had a soda. Now, fried foods — I had to give up a quarter.

What do you learn when you learn to eat better, to take care of yourself? People learn that if they eat right,

they’ll live longer. They’ll feel better. Sickness won’t come upon them. So teaching nutrition is just a part of that life span. From the seven-year-old to the fifty-four-year-old, it’s important that you eat the right foods. When they learn that, then everything else will fall into place. But first you have to learn to take care of yourself, because you are important. You are special. Like I say to my mothers, “If you get sick, I don’t care if mommy cooks the dinner, grandma cooks the dinner, or daddy cooks the dinner, they’re going to wake you up. Mom is mom. So you have to take care of yourself. You’re special. You are special. So whatever else you think of, think of yourself as being special. Know that you are somebody and that you could be anything that you want to be, if you want to be it badly enough.” And they realize that food is the most important thing in life. The way they eat, it is the most important thing in life. So I might not have become that gym teacher, but I’m a teacher. And when I’ve done the best I can, I’ve got nothing to worry about because that’s all God requires of me.

# appendix

## A Guide to Creating Practitioner Profiles

Interviews for a practitioner profile are different than many other kinds of interviews in that they focus primarily on an educator's work, what she or he does, rather than what she or he thinks. Creating a good profile demands that interviewers help keep the conversation focused on the concrete, the particular and the everyday, rather than on abstract ideas and generalizations.

### Outline of Steps

Contact the educator to be interviewed; discuss confidentiality issues, answer questions on the process and purpose of the interviews, settle on the practice story the educator will tell (some discussion may be required to identify a strong story), review the three parts of the interview (see below), and assess the ability of the educator to check and review the final profile.

Conduct and tape-record the interview (either in person or by phone). Interviews typically last about 90 minutes.

Transcribe the interview. Edit the transcription to remove the interview questions; edit the remaining text as necessary so that the result is a smooth, coherent profile.

Schedule a follow-up interview if necessary to fill in missing pieces or elaborate on undeveloped sections or ideas. Share the profile with the educator and ask for his/her corrections and small edits.

### The Three Parts of the Interview

Each 90-minute interview should be divided into three roughly equal parts.

In actual interviews, the time spent on each part may vary significantly from the ideal, based on the educator's ability and interest in talking about their life story, telling their practice story, and reflecting upon it.

❶ *An overview of the educator's life story and experiences focused in a way that helps us understand the interviewee's self-interests, passions, and commitments.* Think of this part of the interview as the part that helps us understand what the educator's "life work" is. Probe for critical life experiences and mentors that helped shape the educator into who he/she is and that influenced the how and why of his/her work.

❷ *The practice story.* The heart of the interview is a detailed account of a specific practice story that shows us what the educator actually does in her or his work. This part of the interview should be aimed at shedding light on actual educational practice, not on the abstract details and philosophy of educational "programs."

❸ *Reflections and lessons.* The final section of the interview should be designed around reflective questions about the practice story the educator tells. See below for suggestions of specific reflective questions that might be asked.

### Interview Questions

The questions that follow are presented as a guide. Except for the background questions, you are unlikely to ask every question in every interview. Further, while the conversation should flow according to the three main sections

(background first, the project story, then reflections), the questions within each section do not need to be asked in the order listed. Rather, they should follow the flow of the conversation as naturally as possible. It may be helpful to think of the interchange as a "structured conversation" with someone whose story you are interested in learning, rather than as a formal interview.

### Part One: Life Story and Experiences

- What's your current position? How long have you been in this position? Can you give me a brief overview of what it is you do in your work?
- What would you say most motivates you to do what you do? What are you most excited or passionate about? What are the goals you most want to accomplish in your work (not so much the goals that are in your job description, but the goals you hold personally)?
- I want to understand how and why you ended up here working as an educator in \_\_\_\_\_. What led you to this job? What were you doing before you came here? What attracted you to work for \_\_\_\_\_?
- Now if we can, I'd like to go way back for a little while. Where did you grow up? What was it like to grow up there? Did you go to college? Where did you go, and what was that like?
- Did you have any key mentors or people who deeply influenced who you are, what you believe in and what you're committed to in your work and life? Tell me about them.

- Did you have any life-changing experiences that put you on the path that led you to be doing what you're doing today? Tell me about them.

### Part Two: The Practice Story

- Let's move on now to the story you're going to tell. What's the specific project you're going to be telling us about today? Give us a brief overview of it.
- Tell us about your specific role and contributions in this project. Let's start with the first thing you did. What was it? (Use lots of prompting questions to get the story out and keep it focused on what they did. Remember that this is the heart of the interview.)
- In the course of getting the story, ask the following:
  - Were there any key turning points in this project?
  - Were there any surprises?
  - What were the key relationships that mattered most? What were the key sources of support or resistance you encountered?
  - Tell me about some of the memorable characters in this story, the ones that give this story color, or brought in drama, comedy, conflict, etc.
  - What was most difficult or challenging? What did you do to deal with these challenges?
  - Did the work fail in some ways? How? What might you have done to prevent those areas of partial failure?
  - What was most rewarding?

### Part Three: Reflections and Lessons

- What are the lessons for someone like me, or for a junior colleague, who might be embarking on a project similar to this one?

- If you could do this project over again, would you do anything differently? Why, and what would you do?
- What did you learn from the people you worked with in this project?
- What do you think you taught them?
- Do you view your contributions as successful? In what ways? What specifically was accomplished?
- Do any metaphors come to mind to describe the kind of work you do, especially in this project? (If needed, give examples like "orchestra conductor," "coach," etc.)
- What were the skills you had to have to do the work you just told me about? Where and how did you learn those skills?
- What does the project you've just talked about tell us about adult/community education? What exactly is community education to you? Who taught you what community education means and how to do it? What did you learn from them? How did they teach you?
- What does the project you've just talked about tell us about the central benefits and challenges of community education and development?
- When you think of the future of the kind of work you've talked about here, what gives you a sense of hope? What makes you concerned or worried?
- What's next for you in your work? What are you looking forward to?

### Rules of Thumb For Producing a Rich Profile

Focus on a project or effort the interviewee thinks is interesting or challenging.

Focus on doing, not thinking. Ask "what did you do about x," not "what do you think about x."

Ask "how did you come to do that?" not "why did you do that?"

Ask about their difficulties and struggles; look for key turning points.

Ask about various emotions as you hear allusions to them: "Were you afraid that...", "frustrated about...", "happy/unhappy about..."

Go beyond labels. To "It's all a matter of respect," ask, "Respect?" Or "Could you help me understand what that means?" Or "Could you give me an example?"

Ask what advice or warnings they'd give others beginning such work.

Allow enough time to assess and reflect upon outcomes once you have an account of how your interviewee reached those results.

Avoid cases in progress so you won't hear, "Can't answer that till the next meeting."

Signal your appreciation of their challenging work. Ask what they really did (trying, stumbling, being surprised, doing some things well, some not so well) in a conversation, not an interrogation, a dialogue of thoughtful, practically pitched questions, not a stuffy, formalized interview.

All good stories have characters, tensions, ambiguities, drama, comedy, action, climaxes, etc. Work to surface these things and have the educator flesh them out in order to fill out the story and give it color.

*Developed by Scott J. Peters and Margo Hittleman, based on the work of John Forester. This guide to creating practitioner profiles is a more fully developed version of the one used to create the profiles in this collection. In particular, the overview of the educator's life story has been significantly expanded. The "rules of thumb" that appear at the end have been provided by John Forester.*

# notes

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