

OMG Center

LINKAGES

AUTUMN 2000

The Alliance Schools Initiative

A Model for Community-Driven Change

What do you do as a parent when you're faced with the sudden discovery that your daughter, the 3rd-grade student with all A's and B's, has never tested above the lowest quartile on the state achievement test, her teachers can't make up for it next year because there are almost no classroom resources, and she won't have a shot at getting into that magnet school you were counting on for her the following year? Normally, there aren't many options for a low-income parent in many of these troubled school districts where funding is scarce and keeping class order takes precedence over creative teaching. However, if you live in the Southwest, your child's chances to learn are much better if there is an Alliance School in your community.

A partnership between the Interfaith Education Fund (IEF), the Southwest Industrial Areas Foundation Network, school staff and parents, school district officials, and the Texas Education Agency, the Alliance Schools Initiative was begun in Texas in 1992 to implement education reform using a process of informing, engaging and organizing parents and the community. As of mid-2000, the Initiative has grown to include 118 schools enrolling over 80,000 students in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and Louisiana.

For the past four and a half years the Annie E. Casey Foundation has provided funds to the IEF to increase its

reform efforts in Austin, San Antonio, Ysleta (El Paso) and Houston school districts. Last year the Casey Foundation engaged the OMG Center to document the Alliance Schools Initiative in San Antonio with the expectation that the study will increase understanding of effective strategies for engaging parents in school reform. One of these that will be examined closely is how community organizing

engagement in school reform efforts, but also for the lessons it may hold for other ambitious community change efforts that are often called "comprehensive" community initiatives, or CCIs. These multi-year initiatives, such as the Casey Foundation's Rebuilding Communities Initiative and CCRP (Comprehensive Community Revitalization Program) in New York's South Bronx, were conceived as



SCHOOL AND PARENT LEADERS FROM SAN ANTONIO RALLY ON THE STEPS OF THE TEXAS STATE CAPITOL WITH ORGANIZERS FROM COPS (COMMUNITIES ORGANIZED FOR PUBLIC SERVICE) AS PART OF THEIR EFFORTS TO INCREASE FUNDING FOR ALLIANCE SCHOOLS, 1999.

can mobilize parents to take more active roles in system change efforts.

The Alliance Schools approach is of great interest to OMG not just because of its potential to provide lessons for those interested in the role of parent

demonstrations intended to take traditional bricks-and-mortar community development efforts to a broader level, where community residents would be actively involved in shaping neighborhood improvements in the

Continued on next page

quality of life, including health, safety, housing, social services, schools, employment training and other areas affecting children, youth and families. While the Alliance Schools Initiative is not a CCI, its emphasis on engaging the community in strengthening their local schools is compatible with much of the thinking behind comprehensive community initiatives.

What is an Alliance School?

The Alliance Schools Initiative was created by the Interfaith Education Fund (IEF) to improve public schools in low-income areas through the combined efforts of parents, teachers, school administrators, public officials, and business and community leaders. Beginning as small-group conversations between local Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) organizers and a few parents, the larger groups in some cases have grown to be very powerful change agents who win large state education grants and waivers, force local school boards to own up to deficiencies, and challenge local government officials to address tough issues important to the community.

The Initiative works by formalizing the relationships among the community stakeholders, who must first engage in a series of meetings and conversations that build the parents', teachers' and school leaders' understanding of and commitment to becoming an Alliance School. Next, parents and school leadership make a public commitment to work with the local IAF organization to improve their school's performance. Various kinds of support are provided by the Texas Education Agency and the Interfaith Education Fund, such as funding for professional development opportunities for teachers, and leadership development opportunities for

parents and teachers, among other enhancements.

How Community Organizing Helps

Since the creation of an Alliance School depends heavily on the participation of parents, the IEF organizers and local IAF leaders begin with them. There are several possible "entry points" into the process, but generally organizers will start at neighborhood churches that are part of the local IAF network, engaging parents in an under-performing low-income school district to find out what they want to see their schools become. They also talk to teachers and principals and discuss their concerns. Later, a series of parent, teacher and community meetings are held. After organizers are assured that they have gained the participation and buy-in of these key stakeholders, an event called a community walk is set up for teachers, parents and school leaders to go out into the neighborhoods around the school to meet other parents and residents. They have conversations with them in their homes to demonstrate their own commitment, discover what issues are important to the residents and invite them to a meeting of parents at the school. During the meeting, IEF organizers look for those parents who seem the most interested and passionate about the problems and then bring them together with school leadership to create an action plan for the school. A school assembly is planned soon after to explain what Alliance Schools are and to determine whether there is enough interest in committing to the process.

The IAF makes it clear during this exploratory period that there is a stark difference between parental involvement and parental engagement — increasing parental involvement usually means little more than better attendance at PTA meetings and other school events and perhaps a little more commitment to helping their children with homework or behavior problems. Parental engagement, on the other hand, is what the IAF and IEF organizers have in mind when they help create the partnerships that become Alliance Schools. This involves what Dennis Shirley describes as parents who are "citizens in the fullest sense — change agents who can transform inner city schools and neighborhoods" (*Laboratories of Democracy: Community Organizing for School Reform, University of Texas Press, 1997*). Parents are charged with taking an active role in whatever is needed to attain a specific Alliance School goal, such as confronting civic officials about problems they should solve, holding them accountable for

promises made, being persistent with school boards in getting needs met and pushing for increased funding, working with the local business community when necessary to gain their cooperation, and also demanding to be a part of school

decision-making that in the past would always have been done by school leadership behind closed doors. It has been IEF's experience that principals and other school leaders must understand and be ready for this unusually high level of parent participation in order for an Alliance School to succeed.

"The Iron Rule is about developing people's confidence in their own competence. ... It is a process which stimulates curiosity, inquiry, judgment, and mastery of new areas of understanding. It recognizes that people can only learn confidence through competent participation: we learn by doing."

Ernesto Cortes, Southwest IAF

'Alliance' continued on page 6

Reflections On Practice

Making Better Use of an Outcomes Focus in Comprehensive Community Initiatives

Tom Burns

Note: Many of these thoughts about how evaluators can help program designers and participants define meaningful outcomes for comprehensive community initiatives (or CCI) originated in an August 1997 focus group conversation organized by the Harvard Family Center. They have been further shaped by the OMG Center's ongoing experience in formulating a Pathway Mapping tool that helps build consensus on key linkages between CCI goals, strategies, programs and expected results.

The Changing Role of the Evaluator

Not that long ago, evaluators worked within a model of evaluation in which program designers figured out what they wanted to do, put it down on paper in a program design document, and then hired an evaluator who would develop a plan for what they were going to look at, and go off and do it. Fortunately, that old model of evaluation is mostly history and evaluation has become far more interesting. Evaluators now play one of many roles within an ongoing process in which there are usually many different stakeholders.

How can you keep the roles sorted out between the evaluator, the program designer, the funding partner, and those responsible for implementing different aspects of a complex initiative? I think it rests on being very clear about what the evaluator team needs in order to do its evaluation work within this complex mix of roles and responsibilities. And, more and more, it requires that evaluators incorporate facilitative and integrative work into their teams and their workplans.

This facilitative skill has become essential to us in meeting our need as evaluators for a clear specification of what the program is about or what the expected outcomes are. But in our effort to gain clarity about what a program is trying to accomplish we need to guard against imposing our own structure on the initiative through the way we frame the questions, or the data we identify as important. We always need to be sure in our facilitation work that the program team and other participants actually *own* the overall structure.

Keeping others involved in defining program goals while keeping the evaluation team sufficiently "outside" the program development process is a continuing challenge. We have found that the best way to achieve this is to be as explicit as we can about the evaluator's role and our own concerns for when that role is expanding beyond where we are comfortable. We also use this as a way of raising role issues with the other stakeholders. Often this can help the other

stakeholders to reclaim some aspects of their own roles that we might be unintentionally appropriating from them.

The Challenge of Defining Useful Intermediate Outcomes

In our evaluation work at OMG we continually discover that the identification of outcomes depends almost entirely on the work that precedes the usual stage in an initiative in which evaluation gets discussed. That is, how clearly did the initiative get defined and how well did people understand and try to state their assumptions? When we enter an initiative as evaluators, we find that the process of identifying appropriate outcomes either has already begun, giving us a framework to work within, or we find ourselves having to back up and work on this with the program's designers and other key participants. We are fairly comfortable with that approach, since we have long been interested in organizational learning and the process of unpacking peoples' theories of action, or as we currently describe it, their theories of change. We find that as an almost indispensable piece of this early work — whether the specific outcome indicators get spelled out then or later — the main work is getting the expectations nailed down and uncovering important differences in how the various players see an initiative's goals and outcomes. We take it as a given that the evaluator needs to assume a lot of responsibility for helping the other players get clearer about what it is they are trying to do.

Often there is a shared view of what some of the long-term outcomes are, but what is not shared universally is what happens in between — what we call the interim outcomes. We find that a lot of our work early in the evaluation of an initiative is debriefing the stakeholders — fairly deeply — to get them to talk about what their expectations are for the initiative in the short-run, and to specify their evaluation questions. And then we use these evaluation questions as the framework for specifying the evaluation design, with their input. Often there are different demands. Different stakeholders at times ask for different sets of outcomes, or express quite different expectations. We maintain that everyone's expectations are respected in the process and everyone's questions are legitimate questions. But we've also observed that the group tends to focus in on building a shared understanding and a consensus, as they move through the evaluation design process. They naturally prioritize the questions that are most important to ask and have answered, and those tend to be the ones that are the shared questions which are used to guide the evaluation.

'Reflections' continued on next page

Many times it is the timeframe issues that get confused or are not well thought out as these initiatives get shaped. The time dimension is one of the most important areas to work on because it is here that different assumptions are made about key connections that link interim to longer-term outcomes. I know in the case of the recent [Annie E.] Casey Foundation work with Rebuilding Communities, it took us, I would say, ten months to a year at the onset of the initiative to build a solid common ground with program people, the evaluation staff, and participants from the sites concerning just the timeframe within which certain kinds of outcomes might be expected. I think the group really began to focus on that issue only after it became more evident that probably not a single one of the ultimate outcomes they'd originally imagined that the initiative would have impact on would likely occur within the timeframe of the initiative, and this was up to ten years! The length of time it would take for the influences of what they were doing to actually show up in the form of aggregate measures of community well-being was sobering. And I think it was only after we really confronted that and owned it were we able to become clearer about the sequences of steps that might occur — and define some reasonable interim progress measures — in directions that ultimately we simply had to *assume* would be likely to lead to the longer-term outcomes that people were after. It was a slow process that required a lot of interaction between the evaluation folks and the program staff and people on the sites.

Settling on a Practical, Feasible Evaluation Design

Thankfully, the evaluation field is now moving more toward mixed-method evaluations and away from the experimental and quasi-experimental designs that used to be prevalent but which are inappropriate and not feasible in complex, community initiatives.

The challenge now is to devise good evaluation designs that clearly articulate meaningful interim outcomes and capture progress toward them using multiple research methods. In particular we seek to combine thorough, “close-in” descriptions of process with efforts to gather harder measurement data. These latter need to provide acceptable evidence that the initiative is progressing toward the desired longer-term outcomes. It takes the careful documentation through skillful use of more than one research method of linkages between what is actually going on and what is resulting, and the knitting together of the results of these different kinds of inquiries that creates the persuasive case — whether it's in support of whatever the initiative's goals are or not.

In piecing together these mixed-method evaluation designs, we have often been struck by how important practical considerations prove to be in deciding how far to go in pursuing answers to evaluation questions and determining how much we invest in one method over others. To take the Rebuilding Communities Initiative again as an example, in designing the community surveys that have been used, it's the pragmatic constraint of how much time an interviewer is able

to spend with a community resident that ultimately helps determine how many different dimensions of neighborhood change can be explored within the evaluation. The team's broad interest in knowing many different things nearly always has to be traded off against what's feasible. Often the final decisions about what gets included in a design and which dimensions are given greater importance get made as people are struggling to operationalize the research design within the real constraints of time and budget.

Using An Outcomes Focus to Help Build Community Capacity

Another goal of many evaluations these days is to achieve some reasonable level of transfer of skills and responsibility to the local community level. At a minimum, the community needs to learn to ask questions to make sure that they get credible answers to their questions, which then move them to the next set of questions. In our view, there is not a great deal of difference between what we refer to as evaluation capacity and what in another context we could call capacity for program planning or management. When we think about it this way, it is often easier to make the case for why the community organizations should try to invest in building their internal capacities through their work with us on evaluation. Evaluations should contribute to building that kind of management capacity in the community organizations with which we work.

The factors that make this possible are, first, some level of staff capacity and a willingness to learn in the context of the assessment. Beyond that, it's up to the assessment team to really engage all the way through, from the very beginning of the assessment to the process of shaping how results are presented, checking how findings are being interpreted, and so on. Finding ways of engaging staff in that process in a continuous way is also critical. I think that is how people learn, by actively doing things and drawing the connections to other aspects of their work. We as evaluators also try to create tools for them to use — the frameworks and systems for gathering and organizing data. This kind of continuous regular engagement can be costly, but must be included in the evaluation design if capacity-building is a real goal.

A key aspect of this process is in the staffing of the lead organizations, the organizations that are central to these collaborations. It can be an exercise in frustration for us external people to invest a lot in this kind of capacity-building without there being some thinking about how it can be sustained after the assessment is concluded. In the Rebuilding Communities Initiative, for example, it took some time to come to the realization that longer-term capacity depended on establishing within the lead organizations one or usually several staff who focused on moving the process along, gathering the data needed, being accountable for showing results in the face of competing demands on staff time and attention. What is needed is an internal champion or leader who says, “*I need to know this.*” There

Reflections' continued on page 7

NEW and Ongoing OMG Projects

OMG continues in its multi-year evaluation of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's **Rebuilding Communities Initiative**, now in the Demonstration Phase. The initiative is a seven-year, \$18 million program designed to expand and enhance ongoing community development efforts in five distressed neighborhoods in the cities of Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, Denver, and Detroit.

As part of a three-year evaluation, OMG is currently conducting organizational assessments (focusing on changes in overall capacity and performance over three years) of ten leading CDCs from around the country selected by the **Fannie Mae Foundation** to participate in its **Sustained Excellence Awards** program. The ten CDC awardees for this program are receiving support that enables them to move forward with specific housing and community development agendas while strengthening the capacity of their organizations and communities to sustain their visions and programs. The program is also supporting a process of cross-site information sharing and learning which is also an important focus of the evaluation work.

A little over a year ago, OMG began working with the Prudential Foundation on early program planning for the **Prudential Neighborhood Partnership Initiative**. This national initiative by the Prudential Foundation targets low-income neighborhoods in five cities — Jacksonville, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Newark and Philadelphia. The initiative aims to improve conditions in these neighborhoods through the coordination of resources, from strategic grantmaking, social investments, and volunteer action. OMG is assisting in

the program development and is expected to shift to an ongoing documentation and evaluation role as the initiative moves forward.

For the Pittsburgh Community Foundation and the Heinz Endowments, OMG recently completed an assessment of the ten-year **Multicultural Arts Initiative (MCAI)**. The intent was to better understand the impact of the MCAI grantmaking as the initiative is currently framed, and to review its successes and shortcomings critically. More importantly, OMG Center and MCAI appraised how the initiative could be more effective and better positioned for the future.

Center staff are currently evaluating **ACES (Arts Create Excellent Schools)**, a multi-year statewide initiative for New Jersey that is a partnership between the Department of Education, the New Jersey Alliance for Arts Education, and the New Jersey Council for the Arts. The objectives of the initiative are to support exemplar public pilot schools to infuse the arts throughout the curriculum, and to simultaneously develop discipline-based arts education in the visual and performing arts; to support a broader network of teachers and administrators to build skills in this model, and to disseminate lessons for replication throughout the state.

OMG Center is part of the **Freire Charter School Planning Group** in Philadelphia and has played an integral role in program, governance and management development for the school's charter application. The Freire Charter School model is an experiential-based, integrated learning program that focuses on developing problem-solving and critical

thinking skills in young people in grades eight through twelve. The school received a charter school grant from the School District of Philadelphia and officially opened in September 1999.

Also, in collaboration with **Foundations Technical Assistance Center/Drexel University**, OMG Center has completed the publication "Implementing Charter Schools in Philadelphia: Barriers and Helps." This document was designed to help charter schools navigate their way through initial planning stages with special attention on suggestions and recommendations about how best to handle school district policies, and budgetary and operational issues.

Center staff are engaged in an evaluation of the **Philadelphia High School Academies (PHSA)**. The evaluation of PHSA — an intermediary operating between the business community and the Philadelphia School District — is a three-year project funded by the William Penn Foundation, designed to assess PHSA's objectives, strategies, and outcomes.

Recently, OMG was selected by the Pew Charitable Trusts to serve in an intermediary role for the Pew Fund's **Program for Vulnerable Adults**. OMG will manage the grantmaking process and work closely with Pew Fund staff over the next three years as this regional Philadelphia program unfolds. OMG will also assist in capacity building for the grantee agencies to better support their efforts to provide services to vulnerable adults.

Alliance Schools, from page 2

Most of those close to an Alliance School — parents, organizers, teachers — would admit that big change and commitment like this is frequently uncomfortable. Parents who suddenly find themselves asking hard questions about low test scores, student failure rates and little funding often begin by blaming the teachers and administrators — usually at very public meetings. The teachers and administrators nearly always react by being defensive and blaming low achievement or other factors, such as a lack of parental interest in their children’s education. IAF organizers say this tension in the early stages is a normal part of changing the system and that these strong feelings are necessary in order to arrive at a common vision around the things that are most important to them.

And, they add that some times during the process of creating an Alliance School, there are a few teachers and administrators who are unwilling or unable to change how they’ve always done things and leave the school. “Fortunately,” reports Kathleen Davis of COPS/Metro, an IAF affiliate in San Antonio, “they are replaced by new teachers or personnel who are prepared in advance that this is not a typical school. They’re chosen for their interest in creating something new together, even though that means they’re all learning as they go.” Davis says they have learned that creating an “Alliance School culture” doesn’t happen overnight: it takes about three to four years before teachers and administrators are at ease and familiar with the new ways of doing things, and for parents to become fully engaged in shaping the success of the school.

The Industrial Areas Foundation and Interfaith Education Fund

The Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) was founded over 50 years ago by Saul Alinsky to build the capacity of community residents to improve their communities by learning how to manage political relationships and building their own power base. Working through faith-based organizations in mostly low-income areas, the IAF provides leadership training for community-based organizations throughout the US so that they can create more local leaders able to share in making critical decisions about their neighborhoods and influence public policy.

The IAF’s community organizing approach involves professional organizers who work closely with local churches to train individuals to act collaboratively, engage one another in debate over those issues that are most important to them, decide how to resolve those issues and improve the community, and how to put their plan into action. In essence, the IAF strategy is based on teaching people to ask for what they want and then helping them hold public officials accountable.

There are several core principles that the IAF has developed over its half-a-century of organizing that have been central to its success: 1) following and teaching the Iron Rule — “Never do for others what they can do for themselves”; 2) having a proper understanding of politics and power; 3) building social capital; and 4) working through broad-based community organizations to implement the principles.

Texas’ IAF chapters created the Interfaith Education Fund as an independent nonprofit in 1989. The IEF trains local community members to be leaders and organizers around issues of concern to their families and communities, such as housing, health and employment, as well as creating and supporting schools in the Alliance Schools Initiative.

Making Change Happen

The experience of the IAF and IEF has been that before the partners in the Alliance Schools can even begin to work on education problems, there are often other critical issues that need attention first. At one school, there was a safety issue stemming from too much vehicle traffic in front; at another, a large population of rats was terrorizing the elementary students and teachers; at still another, a liquor store was located across from the school, creating numerous hazards for young children. Dealing with these challenges as a unified group also ties to in to a key strategy of the IEF, which hinges on the notion that it’s best to cultivate parent leaders through working together on small, achievable goals that will quickly gain them credibility and grow the group’s power base.

For example, at Zavala Elementary School in East Austin a connection was made between the low Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test scores and other achievement indicators and the high absentee rates of students. Parents and teachers started to realize that chronic poor health — attributable mostly to low immunization rates — was the culprit and could be reversed if the students had better access to primary care. The one area clinic was closed for asbestos removal and there was nothing to replace it. None of the parents or community leaders were willing to wait for the clinic to be finished, but there was no suitable space that could be set up quickly either. Eager for a solution, the community residents came up with a proposal to place the clinic at Zavala even though it was an unprecedented arrangement that

would require approval at a number of levels.

After the clinic was approved and in place, organizers report that the parents gained confidence in themselves and raised their own expectations for success as they set about improving student academic performance. While teachers may have felt more pressure from parents, they also began to feel that their efforts were being noticed and that the parents were helping by learning new ways of becoming involved in their children's education.

Seeing Schools Improve

Almost without exception, test scores in Alliance Schools have risen since the schools joined the initiative. The TAAS scores had been very poor in these low-income area schools for years — in 1993, only 25% of all the 21,250 students in the 26 newly designated Alliance Schools passed all test sections. Five years later, 67% passed all sections in the Alliance Schools, which by then had grown to 118 schools enrolling 80,307 students.

While this is one measure of improvement, others include better school attendance rates, stronger parental interest and involvement in daily school life, a safer school environment both within and around the schools, greater opportunities for pupil advancement to magnet schools and other programs, lower teacher and administrator turnover, and increased funding. Knowing that the individual Alliance Schools needed help with this last item, the IAF and IEF have consistently appealed to the Texas Education Agency for more money. Through the strong efforts of IAF and IEF leadership, the Texas legislature created an Investment Capital Fund of \$500,000

in 1993. With continued IAF advocacy, this allocation has grown to \$14 million. These funds have benefited schools throughout Texas — not just the Alliance Schools. In addition to winning about \$7 million for Alliance Schools, awarded on a competitive basis, the IAF is also responsible for another \$7 million or so in the discretionary school fund that has gone to other public schools who meet certain criteria.

Challenges for the Future

After eight years, those who created the Alliance Schools Initiative have seen that their model can indeed improve schools and strengthen communities. Success on a school-by-school basis, however, has only made Initiative leaders even more convinced of the need to expand on the model by involving more schools that act as “feeders” for the existing Alliance Schools. The idea is to maximize the Alliance School experience for students so that, for example, they're not slowed down by graduating to a non-Alliance School in the same low-income, underperforming district. Building greater participation in the Alliance Schools Initiative is considered essential to the broader Alliance objectives of increasing students' abilities to think critically and work with others, providing them with the skills they'll need to excel in the work world, and creating life-long learners.

The OMG Center is nearing completion of its 16-month documentation study of change processes at individual Alliance Schools in San Antonio, at the school district, and in the community. A series of interviews have been conducted with IEF leadership and organizers, school leadership teams (including parents), and school district personnel. The documenta-

tion also involves observation of initiative-wide meetings and other events. In addition, the study will analyze longitudinal achievement school data for “veteran” Alliance Schools (the initial cohort) and will compare these data to longitudinal changes in comparison schools, school districts, and the state. OMG expects a report to be available by December 2000. For more information please contact Manuel Gutiérrez, Research Director, OMG Center.

'Reflections' from page 4

are many ways we have tried to introduce this capacity by engaging staff in the actual work of gathering data on and within the communities — conducting community surveys, neighborhood inventories, resource inventories of various kinds. The residents of the communities have been formally hired as data gatherers and have been responsible for obtaining and organizing the data. Another advantage of this direct engagement of community representatives is that they see the results as their own, not something produced by outsiders. In addition to being involved in data gathering it is important for the evaluation team to also continually demonstrate how the data can be used to answer questions relevant to measuring progress.

There's been a lot of learning in the field lately about the difficulty of this process of defining outcomes, about making choices in how evaluation dollars are spent, and about our responsibilities for making evaluation more relevant to those that, in another time, we were inclined to “study.” There is much group education going on within our world, and there is more willingness to let others into the process of reconceptualizing what we do. These and other changes underway in the evaluation world are, in my view, all signs of our own professional health. I for one welcome them and look forward to where they are leading us.

— Tom Burns is Director of OMG Center.

1528 Walnut Street
Suite 805
Philadelphia PA 19102

215 732-2200 Phone
215 732-8123 Fax

OMG Center News

OMG continues to grow, having completed an office expansion last year and adding five new staff.

Bonita Stowell joined us in 1999 as a Research Coordinator. Bonita has a background in program evaluation, program planning, management and research. Ms. Stowell graduated with a BA from Cornell University and holds a Masters Degree in Urban Policy and Management from the New School For Social Research. She is also a member of the National Black Child Development Institute and volunteers time conducting outreach for the Cornell Black Alumni Association.

We welcome **Gilda Perretta-Stephens**, our administrative assistant who, among many other things, helps us keep track of our trains and planes. Gilda holds a BBA in real estate and finance from Temple University.

Richard Baron recently joined OMG to manage the Pew Fund's Vulnerable Adults grantmaking program. Rick, who is serving as Program Director, brings over 30 years of experience in the health and human services field, with a broad background in program evaluation, policy analysis, professional training and public education. His previous position was as Executive Director of Matrix Research Institute in Philadelphia.

He is joined by **Monica Steigerwald**, Program Manager, a former program associate with the Pew Charitable Trusts' Pew Fund for Health and Human Services.

Monica also has experience in direct service provision for the homeless, having worked for a social service agency in Los Angeles for three years.

We are also pleased to welcome **Amanda Bergson-Shilcock** as the program's administrative assistant. Amanda is a recent University of Pennsylvania graduate with a bachelor's degree in social science.

OMG is very happy to announce that it has launched www.omgcenter.org. Our website has already been well used by clients and many people interested in the field and in our work. Plans are in place for new content areas to be added during the fall as well as some design changes.



Several staff took on the challenge of biking in the National Multiple Sclerosis Society's **City to Shore Bike Tour** last year, logging 150 miles each over two days and raising \$1300. "**Team OMG**" is already preparing for a repeat performance and is busily recruiting more staff for the event!

OMG's publication **Design as a Catalyst for Learning**, produced with Peter Hawley and Meredith Davis and published by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (through a cooperative agreement with the National Endowment for the Arts), was named an Outstanding

Academic Book in the January 2000 issue of Choice magazine. Choice is a publication of the Association of College and Research Libraries.

Who We Are

The mission of the OMG Center for Collaborative Learning is to support organizational learning and problem-solving through consultation, applied research and professional education. Center staff draw upon recent and established theory within the paradigms of systems thinking, action research and organization behavior. The Center works with individual organizations and inter-organizational partnerships, primarily in the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors. Its main focus is on urban and social policy issues; the majority of its activities are directed at finding innovative solutions to problems of community deterioration, poverty and discrimination, environmental quality, and human capital.

The Center is a nonprofit organization with its own governing board and is supported by foundation grants and contracts with government agencies, nonprofit organizations and private firms.

We welcome your feedback!
Please direct your comments/questions to
Margaret@omgcenter.org

Linkages, October 2000 © The OMG Center for Collaborative Learning.
Margaret Berkey, Editor
Design: Moskowitz Design