



## **Promoting Organizational Sustainability Through Leadership Development**

**November 14, 2011**

Pamela Bryer has headed her non-profit organization since it began 18 years ago and is a strong believer in the power of her staff. "Our success here isn't going to be based on one individual," Bryer said. "We work as a team here. It's important to build bench strength."

With the aid of the NELI program, she has worked tirelessly to strengthen leadership skills throughout the staff of the Maternal and Child Health Consortium of Chester County (MCHC) since her participation in the 2008 cohort.

She has sent three other staffers through NELI programs, used its materials and methods in-house, and plans to submit an application for one other staffer.

NELI director Margie DuBrow explained, "Pam has stepped up as an Executive Director and has leadership development at MCHC with a thoroughness that is really rare in the nonprofit world. She and MCHC have done an amazing job of leveraging what we have to offer."

MCHC works to ensure a healthy beginning for all children by reducing barriers to care and the factors contributing to low birth weight and infant mortality. MCHC advocates within public systems to provide services to vulnerable families and to increase access to high-quality health care that will eliminate racial and ethnic disparities.

MCHC offers three major programs: Healthy Start, focused on prenatal and postnatal education and support, the Kennett Square Family Center, which works to ensure that children through age five are prepared to succeed in school, and the Family Benefits Program, which helps low income children and their families access public benefits in 19 locations.

Due largely to the agency's work, more than 96 percent of infants born in 2010 to Healthy Start mothers in Chester County had a healthy birth weight of 5.5 lbs. or over. "We were also able to close the gap between white women and women of color in prenatal health outcomes and health coverage," Bryer said.

Bryer said she wasn't sure how she first heard of the NELI program but that "I was immediately impressed with the concept of it, starting with the idea that the definition of leadership begins with greater knowledge of oneself. She said, "Getting feedback is risky. You make yourself

somewhat vulnerable. NELI provided a safe environment to get that feedback. I took the NELI concept to our entire organization."

With support from the Non-Profit Finance Foundation and the William Penn Foundation, Bryer developed a four-year leadership development plan that will eventually include all of the agency's staff of 35.

"We started with our core values as an organization," she said. These began with maintaining MCHC as a "client-centered" organization and branched out to treating co-workers with respect and "working cooperatively to share information, face challenges and maintain a positive team environment."

The agency's transformation took place on several levels. Using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), other assessment tools from the NELI curriculum, and ones they developed on their own, the agency developed performance measures to align its talent with the organization's strategies and goals.

Bryer hired an external HR consultant to help lead the initiative, and another consultant from NELI to facilitate staff conversations. Internal programs and administrative functions were reviewed, updated, and documented. Staff members in payroll and accounting were cross-trained. The agency changed payroll and 401K companies. Data systems were improved.

And the agency underwent an exhaustive, two-year review by the Pennsylvania Association of Non-Profit Organizations to get certification under its Standards for Excellence Program.

A key part of the transformation, Bryer says, was charting staff members' MBTI results and sharing them in training sessions. The process gave the staff a common language to use, she said, but the process was difficult. Staff learned to appreciate differences in communication and work styles.

And as the process continued, the next generation of agency leaders began participating in NELI programs. Nelly Jimenez-Arevalo, Director of the Kennett Square Family Center, will graduate from the Executive Leadership Certificate program in November.

"The financial piece was very important to me," she says. "And the Myers-Briggs taught me more patience and more acceptance of people who think differently."

Before entering NELI, Jimenez-Arevalo said, she tended to push people to make decisions more quickly than they were comfortable with. "Some people need to take more time and I need to accept that," she said. "And it was challenging for me to really think about what others will feel if

I express my own feelings. As a leader, I have to be careful about how I make a statement and when I make it."

Milena Lanz, a senior program manager with Healthy Start, completed the new Ascending Leadership Certificate Program in April 2011. Lanz said her goals included becoming a more effective manager inside the agency and being better able to present its work to other organizations and at events. She particularly valued an assignment to interview the agency's executive director and financial director in depth. "I have a whole different vision about the organization now," she said.