Q. What are you doing now?

A. I am the Program Manager for Vista Programs, which is a part of Americorps. In fact, we have just placed an Americorps worker with BFNC.

Q. How did your experience with BFNC help you on your journey to where you are today?

A. When I was with BFNC I interacted with all of the programs, particularly through setting up the MIS system, working with Human Resources to find the Tri-Main site, and getting that built out for the various programs that are now housed there. It gave me great experience and an understanding of all aspects of the agency's work. It was my experience at BFNC that focused me on working with nonprofits and giving back to the community. Later, that focus shifted to education, but it still includes the nonprofit aspect.

Q. What do you miss about BFNC?

A. Oh yes. Ricardo remains a great mentor of mine. He has been there whenever I've been ready to take my next step to give his input. I am still friends with Barbara Dixon, who used to handle HR, before Letrice, and Ellen Trautman and I have collaborated on programs. I also still see Mr. Poles from time to time. They are all great people.

Q. Did you make any lasting relationships at BFNC?

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Q. What was your experience with BFNC?

A. The soul. There's a lot of great work duplicated anywhere else. It's also a very talent-oriented organization. Ricardo wants to bring out the best in everyone – it's just a very nurturing environment.

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Our Mission

BFNC prepares, equips and empowers individuals to address life management issues, and to improve the quality of life in their communities.

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Ricardo Herrera

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Our Vision

The Buffalo Federation of Neighborhood Centers, Inc. has a trusted place to go for help in the cracks of the human service system, or who has slipped through or who has had trouble accessing that anyone in Western New York who would like to volunteer their labor.

BFNC News is a publication of Buffalo Federation of Neighborhood Centers, Inc., 97 Lemon St., Buffalo, NY 14204-1297
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Message from Executive Director

We are the Buffalo Federation of Neighborhood Centers, Inc., and one of my goals as Executive Director is to re-establish our role as a good neighbor and a force for positive growth in the Fruit Belt. One result of our past accomplishments has been the expansion of the “Community Meeting Room” as part of the renovation of our flagship, the historic “Neighborhood House.” We have been pleased that various Fruitbelt organizations and Block Clubs have found good use for the community space as intended. At the request of community leaders who are concerned about our youth, we are in the process of bringing the Phil Jones Upstate Basketball Program (a travel league) under our umbrella to operate from Neighborhood House. The courts in front of our building are being restored so youth from middle school through high school will have a safe, supervised environment to practice. Youngsters who participate in the program will also have access to our newly renovated computer lab, tutoring and mentoring from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. each afternoon.

This summer we have also provided office space to VISTA volunteer, Breona Jones, who is working through The Service Collaborative of WNY on a project to help Veterans in the Fruitbelt neighborhood with small repair jobs on their homes. We have provided small business incubation services to the “Pears of Wisdom,” a group of nursing professionals interested in starting their own health care agency. We will be welcoming the “One of a Kind Dance” Studio to our Moot site as we attempt to expand programming and support community business development. We have continued our partnership with the Greater Buffalo United Accountable Health Network (GB UAHN) and - Christina M. Rumiants, CPA.

We have a number of people and organizations to thank for their support and assistance helping us make the necessary changes to offer these new services. Framing Hope Warehouse has done a great job providing us with the materials and labor for our renovations and I sincerely appreciate their efforts.

I feel we are only at the beginning of a great journey which will result in BFNC becoming known as a catalyst for change and cooperation within the Fruit Belt — but the steps we have taken so far are definitely in the right direction.

BFNC opens doors to youth through basketball program

The BFNC umbrella is expanding to bring a traveling youth basketball program (The Phil Jones Upstate Basketball Program) and mentoring to junior high students to Neighborhood House. Chris Lewis, who has been coaching in the program for several years, and Erik Daniels of Residential Services, will be in charge of combining basketball with a mentoring program and providing support through First Hand Learning.

“The goal is to create a safe haven for youth here at Neighborhood House,” Daniels said. “First Hand learning will focus on science, we will have a computer lab open, plus we’ll provide nutritional snacks. We hope to have about 20 kids participate.”

The program will run from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. weekdays, starting July 1, and will transition to after-school in the fall. Additional mentors will be provided through SYE (Summer Youth Employment program).

Basketball Program continued from page 2

The program will run from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. weekdays, starting July 1, and will transition to after-school in the fall. Additional mentors will be provided through CAPP (Comprehensive Adolescent Pregnancy prevention program) and SYE (Summer Youth Employment program). “Our initial funding is coming from a grant from the Children’s Foundation,” Lewis said.

BFNC hosting Veterans and Military Families Project 2013 to do small repairs on Fruit Belt Veteran housing

Veterans living in the Fruit Belt neighborhood who need assistance with small maintenance projects around their homes can contact the Buffalo Federation of Neighborhood Centers (BFNC) to receive help with our Labor Force.

“We will be working with Neighbors Connecting at City Hall and with the various coalitions throughout the Fruit Belt to identify Veterans who need help,” she said. “We are also looking for carpenters, electricians, painters, plumbers and handymen who want to volunteer to assist with these projects.”

The VISTA Summer Program will coordinate volunteer recruitment to help homeowners with small, one- to two-day projects such as flooring, painting, and small plumbing repairs. The goal is to set up the jobs during the weeks of July 21st - 26th and August 5th - 9th.

“We will also be reaching out to retailers such as Walmart, Lowe's and Home Depot, asking for their support for donations to complete these projects,” Jones said. “But our first steps are to identify veteran and military families who need help, and put together a volunteer labor force to do the work.”

Please contact Breona Jones at 716-835-0363 or breona@buffalofn.com or if you are a Veteran who owns a home in need of repairs in the Fruit Belt neighborhood, or if you would be willing to volunteer your labor.

Lessons in Tearing Down Walls continued from cover

through CAPP, they had become motivated to take care of themselves, their partners, and their community. As I was telling them the quickest route to our building, however, let me know it would not be safe for them to walk through that neighborhood, which is a few blocks away from their own. If they did choose to walk those streets, they risked being assaulted or possibly worse, because they would be crossing into gang territory. It would never have occurred to me that coming to my office would be so dangerous for a certain segment of Buffalo’s youth.

I learned a similar lesson last year when I was running a boys’ group at a Buffalo public school. This class of special needs students was not on track to graduate; they had all been slotted in general education classes, which they were uniformly failing. Though they were in trouble academically, they were some of the nicest students I’ve had the pleasure to teach. We started talking about the prison system in group one week, and I learned that all but one of them had already been to jail.

The walls of race, class, gender, sexuality, physical disability and gang territories are omnipresent facets of our society, but they are not impenetrable. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said, “Compassion is the radicalism of our time.”

Recently at CAPP we handed out gift baskets with basic toiletries to a group of at-risk girls at a shelter. Their gratitude for such basic necessities was overwhelming. It was not because of the soap or the dollar wash cloths, but because it showed that people care about them as human beings. This radical idea, to show care for others, is what will eventually tear down all of these walls our society has built.