



# **Moving Forward: An Evaluation Report of the 2014 LIHI/WWU Project**

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## **1. Acknowledgements**

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## **2. Executive Summary**

“When you set a goal you have to work on it” - LIHI resident

The 2014 partnership between the Low Income Housing Institute (LIHI) and WWU’s Woodring College of Education’s, Adult and Higher Education program focused on recruiting and training mentors to work with residents of LIHI. Once selected, the mentors’ training consisted of: a LIHI orientation, a WWU face-to-face workshop on mentoring strategies, and a three-month interactive online training that focused on cross-cultural communication, community-based education, mentoring, digital literacy, issues of discrimination, persistence, and participatory action research. The mentors read articles, watched videos, reflected and dialogued about the material and their experiences of tutoring. The mentors were also trained in interviewing methods.

The mentors interviewed the residents with whom they were matched to determine their skills with technology as well as their goals, needs, dreams, social networks, and issues in their lives. With this information, the mentors, in partnership with the residents, designed a plan of work over the next twelve weeks (1 ½ hours per week) to achieve goals they set. Exit interviews near the end of their time together enabled the pair to assess progress and change as well as to develop “next step” actions for achieving new goals after graduating from the program---this was the essence of their participatory action research.

Analyzing the data for resident outcomes, we found that the mentoring partnership supported their relationship building, fostered their persistence, and helped them to rebuild their worlds. Residents became web-savvy, for example, using job search web services, emailing and social media to communicate. They entered community colleges, applied for or found jobs, created resumes, used career services, and volunteered in community organizations. The mentors changed too. Their perspectives and awareness of the issues of at-risk populations became more informed and they developed advocacy skills. Not only did the mentors draw on community resources to support and help develop the residents’ goals, but, due to the mentors’ own diverse backgrounds and experiences, they had the cultural competence to create more equal partnerships with the residents. The project itself developed a new priority for diversity---awareness of demographically different groups of both residents and mentors--and a new focus on community-based education (action learning and social development to improve the capacity and quality of life of individuals within their communities).

These outcomes led to practice and policy recommendations. These are: 1) an approach to tutoring that addresses and assesses residents' goals in relation to their lives, over and beyond inculcating technical skills, with the aim to link these to opportunities to practice and use these skills independently for real-life needs, and 2) policies that improve access points into mainstream institutions, which can further assist residents to develop skills after they graduate from this program and provide them with community resources; and 3) Capacity building in the program itself for quality, cultural competence, and sustainability over time.

### **3. About the Project**

The Low-Income Housing Institute (LIHI) provides affordable housing in six counties in Western Washington and houses over 4,000 people who are referred to as, "residents." Many of the LIHI residents have experienced housing instability and are a diverse population of U.S. citizens and immigrants and refugees with various needs and goals. The main LIHI sites are based in Seattle where the need is greatest, as it is one of the fastest growing cities with housing affordability problems. Western Washington University's (WWU) mission focuses on equity and inclusion in education and Woodring's College of Education, Department of Human Services focuses on social justice across all communities in Washington state in terms of health and human services. The Adult & Higher Education program, housed in this department, is the only public graduate program of its kind in the state and focuses on diverse aspects of community education.

In 2012, LIHI and WWU's Adult & Higher Education program began a partnership to recruit and train volunteers to tutor LIHI residents who participated in LIHI's technology-based education program. 2014 was the first time the partnership recruited and trained community college students to be mentors with a focus on community-based education. Mentors were from North Seattle Community College, Seattle Central Community College, and South Seattle Community College<sup>1</sup>. Liaisons from the community colleges advertised the positions to teachers who promoted these to students. The mentors engaged in one-to-one tutoring to support the residents in whatever goals they wanted to reach with the use of technology while training. Residents met once a week over a twelve-week period with their mentor for an hour and a half to work on digital skills, anything from writing an e-mail to a family member, to creating a resume or applying for a job online. In the process, they would also work on soft skills.

The goal of the LIHI/WWU partnership was to empower LIHI residents to overcome challenges faced in moving towards greater self-sufficiency, and to provide the mentors with training to assist the residents in achieving these goals, as well as furthering their own education. There were four major stakeholders in the LIHI/WWU project:

1. LIHI recruited the residents through case managers at various sites around Seattle and provided programming capacity such as computers in the community centers at these sites, a volunteer coordinator to match and monitor the tutoring pair, and with a focus on technology and job-hunting skills

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<sup>1</sup> The Seattle community colleges have since changed their names

2. WWU recruited the mentors and provided them with face-to-face and online training on crucial topics affecting at-risk populations, plus, training in mentoring and participatory action research, in addition to support strategies in tutoring.
3. The mentors who were community college students worked towards human service types of degrees matched well the needs of the residents and were given opportunities to engage in non-formal learning as well as peer learning that was different than their formal learning at community college.
4. The residents, by participating in the 12-week program were given opportunities to become digitally literate and expand their opportunities.

The mentors were a diverse group, familiar with the community, and the challenges at-risk populations face. Many of them had to overcome similar challenges on their paths to becoming college students. They would be considered a non-traditional and untapped volunteer pool. The mentors were given a 2-hour workshop on issues of at-risk populations and participatory action research and they also received basic training in interviewing methods, after which was followed by a 12-week online training on topics such as cross-cultural communication, digital literacy, issues of at-risk populations, mentoring, participatory action research, and community-based education. After being matched, the mentors and residents assessed the residents' goals and needs which were of a diverse nature and were long-term and short-term. These ranged from becoming a college student to becoming a self-publishing author. However, a common underlying thread in achieving all of the goals was the need for, and use of, digital literacy, which was at the core of the curriculum. The pair then negotiated times and days to work together with curriculum that emerged from the resident's life, goals, and needs. In conjunction with a technology intake, the residents were given Safeway gift cards worth \$20 to participate in action research at the beginning and then also at the end of the three months, and these initial interviews were important for determining the curriculum. Exit interviews also assessed progress and changes in the residents' lives and perspectives.

Overall, the program emphasized the strengths found in community-based education, with a broad spectrum of community members and institutions collaborating to benefit members of the community. It included a university, a major provider of housing in the Seattle area, local colleges, legislators, volunteers, residents, educators, and administrators. Their strengths were a major contributing factor in the positive outcomes seen as a result of the program. The project itself developed a new priority for diversity and an awareness of demographically different groups, as well as an improved focus on community-based education. A more detailed summary of these outcomes follows in this evaluation report. Additional information about this project can be found on the LIHI/WWU website at <https://wce.wvu.edu/lihi/lihiwwu-mentoring-project>. See also the LIHI website at: <http://www.lihi.org/>.

This evaluation is intended for the public and focuses on the yearlong project partnership between WWU and LIHI, outlined here, including visuals of the timeline of the project and a staircase of supports (to follow)--that enabled the project to flourish. The following sections focus on: resident outcomes, training the mentors, and then the main themes of the project, concerning the processes of residents and mentors' learning and development. After that, case studies of mentor-resident pairs illustrate these themes and the uniqueness of each pair and person. Next the conclusion focuses on the significance of the project and the last section, offers policy and practice briefs for building capacity within the project.

### 3a. Timeline For Project

See: <http://www.dipity.com/TheEducationalTechnologist/WWU-LIHI-Online-Training/>



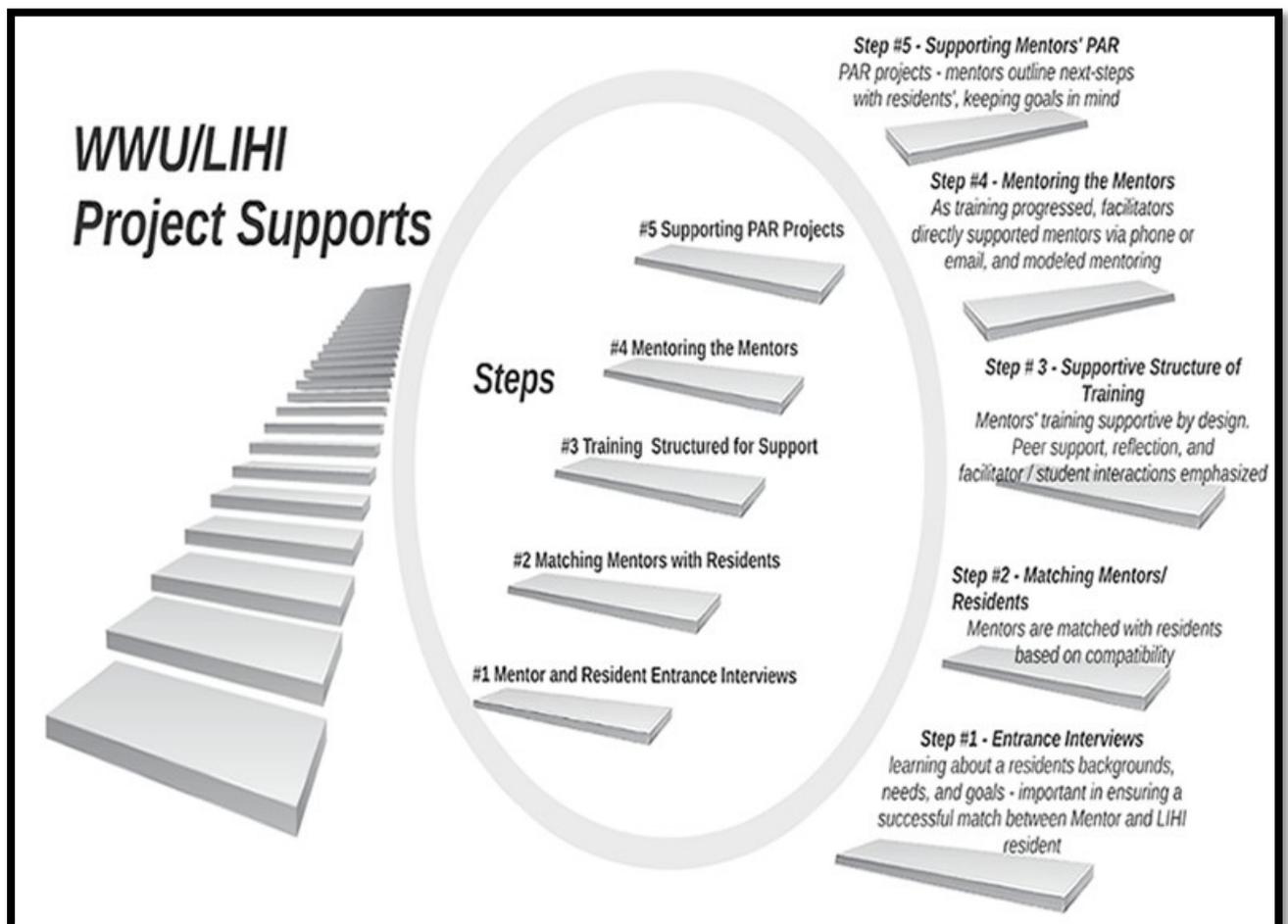
1. The Adult and Higher Education program (AHE) at Western Washington University (WWU) and the Low Income Housing Institute of Seattle (LIHI) begin planning the 2014 program. This is the first year that the project would recruit and train a non-traditional and diverse volunteer pool of Seattle-based community college students in community-based education to mentor LIHI residents. See the video, "What is the WWU/LIHI Mentoring Project?" at <https://wce.wwu.edu/lihi/lihiwwu-mentoring-project>.
2. WWU and LIHI staff recruits and interview mentors together and LIHI staff interviews LIHI residents. Recruitment of community college students is through coordinators and teachers at Seattle community colleges resulting in the largest group the program has had to date (12 mentors and residents).
3. Student-mentors have been selected, and the process of matching them with the LIHI resident begins. Matches are based on both logistics and complimentary strengths. This is the first time a database is used to assist with the matching.
4. The LIHI and WWU team meets with the mentors to welcome them and to introduce them to ideas in the training, including how to interview residents to learn about their lives, needs, and goals. The face-to-face workshop, includes a Fare Start lunch, and a curriculum focusing on at-risk populations. The meeting helps to bond the cohort and contributes greater interactivity because they know one another and are reflecting, and sharing experiences.
5. Student-mentors begin working on the online training, which lasts from March-June. Mentors are trained in: Participatory Action Research, mentoring, community-based education, cross-cultural communication, digital literacy, issues of homelessness, transitional or at-risk populations, and persistence.
6. After being matched, residents and mentors decide when and where to meet for their 1 1/2 hour weekly tutoring sessions and discuss goals for the 12 week period. They both do a technology intake, action research interviews about their goals, lives and social networks, and then begin planning the curriculum as a partnership.
7. The mentors give exit interviews to learn how the residents' learning has changed, about their goals, and lives, over the last three months. The residents and mentors discuss what they have learned together. Mentors and residents wrap-up the tutoring and their participatory action research (PAR) projects. Mentors finish the online training as well as their PARs and submit these as documents to the WWU team and to the residents. The residents now have a plan of action after the tutoring has ended.
8. Evaluation is centered on outcomes for all of the stakeholders of the project: the residents, the mentors and the partnership. The themes for the residents were: their persistence and their relationship building. The themes for the mentors were: changes

in their perspectives and their advocacy. The project themes were: diversity as a core issue for both residents and mentors and the value of community-based education.

9. WWU team member Nicole Harris and student-mentor Alejandra Grillo give a presentation at for the Conversations on Social Issues forum at Seattle Central College describing the project to students which was highly interactive and served to recruit more community college students. See the video, "Homelessness, Community-Based Education, and the Benefits of Mentoring", on the presentation at <https://wce.wvu.edu/lihi/news>.
10. The film "A Place at the Table" was shown at WWU in partnership with Community to Community (<http://foodjustice.org/>) during National Hunger and Homeless Awareness Week (see <http://nationalhomeless.org/about-us/projects/awareness-week/>
11. The "Moving Forward with LIHI" event was a thank you for mentors and residents of the project as well as LIHI staff, coordinators of the community colleges, and WWU for their hard work and support of the partnership. It was also to report the positive outcomes that resulted for the residents. These were: accessing the community college for vocational and ESOL courses, the public library for information and referrals, volunteering for community-based organizations, becoming web-savvy, and applying for, and finding jobs.

### 3b. Staircase of Supports For Project

See: [http://prezi.com/mmlmzmjmrnbz/?utm\\_campaign=share&utm\\_medium=copy](http://prezi.com/mmlmzmjmrnbz/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy)



#### 4. Outcomes For Residents: “The Hope And Necessary Work To Move Forward”

“She has initiative to think about new things she wants to learn and when something isn't working for her she is able to communicate that. She also has courage and will power because she works hard to focus and learn what she wants to learn... She also has a vision about where she wants to go...There is also the awareness of her obstacles and limitations *but the hope and necessary work to move forward*” -mentor about resident partner

- ▶ *Residents joined community college programs*  
The community college mentors mapped out inroads into the community college system for a few of the residents, helping them access a new educational site to continue and expand their goals
- ▶ *Residents became library users accessing information, programs, and referrals in the community*  
Mentors and residents sometimes met at the Seattle Public Library for their sessions and in doing so, discovered other technology programs, information services, and where to get referrals to build their information-seeking capacities
- ▶ *Residents volunteered in community organizations as a way to move back into the workforce*  
Mentors helped those residents with basic digital skills and previous workforce experience to connect to community-based organizations as a way to re-enter the workforce and move into work routines and professional networks
- ▶ *Residents either found jobs, applied for jobs, created resumes, or located career services in person or online*  
As part of practicing digital skills for real-world needs, residents with the help of mentors, focused on job searching, utilizing new access points into the workforce that they previously didn't have
- ▶ *Residents became web-savvy- from online publishing to creating accounts and emailing to using social media, and they were also conducting job searches and gained new communication skills in the process*  
Residents, as part of the digital inclusion of this project, accessed new sites and used these for their own goals and needs, thereby becoming digital citizens
- ▶ *Residents developed new relationships –with the mentors and they connected to new networks of people which supported them to rebuild their worlds*  
Through first with LIHI case managers and then mentors, residents started building constructive relationships that further supported them to develop new networks and identities

How did they do it? Mentors started their tutoring from where participants “were” and asked them in what areas they wanted to grow. So this project planted seeds for residents persisting in their goals for themselves through building skills and relationships. The section on *Themes*, tells about the process of residents moving forward with the support of social networks and their persistence but also how the mentors grew too. See video:

## **5. Behind the Scenes: Mentors Moving Forward Through Training**

Honorariums were given to incentivize these mentors--- busy low-income students and workers--- to participate in this project as well as teachers who saw this as a unique opportunity to promote it to their students. After completing the training, which took about two hours a week, the mentors were paid \$500. The honorarium was for their training rather than for their volunteer work. Yet taken together, the mentors spent about 3 ½ hours a week on the LIHI/WWU project. The blended method of delivery (a face-to-face session followed by online and phone mentoring) allowed students from three different community colleges to participate intensively at any time of day or night and brought them together as a cohort.

The mentors received one face-to-face workshop for two hours at a LIHI site, which was a kick-off for both their tutoring sessions and the online training. This workshop had a catered lunch from Fare Start, and focused on introducing mentors to the issues, to one another and taught them about participatory action research methods---a community-based approach to solving social and educational problems through action and research together. The online training began the next week and was interactive, with the assignments being primarily discussion-based. The modules followed the 12 weeks of training, with a total of 11 modules, all having distinct topics: The early modules covered the foundational themes of housing instability and participatory action research (PAR), and the latter covered the remaining themes of mentorship, digital literacy, cross-cultural communication, and community-based education. The content for the training was drawn from a variety of pre-existing multimedia and was designed to give the mentors a broad view of the themes and deepen their knowledge and competencies in these areas. For example, the module on mentorship included videos and reading material about various aspects of mentoring, and mentoring strategies. The mentors were asked to select, review, and reflect on the content, and then share their thoughts, feelings, what they learned, or what more they'd like to learn, by posting and then responding to others' posts on an interactive discussion board. The WWU course facilitators participated in, and responded to the discussion boards as well. The facilitators provided a high level of support for the mentors, including responding to posts and encouraging mentors to post, exchanging emails, phone conversations, and being an active participant in the creation of the mentors and residents' PAR projects. The mentors' designed the PARs to best facilitate the "next steps" in residents achieving their goals and to keep in mind the importance of connecting residents to other agencies within the communities so they could realistically persist towards these goals. These became the essence of the PAR projects and culminated with the creation, and the application of individual projects within the context of their tutoring sessions. The goal of the PAR projects was the creation of a tangible resource that residents to be used to assist them in the future.

Formative assessments were included throughout the online training to allow the mentors to provide feedback to the facilitators about how they felt about the course itself, and to identify and address any challenges that they might be facing. The reflective nature of the training gave the mentors ample opportunities to reflect on the training, their own experiences, their tutoring experiences, and the benefits of the program. Please see online training video: <https://wce.wvu.edu/lihi/lihiwwu-mentoring-project>

## **6. Themes For Residents and Mentors Moving Forward**

The outcomes for the residents (discussed in the beginning of this report) are only a fragment of the real story of this project: The resident outcomes reveal successes but not the process and support needed for them to move forward in their lives. Themes were gleaned about the processes of the LIHI/WWU project with diverse data sources.<sup>2</sup> The themes were for both residents *and* mentors--the two main stakeholders of this project. The themes for the residents were: 1) Growing relationships and networks and 2) persistence towards their goals. The themes for the mentors were: 1) Perspective-changing moments and 2) developing advocacy expertise.

### **Resident Themes**

Two major themes emerged for the residents about this process of moving forward: *the importance of growing relationships and helpful social networks* and their *persistence to meet goals*, both of which helped them to rebuild their worlds.

#### *Growing Relationships and Helpful Social Networks: "I Have Changed My Relationships a Little Bit"*

Many residents experienced breakdowns in their relationships of housing instability, like, Eric who expressed: "I feel ashamed. I don't communicate with them, no family for me." Through the supportive interactions with mentors, case managers and community organizations however the residents developed new relationships and social networks that transitioned them into the mainstream and moved them out of marginalization.

Reconstructing a network of supportive people and resources proved crucial to both defining and meeting their goals. Once clean and with a place to live as well as support from his case manager and mentor, Eric became a volunteer at a local agency as a way to transition back into the workforce. Another resident, Manny was a caregiver to his elderly parents before they died. His brother was "very critical" of his care for them and believed Manny "wanted money" every time he reached out for emotional connection. As a way to better express himself, Manny, through his mentor, became an online writer publishing his personal stories.

Refugees experienced family separation and disconnection when they left their countries but found learning how to act in an individualist culture, as Amina put it, "hard to make friends and know how to act around other people." Furthermore, their limited English proficiency acted as an additional barrier to forming helpful relationships and social networks especially in a culture that depends on digital communication for relating; as Amina expressed: "the language was very hard to adjust to, it is so different in every way. The use of computers in every part of daily life is hard to get used to....it seems like the online community takes the place of true community here." Here Amina captures the trade-offs of adapting to a new culture without tools to connect. Her and her mentor worked on helping her gain new computer skills but also navigate language courses in her community where she could reconnect to other learners like her. She also bought a new phone that further fostered these new connections. In fact, digital literacy was a practical goal for many residents; the acquisition of which allowed them to access wider networks and relationships outside of their

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<sup>2</sup> The sources of data included: resident intakes and exit surveys, pre and post interviews mentors did with residents, mentor applications, Canvas discussion boards of mentors, demographic data from LIHI, interviews the WWU marketing intern conducted with residents and mentors, coaching conversations with mentors, workshop data, and participatory action research projects.

immediate vicinities. One resident identified emailing as an important way to connect with others, using the help of his mentor. He describes this process: “I’ll type a letter and I’ll start it and then send it over to her [mentor] to check it.”

The process of supporting residents to connect and reconnect to mainstream culture began with helping them to connect to their inner sense of power to make changes, as active agents. One mentor for example “noticed the resident saying, *whatever you say teacher*. So I began to push him in giving me his opinions/ideas to see what he thought.” In each case, both resident and mentor collaborated to build a plan of action to address various challenges the resident was facing. This was the space residents needed to empower themselves through relationships.

Another resident expressed the importance of building a supportive network of family and professionals to help her achieve her goals: “My sisters helped me a lot. I talked to them about my goal and they tried to help me out. I tried to help people in the past but right now I feel like I need time to get on my feet first. I was having clinical depression for a long time. I was down but didn’t know why I was like that. I got to see a psychologist and he prescribed me something which helped.” When addressing her support system she gained through LIHI, another resident stated, “the lady that works [at her LIHI building] helps me out when I need something. Social services give us some money and food. I have some family and they help me. When I have a problem, I communicate with them. I have changed my relationship with them a little bit.” Residents also learned to leverage their own talents and skills to help their communities. One resident, Halima, began interpreting between Somali and English. “Its too hard but now I’m okay because the place I am working, the old people don’t speak English so I am better than them. Sometimes I try to translate for Somali people.”

The mentors became a part of the residents’ supportive networks too. As one mentor noted, “I felt it was very affirming when my resident asked me to have dinner with her and her daughters. Even though I had to refuse due to my contract, it made me feel like her and her family were happy with what I was doing.” Often the development of these networks was necessary to maintaining not only their housing stability but building social capital, as one resident articulated, “First of all I would like to have an apartment, somewhere where we can live. Then buy a car. First I find the apartment and we go to school-me and my kids. Then other things are going to come.”

#### *Persistence To Meet Goals: “Nothing is Too Hard”*

The second, equally important theme that permeated the residents’ experiences was their level of persistence to overcome hardships and meet their goals. Almost uniformly, residents expressed a sense of optimism and hope for the future and a willingness to take practical steps, with the aid of LIHI mentors, to further their goals. One of the mentors described the importance of lived experiences to the aspirations of residents: “Halima came to the U.S. almost three years ago, she hasn’t finished high school yet but is looking forward to it! She lives in temporary housing and she has big dreams.” Another resident, Samuel, emphatically stated, “My body still likes to go back to work and do some job. It’s not used to it, to stay home in the morning and all day long.” Though many other people assumed that due to his age, Samuel should be retiring, he still had professional goals for himself: “I have one goal, and that is to make a business.” This particular resident, possessed the mindset that many of the residents held, and articulated it eloquently when he stated, “nothing is too hard!” This resident was able to see where he had come from, the obstacles he has overcome, and why giving up was not an option: “I left school a long time and I was working, I was working with

a computer no problem. ... Now it's a little bit harder to get back... but the world and all these kind of thing use it." Dogged, this resident recognizes, "You have to motivate yourself... otherwise you have no motivation then you don't do it." It is because of this tenacity that this particular resident, and many others possessed, that the partnerships were so successful. Furthermore, as discussed previously, many of the residents had limited English competencies, which were barriers, but it did not stop the residents from persisting. Halima for example thought life in the U.S. would "be easy" yet found it hard. However she thought if she applied herself to learning English, it "gets better."

Residents with children demonstrated a particularly high degree of persistence to learn the language and connect with their teachers and their homework. One mother expressed, "when you have kids go to school it's really hard when go to school, go to work. It's kind of hard so I joined my school. I want to continue my school, maybe its take a long time but I try... When you don't speak English, it's too hard to live here so I have to go back to school." She also expressed, "I have to prepare for high school and college. I want to become a nurse for children. I have to get a job first."

Mentors were uniformly impressed by the determination and strength of character of the residents—characteristics that defy the usual societal narrative surrounding those who have experienced homelessness. As one mentor remarked about a resident, "she has initiative to think about new things she wants to learn and when something isn't working for her she is able to communicate that. She also has courage and will power because she works hard to focus and learn what she wants to learn even though her three kids can sometimes be in the room asking for different things or interrupting what she's saying. She also has a vision about where she wants to go... There is also the awareness of her obstacles and limitations but the hope and necessary work to move forward." Another mentor described the resident with whom she worked as having, "a lot of drive to learn and keep going even though the simplest tasks may be challenging. He is not afraid to ask for help and do things on his own when he can. Even though he has a lot of work towards his dream.... he never shows me any doubt. His attitude is positive and is working on his computer, reading or writing skills." The residents often felt they wanted to develop their goals in line with the new lives they were in the process of establishing, like one resident who said, "I just need a little bit of touch up."

### **Mentors**

The mentors experienced changes in their perspectives about at-risk populations and gained advocacy expertise.

*Changes in Perspectives: "Knowing The Reality And How Things Had Happened To The People That We Are Mentoring Has Been The Most Powerful Tool In This Process"*

Working intensively with the residents, the mentors began to experience their worlds close-up and shifted their consciousness in an empathic way. One mentor said: "I continue to work in adopting a different mindset and realize that these experiences are incommensurable." Much of this perspective-shaping focused on the discrimination that not only the residents experienced but also the mentors, due to their ethnic and racial heritages, like one mentor who discussed the effects of "institutional racism" that he experienced as a Mexican-American, which he felt was "going to be around for a long time." A Latina mentor similarly declared, "I have engaged in social work and woman empowerment work because I am aware and have been hurt by other people's assumptions and discrimination." In relating directly to the population they worked with another mentor said: "It is true that this population is

discriminated, so what we need to do is to learn how to be less discriminative and more supportive with homeless and at risk people,” At least four of the mentors discussed being on the edge of poverty themselves as children or as adults and having experienced housing insecurity including living in cars and couch surfing. This led mentors to express increased awareness of the complex realities underlying the residents’ histories with housing insecurity—a reality that defies common notions and stereotypes of at-risk people as personal failures. Rather, they saw the residents’ pasts defined more as being disenfranchised, as one said: “Homelessness seems to be surrounded by crisis events...accompanying factors would include insufficient resources to counteract the effects of those crisis events.” This idea of homelessness as “too complex to point out a single variable” was reinforced in the training. Although the mentors experienced difficulties in their own lives they admitted that they held deeply embedded notions of poverty as individualistic becoming aware that this was the predominant perception. As one mentor observed, “It is good for me to adjust my perception of why people are homeless. I think that previously I viewed homelessness as largely being the result of mental illness, but that is really just one part which is absolutely not the universal experience.” The mentors discovered that stereotypes of people having experienced homelessness at one time as drug addicts, mentally ill or as “lazy” were overly simplified and personalized and not encompassing of the larger and much more complex picture, that, as one mentor reflected, “different situations that make people become homeless.” At the same time they became suspicious of the American ideal that hard work leads automatically to rewards or that everyone has “choices” like one mentor who said: “people do not choose these lifestyles for themselves willingly--it becomes a last resort.” This led them to believe that education is not a solution for poverty but that it may help build some necessary skills to become self-determined. They also recognized that the residents already possessed important skills and resiliency, having survived so much extreme poverty. Furthermore, the mentors came to learn that while resources may be available in a community, it might not be accessible to the residents. The mentors articulated that, “the resources often exist in silos, isolated from other systems and resources, which in and of itself is an additional barrier.” The mentors identified that lack of access to technology (the digital divide) excludes people from the instruments of attaining housing, jobs and other means of social mobility. Not only increased awareness, but also a sense of not being judgmental and open to seeing problems through the eyes of the residents was important in being able to relate to their challenges and their goals. As much as mentors might have wanted to swoop in and solve problems to help residents overcome the barriers they faced, the mentors understood that it was ultimately the resident’s decision to make about how and whether to address a particular problem. Instead it was, as one mentor declared, “to keep the residents on track” to achieve their goals. He went on to say, “Its hard to keep moving towards a goal when you don't have any encouragement or guidance, especially when there are so many other things to take into consideration.”

One of the biggest challenges that the mentors saw was the residents’ exclusion and invisibility in society: “At risk and homeless populations can be seen as invisible since our society does not give them the attention they need to improve their lives.” The mentors identified one solution to the invisibility of people who are homeless and/or living in poverty--that being the opportunity to have residents tell their individual stories and having others hear their stories. This act puts a name to the statistics, empowers the resident, and is an option to defy stereotypes about people living in poverty. One mentor said, “It's always nice and helpful to hear other people's stories and experiences because you can empathize and at the same time open up more possibilities about what could happen in our own mentorship experiences and definitely encourage me to give an extra mile.” This was a beginning to the

type of advocacy work involved in mentoring the residents (over and beyond inculcating technical technology skills).

*Advocacy: “Not Only Am I Providing Some Knowledge But Also Options So That They Can Use Those To Better Serve Themselves”*

The mentors helped the residents to tell their stories---one even became an online publisher---this being an act of advocacy in and of itself, as one mentor observed, “The digital access we can give...is going to give them the power to tell their own stories...and other resources they may need.” The mentors developed an increased understanding of advocacy as it applied to their work with the residents. The idea of advocacy, as mentors came to understand it, entailed working with someone in equal partnership, not administering “help.” As one mentor declared, he was instead offering a “service.” This also meant moving beyond delivering a skills approach. One mentor said: “I am not limited to only teach the resident but also help overcome barriers to learning.” Their role therefore was to model and support them in large and small ways, as one mentor said: “People with self determination issues need positive support around them to push them forward in their lives. They need a person with them to keep them motivated and to show them how to do it.” They saw themselves as “guides” supporting residents to ask their “own questions” as one declared: “For most part I feel I am guiding her to find the way to solve problems or find things and I’m also using a leadership role encouraging her to continue with her education because she can do it! I support and guide her on the needs that arise through her own learning process. She is the one in charge of writing ... ask the questions that she needs to ask. I am a guide for her.” Seeing their mentorship in wider terms than two people learning together, another mentor stated: “When the community is involved and the researcher is aware of the needs of the community by becoming part of it the research can potentially benefit everybody participating in the process and create changes where difference is valued and used in benefit of the people experiencing oppression.” The mentors advocated for residents in the sense that they provided a space wherein the residents could empower themselves: “Not only am I providing some knowledge but also with options so that they can use those to better serve themselves” as one stated. Mentors introduced resources for residents and taught them skills designed to advocate for themselves: “We can’t save everyone, the majority of the power lies within the will of the person seeking the services we are providing.” These services included pathways into institutions such as the library for information and referrals, to the labor market through career services, both online and in-person, and community college systems for vocations, as well as volunteer organizations as a way into the workforce. One mentor began assisting the resident to mentor other students, passing on her knowledge: “We are starting to construct a list of resources that my resident can use to tutor her students. She has already met up with one of the residents. The lady has difficulty speaking English so my resident and I learned how to use Google translate in order to communicate with her during their sessions.” In a sense this 3-month period was about planting seeds so that residents could then expand their resources and use other community agencies, which is the essence of community-based education. A few of the mentors advocated for the resident to continue their education, and persist against obstacles towards goals by mapping out access points to the community college system, which is the essence of community-based education (discussed more in the Conclusion section of this report).

## **7. Case Studies of Resident and Mentor Pairs**

The themes of resident persistence, relationship building, mentor perspective changing and advocacy coalesce each of the resident-mentor partnerships that are illustrated in each of the subsequent case studies. These five case studies also illustrate the uniqueness of each person and pair, and their work together.

### **Ayanna and Carlo: On a Bumpy Road to Vocational Training and Jobs**

Ayanna a woman in her 30s originally from East Africa with a young child, was working to obtain a Certified Nursing Assistant's degree (CNA). Ayanna moved to Seattle from New Mexico with her daughter in hopes of improving her job prospects. She had few people offering her any support in New Mexico, only her extended family in East Africa, who were difficult to contact. Ayanna partnered with Carlo, a community college student recently accepted into the Respiratory Care Program and volunteer at a local medical center as a patient liaison. The partnership turned out to be a natural fit, with Carlo's involvement in the medical profession and Ayanna's aspiration to be a nurse in addition to the fact that Carlo's parents were immigrants for whom he was a translator. He understood the challenges Ayanna faced. Their collaboration addressed what Carlo described as her "structured and intentional goals" but which also held obstacles, mainly childcare. She often brought her daughter to the sessions, having no other options. Carlo adapted the tutoring even bringing his iPad for her daughter, allowing the pair to focus on Ayanna's digital literacy skills at the same time. This family intervention helped to create a better relationship between the two and helped her persist. The participatory action research (PAR) project they built together focused on guidance into a Certified Nursing Assistant's degree (CNA) and supporting her to build her capacity to persist in this program—including resources and techniques for improving her knowledge and use of English, and medical terminology embedded into lessons. They drafted a series of strategies for using the public library for Internet connections, so that she could continue to improve her digital literacy. Their PAR was a collection of resources to help her find employment using her child-care certificate. With few illusions, Carlo realized she had to contend with a "system [that] was not built for people of color, for minorities, or the impoverished."

### **Eric and Aurora: Struggling to Re-Enter the Workforce**

Eric, African American, and in his fifties lost a successful business, when he became an addict, spent time in jail, and was on a long slow climb back. As a way forward into the workforce, he wanted to "spend time in philanthropic work" at a local community-based organization which he felt, was "fulfilling" to transition into a new career and even advocated for homeless services. His mentor, Aurora, originally from Columbia, was in her early twenties, and in a certificate program for Chemical Dependency, which was a good match for Eric who had a history of chemical dependency. She saw him as someone who, "used to have everything" and sought ways to help him get back the good parts of his life. Through their work, Aurora reflected on his and other residents' persistence in spite of obstacles: "I know that a lot of (the residents) have gone through hard and painful situations, but they have remained strong and have found support with the LIHI project." The pair built a working relationship based on trust and appreciation, for example, he would text her: "thank you for your help." Furthermore, their listening and seeing each other as individuals built credibility into their collective potential. As she put it, learning digital literacy, is "actually being proactive for their own lives and that there is nothing impossible if they have faith and want to move forward on their life project." This alliance understood the importance of connection, as it is clear in their words and their collaboration. Eric wanted to find a job, but had an old criminal record that was hindering his career options. Aurora and Eric discovered that if a person does not have a conviction for an extended period of time, there is a process whereby one may be able to get a criminal record expunged, bettering their chances of finding work.

For their PAR, the two created a guide on how to get a criminal record expunged so that “he will be able to move on with his life and dreams” --- thereby supporting his persistence.

### **Samuel and Maria: Growing and Blooming**

An immigrant in his sixties, and having a disability, resident Samuel brought a wealth of experience and perspective to tutoring as well as an aspiration, to “take care of the poor.” He made it clear although he was older, he “was not retired” and wanted to keep working and serving. A deeply religious man, he was guided by a powerful sense of social justice; something which instantly connected him with LIHI mentor Maria, a Latina community college student in her twenties who aspired to earn a master’s degree in counseling and was a transfer student in psychology. She also experienced housing instability and poverty herself being raised by a single mother in public housing who survived on food stamps. Even though she had never volunteered before in a program she had been mentored herself and had a sincere desire to mentor those in need. Importantly, Samuel and Maria shared a mindset of persistence. He expressed: “When you set a goal you have to work on it. When you want to reach that goal you have to do it. You’ve got to. Otherwise nothing is going to happen. Nothing is going to come to you.” Samuel and Maria focused their tutoring on supporting his digital inclusion. Samuel was able to learn how to use email, and gain other computer literacy skills, which he noted was the “only way to contact people, also if you want to get a job.” Maria recognized that his digital literacy gains could compensate for his mobility problems as well as further his other goals: “As far as achieving equitability I think it will give him a better opportunity professionally and be able to communicate with family as well as get resources without having to travel as much.” Their PAR project focused on inquiring about the needs of those who are older second language learners, profiling important qualities such as respect and encouragement as well as dialoging about progress. They both decided an outcome for Samuel would be to continue his learning in one to one tutoring at LIHI. Maria reflected: “We discussed that he wanted to be out on the waitlist to receive another tutor again. Since he is already working on his academic goals I think this is the best next step for him.”

### **Corinne and Susie: The Fighter Who Came Back**

As a person with a disability, Corinne wanted to focus her tutoring sessions on job searching, resume writing and improving her computer skills. She worked on these skills with mentor Susie, and put these skills to use for the benefit of others; she, like Susie, became a volunteer and tutor herself in a program. Despite coming from very different backgrounds, Susie and Corinne developed a working relationship built on partnership and equality. Corinne, a white woman in her early 60s was retired but without economic means, having lost her home in another part of the country, and living in her car for a time and then a homeless encampment. She was matched with Susie, a 20-something community college student studying pre-requisites for an occupational therapy degree with a Biology background and experience translating and teaching ESOL. Susie immigrated to the United States as a child and was bilingual in both Chinese and English, and having suffered hardships as a child learning to adapt to a new culture. Through their work together both mentor and resident learned from each other in a collaborative partnership that broke down stereotypes and barriers to achievement. Both were ambitious in their goals for themselves as Corinne put it, “I gave myself motivation.” And Susie found that her and Corinne “share many of the same burdens, dreams, goals.” Susie entered the program hoping to learn more about how empowerment and awareness intersect with barriers to housing stability, and Corinne was able to share her lived experiences in this realm. In this way, Susie saw how people with great economic difficulties should not be viewed simply as objects of pity in need of charity, but as

individuals with unique talents in spite of challenges and she supported Corinne to find volunteer opportunities. She explained: “Corinne and I have looked for opportunities in volunteering that she might be interested in. She has had a passion for helping veterans overcome PTSD . . . We were unable to find an opportunity that is tailored to her needs however, so we emailed some NGOs directly and asked about volunteer positions.” This experienced changed Susie’s perspective as she admitted: “volunteering is the last thing that I would imagine a [formerly] homeless person doing . . . I think that social prejudice against the homeless population has become a sort of taboo and I am hoping that this program, an example of community action, will open up more conversations about this topic.” As Corinne developed new volunteer skills, Susie formed a growing awareness about Corinne as “very intelligent and very capable. I would have never guessed that she was homeless and living in low income housing.” Realizing that Corinne lacked resources they both compiled a list of training resources which she could use as “next steps” and which built on the work that they focused on in their tutoring.

### **Halima and Rosa: Building a Community**

LIHI resident Halima, in her 30s with children, had little access to educational opportunities in her native country of Somalia. As a recent immigrant with a lack of formal education and limited English proficiency she has faced many barriers to her finding decent paying work. For Halima, LIHI was a first step toward realization of her dreams, as she stated, “I have lots of dreams. First I have to improve my English.” As such, Halima engaged with LIHI mentor Rosa, an immigrant from South America, and in her 20s studying psychology at the community college. She was also an artist working on a grant focused on a women’s organization and volunteered with a theater company in Seattle, doing child care work to survive. She experienced hardships when she first came to Seattle, escaping from a live-in position with a difficult family and having to live in her car for a short period. In their PAR project, they focused on not only on building literacy, computer skills and job skills, to aid Halima to locate stable employment but also focused on her empowerment to apply and sustain these skills and embed these into her life: “I work to encourage her to keep going even if the obstacles seem big, because she is the owner of her empowerment as a woman and as a mother. At the beginning of the program Halima stated, “When I was in my home country I wanted to come to the United States. At that time I was taught when you come to the US life will be easy. But when I came life is too difficult----life is not easy. It’s hard when you don’t speak English well.” Through her work with Rosa, Halima was able to develop community resources for learning, as her mentor reflected: “Halima is learning about literacy and digital literacy resources for the community.” With Rosa’s assistance, Halima was able to find gainful employment, and was accepted into an ESL program. Rosa and Halima’s experience underscores the philosophy behind community-based education. Rosa and Halima’s work together exemplified the importance of supportive communities for people who have “a tough battle with more chances to loose than win if not connected to helpful resources.” Their initial connection was important, sharing the common bond of immigrating to America in search of a better future and being limited by English as well as “creating new relationships and that reflection can bring hope.” They saw each other as women who could grow and learn from each other. However Rosa had a much higher level of education and greater leverage than Halima who she described as, “a refugee from another country where education for woman is not a choice and her possibilities to have a job in the US have shrunk because of her lack of education.”

## **8. Conclusion: Progress Made in 2014 that Moved the Partnership Forward**

The overall mission of the project was to “plant seeds” in terms of supporting residents to grow goals and persist as well as build relationships in addition to supplying training to mentors that shifted their perspectives and turned them into advocates (as the themes demonstrated). There were two elements that made the project flourish: the diversity of the participants and the approach to learning that had at its core, community-based education.

#### *Diversity of Mentors and Residents*

The rich diversity of mentors and residents---community college students from under-represented groups trying to obtain a degree and formerly homeless residents trying to rebuild their lives. Similar to residents who were marginalized, many of the mentors had experienced stigmatization due to their ethnicities and the fact that they were community college students who are not usually considered to be a viable volunteer pool. This put the two on more equal par, and contributed to the equality of the partnership, both having lived experiences of discrimination. The mentor cohort was mixed in terms of gender, race ethnicity and sexual orientation. Among the mentors, there were 7 women and 5 men. They were also 1<sup>st</sup> generation students and immigrants from various countries. Their heritages were: Latino (5), Asian (3), African-American (1), and white (3). Nearly all were in their 20s and 30s and single (except for a couple married to each other) and two mentors identified as LGBT.

The resident demographics illustrated diversity as well, with roughly half being male/female and most who were single like the mentors. However a significant proportion of the residents, particularly those who were U.S. born, tended to be older, (40s and upwards), representing a growing segment of American poverty. The residents were divided among the following groups: four residents were African-American, two were white, and there was one Latina. Three residents were East African (from Somalia and Ethiopia), one was Pacific Islander, and another Vietnamese. These six residents identified as being either an immigrant or refugee with four saying English was not their first language. Also three of the residents were veterans.

Given the diversity, being intentional about screening and placement was vital to the success of the project. Intentionally, the mentors were matched or placed with residents with whom a common ground was apparent. For example one mentor whose first language was Vietnamese was matched to a Vietnamese resident, their technology-based tutoring happening in their native language. Across co-ethnic groups, mentors who grew up bilingual understood language barriers first-hand; one U.S. born Latino mentor was matched to an East African immigrant and explained: “My parents and family are people who I have known to be limited by their understanding of language and I can relate to that feeling.” Similarly, building a rapport from day one was central to the mentors and residents successfully working together. To this end, mentors first conducted an interview to learn about the resident’s life story, which helped to further match their interests and backgrounds and develop relevant curriculum. This interviewing complimented the mentors’ studies, as many were engaged in human service type areas in community college, with interviewing central to their professional work. As one mentor who was training to be a nurse said: “What is great about my match is a sort of fated experience. My resident is currently working on her Certified Assistant Nurse. With my background in biology, EMT and medical interpreting, I don’t think there would have been a better fit. I feel confident that I will be able to pass along relevant information and resources for her.” Another resident who worked to overcome a chemical dependency was matched to a mentor who was studying chemical dependency. Yet another partnership found common ground in yet other ways, as one mentor compared: “The

resident and I have many things in common, we are women of color, we are from a foreign country, English is our second language, and we arrive to the U.S. as adults. That was very important for me to recognize when starting mentoring her, because there are similar things that we both have to overcome in order to succeed in Seattle.”

The aforementioned similarities did not occur in every instance however. Given that some residents and mentors experienced tension because of differences in cultural backgrounds, generational differences, and worldviews, the mentors and residents vested their time and energy into building a relationship that was one of equality and openness, like one mentor who said: “Although my resident and I don't have many things in common, we were both open to discuss each other's lives and felt comfortable getting to know each other.” Another mentor reflected these same sentiments when he described the increased levels of comfort that he and the resident with whom he worked as, “comfortable discussing differences in our experiences without passing judgments.” The willingness to learn from one another and have unconditional positive regard was evident in the work that the residents and mentors accomplished; one mentor saying that they were a “good match because we both are caring of one another, we respect each other and even if things aren't going smooth we can share some laughs. Although we have very different experiences I think the main fact is we try to communicate and feel safe to make mistakes. For example this is my first mentoring experience I certainly don't know everything but just like I am patient with my resident he is patient with me and respects me even though I am a lot younger.”

#### *Community-Based Education Commitment*

The second element was the concept of community-based education, with which the residents and mentors, being from Seattle and interested in social development, engaged. Community-based education (CBE) is commonly thought of as learning opportunities to improve the capacity and quality of life of individuals *within* their communities. CBE focuses on action research as a way to develop and work towards goals and resources within local contexts, as one mentor described: “participatory action research is the means for a community to learn and move toward action.”

As discussed, the mentors conducted an interview to gather baseline data about the residents' life story. This story was the foundation for what evolved into the Community Based Participatory Action research projects. Community Based Participatory Action Research is defined as a collaborative effort among professionals and community members to address community problems based on local input and a strategy tailored to the particular community. The strategy is then implemented, monitored and adjusted as needed. Mentors and residents were engaged in community based education PARs. The mentors saw themselves as working *with* the residents to achieve what one mentor saw as “self determination” and went on to say: “We are working to do research and participate in community-based research that will empower those communities to choose their own directions, and every part of the tutoring is enabling residents toward self-help; instead of saying, “Here, let me do that for you,” we are saying, “Here, let me show you how to do that.” As a collective, the mentors and residents engaged in a process that allowed for shared development of curriculum, took action and, learned from one another about their lives while the mentors learned in their online training about the importance of understanding complex issues—socio-political, economic, and cultural--- affecting at-risk populations.

The methods and techniques used in PAR were as telling as the results for mentors and residents as one mentor expressed: “When doing research, focusing on the learning

experience more than any result will benefit the participants of the experience allowing them to open and become more aware of the circumstances they face and will modify the process to create connections and enrich the work.” At its core, CBPAR respects and validates the experience and efforts of the population it seeks to help (as there is no curriculum, it is a resident- centered process): “PAR is the means for a community to learn and move toward action, and without reflexivity the finding and action may be misguided” one mentor declared. This mentor, like others, concluded their tutoring sessions with the residents through the PAR by leaving the residents with “next steps” of resources and connections in their communities, tied to goals the residents wanted to accomplish and devising a plan for how to get there. For instance, some members engaged in CBPAR projects that created community college and educational institution pathways, some residents gained access to the public library system, and others overcame obstacles that previously prevented them from accessing employment in Seattle. One resident and mentor partnership worked on addressing criminal convictions while another partnership directly applied the digital literacy skills learned in the tutoring sessions to facilitating greater self publishing after their partnership ended.

## 9. Recommendations for Policies and Practices

Based on the themes and conclusion of the report, we developed practice and policy recommendations that will improve the depth and breadth of the partnership and the quality of resident and mentor experiences. These are: 1) an approach to tutoring that addresses and assesses residents’ goals in relation to their lives, over and beyond inculcating technical skills, and linking these to opportunities to practice and use these skills independently for real-life needs; 2) policies that improve access points into city institutions, which can further assist residents to develop skills, opportunities, and resources after they graduate from this program; 3) Building capacity within the program to build on the cultural competence and “inside” knowledge of generations of diverse residents and mentors.

1. *Comprehensive Tutoring Approach* – the current program encouraged mentors and residents to learn new digital skills but the assessments they were expected to use were entirely technology based and didn’t focus on the application of these skills or the practice of using these alone nor their transfer to different contexts. Resultantly, mentors did not use the time-consuming assessment form that was a list of discrete technology skills (such as, “ability to use keyboard”) so there was little in the way of understanding resident skill development or even how they used these skills and for what reason. Mentors had to create their own assessments, which were not always consistent across pairs and there was little in the way of evaluating what was working (or not). Next year’s assessments will focus on the mentors helping the residents form goals that they can actively achieve for which technology may or may not be used and move away from an assessment of isolated skills to focusing on their practices. This new approach will focus on digital inclusion and digital citizenship; in other words the ways the residents *use* technology and for what purposes than just gauging their technical competencies and in a test-like way. The training that the mentors receive through LIHI will focus on a more comprehensive assessment of resident progress over and beyond isolated skill development. This new approach will open up the initial conversations mentors and residents have and allow for more emergent curriculum based on the goals of the residents. It will also move away from the

technology itself and look at other practices residents want to develop that deepen and expand their networks and relationships as well as their persistence.

2. *Policies Improving Institutional Access Points* -One major barrier for residents in establishing their long-term goals were obstacles related to accessing institutions that could otherwise support their persistence in learning, working, and gaining information and referrals as well as resources. But this also means accessing jobs, and to this end, career services. City policies should consider easier entry points to those who are the most marginalized being able to use their services, especially making these more people-friendly, instead of just technology-based. Libraries for example have much career and information and referrals as well as educational services such as 1-1 tech learning that could support residents to continue their digital learning after they graduate from LIHI. Moreover they have ESOL and citizenship classes and Talk Time groups that could attract this population. Perhaps creating more satellite services linked to community-based organizations such as LIHI could assist residents to have numerous close-at-hand resources rather than only a few options.
3. *Building Capacity Through Deploying the Cultural Competence of Generations of Diverse Residents and Mentors* – Sustaining the lessons learned through cohorts of diverse mentors and residents working together can improve the overall quality of the program especially its level of cultural competence. However translating these lessons from one year to the next requires consistent leadership and coordination which community-based organizations often struggle due to the lack of resources and their year-to-year contingency with donors and the city. Americorp and Vista volunteers have been important to fill the gaps in staff, but is not often a long-term source of labor. Therefore having part-time staff who are previous mentors or residents employed to recruit, mentor, and transfer “insider” knowledge to subsequent cohorts would be important for sustaining and expanding on the quality of the program and enriching the level of diversity from one year to the next. Additionally, credibility and leadership is inbuilt into this system when mentors and residents use their experiential knowledge to support the next generation.

The phrase, “move forward” or, “moving forward,” which is the title of this report, expressed by mentors and residents alike demonstrated the collaborations and persistence not just of the pairs but of the partnership growing and developing this project in meaningful ways in order to make a difference.

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