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**FINAL REPORT to the  
Bureau of Housing and Community Development**

**The GEARS Connection Pilot Project:  
July 1, 1998 through June 30, 1999**

**Goals of the Project & Progress Report:**

GEARS secured a Community Initiatives Grant from the Bureau of Housing and Community Development beginning in July of 1998. During the first three months of the project we established three self-advocacy centers in outer southeast Portland. Our goal was to provide information and referrals to community residents seeking resources, services and opportunities for neighborhood involvement. Our emphasis has continued to be on encouraging self-determination, identifying family strengths and building self-advocacy skills.

Secondarily, we wanted to 1. collect evaluations of GEARS and other social service organizations and to 2. develop a pool of community volunteers to provide additional staff at the sites.

**We selected diverse settings and locations for this pilot project:**

- Lane Middle School 7200 SE 60<sup>th</sup> Avenue
- Lent Elementary School 5105 SE 97<sup>th</sup> Avenue
- SE Works 6927 SE Foster Road

Initially we focused on selecting staff, creating paperwork and tracking systems, developing relationships with host sites and completing the resource notebooks to cover 20 different assistance topics. All three sites were open and staffed by September. We began extensive outreach efforts in October and continued them throughout the year. We also created a volunteer coordinator role to develop recruitment, orientation, training and retention plans.

It became apparent early in the project that each site would be distinct and unique. We worked to develop common procedures and struggled with the complexity of responding to the needs of the individual locations. Each Connection site had to create hours of availability and referral processes which were responsive to (and would be utilized by) the site hosts.

The GEARS Connection sites were well utilized which indicated to us that they fulfilled a much needed service in the area. Over 320 neighbors used them as a conduit to resources, services and opportunities for community involvement. One participant came

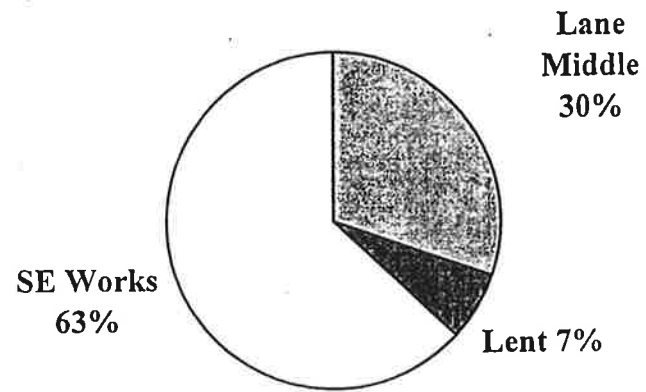
### 1. Who utilized the GEARS Connection sites?

320 community members visited our Self-Advocacy Centers.

Our outreach efforts were well-rewarded. Our original goal for community participation was to have 250 visitors to the sites. We exceeded that goal by 28% (70 residents).

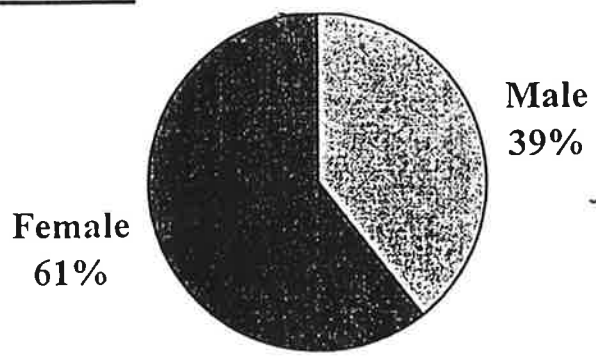
One question which we hoped that the pilot project would answer was which settings would encourage more community usage? GEARS already had a physical presence at Lane Middle School and SE Works. These sites received more referrals from their host sites perhaps because they had pre-established relationships. In addition, SE Works provided a space that was easily accessible to constant foot traffic. Given these conditions, the distribution of site usage was fairly predictable.

#### Distribution of Site Usage:



It was also interesting to us to consider how the site selections effected the demographics of who requested assistance:

#### Gender



**GENDER** - The visitors to GEARS Connection sites are overwhelmingly female. Team members suggest that this is a typical distribution for service in that single parent families are more likely to need and request resources related to poverty and the majority of these families are headed by women.

**AGE** - The age distribution of our GEARS Connection visitors probably reflects the locations we selected rather than the populations in need in the community. We drew in participants who were parents of school-aged children and those seeking employment. As a result, we did not have many of our neighborhood seniors utilize our services. In this next year, we hope to expand our services to community elders by creating a mobile GEARS Connection site. Our current plan is to develop funding to take our resources to places (such as retirement homes) and events (such as meals at the community center) so as to improve this.

**ETHNICITY** - The most current Neighborhood Profiles available regarding Brentwood-Darlington and Lents reflect census information from 1990 and are hopelessly out-of-date. However, if we use those numbers as our best guess, it would appear that GEARS outreach efforts are successfully reaching the culturally diverse populations in our area. The addition of Russian-speaking and Spanish-speaking coaches has dramatically improved this aspect of our work. We would like to continue expanding our repertoire of languages through the use of volunteers.

## 2. What types of assistance did they request?

Individuals using our GEARS Connection sites were asked to fill out an intake form which essentially acted as a survey of community needs (see attachment). Participants were asked to indicate which of the 20 topics were areas of interest *and* which were of priority to them (a likert scale; 1 being extremely important and 4 being of no interest). Based on their responses, we developed the chart below. It shows in descending order the priority of each topic area.

Employment was listed as the most prevalent concern, which we believe reflects the SE Works location. Transportation was the third most common concern and that could be attributed to the number of students who came to us for bus tickets. Overall, the data does tell us:

1. Community members used us most often for emergency basic needs. The top six answers: employment, housing & utilities, transportation, clothing, food & nutrition, health & medical.
2. Participants generally had multiple needs. Intake forms indicate that 81% of our visitors rated three or more topics as 'very important' areas of concern.

to us as a priority. Homeless participants were extremely difficult to contact post-involvement.

Our attempts to create incentives for returning evaluations (such as drawings for Fred Meyers gift certificates) were essentially unsuccessful. Still, the small pool of evaluations we were able to gather did tell us which areas of service the participants were able to access successfully (and which they were not).

**Of the most commonly requested topics, three were quickly and easily accessed:**

**Employment** - Our site at SE Works proved to be very successful. This was due in part to our two organizations' team approach to helping individuals. We shared an intake form. Referrals were immediate and natural.

**Food** - Our participants were able to access emergency food boxes through a number of community based organizations. Unfortunately, difficulty arose if they needed food assistance in our community over the weekend. If they did not have transportation to reach food pantries in north and northeast Portland, we would supply petty cash to feed them until Monday.

**Clothing** - Clothing closets in the area tend to be generous and do not necessarily have eligibility requirements.

**The three topics which were consistently difficult to access were:**

**Housing and Utilities** - Housing (emergency, transitional and permanent) proved to be the most difficult resource to access in the area. Waiting lists for emergency shelters (individuals and families) took weeks to progress through, particularly during the winter months. It was typical for our homeless participants to have to wait over a month for assistance from our emergency provider in the area. We were more successful if community members came to us *prior* to losing their housing; in those cases we were able to provide funding (and find matching dollars) for them to retain their homes.

**Transportation** - Although we were able to provide small numbers of bus tickets, individuals generally had to participate in case management, employment searches or have medical needs, before we could assist them in receiving bus passes. Again, if they came to us while they still had a car, they were more likely to succeed in *retaining* their car (instead of gaining one) by finding repair services or money to pay outstanding tickets and insurance.

**Health & Medical** - Initially, it was difficult to connect participants to medical help. We began inviting a Multnomah County Health Worker to our site and she assisted many families (particularly Russian-speaking) in filling out their Oregon Health Plan forms. Dental care and ongoing mental health care have proven to be two areas of need that are *under*provided in outer southeast Portland.