

*NSRF's Living History: a series of interviews with members about our past, our present and our hopes for the future...This month we're hearing from Lois Crim Butler of the Coalition Center in Chicago as she shares her story with Debbie Bambino of Connections.*

Lois is a school change leader whose original change work began at Chicago Vocational Career Academy, where she was the leader of the Small School of Business and Finance. This school was later cited by the U.S. Department of Education as one of five schools in the nation that exemplified the characteristics of a small learning community.

*When did you learn about NSRF and why were you drawn to this process as an educator/activist?*

I was a Citi-Bank Faculty Member (Program for facilitative leaders of school change developed by CES National from a grant from Citi-Bank in New York) when I heard about a new program that was being designed to take the change work in schools to a deeper level. Applications for the new training were called for, and we had two Chicago teachers accepted into the first training back in 1995.

I was not one of the first trained. However, I did participate in the cohort's Winter Gathering in Chicago as the school coordinator for the Chicago Coalition Center and I remember being struck by the sense "that this CFG strategy was different" and "that it might be just what we needed to influence whole school design changes." After the meeting, I went back to the office and my director and I as leaders of the small schools change process, co-wrote a proposal to the Chicago Annenberg Challenge asking them to allow us to train CFG coaches locally. While we waited for the approval of our local training request, we proceeded with the solici-

tation of applications for the national training from potential coaches in our six Annenberg Challenge Schools. At this point, in the summer of 1996, six more Chicago teachers were trained as CFG coaches by the Annenberg Institute. I was part of that group. We also trained two principals as leaders of the change. Later, in the winter of 1997, after our proposal was funded, we trained 32 more National School Reform Faculty coaches locally. *What in particular stood out about this new approach?*

I had already begun to experience the power of looking at the work of teaching and learning in our schools as an observer. Citi-Bank Faculty had been working on peer coaching and the creation of collaborative cultures to help us look deeply at what was really going on in our buildings. But this new CFG process seemed to go further. I saw the possibility for "a new communication system with information flowing back and forth in all directions." I saw us being able to actually 'see' the mind at work through the protocols.

I realized that we needed to create "a safe way to talk" with each other. I wasn't expecting a panacea, but I did hope that CFG training would help create the conditions that would allow us to challenge the learning gap in schools all across the country.

I was also very interested in the focus on community building. I had seen situations where teachers had become marginalized and written off just because their views were different- they weren't really heard. Misunderstandings and mistaken

assumptions often had the effect of delaying or blocking our ability to make the transformative changes that were needed. I thought this new approach would help us clarify our collective values and set the norms needed to constructively and collaboratively wrestle with the inevitable controversies that we needed to face in order to teach our own and other peoples' children successfully.

*How has your longtime involvement in NSRF supported your efforts on behalf of students? Has the process lived up to your early expectations?*

While the process has been sustained, I think that early on, folks in Chicago were somewhat locked into competition for the same pot of limited funds and weren't always working together. But for the last few years I think we've forged alliances to effectively help kids. We currently do much of our work through a collaborative design with NSRF, CES, the Small Schools Workshop and others, freely sharing the information and resources needed to really effect school change.

One especially strong example I can point to is the experience of Keisha Williams. Keisha was one of my students, who experienced the power of having

teachers who were engaged in reflective, collaborative practice on behalf of students. Keisha went on to earn a scholarship to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Keisha was also identified as a "Golden Apple" student. (Golden Apple is a prestigious, competitive award given by the Kohl Foundation annually and renewable for 4 years.) She was the first member of her family to receive a college degree, and she is now a third-year teacher at

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The NSRF – New York Center of Activity is delighted and grateful to be the recipient of a grant from the Josephine Bay Paul and C. Michael Paul Foundation for its startup activities. What this has allowed us to do is to get started on several fronts:

- we have designed and distributed NSRF NY Standards for Facilitators along with a Facilitation Endorsement Process and have begun working with NYU to assist us in this process to ensure reliability and validity
- we are now able to offer financial

support to locally endorsed facilitators who want to attend the Winter Meeting

- we had a Colloquium in the spring—it was the first time that coaches/facilitators in the New York region had an opportunity to meet and share work. At that Colloquium two previously endorsed facilitators presented their updated portfolios in fishbowl settings, using a structured protocol, and became endorsed "Lead Facilitators," which enabled them to train facilitators and be eligible for work as National Facilitators

- we are now planning a Roundtable for portfolio presentations this January 10 at New York University and would love any and all "critical friends" to join us
- we have held regular advisory board meetings

And the way you can find out more is by visiting our BRAND-NEW website which should be up and running by the time you read this at: [nsrfnewyork.org](http://nsrfnewyork.org). Check out the Equity Resources section!

Contact Alan Dichter at [adichte@nycboe.net](mailto:adichte@nycboe.net)

## NSRF Vermont Margaret MacLean, Vermont

We are pleased to announce that in order to strategically move forward the work of the National School Reform Faculty in Vermont the Josephine Bay Paul and C. Michael Paul Foundation has awarded a one year grant to the Vermont NSRF Center of Activity.

It is the goal of the Vermont Center to transform school climate and culture in at least 36 Vermont schools through the use of Learning Community Seminar methods and materials. This is in addition to the current 12 schools practicing this work.

We will focus our work in five areas:

1. Coaching in Vermont – we will support current coaches by offering an annual colloquium, 2-day conferences, materials and resources and continue to train new coaches
2. Communication – we will create a system of communication and support for coaches
3. Organizational Structure – we will, among other things, maintain a Vermont database, convene meetings, and publish a leadership development model for Vermont
4. Vermont/National Relationship – we will keep lines of communication open between NSRF National and Vermont, share information

- and maintain a Vermont presence nationally
- 5. Research – we will create an ongoing research base for our work to chart our progress and highlight findings

In addition we intend to have an effect on practice in at least three institutions of higher education, and gain the support of the State Department of Education.

We hope to make a significant impact on education in Vermont, on the way schools do business and the resulting achievement of students.

You can contact Margaret MacLean at [margmaclean@netscape.net](mailto:margmaclean@netscape.net)

