

Sheryl: Good morning this is our inaugural national center for mobility management broadcast and we have with us today Dwight Mingle who is the chief transportation planner at the department of human services in Tompkins county New York which is King side region of up state New York and also home to Cornell University. Dwight has told me about a program in his county that he thought was very interesting in terms of inclusive planning and in terms of promoting those people who can generate ideas and also do very good outreach into different communities that exists in a particular region.

So I am just going to ask Dwight a question and let him explain a little bit about what the natural leaders program is. So Dwight can you tell us a little bit about the program and how it got started?

Dwight: Well sure; thank you Sheryl; it is certainly nice to talk with you today. The natural leaders initiative is actually what it is; it is called is a program coordinated by the Cornell cooperative extension of Tompkins county and that itself is a collaboration of four agencies that come together to offer this program. So the way it works is that the objective is to, they recognize that every community has many everyday leaders who aren't often recognized or heard and they believe that the community associations and faith community and youth programs and social services agencies and so forth would work better if there were natural leaders from groups that aren't usually represented in decision making groups.

So we are talking about people of color, low and moderate income people and people who newly arrived in the United States and English is a second language is a process that they are learning. So the way this program works is the Cornell cooperative extension, they run two sessions per year about five months each and they recruit and have eight sessions with and graduate classes of natural leaders and there is about fifteen to twenty people per class then they support them afterwards as they engage in projects that they are working on. A really good way of thinking about this is that in pretty much every social network there are some people that other people turn to, to ask opinions and questions and they are the go-to people.

They like connect the fabric in social networks. So here is a program that really works to identify and give tools to people so they can be effective in leadership. So how this has worked in the transportation area is that our community mobility education program called way to go, which is operated by Cornell cooperative extension when we were creating this like brand new community education program we worked with the first natural leaders class among other things come up with the name of the program. They basically functioned as like a super focused group and they provided a lot of insight relative to mobility challenges that many of their friends have or they themselves had or people who they know have that really provided an insight into how we were designing initially the way to go program but it also provided insight as we developed other mobility services.

We just find it very, very valuable and we are about to engage in a new round with the coordinated plan update that we are working on now.

Sheryl: So Dwight I have two question and the first is how were these natural leaders found and then selected for the program?

Dwight: Well, they are recruited and so there is a nomination process and people can nominate themselves or other connectors can nominate people. So there are some really basic questions like do you have ideas how to make things better in the community like do you get things done, do people come to you for help, do you inspire people and do you care about a community that is inclusive that works for everybody and do you like meeting new

people and learning new things. So they ask these questions are basically the basis of being nominated and then they recruit people in like I said two sessions per year and then they graduate and move people through this process.

Sheryl: My second question is, how do you think that the natural leaders differ from staff at non profits or faith based groups who represent a community or who have worked with certain populations?

Dwight: Well that's a very good question. First let me say that one part of the natural leaders initiative is to have training for other, well let me back up; the natural leaders program is for recruiting individuals into this community leadership development program but it also trains human services groups to look for their own natural leaders who are working for them and to help provide this group leadership experience where they gain skills to be more effective at work and when they are not at work.

So I think one thing that is different is that you have people who are being given skills and practicing skills for leadership and that's something which can really be different than other organizations. So what do people learn? They learn everything from how to get things done and how to listen and public speaking skills and building support and dealing with all issues of leadership which can include anger and hopelessness and everything else and really just looking for how to have relationships with diverse groups of people and developing effective allies.

So there are people who are being, that have training in these areas and that is not as common as you would hope.

Sheryl: Okay so it is a little bit community organizing, a little bit as you said developing focus groups and hopefully developing people who will then go on to provide leadership in transportation in other areas in their communities.

Dwight: Right and just in terms of the structure of their training is that it occurs in the evening and there is dinner and child care and help with transportation for each group session. So it is really about developing like new social networks and how people can better organize to work on issues that they are very interested in and we always find that transportation is always a hot topic.

Sheryl: Well thank you very much for sharing the information about this program today. There is going to be some information about it during our webinar on inclusive planning and if you need any more information about this you can contact me, Sheryl [Growth] Glazer and I am sure Dwight would be happy to share more information about this program; thank you so much

Dwight: Thank you very much Sheryl.