



First Up staffer Christine Haley-Brinen with apprentice Herschel Croswell and coach Sarah Froebrod from Western Learning Academy.

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Sustaining the Apprenticeship Program

Alison Leshan, First Up Early Learning Specialist

When I was first asked to help manage the Directors' Sustainability project for the 1199C ECE Apprenticeship program, I was excited, but not exactly clear about many parts of it. Over the last six months, however, I have gotten clearer about the impact the apprenticeship program has had on the lives of so many teachers, and also seen ten directors grow, reflect, develop systems, and begin to really understand how to sustain it within their programs.

As the coordinator, I have the honor of meeting monthly with each director and running a learning circle that is specific for this project. In the individual meetings, I use a collaborative coaching approach, guiding them to goals that are specific to their own programs, and supporting them as they work to achieve those goals. Through this process I feel that I have developed a trusting relationship where they have an opportunity to reflect on challenges, successes, and the systems and policies needed to make the apprenticeship program sustainable.

The Director's Learning Circle provides the opportunity to talk about their experiences in participating with this project and receive support from their peers. During the first learning circle, they discussed all the systems they now have in place to support their coaches and apprentices. In setting goals for our bi-monthly meetings, we decided the first task will be to develop a Director's Toolbox, including their own experiences of implementation, that could be shared with any director who plans to be part of the apprenticeship program.

Over the last six months I have documented many of the highlights of this project. This has allowed the team at 1199C to make adjustments for the second cohort of the apprenticeship, to include a more thorough orientation for directors

as well as additional supports for both coaches and apprentices. Below are just a couple reflections from participating directors.

Lynda Calvano, Owner/Director of Care A-Lot Children's Center, reports, "I am fortunate because my coach and apprentice are so good. I thought I had a good system of supporting both of them and doing what 1199C needed us to do. Through this directors group, I have learned that there was much more to do to make the program grow and be sustained here at Care-A-lot. As a result, we have developed a handbook for the apprenticeship, including some new policies and procedures that support the apprentices, the coach and the program. We have created a coaches' book where she records all the progress the apprentice has had and any challenges that needed to be addressed. I have also been able to use both tools and the policies to help orient the next teacher who will participate in the 1199C Apprenticeship starting this summer." Like several of the other directors, Lynda recognizes that this project is also about building systems that support her leadership.

"As I met with Alison, I realized that I didn't have a solid sense of how things were going with my coach and the apprentice. What I have learned is that I needed to be more involved," explained Kharma Hicks, Program Coordinator of the Parent Infant Center. "Through this project, I have begun to develop a handbook that I can share with any teacher who wants to enroll in the apprenticeship. I have also written a policy and procedure that helps everyone understand how release time (for T.E.A.C.H.) works within our organization. We have more to do, but it is nice to have the opportunity to think and talk about the systems we need to make sure that the apprenticeship is running well."

I have not only seen the directors grow, but I have also learned a lot from them. They have given me a whole new perspective about how each program is unique, and how each implements the apprenticeship differently, but how they all need supports to sustain and grow programs like this. I am excited to see what happens in the next six months!

