This report will review the past quarter and reflect on the first year of this pilot project as a whole. The progress we have seen in the families over a short period of time and the feedback we are receiving from the families and the community strengthens our determination to continue with our current plans and further develop our services.

During the past three months the following major activities have been initiated by the A.C.O.R.N. Center for Families’ Work First Pilot Project:

- Through this pilot project, we have recognized that not only are the Hispanic children in Carteret County not speaking English at home, they are not even learning numbers, colors, or other developmental skills in their own language. We have initiated a project with the health department, Carteret County Partnership for Children, and Head Start to further identify children ages 0-5 who are not in any formal daycare or educational program. These are the primary years for language development and we have seen rapid progress among the children we have been able to place in daycare or preschool. One three year old child that did not speak any English, with in three months of being in daycare she is now communicating with her teacher and fellow class mates in English. Another child who it was assumed was not speaking because he didn’t understand English has now been identified as having a speech delay in Spanish also.

- In our efforts to create safe neighborhoods and nurturing environments for the children and families we have been working with several of the landlords and property management professionals to assist with the housing needs of the families we are working with. With many of the families living in areas
overwhelmed by criminal and illegal activity, the best option is to find alternative affordable housing – a limited resource in Carteret County.

- The Hispanic Family Support Coordinators continued to develop the project’s resource and referral component by working closely with the local school system, Coastal Community Action, Carteret County Health Department and Carteret County DSS. The Hispanic Family Support Coordinators met with family members at the ACORN Center, at other agencies, and at the homes of the Hispanic families. We have also been encouraging agencies to learn conversational Spanish so appointments can be scheduled and basic needs can be met. The community college is working to develop a curriculum to better meet the needs of agency staff.

- English as a Second Language Classes have recruited new participants and have further tailored the classes to meet the needs of Carteret County’s Hispanic Families. Classes were offered one night a week and one afternoon a week to accommodate the different shifts at the local factory where the majority of the people work. Participants are empowered to overcome language barriers by learning the basic skills needed to access resources for their families, such as basic banking, advocating for their child’s education, and employment terminology.

- Outreach was provided to families begin registering children for next school year. One issue we are discussing with families is the value of education in America and the reasons children should finish high school, especially the girls (who nationally have the highest dropout rate of any minority group).

- Work continued in the community to further develop neighborhood watch programs that create safer neighborhoods and lead to a better understanding between the police and the Hispanic families. We are working with the police departments to bring together multiple cultures living in the same communities.

During the first year we have identified 150 Hispanic families in Carteret County, but not all of them qualify for services under the guidelines. ACORN’s Hispanic Family Support Coordinators are currently working with 42 families that qualify for services under the defined guidelines which equals 143 individuals.

The outcomes observed for the individuals served during the last three months include:

- For the 141 individual contacts made assisting Hispanic families overcome language barriers, the correct community resources were utilized and independent, educated decisions were made. This component is ensure the Hispanic families are receiving the services they require and are eligible for.
Hispanic Family Support Coordinators have tremendously increased the Hispanic Families access to community resources by educating the families on which resources could assist them, translating and communicating between the families and the local agencies, and assisting with applications and forms. Community resources benefit from correct referrals for their services and provide services Hispanic families need. Overcoming language barriers is helping Hispanic families become part of the community and others are seeing them as equals.

- For the 43 children who were involved with child development programs or received access to them, their progress is evident not only to the professionals working with them, but also to their parents. The parents understand that engaging their children in these programs will lead to the future success of their children. Staff is working individually with several of these families to strengthen their parenting skills and help them overcome the language barriers involved with advocating for child’s needs.

- For the 3 individual contacts made to assist Hispanic families in creating safe neighborhoods by eliminating criminal activity or other dangers to child and family safety and well being, the families received information and skills to better care for their families in emergencies, such as hurricanes, and improve their communities by organizing crime watch groups.

- For the 11 individual contacts needing assistance with finding housing and moving from poverty to self-sufficiency, staff is working with the families to identify their immediate needs and long term goals. In many cases, addressing their immediate needs leads to placement in a transitional housing situation while a long term solution is worked out.

- The program is yet to identify any non-custodial Hispanic parents who qualify for services through the guidelines of this funding, but staff is prepared to help them when identified and is able to refer non-custodial parents who do not qualify for services to the correct community resources.

These outcomes are inline with the overall goal of the program, which is to strengthen the local community through the empowerment of Hispanic families in Carteret County. The only major change we are preparing to make in year two is the addition of a Financial Literacy and Housing Counselor to further meet those specific needs of the families.
During the last three months, 29% of the first year project funds have been expended. For the first year of project funds, a total of 87% have been expended and when combined with the ACORN Center for Families second year amendment 45% of the total two year amount has been expended.

Executive Summary

The goal of this pilot project is to strengthen the local community through the empowerment of Hispanic families in Carteret County. Hispanic families involved in this pilot project are using their newly developed skills to build upon their strengths and address their own employment and language barriers. Through community collaboration, Hispanic families are gaining the opportunities and resources required to stop intergenerational poverty and reach their full potential. Within the first year of this program, Carteret County gone from ignoring the Hispanic Community to embracing them. We get several calls a week from people wanting to volunteer their time to assist the Hispanic children and families. Agencies who one year ago were questioning what we were attempting to accomplish are now lined up to help us and asking us how they can improve their services to the Hispanic families.

The Center sponsored a Hispanic Heritage Month Fiesta on October 11, 2000 for all families in the community. Parents participated in the event’s planning and activities which improved their leadership skills and moved the families toward becoming part of the community. Approximately 280 people attended the event, including Hispanic, African-American, and Caucasian families - truly bringing the community together. It was a major turning point in this projects development within the community.

We have been working with the Carteret County DSS to identify which families can receive our services. Of the 150 Hispanic families we have identified in Carteret County only 42 families qualify for services under the defined guidelines (these families equal 143 individuals). One of the frustrations has been the several non-custodial fathers we have identified, but that do not qualify under the current guidelines to receive our services. They are fathering children in this country and not taking responsibility. The children then born in this country qualify for services, but start life at a tremendous disadvantage.

Just as the Hispanic families are striving to improve themselves, this pilot program is working towards a strong future and working on preventative measures. In our work with area agencies, we have identified that there are currently 25 Hispanic
women pregnant. The point we have made to local leaders is that is an entire Kindergarten class in 5 years time – what are we going to do to prepare these children to succeed in school and throughout their life? This question alone has brought agencies to the table that had up until now been ignoring the growing Hispanic population.

During the first year, we have been devoted to fine tuning our measurement tools. To evaluate and track this program each qualified family has a Community Partnership Folder which includes notes on contacts with families, referrals to other agencies, Family Development Plans, and needed paperwork. The Hispanic Family Support Coordinators are required to track and code their work on Weekly Contact Log Sheets which are easily used to tabulate our efforts in the community. There are weekly reviews with staff to discuss the outreach and services we are providing in the community and how we can improve performance and reach more people.

Through the accomplishments and hard work of both the staff and the Hispanic families, we now have the support of the community and other agencies. Hispanic families involved in this pilot project are using their newly developed skills to build upon their strengths and address their own employment and language barriers. The families feel their children have a better chance at success because of their involvement with this project.