



A Center of the Public Health Institute

Strengthening Sustainability

Dori Rose Inda, Executive Director
Watsonville Law Center – Watsonville, CA

Dori Rose Inda, Executive Director of the Watsonville Law Center (WLC), has the unique distinction of being the only executive director to participate in the Organizational Development Services program twice. Dori participated in the ODS program in 2004 – 2005 as program director for the WLC, while the WLC was under an umbrella organization, and again five years later during 2008 – 2009 as executive director of the WLC, once it became an independent nonprofit. Dori recounted how she came to participate in the ODS program for the first time back in 2004. “At the time, we were a program under Community Bridges.” Community Bridges, a nonprofit in Santa Cruz, had been selected to participate in the ODS program. Sam Storey was the executive director of Community Bridges. According to Dori, “Sam went to the executive director retreat and participated in the group activities, while we got most of the one-on-one technical support.” Dori said that Sam felt it was fair for Dori to receive the one-on-one support since The California Wellness Foundation grant supported the Watsonville Law Center. According to Dori, “We were totally in a start-up phase. We had opened our doors in 2002 and we had early systems for administration and program services. We had developed an advisory board and had about four staff including me. It was always in my mind to eventually be on our own, but it was an overwhelming process. I knew that being under an umbrella agency meant we could focus on our program services. At that time, doing the human resources, financial management, etc. was too much.”

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Dori then talked about how she came to participate in the ODS program for the second time in 2008. “For the second time around, we got an application or a phone call. We applied the year before, but the application was lovingly denied. The Center for Civic Partnerships watched and waited until it was the right time. In 2008 we were incorporated; we had a board of directors. The decision [to accept us into the program] made sense. When we finally participated in the ODS program as our own organization, we were looking at board development, strengthening staff leadership and going from ‘dust-settling’ to expertise.”

Dori reflected on her first year of participation. “We did a board retreat with our technical support provider in 2005. The board retreat was really incredible and resulted in a sustainability work plan. The plan was divided by programs and had a goal that was focused on structures and systems. There was another goal on staff retention and compensation with an eye towards excellence. The last goal had to do with funding. It was a three-year plan. All the things were accomplished, but we have continued to work on diversifying our funding.” Dori added, “Our technical support provider’s work in 2005 allowed us to access more capacity-building funding. The sustainability plan gave us something to follow. It got everyone on board and gave me a tool to get funding. Without a doubt, I wouldn’t have been able to get capacity-building funding without that plan. We were able to leverage hundreds of thousands in capacity-building funds by having our sustainability plan. Without those funds, we couldn’t have done all that growth. It made a huge difference.”

When asked what was different for her the second time around in the ODS program, Dori responded, “What was

different for me is that I got to do what Sam did, like meet with other EDs at the retreat and better understand their leadership styles, issues and challenges. The result has been a building of confidence that we are in a good place. Things have been getting stronger and stronger.” Dori described that what gave her more confidence as an executive director was a combination of seeing other organizations dealing with issues that they had already resolved and seeing that her organization was well-positioned to deal with issues as they arose. “Prior to our board retreat, I had gone to a local community foundation to hear a presentation on organizational maturity. It was clear that we were heading into our prime. We had gotten through difficult stages gracefully. We were in a place of relative stability and no longer worried about systems. We could focus on the good stuff.”

Dori described her recent experience in the ODS program. “We just completed our second board/staff retreat in May with our technical support provider. I am now taking the results of that retreat and creating a work plan with new goals. We have goals for funding, program services and board development. We no longer have a goal for organizational infrastructure because it’s in a good place. It was a really positive retreat. It was wonderful for board and staff members to celebrate accomplishments and energize people about where we’re going.”

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When asked how the ODS program affected her as a leader, Dori responded, “The program provides so much support that you can’t get anywhere else and that allows you to be calmer. If you’re all alone trying to do something, it can be scary. The technical support provider can offer viewpoints on how other agencies have done things. The support allows you as leader to meet your staff’s goals, which you are trying to facilitate happening. It helps you be successful. The kind of support provided is technical, but it’s also guidance and philosophical support, which can be even more valuable.” The ODS program positively impacted Dori’s organization as well. “What’s really valuable is that when staff members know that CCP is working with me, it helps them feel like the organization has outside support. It has given them a different kind of support.”

Dori expressed enthusiastically that the ODS program had a very direct impact on WLC’s success. “I don’t want to exaggerate its importance, but the ODS program contributed to so many layers of the WLC’s success. The clearest example is coming out with a sustainability plan that helped us leverage so many other resources, which in turn helped us create a successful organization. When I say successful, I mean an organization that exists. The goal was being a separate organization.” Dori reflected on what success means for her organization in the future. “A healthy organization has to handle anyone leaving. What came out of our recent board/staff retreat was succession planning, ensuring that the organization is sustainable regardless of who’s there.”

Dori said that she would certainly welcome any opportunity to work with the Center for Civic Partnerships (CCP) again and shared what she felt was unique about CCP’s approach. “We usually work with consultants with very specific expertise. The Center for Civic Partnerships is way more big picture. It’s about sustainability and organizational development and how all the pieces such as fundraising, board development and staffing fit together. Also, the relationship CCP has with our funder is important because it brings the health focus of all the grantees into the CCP’s work. The relationship shows how important organizational development is to our funder. Funders want to know that we do our work effectively and that their money is well-invested. CCP meets that standard. CCP brings with it its own standard of excellence, which helps grantees meet their own level of excellence and helps grantees meet the expectations by the foundation.”