

New York's Valuable, But Ignored Human Capital

August 26, 2009

By Gerson Borrero

Yesterday the Community Service Society (CSS) and the Center for an Urban Future (CUF) convened a panel of six experts to discuss what they call "New York's Human Capital."

It is a tough proposition in general to speak from a place of understanding about the members of society who are neediest, most marginalized, most rejected or most excluded. The challenge is greater still when discussing immigrants, ex-convicts, youth or those who receive public assistance in a city that swarms with Wall Street looters plus other multimillionaires assuring us that all is well.

Using their vast experiences working with this ignored human capital as a springboard, Elizabeth Yeampierre of UPROSE, Lisette Nieves of Year Up, Chung-Wha Hung of the New York Immigrant Coalition, Saru Jayaraman of ROC-United, Glenn Martin of Fortune Society and Mindy Tarlow of the Center for Employment Opportunities succeeded in pulling together a set of recommendations for what must be done.

What they articulated included measuring these groups by their "potential and not their risk," improving the income of 75 percent of families currently affected by a margin of \$8,000 per year, dedicating more resources to English for immigrants and creating more subsidized programs to create employment.

Ester R. Fuchs, professor of political science at Columbia University, stood out as well in saying that the effectiveness of community organizations must be evaluated and that agencies determined to be ineffective must be partnered with ones that are successful.

David Jones, who heads CSS--and in his welcome asserted that what's being done "is not sufficient"--said that they will publish a report on both the event I moderated yesterday and the previous one, held on July 23. It is troubling that there was not a single elected official among the nearly 400 attendees.

The terrible economy provides those who care little for the underprivileged with an excuse. CSS and CUF's efforts not to leave those who are affected behind encourages us and we look forward to their report. Perhaps we can get those who claim to represent us to read it.