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SAN DIEGO ARMED SERVICES YMCA

CHILDREN DO WELL WHEN THEIR FAMILIES DO WELL, AND FAMILIES DO BETTER WHEN THEY LIVE IN SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

SAN DIEGO ARMED SERVICES YMCA

Award-winning program: Family Outreach Department
Amanda Cross, Senior Program Director
Paul Steffens, Captain, SC, USN (Ret.), Executive Director
3293 Santo Road
San Diego, CA 92124
858-751-5755
www.asymcasd.org

2006 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

SERVING THOSE WHO SERVE AMERICA

The unpredictability of military life and overseas deployments are particularly challenging for junior enlisted servicemen and women who are parents. On a regular basis, they need to move their families, establish new homes and enroll their children in new schools. The San Diego Armed Services YMCA supports these vulnerable families, easing their burdens through more than 40 specialized programs. In a city where approximately 95,000 uniformed military personnel and their families make their homes, this care forms an important foundation for family stability.

Many young families already feel isolated by the move to San Diego from smaller towns and rural communities. "Enlisted families are hit the hardest by separations and relocations," says Executive Director Paul Steffens. "The youngest parents, uprooted from extended families, often need not only financial training, but basic tools and skills for managing their households and caring for young children." Staffed by professional social workers, the San Diego Armed Services YMCA's unique Family Outreach Department has evolved to meet these needs.

THE NEEDS OF MILITARY FAMILIES ARE TOO EASILY OVERSHADOWED BY THE CONFLICTS IN WHICH THEIR PARENTS ARE FIGHTING. THE YMCA SHAPES ITS PROGRAMS TO STRENGTHEN FAMILIES AS THEY RESPOND TO THE UNIQUE CHALLENGES OF MILITARY LIFE.

—Paul Steffens, Captain, SC, USN (Ret.), Executive Director, San Diego Armed Services YMCA

SAFE SPACES, SHARED FUTURES

As the San Diego Armed Services YMCA's programs have expanded their services, participation has more than doubled, from some 2,000 parents and children in 2004 to more than 5,000 today.

"Our typical client is a parent between the ages of 18 and 24, living on less than $24,000 in one of the most expensive cities in the country," says Senior Program Director Amanda Cross. "The most powerful thing we do is to help families meet this challenge with in-home counseling. Because we are not part of the military, parents feel they can share their problems with us without fear of this information being reported to the service member's command. The priority we place on their privacy removes any stigma from getting help from us."

In-home counselors help parents develop problem-solving skills, plan their budgets and understand child development. A respite care program provides young parents with essential financial assistance for short-term, temporary child care, giving breathing room to parents and reducing the risk of child abuse and neglect.

In addition to being there for parents, the Family Outreach Department supports children's emotional and psychological well-being through programs that address feelings of anger, loss and dislocation. The after school tutoring and mentoring program, Operation Hero, helps school-age children adjust to frequent moves and their parents' deployments by providing a place where trained mentors work with them.

"Healthy families contribute substantially to the success of the military," says Steffens. "Parents can focus on their mission when they know their families are stable and their children well cared for."

FAMILIES COUNT FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

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MUSCATINE COMMUNITY YMCA MUSCATINE, IA

CHILDREN DO WELL WHEN THEIR FAMILIES DO WELL, AND FAMILIES DO BETTER WHEN THEY LIVE IN SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

MUSCATINE COMMUNITY YMCA

Award-winning program: Family Program Services

Diana Broderson, Program Director
Susan Cory, Executive Director
1823 Logan Street
Muscatine, IA 52761
563-263-9996

2006 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

A TRADITION OF MEETING NEEDS

Guidance for young parents just starting out. Support for grandparents raising grandchildren. A helping hand for mothers at-risk for child abuse. Fulfilling all these roles, the family programs of the Muscatine Community YMCA in Muscatine, Iowa, are a far cry from what they were two generations ago, when rural mothers would stop in to nurse their babies while their husbands did business in town.

Under the umbrella of its Family Program Services, the Muscatine YMCA serves an average of 300 low-income, high-risk families each year. Staff members work with parents on family plans that may include budgeting, job-seeking skills and literacy education. From daytime classes emphasizing activities for stay-at-home mothers to weekly support groups in Spanish, programs are designed to reduce the stressors leading to child abuse and help families become self-sufficient. Ninety percent of parents in Family Program Services report improved parenting skills and increased awareness of community resources.

WE ARE ALWAYS ON THE WATCH FOR NEEDS AMONG OUR FAMILIES THAT ARE NOT BEING MET—AND CONSTANTLY CHANGE TO MEET THOSE NEEDS. THAT CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT AND ADJUSTMENT IS PART OF THE YMCA TRADITION.

—Susan Cory, Executive Director, Muscatine Community YMCA

REACHING ACROSS GENERATIONS

In 2000, Program Director Diana Broderson and her team realized that Muscatine was experiencing a phenomenon common to many communities hit by both economic hardships and growing methamphetamine problems: grandparents raising grandchildren. In response, the YMCA stepped up and launched a Grandparents Raising Grandchildren program, now recognized among human service professionals as the most successful group of its kind in Iowa.

“Grandparents face unique issues, including shame and guilt about their children, that can prevent them from attending groups like this,” says Broderson. “We let them tell us what help they need in order to feel better about themselves and their situation. It’s the best way they can grow into their role and give their grandchildren a good home and a brighter future.”

To jump-start their efforts, Broderson and her team made certain to hold regular weekly sessions, even when attendance faltered. Their investment paid off: participation has quadrupled since the program launched. Grandparents participate in educational seminars and group recreational activities and receive legal and medical guidance, as well as individual and group counseling.

The Muscatine YMCA also provides valuable opportunities for other parents to share their special circumstances as they work toward self-sufficiency. A special group for teen parents strengthens basic parenting skills, while parents with learning disabilities gain similar skills using a curriculum designed for them. “Parenting success is not about age or status,” Broderson reflects. “It’s about love, commitment and skills.”

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YMCA OF GREATER BOSTON

CHILDREN DO WELL WHEN THEIR FAMILIES DO WELL, AND FAMILIES DO BETTER WHEN THEY LIVE IN SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

YMCA OF GREATER BOSTON

Award-winning program: Training, Inc.
Elsa Bengel, Vice President and Executive Director of Education and Training
John Ferrell, President and CEO
316 Huntington Ave.
Boston, MA 02115
617-536-7800
www.ymcaboston.org

2006 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

OPENING NEW WORLDS WITH WORK

Enough to eat. Real health benefits. A home on a safer street. Training, Inc., the YMCA of Greater Boston's workforce development program, understands that for many parents, a job that results in these improvements means the world. It also means the chance to offer their children a new and better set of options.

Located in downtown Boston, Training, Inc. uses a workplace simulation model to prepare trainees for the regional job market. Parents in the program —often low-income, immigrant, single mothers from some of the city's most challenged neighborhoods—learn the skills they need to get and keep full-time employment. They also gain experience with the systems and routines that will help them balance work and home life so new jobs can translate into long-term success. While enrolled in Training, Inc., parents commute to a central training location where they maintain a full-time schedule. Whenever possible, area YMCAs offer day care for their children. Since 1984, more than 3,500 men and women have improved the lives of their families by using Training, Inc. as a bridge to better jobs, better pay and continuing education.

AS BOSTON'S LARGEST PROVIDER OF SERVICES FOR FAMILIES AND CHILDREN, WE HAVE AN INCREDIBLE OPPORTUNITY TO SHAPE THE FUTURE. WHEN YOU INVEST IN THE SKILLS OF AN ADULT WHO IS SUPPORTING A FAMILY, THAT INVESTMENT KEEPS GROWING.

—John Ferrell, President and CEO, YMCA of Greater Boston

BETTER JOBS, BETTER CONNECTIONS, STRONGER FAMILIES

"Our program gets parents on the road to success," says Elsa Bengel, Vice President and Executive Director of Education and Training at the YMCA of Greater Boston. "Finding that good job provides more than a bigger paycheck. For many graduates, it's also about connecting for the first time with other parents who have middle-class aspirations. These connections help parents see that there is a place for their families in the mainstream economy. It's about overcoming cultural isolation."

Over the years, Bengel and her team have honed their approach to meet the needs of employers and trainees alike, mixing technical training and ongoing support, and prioritizing other skills that lead to success in the workplace. Partnerships with employers result in jobs for many graduates that lead to long-term employment with opportunities for advancement. For instance, many of Training, Inc.'s employer partners offer tuition support and the chance for advanced training.

But the best outcomes are the families, who reach goals they never dreamed of achieving. Children of Training, Inc. parents enroll in college at twice the rate of the general population. Bengel knows parents are behind this success. "There is plenty of evidence that our graduates give back—as neighborhood leaders, homeowners and engaged citizens," she says. "But, most of all, they give back to their children."

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YMCA OF GREATER CHARLOTTE

CHILDREN DO WELL WHEN THEIR FAMILIES DO WELL, AND FAMILIES DO BETTER WHEN THEY LIVE IN SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

YMCA OF GREATER CHARLOTTE

Award-winning program: Strengthening Families Program
Andy C. Calhoun, President and CEO
Cynthia Flynn, Vice President of Community Development
Yvette Williams, Program Director
500 E. Morehead St., Suite 300
Charlotte, NC 28202
704-716-6200
www.ymcacharlotte.org

2006 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

PUTTING FAMILIES FIRST

The economy of Charlotte, North Carolina, is one of the most vibrant in the nation. Yet even as Charlotte booms, families in the region's most fragile neighborhoods often lack the skills and resources to take part in their city's success story.

Through intensive assistance, including home visits and connections to vital community services, the YMCA of Greater Charlotte's Strengthening Families Program addresses the educational, emotional, economic and health needs in low-income families. "Our approach addresses the specific needs of each family and offers an increased level of support, whether it's access to health care, employment training, financial planning or good housing," says Program Director Yvette Williams.

Each day, seven community social workers and a family advocate go into neighborhoods, working with families to move out of crisis through family action plans and to advance on the road to self-sufficiency. Over a month, the program serves approximately 150 families, many headed by single mothers. "We create solutions, one family at a time," says Williams. "Early intervention is the only way things are going to change."

THE ULTIMATE GOAL IS TO SUPPORT PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN ON THEIR JOURNEY FROM DEPENDENCY TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY BY MAKING THE BEST USE OF ALL THE BRIDGES THE YMCA OFFERS TO OUR COMMUNITY.

—Andy C. Calhoun, President and CEO, YMCA of Greater Charlotte

MEETING FAMILIES WHERE THEY ARE

Strengthening Families has become a regional leader in "intensive home visitation." Cynthia Flynn, the YMCA's Vice President of Community Development, points out, "For isolated families, who often have no access to transportation or little idea of how to access services, home visits build relationships and build trust."

Sometimes almost daily visits mark the early stages of a family's involvement. Different steps—from GED and ESL classes to health care, backed up by YMCA wellness programs for the entire family—are tailored to specific situations as the parents and staff collaborate on meeting important goals.

Families graduate from the program when they have met or exceeded their own goals, including employment for the parents and economic self-sufficiency for the entire family. The results are promising. Last year, as measured against parents' goals, 65 percent of families visited by Strengthening Families staff became more self-sufficient. Just over half of parents with employment goals completed training or secured jobs to help support their families.

Parents report they are better prepared to support their children's education, a process bolstered by innovative YMCA programs such as Starfish Academy, a literacy program developed in partnership with Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools.

"We're offering models for best practices, productive careers and healthy relationships," says Williams. "These are the building blocks for family success."

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YMCA OF CENTRAL OHIO

Award-winning program: Early Childhood Resource Network
John E. Bickley, President and CEO
Samantha Stewart, Executive Director
40 West Long Street
Columbus, OH 43215
614-224-1137
www.ymcacolumbus.org

YMCA OF CENTRAL OHIO

CHILDREN DO WELL WHEN THEIR FAMILIES DO WELL, AND FAMILIES DO BETTER WHEN THEY LIVE IN SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

2006 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

LINKING FAMILIES TO THE RESOURCES THEY NEED

On the day Jennifer's twin boys turned three, nearly the only words they spoke were "Mama" and "Dada." Jennifer consulted the boys' pediatrician, who referred her to the Early Childhood Resource Network (ECRN), an early intervention program of the YMCA of Central Ohio. Serving more than 1,500 families each year from all walks of life, ECRN gives them a place to turn for coordinated and comprehensive services to help young children with special needs or those who are at risk of developing a delay or disability. ECRN conducts screenings and home visits and then connects families to services and resources that allow their children to learn, grow and succeed.

In the case of Jennifer's twins, ECRN's screening detected speech and other developmental delays. The staff answered Jennifer's questions about her children's rights and the school district's responsibilities and directed her to programs that could help, including a special education preschool. Today, Jordan and Dominic have made great strides. Now almost five, they write their names and sing their ABCs. Says Jennifer, "Thanks to the YMCA, my children will begin kindergarten in a regular classroom with few, if any, delays."

WE ENABLE FAMILIES TO ADVOCATE FOR THEIR CHILDREN THROUGHOUT A LIFETIME, EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE ONLY WITH US FOR A FEW YEARS.

—John E. Bickley, President and CEO, YMCA of Central Ohio

PARENTS AS ADVOCATES

"A developmental screening is important to help identify special needs a child might have, especially for families who may not have the resources to secure help for their children before entering kindergarten," says Samantha Stewart, ECRN's Executive Director. ECRN's Service Coordinators first focus on stabilizing families—some of whom are threatened by eviction or unemployment or simply overwhelmed by the realization their child may have special needs—before tailoring detailed family plans around a child's needs. Staff assist parents in enrolling in GED classes so they can strengthen their earning power, signing up for available health coverage and accessing other supports so they can put their families on stable ground.

ECRN staff guide parents through the often complex health care and educational systems, attending appointments with them, making phone calls to open doors and simply providing a shoulder to lean on. ECRN programs extend to meet parents' other pressing needs in families whose children have special needs. An Equipment Exchange Program provides parents with specialized adaptive devices for their children. Four YMCA branches offer evening speech therapy for the children of working parents.

Yet the most important thing ECRN does may be what Stewart calls "teaching families to fish"—training them to be skilled advocates for their children. "As children get older, we help parents recognize their own strengths and take charge of getting their child needed services. We teach them not only what they need to do, but what they can do for themselves and their children."

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