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# YMCA OF GREATER LONG BEACH

## COMMUNITY SERVICES BRANCH

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


YMCA OF GREATER LONG BEACH

Award-Winning Program: Downtown Community Development Branch

Alan Hostrup, President and CEO
Robert Cabeza, Executive Director, Downtown Community Development Branch
Blanca Vasquez, Family Involvement Director
Lenore Gabel, Director of Development
525 E. 7th Street
Long Beach, CA 90813
562-624-2376
www.lbymca.org


2008 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

## SUCCESS IN THE LONG RUN

In a city with the nation's sixth-highest poverty rate, the YMCA of Greater Long Beach, Calif., is bringing parents, schools and communities together to help families achieve brighter futures. The Downtown Community Development Branch of the YMCA of Greater Long Beach daily works with 1,600 children and parents in neighborhoods throughout the community in its family improvement programs, Community Leadership Institute, community schools, after-school programs and health and fitness activities. Ninety percent of families at the branch are low-income, and nearly 70 percent of families speak a language other than English in their homes. Though many parents work multiple jobs and face various economic barriers, parents are learning new skills, becoming more involved in their children's schools and advocating for community improvements with help from the YMCA.

"We want to help parents to become leaders and advocate for their own children, families and communities so that they will continue to succeed long after we are gone," says Blanca Vasquez, family involvement director.

WE RECOGNIZE THAT FOR CHILDREN TO SUCCEED IN OUR COMMUNITIES, WE NEED TO FOCUS ON THE ENTIRE FAMILY AND MAKE AN IMPACT IN THEIR HOUSEHOLDS.

—Blanca Vasquez, family involvement director, Downtown Community Development Branch, YMCA of Greater Long Beach

## LEADERSHIP: THE KEY TO LASTING CHANGE

At eight schools across the region, parents meet every day for free classes designed to help families achieve greater self-sufficiency. In 2007, more than 1,000 parents participated in these classes and other events such as family literacy nights. Parents also lead most of the classes which include lessons as diverse as English as a second language, computer skills, budgeting, public speaking, cake decorating, hair styling and flower arranging.

Thanks to the YMCA's Community Leadership Institute, parents develop key leadership and advocacy skills. Parents have successfully advocated for the City Council to repair sidewalks around a school, convinced the local transit system to provide free bus passes for parents attending classes and raised $17,000 to build an awning at a school bus stop, among other accomplishments. As part of this program, parents meet weekly for four months to learn about team building, community resources, public speaking, group facilitation, local laws and citizen's rights. Parents complete homework assignments such as attending a City Council meeting or visiting a school classroom. Graduates of the program continue to work together on community projects.

Through a partnership with the South Bay Service Planning Area, graduates of the leadership program have been hired to teach leadership classes in other communities. Parents also can receive loans to start their own business ventures.

"Our families have higher self-esteem and are more involved in the community," Vasquez says. "Parents have made a huge impact on the safety and well-being of our neighborhoods, as well as the success of their families."

## FAMILIES COUNT FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

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# YMCA OF GREATER LOUISVILLE

## YMCA OF GREATER LOUISVILLE

Award-Winning Program: YMCA Safe Place Services' Shelter House Program

R. Stephen Tarver, President and CEO
Matt Reed, Shelter Director
2400 Crittenden Drive
Louisville, KY 40217
502-635-5233
www.ymcalouisville.org

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

2008 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

## A SAFE, SUPPORTIVE PLACE FOR TEENS AND PARENTS

Although families may fight and argue, they can still find a way to compromise and work things out with support from the YMCA of Greater Louisville. The YMCA's Safe Place Services' Shelter House Program helps teens and parents resolve their differences and work successfully with each other without ending up in foster care or on the streets. About 85 percent of those served live at or below the federal poverty level. In 2007, the shelter aided 892 families and reunited 665 youth with their parents or other caretakers. The shelter takes a holistic approach to supporting teens and their families, offering supports ranging from temporary housing and free meals to family mediations to connections to Alcoholics Anonymous groups – all for free. Youth and parents also can call a 24-hour hotline for immediate advice or referrals to numerous community resources.

"By working with both the parents and the teens and linking them to needed supports, we help families stay together," says Matt Reed, director of the YMCA Safe Place Services' Shelter House Program.

OUR GOAL IS TO KEEP KIDS OUT OF FOSTER CARE AND CONNECTED WITH THEIR FAMILIES. WE HELP TEENS AND THEIR PARENTS OR OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS WORK THROUGH THEIR DIFFERENCES AND FIND NEW WAYS TO COMMUNICATE AND BOND.

—Matt Reed, director of the YMCA Safe Place Services' Shelter House Program

## YOUTH CHOOSE

When teens stay at the Safe Place shelter, they agree to work toward making positive changes in their lives, and since the shelter is not part of the state's social services system, there are no forced placements. Teens work with staff to achieve short- and long-term goals. The shelter helps teens in many ways: In 2007, staff served 22,045 meal; developed case plans for 512 teens; held 478 family meetings; and taught 1,600 life-skill building sessions. Staff members seek out youth in schools, parks and downtown entertainment hubs. Some teens go to designated "Safe Places" – fire houses, grocery stores or gas stations - where they can call the shelter to request transportation or advice.

"The youth who are here choose to be here," says Reed. "The support that they receive is driven by their needs and what they want to work on. Staying at the shelter isn't punishment – it's time to evaluate family dynamics that have been causing a youth pain or distress and finding helpful solutions."

In the three decades since the shelter opened, the definition of "family" has shifted to include aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents and even friends. Shelter staff members are trained to handle many combinations of relatives and friends and to be sensitive to everyone involved. Using a "family team conferencing" model, the program strives to engage the entire family unit, regardless of blood relation. In some cases, adults receive referrals to drug treatment programs and counseling to help them with anger management, grief or depression.

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# YMCA OF GREATER GRAND RAPIDS

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

## YMCA OF GREATER GRAND RAPIDS

Award-Winning Program: Healthy U

Ron Nelson, President and CEO
Kelly Hagmeyer, Grants and Communications Specialist
475 Lake Michigan Drive, NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49504
616-855-9600
www.grymca.org/

2008 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

## TEAMING UP FOR BETTER HEALTH

Losing weight and sticking to a healthy diet can be difficult, but when kids and their parents team up to meet these goals, they succeed. That's the lesson of the Healthy U program. Although it was originally created to help children lose weight and commit to an exercise regime, the program has resulted in several successful spin-off programs aimed at adults who also want to lead healthier lives. These days, it's not uncommon to see mothers walking laps as part of the Sisters in Action program while their children play basketball with Healthy U, which serves roughly 3,400 low-income school children annually.

"Our parents wanted to have healthier lifestyles, but they didn't know how to go about it," says Hagmeyer. "We teach them how to make better choices when they go to the grocery store and how to cook some of their favorite meals with less fat. They know that their choices benefit the health of their entire family."

SINCE 2002, THE YMCA OF GREATER GRAND RAPIDS' HEALTHY U PROGRAM HAS PROVIDED CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES WITH ACCESS TO PROGRAMS THAT HELP THEM DEVELOP HEALTHY LIFESTYLE HABITS. THESE FAMILIES ALSO BUILD STRONG RELATIONSHIPS AS THEY WORK TOGETHER TO MEET WELLNESS GOALS.

—Kelly Hagmeyer, grants and communications specialist, YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids

## CARNIVALS AND GARDENS

Healthy U staff members travel to neighborhood schools to meet with parents and their children and to connect families to other community resources. They host Nutrition Carnivals at which families play games together such as "Guess the Mystery Vegetable" that teach them the value of a diet filled with fresh foods. These events also give parents a chance to learn how to cook healthier meals. The carnivals have reached roughly 8,000 children and adults in the last two years.

In addition to partnering with the local schools, the YMCA also works with banks, business owners, and hospitals to help its families access financial services, job training and quality health care.

"Whatever their needs, all families who attend our programs are referred to supports that will help them lead healthy, successful futures," Hagmeyer says.

The YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids has continued to expand the Healthy U program, adding access to farmers markets and community gardens. In community gardens that have cropped up in formerly weedy lots, families are working together to tend tomatoes, cucumbers and zucchini. And this year, for the first time, 50 children will participate in Camp Healthy U, an intensive summer program that requires parents to attend weekly meetings with their children. This time together reinforces lessons about diet and exercise, as well as parent-child bonds.

"Helping families build their knowledge, skills and relationships is an intentional component of this program that has been a cornerstone to our success," says Hagmeyer.

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# YMCA OF LINCOLN

## YMCA OF LINCOLN

Award-Winning Program: Community Learning Center

Barbara A. Bettin, President and CEO
Sharon Bredehoft, Executive Director, Downtown Branch YMCA
1039 P St.
Lincoln, NE 68508
402-434-9236
www.ymcalincoln.org

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

2008 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

## LEARNING AT ANY AGE

At Community Learning Centers, parents are encouraged to learn with their children. And with the knowledge they gain, they can map out a better future for their families. The Community Learning Centers, an initiative of the local school system, offer comprehensive support to parents at 22 sites in Lincoln, Neb. The YMCA of Lincoln manages four sites and works with a number of other agencies to help families across the region achieve success. At the YMCA sites, parents can learn to manage their finances, apply for tax breaks, learn English as a second language, and explore low-cost housing options. That's a boost to family stability as families move less often; in recent years, the number of relocations by families served by the centers has dropped by roughly 7 percent.

"Since housing is important to building economic stability, we help our families find affordable options," says Sharon Bredehoft, executive director of the YMCA of Lincoln's Downtown Branch. "We work closely with the Lincoln housing authority, which comes in and teaches parents about rental assistance and the benefits of owning a home."

THE SUCCESS OF COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS RESTS ON IMPROVING YOUNG PEOPLE'S DEVELOPMENT, STRENGTHENING FAMILIES, AND ENCOURAGING NEIGHBORHOOD INVOLVEMENT THROUGH ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES.

—Sharon Bredehoft, executive director, Downtown Branch, YMCA of Lincoln

## EXTRA HELP FOR NEWCOMERS

The YMCA of Lincoln serves many recent immigrants, including families from Bosnia, the Middle East and the former Soviet Union. These families need special attention as they adjust to a new culture and way of life. YMCA-operated Community Learning Centers help them access available supports in the community to improve their lives and achieve their dreams.

Working with the Human Services Federation of Lincoln and Lancaster County, which offers a financial education program, these families received $4.5 million in tax refunds in 2007. Through the centers, parents also are connected to English classes at Southeast Community College, cooking classes that focus on planning nutritional meals and food assistance.

"These families need a great deal of support initially due to limited language proficiency and job skills," says Bredehoft. "But we have been successful in helping them make positive first steps toward community integration."

The Community Learning Centers are monitored by School Neighborhood Advisory Committees, which include program staff, school partners and parents. The committees are important because they give parents an opportunity to offer feedback regarding their children's after-school programs and also reinforce some of the lessons they have learned through the Community Learning Centers.

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# YMCA OF SOUTH HAMPTON ROADS

## COMMUNITY SERVICES BRANCH

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


YMCA OF SOUTH HAMPTON ROADS

Award-Winning Program: Community Services Branch YMCA

Chuck Harris, President and CEO
Mervin Pitchford, Vice President, Community Services Branch YMCA
Angela Walsh-Benard, Senior Director of Community Services
Brenda Garrett, KidsPriorityOne Director
4101 Granby Street
Suite 305
Norfolk, VA 23504
757-962-2112
www.ymcashr.org


2008 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

## EXPANDING REACH

With innovative ideas and strategies, the YMCA of South Hampton Roads is successfully reaching low-income families where they are – in their neighborhoods, at their schools and even at home. In 1997, the YMCA of South Hampton Roads created a branch to serve as a "YMCA without walls." The Community Services Branch works with families in underserved in communities in Chesapeake, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Suffolk and Virginia Beach, Va. Today, the Community Services Branch reaches hundreds of families through parenting education, an information and referral hotline, a mobile computer lab, after-school programs and youth arts programs—all designed to meet community needs in an easily accessible way.

"When we saw how many low-income families were not coming into the YMCA, we took our programs to them," says Mervin Pitchford, vice president of the Community Services Branch. "By working with both parents and children, we are helping whole families improve their futures."

IF WE WANT TO HELP KIDS MAKE HEALTHY CHOICES, WE HAVE TO HELP PARENTS MAKE HEALTHY CHOICES. THAT IS WHY WE TAKE A DUAL APPROACH – WORKING WITH BOTH CHILDREN AND PARENTS.

—Mervin Pitchford, vice president, Community Services Branch, YMCA of South Hampton Roads

## CLASSES, COMPUTERS, CONNECTIONS TO RESOURCES

For more than a decade, the Community Services YMCA has offered supportive parenting groups and classes to help improve parenting skills. The Positive Parenting program annually works with 250 parents — 95 percent of whom are single mothers living below the poverty line and referred through the Department of Social Services. For six weeks, parents learn about topics such as effective discipline, child development and positive communication. To enhance accessibility, these classes, which are funded through grants, are offered for free, with free child care, at four sites located near bus stops.

The Community Services Branch also partners with the Kiwanis Children's Council of Hampton Roads to operate a free information and referral service, KidsPriorityOne. By calling 757-CHILDREN or visiting www.kidspriorityone.org, parents in 14 local communities can find out how to access supports such as housing assistance, mental health services and employment assistance. In 2007, the hotline received 780 calls. The web site logged nearly 40,000 visits.

"We're here to help parents raise happy, healthy children," says Brenda Garrett, director of KidsPriorityOne. "Sometimes parents don't know about the resources available in the community. We connect them to services and help them find information related to their children's development."

The YMCA also helps families build computer literacy through an InnerActive Mobile Learning Center, a bus equipped with computers and Internet access. Traveling to neighborhoods and schools, the Mobile Learning Center offers computer skills classes to children, youth and senior citizens.

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