

## Family Strengthening in Youth Development

### Policy Brief No. 6

**Out-of-school youth development programming is ripe with opportunities to strengthen families and engage families as equal partners with youth development staff. This brief assesses how youth-serving programs involve parents as decision-makers and presents strategies for how national organizations and initiatives serving youth can empower parents as partners in their work.**

### Introduction

Caring relationships and consistent emotional bonds between families and adolescents have been found to be significant protective factors for youth and a necessary component to achieve positive outcomes. In defining the developmental assets that youth need to thrive, Search Institute, America's Promise, and the Forum for Youth Investment identify caring adults and supportive family relationships as key ingredients for the healthy, positive development of youth<sup>1</sup>.

Out-of-school youth development programming is ripe with opportunities to strengthen families and engage families as equal partners with youth development staff. Youth serving organizations, programs and initiatives have several distinct advantages in engaging families:

- Many youth development agencies embrace and share values that are core to a family strengthening approach, such as engaging youth as resources; working from an assets-based approach that recognizes the competencies and wisdom of youth; working with youth as partners to develop their leadership capacities instead of “doing to” and “doing for” youth; and acknowledging that the experience and development of young people is rooted in the communities where they live. Youth organizations that already apply this philosophy to their work have an advantage over other agencies to expand this approach to partnering with adult family members to help them develop leadership skills and learn about their own assets.
- Youth organizations and programs serve millions of youth (Boys and Girls Clubs reach 3 million youth; Cub Scouts alone serves 2 million boys) and connect with or have the potential to connect with adult family members of these youth.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about the work on youth assets and competencies, please see the Search Institute ([www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)), America's Promise ([www.americaspromise.org](http://www.americaspromise.org)) and Forum for Youth Investment ([www.forumforyouthinvestment.org](http://www.forumforyouthinvestment.org)).

## Definitions:

**Youth development programs: prepare young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a structured, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them obtain social, emotional, ethical, physical, and cognitive competencies. They address the broader developmental assets all children and youth need (such as caring relationships, safe places and activities, health and mental health, marketable skills, and opportunities for service and civic participation), in contrast to deficit-based approaches which focus solely on youth problems. (www.NYDIC.org)**

**FAMILY: A supportive group of people who are committed to each other and may include, though is not limited to, nuclear, extended, foster care or adoptive families.**

**PARENT: Refers to a biological or adoptive parent of a child, foster parent, person acting in the place of parent (such as a grandparent or stepparent with whom the child lives), or any caregiver who has primary responsibility for the care and support of a child.**

That being said, the integration of families as assets in youth development organizations is not a universal standard. In a review of 27 youth serving programs to assess the level and quality of family involvement, The American Youth Policy Forum's (AYPF) report, "No More Islands", found that over a quarter of the program evaluations described some family involvement, though mostly in a cursory form and most family involvement strategies were "problem-based" and top-down instead of assets-based and collaborative

(American Youth Policy Forum). AYPF observes that "...in many programs that embrace the strengths and assets young people bring to programs—culture, language, ideas, energy, enthusiasm, special skills—families and communities are not yet recognized as highly significant parts of young people's lives, inner strengths and assets" (James and Partee, p. 12).

In this brief, the FSPC examined the extent to which youth serving programs promote a central concept in family strengthening practice: involving parents as decision-makers in how their communities meet their families' needs. We looked for evidence of family engagement strategies, ranging from informing parents about program goals and opportunities to be involved to promoting parent leadership roles within organizations.

The case studies presented in this brief illustrate promising practices for strengthening families and demonstrate the range of opportunities for engaging families as partners in youth development work. Our overall findings suggest that national organizations and initiatives serving youth are engaged in a broad spectrum of strategies to empower parents as partners in their work. These strategies are evident in the organizational philosophies and missions, program activities, staffing and training policies, outreach and recruitment strategies and other areas. Yet it is unclear whether active parent and family involvement is an integral part of most youth programs. Great potential still exists for organizations to harness the assets of parents to share in the overall decision-making process and serve in advisory and leadership roles within youth serving organizations.

## **Why is family engagement important for in-school and out-of-school time?**

Parents are a critical, if not the most critical factor in the development of children and youth. Effective youth programming and youth development strategies recognize that engaging families can lead to sustainable positive outcomes for young people. This is supported by research that shows how parent-child relationships where parents provide their children with respect, support, and supervision can serve as a strong protective factor for children and buffer them from antisocial behavior and delinquency (Huizinga et al, 1995; Alvarado & Kumpfer 2000).

Furthermore, when family members become involved in after-school programs, they are more likely to become more interested and involved in their child's learning and in the life of the school as a whole (U.S. Department of Education & Department of Justice 2002). This is important because research shows that when parents become more interested and involved in their children's education, parents and children both stand to gain. Youth show improved academic achievement and a decline in negative behaviors such as violence and alcohol use (Henderson and Berla 1994).

Youth are not the only ones who benefit – parents benefit too. Parents show greater confidence in their abilities to help their own children, develop closer ties to their communities, and build social networks that expand opportunities for themselves and their families (Henderson and Berla 1994). Parents also benefit from greater access to services and supports.

A family strengthening approach to serving youth is particularly timely given the deepening cuts to human service programs and the challenges of human service fragmentation as management devolves to local levels. Family strengthening and family

engagement are an opportunity to fill the gaps in human services by bringing parents on board in the work to create stronger support networks for youth during out-of-school time.

## **What does family strengthening in youth development look like?**

There is a strong intersection between the values and principles central to family strengthening and youth development practice. In particular, the emphasis of the parent and youth as a leader and partner in the decision making process to create change in their life, that of their family and their community. The Youth Development Institute (2002) proposed a set of common principles found in family strengthening/youth development practice. The following principles, which are illustrated in the case studies presented in this brief, can serve as a guide for developing approaches that promote the dual goals of family strengthening and youth development:

**“Success requires a paradigm shift from being youth-focused to being family-focused.**

**It requires looking at how events are scheduled, so that families can be included.**

**It includes thinking about how award and recognition are done.**

**Planning activities for families takes more time in that activities for all ages need to be included.”**

*- Kathy Hermes, Camp Fire USA*

- *Promote emotional connectedness* by providing opportunities for young people and their families to have common experiences and structured activities devoted to stronger communication, and to talk with and express their feelings to one another.
- *Share goals and promote high expectations.* Effective youth workers seek to expand the number of young people, parents, and other adults committed to building a strong and positive community.
- *Help mediate between youth and families.* Tensions and even conflicts with parents and others in guardian roles are common during adolescence. Staff in family strengthening/youth development programs are trained and experienced at helping families work through these disagreements and build common understanding.
- *Promote parental efficacy.* Youth programs focused on family strengthening offer parents opportunities to develop and expand their own skills through workshops and classes and as volunteers and community leaders. Their competencies as parents also grow when they learn more about their own children's interests, goals, and development. Parent efficacy is also increased by connecting them to resources such as health or job training programs.

For another perspective on how youth serving organizations can promote family engagement and involve parents as partners in the healthy development of their youth and in promoting safe and nurturing communities for their children, please see the Toolbox for Organizational Strategies for Promoting Family Engagement (American Youth Policy Forum) in Appendix A.

## Case Studies

### Girls Inc. of Jacksonville, Florida & Holyoke, Massachusetts<sup>2</sup>:

[www.girlsinc.org](http://www.girlsinc.org)

*Building Better Citizens* is a civic involvement program for low-income girls and their families developed by Girls, Inc. of Jacksonville, Florida to demystify politics to teenage girls and enhance their families' sense of connection to the political process. The *Building Better Citizens* curriculum motivates girls to become involved in and become voting adults. The curriculum includes weekly fieldtrips to meet with elected officials; exploring avenues for making their voices heard; participating in a City Council committee meeting; holding a mock election; learning about the women's history in politics; and visits from women in politics.

Each session closes with an assignment to interview a family member as a way for girls to explore the roots of their family's political attitudes, and encourage dialogue between girls and their families about politics, causes for political apathy and strategies for positive change. Girls Inc. of Jacksonville has been asked to further refine the curriculum so it can be replicated and distributed nationally.

In Holyoke, MA *Girls And Mothers Excelling thru Sports (GAMES)* is a program that brings together mothers and daughters to learn and play sports, and creates new occasions for mothers to actively support their daughters' efforts to reach their full potential...both on and off the courts. The program

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<sup>2</sup> Girls Inc. of Jacksonville received the FAMILIES COUNT Family Strengthening Award from the Annie E. Casey Foundation in 2004. The award recognizes outstanding programs that help give children what they need most – strong, capable and economically successful families.

offers girls, ages 6 to 14, an opportunity to have fun and bond with their mother (or other significant female adult) through exploring new sports, developing common interests and supporting each others growing sports involvement, skill development and awareness of the benefits of sports participation.

**GAMES** recognizes that family support is critical to girls getting involved and staying involved in sports. Creating an environment in which girls are encouraged by their mothers (and families) to participate in sports is an integral part of the **GAMES** program. By “hooking in” both girls and mothers to the beneficial aspects of sports, **GAMES** makes the playing field (or court) a great place for developing a strong mother/daughter bond around sports and physical fitness.

#### **YMCA of the Suncoast: Engaging Parents in Program Planning and Development**

[www.suncoastymca.org](http://www.suncoastymca.org)

Recognizing that the YMCA is uniquely positioned to positively impact the health of the children it serves provided the impetus for the YMCA of the Suncoast to participate in a national collaborative effort of YMCAs to provide healthier, more active environments for children and their families. All involved in this experimental project recognized that in order to be successful, YMCAs needed to do a much better job engaging parents, children and staff in this work.

The YMCA of the Suncoast learned from a focus group of a diverse group of parents from the local elementary school the best days and times of the week for meetings, what would make them attend, and what aspects of their children’s health concerned them the most. Building on the momentum and the interests of these parents, staff invited parents,

children and YMCA group leaders to become active in a committee to lead this initiative. To date, the leadership team has discussed and prioritized the issues, set goals for program improvement and family involvement and is now forming smaller teams made up of leadership team members and newly recruited parents and children. This “divide and conquer” methodology is allowing the parents, children and staff to work in four specific areas: YMCA program improvement, staff healthy habits, children’s healthy habits, and parent healthy habits.

#### **Girl Scouts of the USA**

<http://www.girlscouts.org>

To reach out to parents and family members of current and perspective participants, Girl Scouts of the USA implements a variety of strategies in its communications, staff training and program models to reach families and provide them with the support and services they need to help their daughters be successful. These strategies include:

- **Culturally appropriate family-centered outreach initiatives** to recruit Hispanic and Asian participants to the program were based on the recognition that without honoring the important role of families in many traditions and cultures, Girl Scouts would be unsuccessful in recruiting girls from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. In some local council programs, parents’ help adapt the Girl Scouts curriculum to honor ethnic traditions and customs, as in the case of the Tip of Texas Gil Scout Council in Harlingen, Texas which brings in mothers of girl scouts to teach about Latina culture and traditions.
- **A web site section for adult family members** ([http://www.girlscouts.org/for\\_adults/](http://www.girlscouts.org/for_adults/)) to provide families with resources.

- **Basic training for Girl Scout volunteers** includes skill building on how to work effectively with families to best support the healthy development of girls and how to connect families to needed resources in their community. In some instances, Girl Scouts staff makes visits to family homes to encourage adult family members to support their child's participation in the program.
- **Resources to encourage parents to participate:** Through the federally funded program, Girl Scouts in Public Housing, parents are offered small stipends for child care and transportation. The program also organizes events that the whole family can participate in, such as group meals and picnics.

Another program that promotes positive family relationships for youth is *Girl Scouts Beyond Bars* which keeps incarcerated mothers and their daughters connected, lessening the trauma and negative impacts of parental separation. *Girl Scouts Beyond Bars* facilitates visits between mothers and daughters and engages them in social and educational activities designed to foster positive familial and personal development.

#### **Families and Schools Together: Promoting Academic Competence Through Family Support**

[www.fastprogram.org](http://www.fastprogram.org)

One of the primary strategies of FAST is parent empowerment: parents receive support from other parents and from the team to be the primary prevention agents for their own children. Parents are valued as equal partners in the program process from the earliest planning stages to the monthly parent-led reunions. Experimental studies of the FAST program show statistically significant results in the improved behavior and academic competence of participating children, a reduction in child's problem

behaviors, an increase in parent involvement in schools, reduced family conflict, increased friendship networks for families, and increased parent leadership in the community.

Program Components offered after-school include:

- **Outreach:** one to one home visits to recruit voluntary participation of whole families to come at least once to "try out" the multi-family support groups.
- **Multifamily support groups:** these groups are structured around activities such as family meals; parent-led family communication games, self-help parent support group gatherings, one-to-one parent-mediated play therapy, and opening and closing ceremonies that model the effectiveness of family rituals for children.
- **Multifamily meetings:** Held monthly for two years, after families "graduate", local parents design the agenda to maintain the friendships and the family, school, community networks that were developed, and to identify and develop local community development projects.

#### **Camp Fire USA**

[www.campfire.org](http://www.campfire.org)

Camp Fire has established 400 Community Family Clubs that are helping to revitalize families and strengthen communities across the country. In Community Family Clubs families come together to share meals and activities and learn to communicate more effectively. Both parents and youth can develop support groups, learn about resources in their neighborhood that they never knew existed such as referrals to community services and economic resources, participate in English language

classes, and experience a genuine sense of community. The work of the Community Family Clubs has resulted in increased parental engagement in the lives of their children, stronger connections and relationships built between families, parent and family involvement in service projects that benefit the community, and greater participant access of services and benefits like immigration law resources, job training, and EITC benefits.

*For more information on the Community Family Clubs please see Appendix B.*

## Helpful Tips

*From Kathleen Hermes, Camp Fire USA*

**The program (Community Family Clubs) takes a lot of community development work to establish the groups and a lot of coordination to organize the meetings and get everyone to attend.**

**We have found that once a group establishes itself with its own leadership, it is likely to sustain itself over time. Identifying families that are willing to make an initial commitment to the club can be difficult.**

**It requires a lot of personal contact and follow-up. It's important to have a core group of families before the program begins to assure that enough people will attend each meeting.**

## Boy Scouts of America:

### Family as Context for Youth Learning

[www.scouting.org](http://www.scouting.org)

The Cub Scouts program of Boy Scouts of America is a home and neighborhood centered program focused on creating opportunities for parents to do activities together with their children. Central to the Cub Scouting program is the belief in “involving families in the training of youth” and “being sensitive to the needs of present-day families.”

Boy Scouts of America has developed a variety of tools and approaches for engaging families that accommodate both parents who are active volunteers in the programs and those who are eager to be involved but unable to lead troops:

- In the Cub Scout Handbook for parents, one of the 10 levels of achievement Cub Scouts are expected to master is focused on “family fun” and includes activities for Cub Scouts and family members to perform together.
- The Optional Family Program recognizes the central role of parents and family in the healthy development of youth, and presents Scouting as an “available resource that can help families accomplish worthy goals while building and strengthening relationships among family members.”

BSA prepares pack leaders to run family-centered programs such as the Cub Scout Family Program by suggesting strategies for enhancing family involvement in training and orientation materials. Suggested strategies include:

- Urge and expect a parent or guardian to be present at and participate in ceremonies when the Cub

Scout is inducted, recognized for advancement, or graduated from the pack.

- Use Family Talent Survey Sheet to identify talents, abilities, and resources that can be used in den and pack meeting activities.
- Communicate with families by telephone, e-mail, newsletters and website.

### **Recommendations: How can we strengthen families through youth development programs and initiatives?**

Agencies often encounter obstacles to integrating family strengthening/youth development practices. Examples may include: difficulties identifying staff with the appropriate skills; finding the resources to train staff to work with youth and family members; and securing flexible funding for youth programs that permits family engagement strategies to be incorporated into existing work. However, the following recommendations offer agencies wanting to integrate the family strengthening approach guidelines into their work as well as recommendations for policy makers.

#### **Recommendations for Agencies Delivering Youth Programming<sup>3</sup>**

- Create opportunities for parents and youth development professionals to share power and leadership. Create parent councils and youth councils that provide opportunities for family members and young people to help shape

activities from the early planning stages through completion and planning for follow-up. Work with parents to jointly develop strategies and tools for enhancing family engagement strategies. Create opportunities for parents to participate in program development, implementation and assessment.

- Recognize and acknowledge non-traditional families in which teens' primary caretakers may not be their biological parents.
- Create a welcoming atmosphere for family members. Communicate clearly and consistently to parents that they are welcome and explain how they can support their child's learning process.
- Retain staff skilled in working with both youth and families, including multilingual staff members who can do parent outreach with non-English speakers. In addition to retaining dedicated staff committed to family outreach and engagement, all staff should be knowledgeable about ways to enhance family and community involvement. Staff should be trained to work with families and to take an assets-based approach to engaging both youth and adult family members.
- Maintain regular communications with parents regarding programs and activities through diverse communication strategies including newsletters, flyers, telephone calls, web sites and home visits.
- Conduct family assessments to identify needs and assets of the youth and the family as a whole. Listen to what parents want instead of assuming they will be interested in programs you have to offer. Tailor programs to family needs, wants and interests. Create opportunities

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<sup>3</sup> Recommendations drawn from work of American Youth Policy Forum (See "No More Islands: Family Involvement in 27 School and Youth Programs") and Youth Development Institute/Fund for the City of New York's "Family Strengthening/Youth Development: Introduction to an Emerging Field."

for parents to realize their assets through program involvement and other contributions.

- Identify community partners that can help support the work you do to promote success for youth and families. Start by identifying which other community-based and human service agencies the family is currently working with and determine what other agencies might share your vision to support the families your agency serves. Don't overlook individuals in community who can help with parent outreach and developing trusting relationships between your agency and families in the community.
- Allocate resources in existing programs or in grant proposals for future initiatives to provide families with services and activities that provide for family member's holistic needs, including economic self-sufficiency, health, housing and education.
- Convene meetings with representative from the youth development, family strengthening and family support fields to identify shared objectives, values and principles and to identify common goals, policy agendas and opportunities for collaboration.

#### **Policy Implications:**

- Support family strengthening strategies by incorporating principles of family engagement and holistic family services into legislative proposals.
- Create funding streams that are flexible, not categorical. Flexible funding enables human service agencies to provide coordinated, community-based supports and services that

address the holistic needs of families. One strategy for doing this is by decategorizing funding by removing narrow eligibility requirements and rules governing allocations from existing funding streams<sup>4</sup>.

- Create dedicated funding streams through earmarking, tax levies, trust funds and other financing mechanisms to support funding for organizations and agencies to promote family strengthening principles. Possible expenditures include, but are not limited to retaining family and community engagement staff and conducting family asset and needs assessments.
- Foundations, philanthropies and government grant makers should consider supporting research that examines the impact of family engagement on youth outcomes, particularly in the context of youth development programming and out-of-school time activities.
- Convene agencies working across human service systems and fields to examine how they can collaborate more effectively to serve whole families and communities. State government can promote initiatives to pool funds from multiple health and human service agencies and programs into a single, unified funding stream. Pooled funding can also be achieved through the creation of trust funds for receiving funds from categorical programs that can then be distributed to flexibly fund community programs and services.

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<sup>4</sup> For more information about financing strategies that support family-focused, neighborhood-centered financing policies, please see "Thinking Broadly: Financing Strategies for Comprehensive Child and Family Initiatives," Cheryl D. Hayes, The Finance Project, June 2004.

## RESOURCES

### **American Youth Policy Forum**

[www.aypf.org](http://www.aypf.org)

The American Youth Policy Forum is a non-profit, non-partisan professional development organization providing learning opportunities for policy makers on youth policy issues at the national, state and local level.

### **Afterschool Alliance**

<http://www.afterschoolalliance.org>

The Afterschool Alliance is a nonprofit organization dedicated to raising awareness of the importance of afterschool programs and advocating for quality, affordable programs for all children. It is supported by a group of public, private and nonprofit organizations that share the Alliance's vision of ensuring that all children have access to afterschool programs by 2010.

### **AfterSchool.gov**

[Afterschool.gov](http://Afterschool.gov)

Afterschool.gov connects people to federal resources for information on strategies to support children and youth during out-of-school hours. The site includes a searchable database of federal government funding sources; ideas on networking with others in the field; links to organizations and publications that focus on youth issues.

### **National After-School Association**

<http://www.naaweb.org>

A professional association with a membership component-our membership includes more than 7,000 practitioners, policy makers, and administrators representing all public, private, and community-based sectors of after-school and out-of-school time

programs, as well as school-age and after-school programs on military bases, both domestic and international. As the leading voice of the after-school profession, we are dedicated to the development, education, and care of children and youth during their out-of-school hours.

### **National Fatherhood Initiative**

[www.fatherhood.org](http://www.fatherhood.org)

The National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) was founded in 1994 to lead a society-wide movement to confront the problem of father absence. NFI's mission is to improve the well-being of children by increasing the proportion of children growing up with involved, responsible, and committed fathers. Through its National Fatherhood Clearinghouse and Resource Center, NFI administers curricula and workshops to reach fathers as well as assisting local organizations in starting and operating an effective fatherhood programs. The NFI is also the center of educational material distribution and all technical assistance.

### **National Institute on Out Of School Time**

<http://www.niost.org/>

For over 20 years, the National Institute on Out-of-School Time has successfully brought national attention to the importance of children's out-of-school time, influenced policy, increased standards and professional recognition, and spearheaded community action aimed at improving the availability, quality and viability of programs serving children and youth. NIOST's varied initiatives have moved the field forward using three paths: Research, Evaluation and Consultation; Policy Development and Public Awareness; Training and Curriculum Development.

### **Promising Practices in Afterschool Listserv**

<http://www.afterschool.org/communicating.cfm#listserv>

The Promising Practices in Afterschool Listserv is a virtual community of afterschool program staff, youth workers, school-age care providers, educators, researchers, policymakers, and others with an interest in keeping up-to-date on the latest in afterschool.

### **21st Century Community Learning Centers**

<http://www.ed.gov/programs/21stcclc/index.html>

This Department of Education program website provides information and resources related to the 21st Century Community Learning Centers, an initiative created under the No Child Left Behind Act. Website includes opportunities for students and their families to continue to learn new skills and discover new abilities after the school day has ended, drug and violence prevention programs, technology education programs, art, music and recreation programs, counseling and character education to enhance the academic component of the program.

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## APPENDIX A

### Toolbox: Organizational Strategies for Promoting Family Engagement

Parent engagement represents a broad spectrum of strategies for involving parents as partners in the development of thriving, healthy youth. These are five key strategies and examples, adapted from the work of the American Youth Policy Forum report “No More Islands: Family Involvement in 27 Schools and Youth Programs.”

OPERATIONAL STRATEGY	EXAMPLES
<b>Communicating with Families</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to parent resource rooms or centers</li> <li>• Creative parent outreach strategies (e.g. presentations, workshops, potlucks, social events, child care provided)</li> <li>• Resources and strategies for overcoming language and cultural barriers (meetings and materials in local languages)</li> </ul>
<b>Reinforcing Parents' Understanding of Learning and Other Program Goals</b> <i>(e.g. improvements in academic achievement, participation in program activities, college and career guidance, health and well-being).</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curricula for Families: to be used by youth and family members at home</li> <li>• Influencing Family Behaviors: e.g. encouraging parents to read with their children, attend social events organized by agency, enroll in parent education classes</li> <li>• Families in Academic and Career Guidance: e.g. Providing information to families so that they can help guide the youth's academic and career plans</li> </ul>
<b>Staffing and Professional Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff person involved in connecting families to comprehensive family support services and community resources; making family members feel welcome; organizing activities for parents; etc.</li> <li>• Availability of bi-lingual, bi-cultural staff</li> <li>• Staff trained in improving family outreach and involvement skills</li> <li>• Volunteers trained to operate within a family system</li> </ul>
<b>Designing and Implementing Family Member-Related Services and Activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programs provide range of services and activities designed to provide for the needs of families and improve family members' skills, including:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengths and Needs Assessment: in-depth survey of youth, family and / or community needs and strengths.                 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Types of Family Needs: health, financial (food, clothing, shelter, income, and employment assistance), educational (literacy, English language proficiency); human and social services system navigation</li> <li>• Building on Family Strengths: talents, resources, capacities, special skills and willingness to contribute to program activities or community</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Parenting Assistance: helping parents understand their children's development and abilities; improving family member skills (ESL classes, GED preparation, literacy, computer skills, citizenship classes, EITC/CCTC and financial planning, home ownership and housing assistance), and offering parent support groups and counseling</li> <li>• On-Site Assistance: medical, dental, mental health, health and nutrition education, employment services (job training and placement), continuing education counseling and family case management which may include drug &amp; crisis intervention services</li> <li>• Home visits and home based services to improve communication between project and families as well as to model educational activities and recruit perspective youth participants</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Promoting Family Member Advisory, Program, Advocacy, Leadership and Community Roles and Relationships</b>	<p>Family members play advisory roles on policy councils and committees; are involved in decision-making communities; serve on parent advisory boards; &amp; involved in program implementation or serve in volunteer capacity</p>

## APPENDIX B

### Q&A: Kathy Hermes, Camp Fire, Community Family Clubs

**Q:** *Why is engaging families as partners in youth development programs and activities important?*

**A:** Camp Fire staff encourages parents, extended family members and other members of the community to routinely interact with youth and to develop their own parenting and mentoring skills through their relationship with Camp Fire. Experience has shown that when adult family members get involved with children in a supportive and fun atmosphere they become invested in the program.

**Q:** *Please describe a typical Community Family Club.*

**A:** Community Family Clubs are sponsored by schools, faith communities, afterschool programs or other community organizations. The youth and their families meet regularly to share a meal, do large and small group activities and share quality time together. They meet in neighborhoods in a large space, like a school cafeteria. The program is initiated by a Camp Fire Council or Chapter in cooperation with a community partner. Camp Fire staff identifies adults that might be ready to assume leadership roles so that the program becomes volunteer driven over time. All ages of children and youth participate with their families. They come to the meeting with any adult that can serve as a mentor, including grandparents, other family members, and neighbors.

In addition to the monthly meetings, clubs offer an at-home project, a field trip or special event and an informal activity night during the month. Families may choose to do just the monthly meeting or all three

components. Many parents take on short-term volunteer roles, offer to help children with the activities or share a skill.

**Q:** *What are the challenges of integrating a family-centered curriculum in a traditionally youth-focused program or organization?*

**A:** The program takes a lot of community development work to establish the groups and a lot of coordination to organize the meetings and get everyone to attend. We have found that once a group establishes itself with its own leadership, it is likely to sustain itself over time. Identifying families that are willing to make an initial commitment to the club can be difficult. It requires a lot of personal contact and follow-up. It's important to have a core group of families before the program begins to assure that enough people will attend each meeting.

**Q:** *What are the specific outcomes / benefits of a family-centered approach to serving youth? What kind of family and community outcomes (in addition to youth outcomes) have you measured or observed?*

**A:** The majority of both children and adults who completed the Camp Fire USA Outcomes Measurement Toolkit either *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that, because of the clubs, they:

- Had a greater understanding of different cultures, religions or people with disabilities,

- Had learned new skills that would help them with their family lives,
- Did more activities with their families outside of club meetings,
- Talked with their parents or children more outside of club meetings,
- Believed their family was stronger, and
- Volunteered in their communities more, along with their families.

**Q: *What effective strategies can you recommend to other youth development organizations interested in strengthening families and communities?***

**A:** Look for practices that are currently in place that support families. It is easier to build on what is in place than to start from scratch without a track record. Including families in service activities, award and recognition events and activity nights is a good way to add on to what many youth development organizations are already doing. Engaging families requires support at all levels of the organization from the board to the front line staff. It requires time, funds and patience. It requires listening to what parents want, rather than assuming they will be interested in the programs you already have in place. Find a “champion” that can recruit families to participate. Families are more likely to listen to each other than to respond to a program flier announcing an event. The more local the activity is, the better turnout can be expected. The grass roots nature of neighborhood based programming builds community. It also presents excellent opportunities for service learning.

**This series of policy briefs produced by the Family Strengthening Policy Center (FSPC)** seeks to describe a new way of thinking about how to strengthen families raising children in low-income communities and how this approach can and should influence policy. The premise of “family strengthening” in this context, and as championed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, is that children do well when cared for by supportive families, which, in turn, do better when they live in vital and supportive communities. The series describes ways in which enhancing connections within families and between families and the institutions that affect them result in better outcomes for children and their families.

The Family Strengthening Policy Center is funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and is an initiative of the National Human Services Assembly, an association of the nation’s leading national nonprofits in the fields of health, human and community development, and human services.

This brief reflects the findings and views of the Family Strengthening Policy Center, which is solely responsible for its content. Additional policy briefs are available at [www.nassembly.org/fspc](http://www.nassembly.org/fspc).

**This policy brief was produced with significant support and contributions from:**

**The Family Strengthening Task Force of the National Human Services Assembly**

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*For more information about the Family Strengthening Task Force and its membership, please see the Family Strengthening Policy Center web site at:*

*[www.nassembly.org/fspc/aboutus.html](http://www.nassembly.org/fspc/aboutus.html)*

In particular, the Family Strengthening Policy Center would like to acknowledge the valuable contributions of case study and Q and A contributors:

*Boy Scouts of America*

*Camp Fire, USA*

*Families and Schools Together, Wisconsin Center for Education Research  
University of Wisconsin-Madison*

*Girl Scouts of the USA*

*Girls Incorporated of Jacksonville*

*Girls Incorporated of Holyoke*

*YMCA of the Suncoast*