



VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA
DAKOTAS

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

2008 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

THE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO TREATING CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY

Since 1994, Volunteers of America, Dakotas, has provided an innovative, holistic treatment program for youth struggling with substance abuse. The Heisler Adolescent Chemical Dependency Treatment Program in South Dakota serves nearly 900 youth ages 12-18 annually with residential and outpatient treatment involving the entire family. Recognizing that families benefit from supports tailored to their specific needs, treatment offerings include the New Start program for pregnant and parenting young mothers—the only one of its kind in the state. Mothers who keep their children during treatment are eight times more likely to remain drug free, so the program provides housing and services for the mothers and children to stay together. For all youth, the agency takes a comprehensive approach including mental health therapy, family sessions, career and education exploration, resource connections, case management and medical support.

“It’s important to holistically address an adolescent’s psychological, physical and spiritual needs while strengthening the entire family to address the root causes of addiction,” says Sheryl Barnett, vice president.



ADDICTION IS A DISEASE THAT AFFECTS THE
WHOLE FAMILY, SO IT IS IMPORTANT TO
TREAT THE YOUTH AND THEIR FAMILY AS A
WHOLE. THIS INCLUDES ENSURING MEDICAL
AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TREATMENT, HELPING
FAMILIES ACHIEVE SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND
CREATING NETWORKS OF SUPPORT – ALL IN A
CULTURALLY COMPETENT WAY.

—Chris Sandvig, chemical dependency services director, Volunteers of America, Dakotas

CULTURAL COMPETENCE AND FAMILY SUPPORT

In South Dakota, an increasingly disproportionate number of Native American youth need substance abuse treatment. Tailoring treatment for this population, Volunteers of America, Dakotas, offers the Native Hope program, which incorporates culturally relevant traditions, beliefs and spirituality for Native American youth. A cultural coordinator and an advisory committee comprised of spiritual leaders and elders from nine South Dakota reservations help guide the program's cultural content. If youth desire to incorporate cultural aspects to their treatment, they can participate in traditional ceremonies such as a "sweat lodge," a ritual of sweating to purge impurities, a "talking circle," a communal gathering for sharing thoughts, or "smudging," which involves burning herbs for purification.

Volunteers of America, Dakotas, offers extensive support for parents and siblings of youth in treatment with weekly support group meetings, family therapy and monthly six-hour sessions to educate family members on addiction and building communication skills. Families also receive referrals to needed services and receive free tickets to sporting events and concerts to promote bonding.

"We do all that we can to ensure that when a young person returns home, the family and the community act as a supportive network to help the youth stay sober," Barnett says. "And ultimately, the community benefits: For every dollar we spend on these youth, we receive \$7 in savings from costs associated with delinquency, special education, medical costs and social services."

FAMILIES COUNT FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

Through a joint venture of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Volunteers of America, the FAMILIES COUNT Family Strengthening Awards recognize Volunteers of America affiliates with outstanding programs that work to give children what they need most—strong, capable and economically successful families. Responding to the varied needs of the families they serve, these organizations improve the economic prospects of working men and women and create the services and networks of support that all families need to realize their aspirations for themselves and their children.

For more than a century, Volunteers of America has served the families of the nation's most vulnerable individuals, supporting them in the achievement of self-sufficiency and self-determination, improving the lives of children and bolstering community support networks for families. In more than 400 communities across the nation, the affiliates of Volunteers of America, a national non-profit, faith-based organization, reach 2 million people, including at-risk youth, ex-offenders, families in poverty and victims of domestic violence. "We are dedicated to using innovative and effective approaches to comprehensively meet the diverse needs of our families," says Charles W. Gould, president and CEO of Volunteers of America. "By strengthening families, we are strengthening the future success of our most vulnerable children."

VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA, DAKOTAS

Award-Winning Program: Heisler Adolescent Chemical Dependency
Treatment Program

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