



VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA  
OF WESTERN NEW YORK

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

2008 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

## MORE THAN CHILD CARE: CARING FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

For 21 years, the Volunteers of America of Western New York (VOAWNY) has provided affordable child care for low-income families with children six weeks to 12 years old in its Children's Center. Caring for more than children, however, the program encompasses the entire family. As a Head Start provider, VOAWNY recognized the potential for improving children's lives with a more holistic family approach. So the agency expanded comprehensive services to the families of all 260 children in its Children's Center. Family service providers meet with each family regularly to help gauge needs, set family goals and connect parents to needed resources. After developing a partnership agreement detailing the family's goals, the family service provider helps parents work toward GEDs, enroll in job training and literacy classes, receive food assistance, find health clinics and obtain other services.

"We want mothers and fathers to do the best for themselves so that they're doing the best for their children," says Kathleen Eastman, vice president of children's services.



CHILDREN DO NOT EXIST ON THEIR OWN.  
EVERY CHILD IS PART OF A FAMILY. ONLY BY  
WORKING WITH THE WHOLE FAMILY CAN WE  
MAKE LASTING, LONG-TERM CHANGES IN  
CHILDREN'S LIVES.

—Kathleen Eastman, vice president of children's services, Volunteers of America of Western New York

## FOLLOWING PARENTS' LEAD

VOAWNY makes a concerted effort to involve parents in decision making. A parent council advises the Children's Center, and at least one parent serves on the agency's board of directors. Parents also lead their own support group and hold family recreational nights to build social support networks with each other.

VOAWNY offers a variety of supports to help parents achieve greater self-sufficiency for their families: Parent training classes teach parenting, life and job skills and financial education, the Working Wardrobe provides business attire, homeless intervention services help families facing eviction, and a social worker provides counseling.

Partnerships further strengthen VOAWNY families. In an innovative partnership with Strong Memorial Hospital, VOAWNY helps parents by making health care more accessible for their children. Children can receive medical advice and care remotely through a computer that transmits images and information from the Children's Center to doctors at the hospital. Telemedicine allows doctors to determine whether a child has an ear infection or strep throat and whether a child should go home or seek further care. Prescriptions also are delivered to the Children's Center.

"If you are a low-income parent traveling by bus, coming here to pick up your child, then going to the doctor and the pharmacy, it could take quite a while and you could lose your job," Eastman says. "Parents love this system. It cuts down on false alarms and allows families to receive better health care."

## 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 OF WESTERN NEW YORK

Award-Winning Program: Family Partnership Program

Dianne Newhouse, President and CEO

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