

This year, Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) and its vital programs will reach nearly 4.5 million young people and their parents in 3,700 neighborhoods and rural communities. BGCA's professional staff will support and engage parents as their school-age children learn character and leadership development, vocational training, healthy behaviors and benefit from a wide range of academic and cultural pursuits. "We not only change the trajectory of a young person's life today but also the trajectory of their children's lives tomorrow," says BGCA President Roxanne Spillett. "That's why we call our work family-strengthening and generation-changing."



BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS OF BUFFALO

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Award-winning Program: Families Matter
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CHILDREN DO WELL WHEN THEIR FAMILIES
DO WELL, AND FAMILIES DO BETTER WHEN
THEY LIVE IN SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

2005 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

PARENTS ARE THE KEY

In the 1990s, Boys & Girls Clubs of Buffalo realized that engaging parents could help children and youth become productive adults. Staff also recognized that this goal would require a better understanding of how the organization could best foster parents' involvement.

"Parents *want* to participate fully in their children's lives, but they're constantly forced to make tough decisions about time, money and resources," says Chief Professional Officer Diane Rowe. "To support them, you first have to understand the many challenges parents face—from grueling work schedules and limited language skills to domestic abuse and unemployment."

From that beginning arose Families Matter. Serving low-income families, most headed by single mothers, the program connects highly stressed parents in networks of mutual support—and opens the doors to resources they can access to move their families forward.



WE PLUG PARENTS INTO A NETWORK THAT FACILITATES SHARING IDEAS AND RESOURCES WITH ONE ANOTHER. IT'S A REMARKABLE WAY TO HELP PARENTS GROW AND FOR THEM TO BUILD SKILLS THAT SUPPORT THEIR CHILDREN'S SUCCESS.

—Diane Rowe, Chief Professional Officer, Boys & Girls Clubs of Buffalo

DEVELOPING PARENT LEADERSHIP

Today, Families Matter brings parents together for field trips to health and career fairs, local supermarkets and pharmacies. Staff and local partners use these real-world settings to teach skills that support good nutrition, health and career exploration. Monthly get-togethers provide parents with opportunities to teach each other in areas such as household budgeting and selecting a health care plan. Supporting the Clubs' strong focus on literacy, parents teach parents new to Families Matter about the techniques they have learned to improve their children's reading and comprehension.

Parents attending Families Matter programs can check the Parents Club Corner for information on job opportunities, renters' rights and community supports. The official Blue Book provides a list of Clubs' services, ranging from food assistance through a food bank to help in identifying educational goals. "If something is not available," says Rowe, "we will find it somehow, someday."

Rowe also stresses the continuing role of parents in shaping the Clubs' services and programs for families. "We spend a great deal of time talking with parents, one-to-one and in small groups, to get their point of view," she says. "We discover where they are in their lives and where they want to go. Then we find the best ways to support them."

FAMILIES COUNT FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

Through a joint venture of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Boys & Girls Clubs of America, the FAMILIES COUNT Family Strengthening Awards recognize Club 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.