

Camp Fire USA serves more than 750,000 young people and their families each year in hundreds of neighborhoods, towns and rural communities nationwide. To realize its mission of developing caring and self-confident youth, Camp Fire places a high priority on strengthening families so they can help their children succeed. Family-based programs complement an approach that involves families in the full range of Camp Fire activities. "In our councils, families share a respite from life's demands and gain other families' support to move forward," says Jill Pasewalk, Camp Fire's National CEO and President. "We give them a place where they can connect with each other and their communities in a meaningful and lasting way."



# CAMP FIRE USA BALCONES COUNCIL

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Award-winning Program: Balcones Council Family Programs

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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

## CONNECTING FAMILIES

In the towns and cities of Central Texas, low-income families can turn to Camp Fire USA Balcones Council to overcome their cultural isolation and find the resources they need to succeed. “Our families live a daily struggle to find and keep employment. Many are immigrants trying to get by on limited English and assimilate into a new culture,” says Rebecca Benz, the Council’s executive director. “Services are hard to access, and family time is often an unaffordable luxury.”

The Council’s Family Programs connect families to each other and to community supports. “Over the past several years, we’ve seen an increase in the number of parents unable to support their children,” Benz says. “We designed our Family Programs to help these parents develop the skills and assets that will move their families forward.”

## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Through valuable partnerships with other organizations, the Balcones Council links families to a broad range of conveniently located services to help them achieve economic stability and long-term goals. One such partnership is with Foundation Communities, a nonprofit organization that manages the housing units where many of the families live.

In 2004, the Council and Foundation Communities collaborated to begin a Community Family Club. Based on a Camp Fire program model, families build community at Club meetings over a shared meal. Following dinner, parents participate in activities and projects that build financial literacy and develop knowledge around issues such as domestic abuse. Programs address challenges identified by parents themselves.

Council families can take advantage of Foundation Communities’ classes in ESL, money management, homeownership, parenting and computer skills. Camp Fire also encourages families to seek help preparing their tax returns from FC’s Community Tax Centers, where they can apply for their Earned Income Tax Credit and other credits that help them build their assets.

Camp Fire Family Programs, such as Outdoor Living Skills and Outdoor Adventures, take families out of their urban surroundings for shared wilderness experiences. “Families who participate in all of our Family Programs come away as part of a larger community, with new skills and resources,” says Benz. “They are better parents because they are more confident and skilled people, and have opportunities to connect with each other away from the daily routine.”

## FAMILIES COUNT FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

Through a joint venture of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Camp Fire USA, the FAMILIES COUNT Family Strengthening Awards recognize Camp Fire USA councils 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.



AS FAMILIES FACE GROWING PRESSURES,  
WE HAVE BECOME MUCH MORE INTENTIONAL  
ABOUT DEVELOPING PROGRAMS THAT BUILD  
THEIR SKILLS AND CAPABILITIES AS PARENTS.

—Rebecca Benz, Executive Director, Camp Fire USA Balcones Council