



# CAMP FIRE USA MIDLANDS COUNCIL

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

2005 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

## FAMILY BENEFITS ACCRUE

When Camp Fire USA Midlands Council in Omaha, Nebraska, brings families together, the benefits continue long after everyone goes home. That's the idea behind the Family Enhancement Program, created by the Council to help families develop the skills, knowledge and support they need to achieve their goals.

Launched in 2000, the Program now attracts more than 200 parents and children to its Family Night events that combine fun and learning. Most of the families come from low-income neighborhoods, where parents struggle to create more options for their children than they had.

"Parents tell us, 'What you did for our family is the best thing that's happened to us,'" Executive Director Penny Parker says. "It's also the best thing that's happened to their communities. We see parents and children communicating better and improving their neighborhoods so children can thrive. The results are frequently tangible and immediate."



A SIMPLE MEAL CAN BE A JUMPING OFF  
POINT FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN TO  
LEARN TOGETHER, GROW TOGETHER AND  
FIND SUCCESS.

—Penny Parker, Executive Director, Camp Fire USA Midlands Council

## BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE

At Family Nights, families share a meal and hear from speakers on subjects identified by a parent advisory council and teen board. On one evening, parents and teenagers may learn about applying for college and finding financial aid. On another night, they may hear from a neighbor about medical and dental care available in their community.

Demonstrations and group discussions engage parents in hands-on learning as they practice mediation techniques to settle a neighborhood dispute and practice getting the most from a parent-teacher conference.

Families become networks of support that can work together to move their families forward. Neighborhood cleanups, nursing home visits and tutoring sessions for younger children link families in tasks that improve their community. “Parents and children show up together for service projects,” Parker says. “They feel a real commitment to this work and to each other. If one family member can’t make it, another one comes instead. They start operating as an effective, productive family.”

The Program consistently reflects parent and youth input. “But we also make sure the needs and interests of that neighborhood and those families are front and center,” says Parker. “Strengthening family relationships is at the heart of everything we do.”

## 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.

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."

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Award-winning Program: Family Enhancement Program

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