

Founded in 1911 as the National Federation of Settlements, United Neighborhood Centers of America (UNCA) has always put families first, continuing settlement houses' historic role as family centers to low-income neighborhoods. Today, UNCA supports 150 member organizations and 700 centers, improving and deepening the resources and services nearly a million family members take advantage of each year. "Family strengthening is an UNCA tradition," says President Ian B. Bautista. "Settlement houses have always been there for parents who seek economic self-sufficiency and brighter futures for their children. Over the years, the fabric may have changed but the thread of our work continues to restore families and communities."



# SOUTH SIDE SETTLEMENT HOUSE

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Award-winning Program: Young Children's Care Co-operative  
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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 AS PARTNERS

In Columbus, Ohio, the century-old South Side Settlement House (SSSH) watched too many children repeating the patterns of their parents who had done poorly in school. SSSH decided to engage these same parents as essential partners in reversing this trend through the Young Children's Care Co-operative.

"We found many parents lacked a high school education; some hadn't graduated middle school," says Executive Director Marialyce Sunami. "They were passing on negative perceptions of school to their children, who then encountered difficulties with learning, attitude and attendance, sometimes as early as kindergarten."

A licensed, full-day child care program, the Care Co-operative works on two levels. Children gain the cognitive and social skills to enter kindergarten ready to learn. Working in the program as volunteers, their parents learn to prepare their children for school, gain confidence in their parenting roles, and become part of a community that offers other supports.

## EVERY PARENT ADDS VALUE

"Alumni" of the Care Co-operative routinely make successful transitions to schools. The program works, in part, because "we consider all parents to have valuable resources they can contribute to the program," says Sunami. "This makes it a good point of entry for families who may otherwise be reluctant to enroll their young children in activities away from home."

Parents help design children's activities as well as experiences for other parents that help them maintain a continuum of learning at home. Some parents continue to volunteer, long after their children have left the program.

As they become comfortable at SSSH, parent volunteers make use of other services, ranging from prenatal care to after-school programs for their older children. Many parents take advantage of programs, such as GED classes and job training, that help them move into decent jobs. Successful transitions into permanent employment are actually at the heart of the Care Co-operative's story. Explains Sunami, "When more of our parents found full-time jobs with a living wage, they needed the Care Co-operative to be a full-day resource.

"Child care should never be an isolated service," she continues. "It needs to be part of the whole community, if a community is determined to succeed. Our parents are very determined."

## FAMILIES COUNT FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

Through a joint venture of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and United Neighborhood Centers of America (UNCA), the FAMILIES COUNT Family Strengthening Awards recognize UNCA member organizations 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.



OUR STORIES AREN'T JUST ABOUT CHILDREN  
OR JUST ABOUT PARENTS. THEY ARE ABOUT  
FAMILIES AND HOW A PROGRAM LIKE THE CO-OP  
CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR DEVELOPMENT AND  
BENEFIT THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY.

—Marialyce Sunami, Executive Director, South Side Settlement House