

The Child Care and Family Support Centers demonstrate the dedication to strengthening families found nationwide among the affiliates of Volunteers of America, a national, nonprofit, spiritually-based organization. From rural America to inner-city neighborhoods, Volunteers of America reaches out to the vulnerable—at-risk youth, the frail elderly, abused and neglected children, people with disabilities, homeless individuals and many others. “We will be most effective in improving the lives of the children by serving their families as well,” explains Beth Poffenberger Lovell, national director for children, youth, and families. “For us, family strengthening is all about intentionality, about engaging the whole family in a deliberate way to improve outcomes of children and their families.”



VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA DAKOTAS

VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA, DAKOTAS

Award-winning Program: Child Care and Family Support Centers

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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

CHILD CARE PLUS

Since 1920, Volunteers of America, Dakotas has worked to strengthen vulnerable families and help them achieve a bright future for their children. This mission has remained constant even as the communities the organization serves have changed dramatically.

With the oldest, continuously operating child care center in America, Volunteers of America, Dakotas now reaches out to families from 82 home countries. Over the years, the staff have honed their skills in adapting services to the cultural backgrounds of diverse families. Native Americans as well as newcomers bring their rich traditions and special histories to the mix that makes the organization so vibrant.

Today, in addition to offering affordable child care, Volunteers of America, Dakotas helps families succeed by offering parenting education classes to young, inexperienced parents, substance abuse counseling and literacy programs. Its Boden Youth Center provides a range of after-school programming, a safe space for young people in the neighborhood and even a shelter for runaway teenagers.



OUR PARENTS ARE COMMITTED TO THEIR EDUCATION, ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE AND TO BECOMING STRONG ADVOCATES FOR THEIR CHILDREN. OUR FAMILIES REALLY INSPIRE US TO DO OUR UTMOST EVERY DAY.

—Pamela Bollinger, President/CEO, Volunteers of America, Dakotas

CULTURE CHANGE

Consider the situation of one young family, escaping the strife and famine of their native Ethiopia and newly resettled in South Dakota by Lutheran Social Services. Unemployment, language barriers and the challenges of caring for a disabled child compounded the culture shock that made every day an extraordinary challenge.

This family found one of Volunteers of America, Dakotas' Child Care and Family Support Centers, which now cares for the family's four-year-old son and provides the mother with ESL classes, career counseling, resume-building and parenting classes. A dedicated family facilitator, who comes to the family's home, helps with everything from shopping and banking to handling the child's special behavior and communication needs.

Close partnerships with programs and agencies such as Even Start, Head Start, Bright Start and South Dakota's Department of Social Services make this range of services possible by linking parents to a broad network of expertise so that the organization can develop support systems tailored to each family.

"We reinforce parents' own strengths as advocates and teachers, so that their children reach their full potential as learners even in the most difficult circumstances," says program director Jackie Polzin. "When you meet the mother whose husband has been killed or who had to leave children behind, it hits close to home. You know you need to do more."

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.