



VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA SPOKANE

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

2005 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

EACH CHILD'S FAMILY TEAM

Breakthrough for Families (BFF), a program of Volunteers of America of Spokane, traces its inspiration to John VanDenBerg, a father frustrated by the lack of cohesive support services for his daughter. Searching to meet her special needs, he encountered routine disregard for his input from parents and poor communication between the various agencies managing her care. To help, VanDenBerg developed the “wraparound” model, a team-based approach to meeting people’s needs across systems, which became the backbone of BFF.

BFF serves runaway, homeless and at-risk youth, ages 13–24, who face multiple and complex challenges, including homelessness, poverty, chemical dependency, unplanned pregnancy, abuse and/or mental illness. Each participant, guided by a social worker, builds a personal support team comprised of parents, teachers, friends, counselors, religious community members, mentors and anyone else the teen designates. Based on individual strengths, the group assigns team members to address needs that include housing, finance, transportation, recreation and cultural/spiritual activities.



THE FAMILIES TELL THE PROFESSIONALS
WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE, INSTEAD OF
THE REVERSE.

—Marilee Roloff, President/CEO, Volunteers of America of Spokane

INVESTING IN A FUTURE

Breakthrough for Families empowers families to decide what services they need. “Rather than hearing ‘you need counseling’ before anything else,” explains Lonnie Keesee, youth programs director, “parents direct the team in meeting the basic needs of all family members.”

While the social worker phases out of the process after an average of nine months, many teams continue to function. This consistency keeps the teen’s new family team strong, however “family” is defined. “The goal is to identify the people that are going to be in the child’s life 10 years down the road,” says Keesee. “Then we help the team learn how to nurture their inherent support system and give them the tools to meet their needs without the help of professionals.”

“This is just one way we’ve seen that investing more dollars in the process for the short term saves the system money in the long term,” says Spokane executive director Marilee Roloff. Participating teens also reported significant drops in suicide attempts (57 percent to eight percent), in arrests (62 percent to 27), and in school problems (88 percent to 33), and an increase in those living at home (64 percent to 88). Roloff emphasizes, “‘Wraparound’ is much more effective than traditional approaches because it acknowledges that families understand their own needs best.”

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.

Breakthrough for Families demonstrates 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 OF SPOKANE

Award-winning Program: Breakthrough for Families

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