

This year, Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) and its vital programs will reach nearly 4.5 million young people and their parents in 3,700 neighborhoods and rural communities. BGCA's professional staff will support and engage parents as their school-age children learn character and leadership development, vocational training, and healthy behaviors and benefit from a wide range of academic and cultural pursuits. "We not only change the trajectory of a young person's life today but also the trajectory of their children's lives tomorrow," says BGCA President Roxanne Spillet. "That's why we call our work family-strengthening and generation-changing."



BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS OF TOPEKA, KANSAS

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Award-winning Program: Family Support Programs

Jon Farr, Chief Professional Officer

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

2006 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS

For generations, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Topeka have been a place where children found activities and programs. But in recent years, B&GC Topeka have evolved to provide more support for families as a critical path to a brighter future for their children. The challenge was getting that message out to parents.

“We’ve always worked to instill confidence in these young people by listening to their ideas and making them feel like they belong,” says Jon Farr, Chief Professional Officer. “Now we’ve transferred that same strategy to their parents. That was the missing piece.”

The Clubs’ focus on families received a big boost in 2003. The local Camp Fire USA council closed and B&GC Topeka stepped in and absorbed the family-oriented programs, like Community Family Clubs. Through group projects, field trips and activities with specific goals, parents and their children strengthen their relationships by learning and having fun together. Today more than 4,700 members benefit from these programs.



IN THE PAST, PARENTS DIDN'T SEE THE CLUBS
AS A PLACE FOR THEM. NOW THEY SEE THEM
AS A RESOURCE FOR THEIR FAMILY AND THE ENTIRE
COMMUNITY.

—Jon Farr, Chief Professional Officer, Boys & Girls Clubs of Topeka

PARTNERING WITH PARENTS

B&GC Topeka’s programs are offered in six locations, some urban and others rural. Despite their different surroundings, many of these families share limited access to computers, health information and employment resources.

At monthly meetings called Family Nights, families share dinner, participate in group activities and discussions, and discuss family and parenting issues with guest speakers. Family Nights also introduce parents to the Community Family Clubs program and the services offered through B&GC Topeka’s Technology Center. Here many parents who have never used a computer before learn how to find job leads and information on money management to build family assets. Though most of these parents have little formal education themselves, they learn how to search for scholarship opportunities to help their children achieve higher educational goals. The programs place a high priority on soliciting feedback to ensure they are serving all families most effectively. “That really validates the programs for the parents,” says Chief Operating Officer Shelli McNabb. “And that helps us keep the families involved over the long-term.”

Plans for the future respond to requests from parents. They include providing families with more transportation to attend Clubs’ programs, free help preparing taxes, dental screenings, and drug and alcohol abuse classes. “Incorporating the Camp Fire programs helped us interact with parents a lot more often than when they were dropping off or picking up their children,” says McNabb. “Now we’re providing families with resources they just weren’t getting anywhere else.”

FAMILIES COUNT FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

Through a joint venture of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Boys & Girls Clubs of America, the FAMILIES COUNT Family Strengthening Awards recognize Club 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.