

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."



CAMP FIRE USA MIDLANDS COUNCIL

OMAHA, NE

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Award-winning Program: Action Pact South Teen Program Family Nights

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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

THE POWER OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Four years ago, Omaha's Camp Fire USA Midlands Council recognized that a key element was missing from its after-school enrichment program for low-income teens. "We realized that—to make the greatest and most lasting impact—we had to engage parents in our work," says program manager Megan Addison. "If you want to create new options for young people's success, you need their parents closely involved."

Soon after, the Midlands Council introduced Family Nights to the three public schools that were implementing its Action Pact South enrichment program. This monthly event has three goals: helping families develop life skills focused on positive communications; educating parents and their children about college and career opportunities; and linking participants of all ages with expert advice from the community.

"When parents become excited about this work, they become advocates," notes Addison. "They've helped us engage more parents from the 70 families we serve."

MAKING DREAMS A REALITY

By focusing on young people's futures during Family Nights, the Midlands Council becomes these parents' ally in working toward the goal they have for their sons and daughters: a college degree followed by a career path with a high trajectory.

Career and College Fairs during some Family Nights connect parents and their children with local professionals from a range of occupations and with representatives from local colleges. Together families learn about which options are available to them, what employers are looking for and how to apply for financial aid to pursue higher education.

Addison sees significant long-term implications: "After attending Family Nights, parents are better able to support their children's dreams of going to college, instead of working and starting a family right after high school." She points to an example of one father who was surprised to learn it was financially feasible for him to put his daughter through nursing school, where she is now enrolled.

Other Family Nights focus on practical life skills that build on families' existing strengths. A psychologist teaches parent-child communication skills through hands-on activities and role-playing. A local bank representative brings dollars-and-cents common sense to lessons about opening savings accounts, balancing checkbooks and using credit cards prudently. Health care professionals, police officers and representatives from regional nonprofits introduce parents and children to other resources and options that lead to family success.

Addison sees these connections as just the beginning: "We look forward to opening more doors to positive futures."

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.



OUR WORK BECOMES MORE POWERFUL
WHEN TEENS AND PARENTS ARE HEARING
THE SAME INFORMATION, TAKING IT HOME
WITH THEM, DISCUSSING IT TOGETHER AND
MAKING IT WORK FOR THEIR FAMILY'S SUCCESS.

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