



FAMILY SELF-SUFFICIENCY PROGRAM

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

2006 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

FINDING A PATH TO FREEDOM

Low-income families in Lake County, Illinois, share a rapidly rising cost of living with families down the road in Chicago. What they don't share are the economic and educational opportunities of an urban center. Two decades ago, their challenge inspired Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago to reach out to these parents with the Family Self-Sufficiency Program (FSSP). Today, this initiative has evolved into a long-term strategy that supports family success in the face of limited resources.

"We've learned to invest in the ultimate success of these families—however long it takes," says Grace Robinson, the Catholic Charities department director who leads FSSP's work. "By working with families over a number of years, we can help parents set realistic goals and support them every step of the way to achieve them."



FAMILIES CAN'T BECOME SELF-SUFFICIENT OVERNIGHT. PARENTS NEED ONGOING SUPPORT TO BUILD THE SKILLS AND ACCESS THE RESOURCES THAT ENABLE THEM TO LEAD THEIR FAMILIES TO INDEPENDENCE AND SUSTAIN THAT ACCOMPLISHMENT OVER TIME.

—Grace Robinson, Department Director, Family Self-Sufficiency Program,
Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago, Lake County Services

SUCCESS AS A FAMILY ENTERPRISE

FSSP case managers first help parents prioritize the steps they can take that will make the most positive difference in their families' lives. Those steps may include learning new job skills, becoming more knowledgeable caregivers for their children, and setting and maintaining household budgets. "Financial management is key," Robinson explains. "Parents who become adept at maximizing limited resources can begin to build the savings and assets that will carry them through emergencies and let them realize their aspirations."

Collaborations with 43 local employers facilitate FSSP's employment training and job placement in the Lake County area. The program also partners with employers to help parents with felony convictions move into the workforce—and succeed once they are there. Work with local housing authorities helps other parents realize the American dream of home ownership, as federally sponsored escrow accounts support low-income families in qualifying for a mortgage.

Every year, the Family Self-Sufficiency Program provides ongoing case management for more than 188 families. When a family experiences success, Catholic Charities staff encourage the entire family to celebrate, an especially important step for children. "Watching their parents work hard and achieve goals teaches children a very positive lesson," Robinson says. "They learn they're part of a successful family. Some families might not think twice about saying: 'We're successful.' For other families, those words mark a very special day."

FAMILIES COUNT FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

Through a joint venture of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Catholic Charities USA, the FAMILIES COUNT Family Strengthening Awards recognize Catholic Charities 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.

Among the nation's largest social service providers, Catholic Charities USA traces its roots back 275 years. Today, through innovative programs like the Family Self-Sufficiency Program, 1,700 Catholic Charities member agencies and institutions fulfill a mission of providing help and creating hope for more than 7.1 million people annually, regardless of religious, social or economic backgrounds. According to Rev. Larry Snyder, President of Catholic Charities USA, "these remarkable programs are successful because they create strong partnerships with vulnerable families and organizations in the neighborhoods where they live. Equally important, the programs work to increase the families' economic assets with education, jobs and savings."

CATHOLIC CHARITIES OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO, LAKE COUNTY SERVICES

Award-winning Program: Family Self-Sufficiency

Grace Robinson, Department Director

671 South Lewis Avenue

Waukegan, IL 60085

847-782-4162

www.catholiccharities.net