



# VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA OF INDIANA

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

2006 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

## HEALING A FAMILY'S PAST

In 2004, Volunteers of America of Indiana opened Theodora House to provide a safe haven for women taking their first steps back into society after leaving prison. The mothers among the residents have an overriding goal: to reunite with their children and form successful families. Volunteers of America created the Healing Families program to support mothers and children along this path.

“The most compelling aspect of their transition is how desperately these mothers want to be good mothers,” says Shannon Schumacher, the affiliate’s director of clinical services. “But often their lives have been so filled with trauma that they haven’t had a space to learn parenting skills.”

The Healing Families program begins filling the gaps in knowledge and skills for mothers, while it seeks to give children a new beginning as well. “The mothers’ incarcerations make their children more vulnerable to repeating the cycle,” Schumacher points out. “That’s why we serve entire families.”



OUR GOAL IS TO EQUIP WOMEN WITH THE  
TOOLS TO RENEW THE FAMILY BONDS

SEVERED THROUGH INCARCERATION AND TO  
RE-ENTER SOCIETY SUCCESSFULLY. WE ALSO  
EXPOSE WOMEN AND CHILDREN TO HEALTHY  
FAMILY DYNAMICS.

—Tim Campbell, President & CEO, Volunteers of America of Indiana

## SECURING A FAMILY'S FUTURE

Healing Families first helps mothers come to terms with the abuse that has formed a common thread in their lives. As the women gradually learn to manage anger and stress, parenting classes build on this emotional foundation by teaching such fundamentals as positive discipline and an understanding of child development. Interactions between mothers and children in observed settings allow Healing Families staff to support families through these highly charged moments. Staff also help mothers recognize that their children may need more intensive support in dealing with the same burdens of trauma and dislocation they themselves have experienced.

Supporting their long-term success, Volunteers of America also links mothers to services through collaborative partners in the Indianapolis area. Mothers find they have resources for job training and placement, education and health care for themselves and their children.

As mothers gain skills and know-how, they also take part in Theodora House events that bring together families for healthy activities and create a model that parents can later apply to their lives. Healing Families has already created brighter futures for 154 mothers and their children. "Families usually stay with us for six months, sometimes up to a year," says Schumacher. "We hope to stay with them for a lifetime."

## 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.

Healing 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 INDIANA

Award-winning Program: Healing Families

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