

## Charlottesville/Albemarle Commission on Children and Families Assets for Youth Work Group Report and Recommendations, May 4, 2005

The Commission on Children and Families (CCF) provides local governments with tools to make informed decisions on program and policy recommendations related to child and family services. CCF's goal is to ensure that the community's public investments improve and support the well-being of children and families. To provide this information to you and to be a catalyst for solving identified problems, CCF follows **three** critical steps. Today we would like to share with you the report and recommendations from CCF's Assets for Youth Work Group.

In the first step of the process, CCF used existing data and conducted original research to understand current and emerging conditions for youth in our community.

- *CCF 2003 Community Needs Assessment found discrepancies in after-school and extracurricular activity participation for youth based on race and income.*
- *National research indicated importance of safe and enriching after-school activities to young people's development and academic success.*

Next, CCF convened local residents—private and public partners—to better understand the problem and address it in the context of local City and County resources and needs.

- *CCF Assets for Youth Work Group (25 members of the community who work with youth.)*
- *Work group members and school staff recruited 23 youth leaders to lead focus groups with 276 diverse youth to find out how to involve middle and high school students more in productive after-school activities ("Youth Voices: Out-of-School Time in Charlottesville/Albemarle.") This study was funded by the Foundation of St. John the Baptist in the Woods.*

Finally, CCF staff and the work group formulated recommendations and are in the process of identifying and coordinating resources needed to address these recommendations.

- *Developed "Improving Access to Out-of-School Activities in Charlottesville/Albemarle."*
- *Published the "What's There to Do After School?" brochures and distributed them to every public school student at the beginning of the school year.*

### Findings

The *Youth Voices* study identified critical factors that impact student participation in out-of-school activities.

- While 69% of students interviewed participated in one or more structured after-school activities, the majority desired more opportunities.
  - Activities youth most currently involved in: sports programs, fine arts, and school-based activities.
- Barriers to involvement
  - Lack of peer participation: Youth are reluctant to participate in activities without friends, and are concerned about peer judgment if activity perceived as unpopular.
  - Financial cost of activity (one third of the student questionnaires indicated this), particularly the perceived or actual high cost of participation fees; Entrance fees for school events (games, plays, dances), and transportation.

- What youth would like to see after school
  - Teen club, coffee house, or music hall, where teens could congregate for social, recreational, and educational activities.
  - Comfortable, safe place, preferably located nearby or within their neighborhood.
  - Programs led by adult leaders who are respectful and caring, but not controlling.
  - Programs open on weekends and nights.
- What youth are doing now on weekends
  - Some cite “partying,” which is associated with use of drugs and alcohol.
  - Going to malls, friends’ houses, parks, churches, gyms.
- Summer
  - Most of high school students interviewed worked or wanted to work.
  - Difficult to find job.
  - Few employees willing to hire under age 16, even with work permit.

### Recommendations for the County of Albemarle

Of the work group’s main recommendations, some can be addressed now by existing after-school and recreation programs, while others require new resources and attention.

#### (1) Recommendations using existing resources

- Improve engagement and involvement of youth in the design, governance and operation of out-of-school programs.
  - *To facilitate this, the Board could offer incentives to school and community youth programs that demonstrate youth engagement and leadership in their design and operation.*
- Assets for Youth Implementation Team will guide the development and implementation of recommendations for improving access to out-of-school activities.
  - *To facilitate this, the Board could use this body and the youth involved in community and school-based out-of-school programs for continued guidance.*
- Make information about financial assistance available and understandable to all students and their parents.
  - *CCF will distribute a listing of after-school programs and available scholarships in early fall.*

#### (2) Recommendations requiring new resources

- Increase on-site year-round extracurricular activities at County middle schools, particularly Walton and Henley.
  - *CCF has begun discussions with Walton Middle School principal to enhance after-school programming; school staff and work group member programs are eager to assist in this process.*
- Investigate feasibility of neighborhood teen clubs and/or the adaptation of existing youth program facilities to respond to youth’s descriptions of attractive and accessible places. In particular, students in the western and southern parts of the County would like to see a teen club located in Crozet and Scottsville.
  - *CCF has applied for a youth leadership and research grant for this purpose and will seek additional sources of support.*
- Expand hours of community and school-based programs and facilities: evenings, weekends and during summer for school gyms, computer labs, and public swimming pools.
  - *These recommendations will be presented to City and County School Boards and Parks and Recreation departments, and costs for expansion will be determined.*
- Increase financial assistance for lower income youth to participate in fee-based extracurricular and out-of-school programs. Eliminate entrance fees.

- *Recommendation to eliminate fees will be presented to the County School Board.*
- Launch marketing campaign to increase youth involvement in existing after-school programs
  - *Work group members will solicit support for this campaign from private and public sources.*
- Increase community opportunities for youth development and employment in summer, particularly for youth ages 14-16, in response to federal funding cuts in this area:
  - *Work group seeks research funds and staff support to investigate funding sources and identify quality programs.*
- Conduct a market study for an after-school bus line to community-based programs and to increase bus ridership among youth in the County's urban ring.
  - *Will present recommendation to Charlottesville Transit Service and County School Board.*

CCF staff and members of the work group are here today to answer any questions and hear your response to our recommendations.