

October 22, 1998

Boost for Kids National Partnership for Reinventing Government  
Suite 200, 750 17<sup>th</sup> Street N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20006

Dear Vice President Gore:

I am delighted to write to you on behalf of the Athens Family Connection Partnership seeking to join your Boost for Kids team. We have a Strategic Plan (5 years, updated annually with major update next year); an Annual Work Plan with specific goals, objectives, strategies, and benchmarks for the coming year and reports on each of those for the previous year; an Annual Report detailing our work for the community; annual report card (three year statistics related to children and families); a signed Partnership Agreement (copy follows this) for each of our more than 100 Partners, including a commitment to provide and utilize data; not only readiness and a commitment to cut red tape, integrate and better coordinate services, use current funding more effectively and achieve better results for children, but also a track record in all these areas; designation involvement by both the local and state governments as the official planning and coordinating body for services for children and families in our community; partnership involvement by the local and state governments, as well as business, faith, school, and other partners; long term commitment and planning; a real impact on the issues and proposed outcomes; and a very diverse community of more than 100,000 citizens, including both highly educated (more than 35% college degreed) and poorly educated (less than half are high school graduates), prosperous (our county has the lowest unemployment rate in the state) and not so prosperous (more than 25% of the households have annual incomes less than \$10,000), and ethnically diverse populations (Caucasian, African American, Latino, and other).

In short, we meet or exceed all the criteria you list. I am confident that when you finish reading this, you will agree, and I hope that you will designate us as one of your partners.

We are pleased that we have been designated by the local and state governments as the official planning body for children and families in our community, but that is not what most pleases us.

We are pleased that our collaborative includes all major social service agencies, the school district, several schools of the University of Georgia, the unified city-county government, the Chamber of Commerce, individual businesses, a collaborative of more than 35 churches, low income families, and others, but that is not what most please us.

We are pleased that several of our programs have been selected as models for other communities and for the state – for example, our prekindergarten model was adopted state wide and is nationally recognized – but that is not what most pleases us.

We are pleased that our Partnership brings together the community to look at needs and strengths, then seeks (or redirects) resources accordingly, rather than simply responding to grants as they become available, but that is not what most pleases us.

We are pleased that we were among the community's to participate in the President's Summit for America's Future two years ago, and that we have implemented our major goals from that Summit.

We are pleased that we have changed systems in ways that make services easier to access, but that is not what most pleases us.

We are pleased that agencies have voluntarily transferred grants to other agencies when, through our planning process, they concluded that redirecting their own resources would more effectively help children, but that is not what pleases us most.

There are countless successes that please us, but what pleases us most is that our work is succeeding *for the children*. Concrete results are coming in program after program after program, year after year after year. Best of all, like ripples from a stone tossed into a pond, these successes are reverberating throughout the community, and our children's lives are improving – in concrete, measurable ways.

When we started Family Connection in Athens at the start of this decade – merging earlier coalitions and collaboratives, constantly adding new partners – we decided to tackle tough issues that others suggested would be too difficult – reduce teen pregnancy (after thirty years of increases), reduce child abuse and neglect, increase school success, and help families move from welfare to work. Our philosophy of a family-centered, strength-building, community-supporting approach would, we knew, be incremental and take time, but we believed it would be the best way to succeed. This approach required paradigm shifts by agencies, participation by the entire community, and credibility with the families being served. We anticipated that initial success would be with families feeling that things were getting better, followed by families directly served being measurably better off, followed by measurable improvement for the community as a whole.

Through extensive community involvement (more than 100 partners), agencies changing the way they do business, and families helping themselves, the families served state that services (and their lives) have improved, independent evaluations show incredible success for the youth and families participating in our projects, and community-wide numbers are improving.

Consider:

- ★ After thirty years of increases, teen pregnancy rates are down in Athens-Clarke County by 18% (nationally, rates have declined by 5%, and in Family Connection communities throughout Georgia by 10-12%);
- ★ In April 1995, 2005 Athens-Clarke County families were on welfare; today, this has plummeted to fewer than 650 families on welfare, a decrease of more than two-thirds;
- ★ Our Rites of Passage project has served more than 100 youth ages 11-17, all of whom were labeled as either trouble-makers or “extremely high risk,” many of them having been in legal trouble; half-way through our third year of this project, none of the youth have been involved in pregnancy (compared with a 13% per year expectation), their recidivism rate for the juvenile justice system is 90% below the state average, none have dropped out of school, and (as an independent evaluator demonstrated) they are doing significantly better in school;
- ★ Truancy is down after years of increases, and enrollment in public high schools is up after a decade of decreases;
- ★ Confirmed rates of abuse and neglect are slightly lower (though changes in state

definitions and methods of measuring this category make conclusions difficult);

- ★ We have increased our childhood immunization rate from about 60% to 99%;
- ★ We initiated a pilot six years ago prekindergarten program that was selected as the model for the state, which has made it available to all 4-year-olds in Georgia; children who have participated are doing much better in school than their peers;
- ★ All the students who participated in the first two years of our Summer Opportunities Program (selected for the program based on a determination of being at high risk of dropping out of high school) are still in school and 100% of the first year graduates were offered jobs the next summer;
- ★ Participants in our Healthy Families initiative (all single moms) have 90% lower repeat pregnancy rates, and much lower rates of abuse and neglect, than their peers.

We still have a long, long way to go. Too many of our students are failing to complete high school. Welfare recipients still on the rolls generally have greater barriers to getting jobs than did those who are now working. More than 300 cases of child abuse and neglect are confirmed in Athens each year. But the above and other successes demonstrate that the community working together can and will make a difference.

This year, among other initiatives, we have joined in a partnership with several state entities to pilot a truly community-wide initiative to reduce child abuse and neglect. This will include building community awareness, increasing prevention, and intervening aggressively.

The narrative that follows provides more information about the programs that are achieving the successes outlined above.

Together, we are making a difference for our children and families. We hope to join with you so that we can do even better, and so that our successes can be shared throughout the nation.

Sincerely,

Tim Johnson  
Director  
on behalf of all the Partners, staff, and projects of  
the Athens-Clarke County Family Connection Partnership

*“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn’t serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you. We are born to make manifest the Glory of God that is within us. It’s not just in some of us, it’s in everyone, and as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.” – Nelson Mandela*

## **OUTLINE OF OUR GOALS**

The Athens-Clarke County Family

- **Healthy children,**
- **Children ready for school,**
- **Children succeeding in school,**
- **Strong families, and**
- **Self-sufficient families.**

Through an extensive, ongoing planning process, the Partnership through the years has identified and modified five major, interrelated priorities. These are:

- **Young children will receive nurturing parenting and care;**
- **Children will postpone pregnancy until they reach adulthood;**
- **All children will achieve educational success and will be contributing members of the community;**
- **Children and parents will be free of substance abuse; and**
- **All families shall have the resources to meet their basic needs and the opportunity to reach their full potential.**

For each of the goals, we convene work groups composed of diverse constituencies to identify, through the collaborative planning process, objectives and strategies to achieve the goals and responsible clusters and Partners to implement the strategies.

All Family Connection clusters, committees, task forces, and projects address each of these goals, which are intricately interwoven. Reducing teen pregnancy, for example, increases family self-sufficiency, improves school success, and reduces the incidence of neglect. While discussing our goals individually, it is vital to remember that they are always dependent on each other.

Through big-picture planning, community-wide involvement, and a lot of hard work by countless (mostly anonymous) individuals, we are achieving remarkable success, even beyond our optimistic expectations.

This narrative describes, very briefly, the work being done through our clusters and

Connection Partnership has five major goals. These are:

Projects could be written about each of these activities. Of necessity, this summary cannot describe the richness and power being demonstrated every day by caring people to make life better for all children and families in our community.

## **ACHIEVING SUCCESS – CLUSTER AND PROJECT ACTIVITIES**

*Note: All graphs are pulled from the Web site of the Georgia Policy Council for Children & Families (<http://www.pccf.state.ga.us/results>).*

### **REDUCE CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT: A Pilot Initiative in Partnership with the State**

The General Assembly’s Budget Review & Oversight Committee (BROC) last year requested that the Children’s Trust Fund, the Georgia Division of Family & Children Services’ Child Protective Services, and the Georgia Council on Child Abuse identify initiatives anywhere in the country that had succeeded in reducing child abuse and neglect rates community-wide. They reported high success rates for community-based initiatives in North Carolina and Wisconsin, facilitated by the Jordan Institute for Families out of Chapel Hill (which Michael Jordan funded in memory of his father). The State then selected two communities – one urban (Athens) and one rural – to pilot an initiative utilizing the consulting services of the Jordan Institute. Athens was selected based primarily on the diversity of participation in our partnership. Involvement of the entire community is a vital component of the Jordan Institute approach (and of our Family Connection).

We held a two-day community dialogue in November. More than 180 individuals participated. Participants included parents whose children had been removed from their homes by the state, foster parents, law enforcement, Child Protective Services, two judges, adult survivors of child abuse,

schools, Mental Health, Health Department, business, Child Advocacy Center, Housing Authority, Family Counseling, Juvenile Justice, prosecution, defense, recreation, faith community, media, and others. We discussed ways that each and all can and will work to reduce child abuse.

Strategies identified, and being implemented, include changing systems to focus Child Protective Services efforts on more egregious cases with others addressing the rest; encouraging neighbors to watch children while the parents are away [the largest number of neglect cases in Athens-Clarke County are inadequate supervision]; involving the families in developing and implementing case plans; and others. The Jordan Institute consultants stated that they have held these dialogues throughout the nation, and this was the most successful one they had held.

Through this and earlier work, we have developed a multi-faceted approach to our goal of reducing abuse and neglect. We have implemented two multi-agency staffing committees (Children's Health & Child Guidance for younger children, YES Staffing Committee for adolescents) to assist multi-problem families and support children and youth with a variety of needs. Through these staffings, more than twenty agencies come together each month with the families (and anyone the family wants to bring) to address their needs while recognizing and building on their strengths.

The projects we sponsor and support include a family support component. We have various community education efforts relating to prevention of abuse and neglect, including provision of educational materials to the parents of every newborn baby in the county.

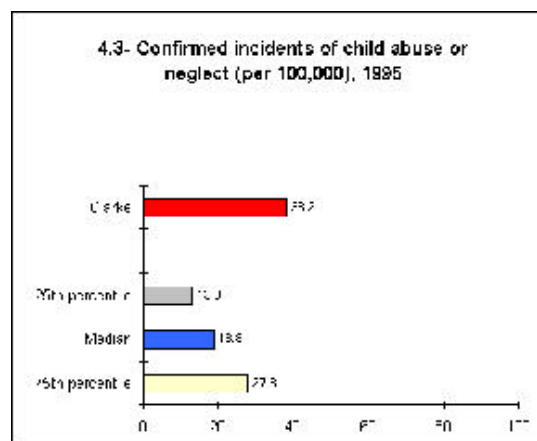
We are working to establish a treatment program for juvenile perpetrators of sexual abuse and have obtained more than \$12,000 from a local church for start up. We are working to expand availability of temporary foster care, including establishment of a Granny House (a home for voluntary placement of children while their parent is in residential substance abuse treatment or other medical care). And we are advocating for more aggressive prosecution of child abuse.

We will have ultimately succeeded when the rate of abuse and neglect reaches zero

The Children's Health & Child Guidance

Service (CHCGS) is a Family Connection cluster focusing on service delivery to at-risk children and families in the context of a community-wide intervention plan with comprehensive child tracking and case management. CHCGS integrates and expands existing family support services available through several community programs and agencies into a single point.

CHCGS targets families with children from conception to six years of age. Partners active with this cluster include, among others, the Athens Area Child Abuse Prevention Council, Clarke County Department of Family & Children Services, Family Counseling Service, Northeast



Health District/Clarke County Health Department (including Children First, Children's Medical Services, and others), Clarke County School District Programs for Young Children, Child Advocacy Center (of the Sexual Assault Center of Northeast Georgia), Northeast Georgia Center for Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse Services, Community Connection, and the Institute on Human Development and Disabilities. These organizations bring their existing roles in screening/early detection, their commitment to early intervention/risk reduction, their active use of parent aides/family support workers as a primary service delivery strategy, or their role in implementing other traditional family support efforts.

The Children's Health and Child Guidance Service integrates these existing programs into a single service delivery strategy based on the concept of universal contact with primary prevention (screening/assessment), secondary prevention (risk

reduction, parent education, and parent support), tertiary prevention (early intervention and acute/crisis care), and continued care service components.

CHCGS provides coordinated screening and risk assessment for all Athens-Clarke County families with young children, making extended tracking and follow-up services available to at-risk and high-risk children and their families. Follow-up is provided as needed through the appropriate entity, including the Healthy Families initiative (which grew out of this cluster's work).

The Child Tracking System is an integral component of the Children's Health and Child Guidance Service, established to enable early identification of children and families at risk in order to improve their long-term outcomes. It identifies a broad range of risk conditions that may potentially affect child health and development.

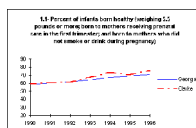
The mission of the Child Tracking System is to assure the early identification of all children from birth to six years of age with or at risk for poor health, social well-being, and/or developmental delays. It assists families in obtaining preventive, specialized, and supportive services within their communities. The goal of the system is to insure that at-risk children and their families have the opportunity to reach their full potential and gain a sense of well-being and self-sufficiency.

When medical, social, or developmental concerns are discovered for children through the Tracking System, information and support are offered to help families with needed health, education, and/or social services. Children and families in Athens-Clarke County who are assessed as having multiple problems and needs may require staffing through the case management process under the Children's Health and Child Guidance Service. After obtaining parental consent for sharing of information, the staffing process provides a case management plan for integrated service delivery to these children and families through interagency collaboration. Family support workers, counselors, parent aids, and various in-home services such as nutritional counseling and outreach are available.

The basic criteria for an agency to refer a family to the interagency staffing is that the family has children between birth and six

years old and has multiple problems for which the referring agency cannot identify solutions and/or needs interagency collaboration to formulate solutions. The agencies work together to identify and pool resources to address the needs. Staff may be housed at one agency, paid through another's administrative mechanism, with funding from several. A locally generated pool of funds governed by the cluster provides a mechanism for covering the costs of services which are required but would otherwise not be available.

The family is strongly encouraged to participate in the staffing, along with anyone (minister, friend) they would like. A family advocate is provided to meet individually with the family before hand, explaining the process and accompanying them to the



staffing.

Another initiative of the cluster is that the parents of every newborn baby in Athens' two hospitals receives a brochure (prepared by CHCGS) that briefly describes a variety of services available.

The Children's Health and Child Guidance Service cluster also identifies ways to improve service delivery through systems change and other policy issues, then implements or advocates for the reform.

Consolidating several risk assessment systems is one such change. Another is the voluntary moving of counseling services for sexually abused children from a traditional counseling center to the Child Advocacy Center where the physical examinations take place, making it more accessible for the children and their families. Recognizing that parental illiteracy is the greatest risk factor for children failing in school, this Cluster developed and obtained funding for a local

Even Start project, through which parents of preschool children receive literacy training which incorporates (among other benefits) reading to their children. We successfully advocated for a new group foster home. We are now advocating for development of a Granny House (a community-based alternative to traditional foster care) and for services to treat juveniles who are sexual abuse offenders.

The Athens-Clarke County Family Connection Partnership has several clusters which take similar, holistic approaches to addressing needs and building on strengths with families. This narrative summary of one of our clusters is but a brief outline of the array of activities through that cluster, and we will not attempt to provide such extensive narrative explanation for the others..

### **Pre-Kindergarten and Even Start**

The Pre-Kindergarten program in Clarke County schools began as a pilot program before the Georgia lottery went into effect. The pilot – utilizing the High Scope curriculum with the children, and providing support to their parents to help them holistically pursue their goals in life – was so successful that it was adopted as the state-wide model when the lottery was approved by the voters.

The program's success has grown through the years, from serving fewer than sixty Clarke County families that first year to serving 580 through the School District program now.

When asked to name an anti-crime initiative he had sponsored, Governor Zell Miller quickly responded, "the Pre-Kindergarten Program." His point is that helping children succeed early will help them in later school years and then in life. The great majority of prisoners in Georgia dropped out without a high school degree.

Pre-K goals include:

- ◆ To foster a nurturing relationship between children and their care givers.
- ◆ To facilitate connections among families and schools, providing information and support to families.
- ◆ To provide a positive first experience with school, encouraging children to become life-long learners.
- ◆ To encourage children to think independently, critically,

creatively, and to differentiate between right and wrong.

- ◆ To teach children to value, accept and understand differences.
- ◆ To help children succeed in school by building a large base of experiences, familiarizing children with instructional language, and strengthening connections between concepts.
- ◆ To increase care givers' knowledge of age-appropriate parenting skills.

Pre-K services are being provided to 580 four-year-olds in 29 developmentally appropriate classrooms throughout the Clarke County School District. The High Scope Curriculum is utilized.

Resource coordinators for Pre-K assist families in obtaining needed services in order to reach their full potential. The focus is on GED, education (college or technical), job skills training, and securing needed social and community services.

Parents are involved with their children in the Pre-K classroom. During PACT (Parent and Child Together) sessions, parents are invited to come into their child's classroom and take the role of teacher to emphasize that parents are their child's first and most important teacher. Strategies for developing readiness skills through play are presented at each session. Parenting mini-workshops are also offered to give parents the opportunity to discuss problems and questions they have as parents, such as nutrition and discipline. It is also a chance to design activities which foster learning in the home and to listen and talk to guest speakers.

Independent evaluations continue to demonstrate conclusively that children participating in the Pre-K program do better in later grades than comparably situated children who do not participate in the program. The Clarke County School Board strongly supports this initiative. Pre-Kindergarten, with continued development of needs throughout the school years, will pay dividends for our future far beyond the initial investment in our children.

The Clarke County Pre-Kindergarten Program was one of two initiatives in the state recently selected for presentation as programs of excellence.

The **Even Start** program was initiated through our Children's Health & Child Guidance cluster. Jan Stevens, who headed

up the Pre-Kindergarten program, was familiar with Even Start and the important role it could play for young children's future education. A group brought together through the cluster worked diligently and successfully to obtain funding for the project beginning three years ago.

Research shows that the greatest single predictor of school failure is parental illiteracy. Working with parents of preschool children to teach literacy, G.E.D., and related skills, Even Start helps the parent and child achieve success. A major component of Even Start is PACT (Parent and Child Together) time, where the parent reads to the child. Science shows that parents reading to their young children actually improves brain development in the children, in addition (and related) to the nurturing aspect of the activity.

### **School Success Subcommittee: Fighting Truancy and More**

Because of the disturbing level of absenteeism in general and truancy in particular, a special subcommittee of the Youth Success Committee was established last year. This School Success Subcommittee includes top level representation from the School District, the Juvenile Court, the Police Department, the Institute for Violence Prevention, the Department of Juvenile Justice, and others.

An immediate success came through establishment of a protocol between the Police Department and the School District when the police bring truant children to the schools. There had been inconsistent policies from school to school, and in some cases police were asked to escort the student off school grounds. High level collaboration between the two led to a clear protocol where police take truant children to their home school and the school takes them from there.

Subsequently, the Police Department developed, and the Mayor and Commission adopted, a curfew ordinance which includes a prohibition against school-age children being unaccompanied by an adult in public during school hours. This ordinance makes it easier for police officers to enforce school attendance — and to prevent juvenile delinquency, gang activity, pregnancy, school failure, and other problems.

After considerable discussion, the subcommittee developed other strategies.

One called for solicitation of funding and implementation of a computer calling system to let parents know when their children are absent. The School District included this funding in its new budget, purchased the equipment, and began using it last year. The computer calls the parent of absentee students; the Athens Housing Authority's Resident Services provides its phone number for those public housing residents who don't have telephones. The District reports that the system has been effective at reducing truancy.

The School District also hired a full-time social worker to work with truant students and their families.

Through media and other efforts, we are encouraging citizens to telephone the Police Department to report truant students. The Department's role has been clarified through passage of the local ordinance prohibiting students unaccompanied by an adult from being in public places during school hours (with certain exceptions).

The police report that these strategies are proving effective, as do citizens who had previously complained (such as the owner of an apartment complex adjoining a local high school who complained about student "trysts" in a park area adjacent to the apartments).

Another strategy is expansion of after-school activities. All elementary schools in the county now have after-school programs which provide care up until 6 p.m. for \$5 per day. Our Rites of Passage program (described later in this report) now provides an after school program for youth ages 11-17. A variety of community initiatives are looking at expanding recreational, educational, and volunteer activities in non-school hours, particularly for middle- and high-school students.

After more than a year of work under the leadership of Juvenile Court Associate Judge Robin Schearer and Clarke County School District Lead Social Worker Patty Goodwin, we have launched a monthly Attendance Panel team that meets with families whose children have too many unexcused absences. The Panel includes representatives of the Juvenile Court, Department of Family & Children Services, Department of Juvenile Justice, Police Department, and others. The team meets to review cases referred by the School District and select those to appear before the panel.



The Sheriff serves the selected families with an official paper directing their attendance at the hearing; though appearing is not in itself legally required, failure to appear will result in legal action to enforce school attendance laws.

effective with their children, and significant school improvement.

Components of this project include conflict resolution, the free enterprise system, pregnancy prevention, healthy

**Rites of Passage/Family Resource Service – Partners for Success**

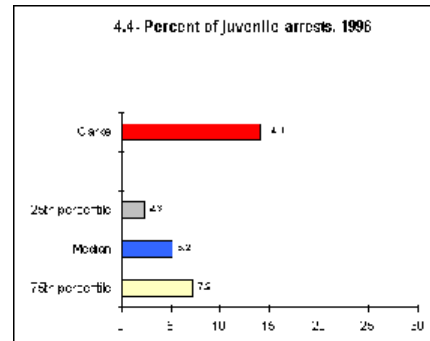
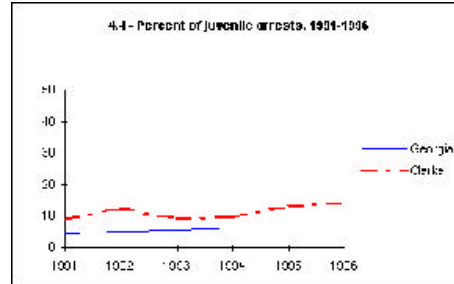
The Rites of Passage project utilizes an Afro-cultural approach and serves families with troubled or at-risk youth. As these youth achieve success in the different stages of the project, they receive recognition through group celebrations, utilizing the Rites of Passage model. Upon successful completion of all components (which include conflict resolution, entrepreneurship and business development, teen pregnancy prevention, mentoring, and enrichment activities), students graduate in a formal ceremony. They cannot graduate until they successfully complete each component (which includes demonstrated competence in the particular area).

Involvement of the entire family is a major aspect of this project. For individual youth and their families, the performance component is graduation. The ultimate performance components are success in school, avoidance of violence and delinquency, and avoidance of pregnancy.

Parental involvement has been a major success, with parents not only working with their own children but also mentoring other parents and children. And the results so far have been amazing.

Though these participants were considered to be at extremely high risk for pregnancy (as the father or mother), not one of them has been. Though they were considered to be at extremely high risk for drop out, all of them are still in school. Their recidivism rate for the juvenile justice system is far below average.

After the first year, we hired an evaluator from the University of Georgia whose evaluation included reviews of school records (parental waivers were acquired) and other indicators of success. He concluded that the program had been extraordinarily successful in its short-term results: no involvement (male or female) in teen pregnancy, one teen re-entering the juvenile justice system, a strong feeling by the parents that they were closer to and more



relationships/prevention of dating violence, parenting skills, mentoring, and cultural enrichment.

Last summer, a program auditor from one of the funders visited. She was very positive about the record keeping and the documented results. The most powerful impact came when she met with the families. She commented afterward that we should be ready for the phones to be ringing because she was going to tell everyone in the state that this was the way to success for our children and families.

**Teen Pregnancy Prevention Task Force**

Teen pregnancy prevention is fundamental to youth success in other areas, so it is a separate goal of our collaborative in addition to being among the strategies for each of our other goals.

We received terrific news last fall as state data showed an 18% drop in teen pregnancy in Athens-Clarke County in the last four

years – the period since Family Connection began implementation here. It is not a coincidence that there were sharp declines in the two populations we targeted (African American teens and repeat pregnancies), while there was a disturbing increase in the group we did not target (Caucasian teens). In any case, while the news is good, teen pregnancy remains too high, and remains a priority for our work.

Teen pregnancy is a much bigger question than “abstinence vs. contraception” debates. Every strategy of every goal connects, in the long term (and often in the short term) to successful prevention of teen pregnancy.

Our booklet, *A Holistic, Community Approach to Preventing Teen Pregnancy*, provides more detailed information about our approach, summarized here.

In essence, our philosophy is that to prevent teen pregnancy, we must give teenagers the desire not to get pregnant or cause pregnancy. Without such a desire, arguments about abstinence versus contraception are irrelevant.

One strategy is to provide hospital or home visit with information at birth. Through our Children’s Health & Child Guidance cluster, we are providing universal contact in the hospital for newborns and their parents. A component of this is identifying at-risk families for follow up support. Through this follow-up, information is provided relating to pregnancy prevention.

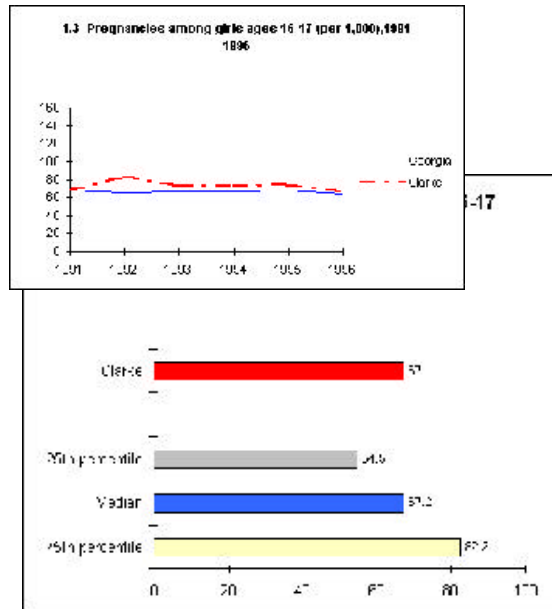
The Healthy Families program (with the Child Abuse Prevention Council under our Children’s Health & Child Guidance cluster) provides intense support to families identified as most at risk. Fewer than 3% of the teen moms served had repeated their pregnancies in the first 3 years of the program, less than one-tenth of the county average for repeat births to teen mothers.

A major initiative of the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Task Force is community awareness. A variety of awareness activities are provided, including Teen Pregnancy Prevention Week beginning on Mother’s Day.

Another strategy identified by the partners is to provide hands-on, interactive parent coaching. This is happening through our Family Resource Service, our Healthy Families program, and other projects.

The Sexual Assault Center, one of our partners, presented workshops on preventing rape, appropriate dating, and related information to more than 10,000 parents and teens in the region in the last year.

Another identified strategy is providing training utilizing the curriculum Postponing Sexual Involvement. This has been provided to many partners and will be provided throughout the community in the coming year.



Recognizing the need for better information about a variety of risky behaviors affecting teen health, including sexual activity, we recently persuaded the Clarke County School Board to allow the Health Department to implement the Behavior and Risk Assessment for Teens survey this spring.

The School District is providing HIV/AIDS updates twice a year to middle and high school students in an effort to reverse the disturbing increases in teenagers contracting this deadly disease.

Another identified strategy is adult education options, including high school. Through our Evening School Program (a Family Connection initiative provided by the School District), high school diplomas can be obtained by those no longer in high school. In addition, the Evening School provides a G.E.D. program. We continue to work with DFCS, Athens Tech, the Athens Housing Authority, the School District, and

other key partners to explore needs and to develop resources, particularly with welfare reform.

With leadership from DFCS, the Housing Authority, welfare consumers, and others, we developed a curriculum and presented workshops on the impact of welfare reform. These included workshops for agency staff and separate workshop for welfare recipients. These were effective at communicating the dramatic changes under the new welfare laws.

Another identified strategy is life skills development. Our Family Resource Service, Healthy Families, and other projects and Partners provide this as part of our holistic approach to strengthening families.

Another strategy is to provide family advocacy and holistic case management. Our Children's Health & Child Guidance cluster brings together case management for families with young children. This cluster and the programs that work with it (Healthy Families, Even Start, Prekindergarten, Child Advocacy Center, *et al.*) is successfully providing family advocacy, focusing on the families' identification of their own goals and resources and assisting them in self-advocacy.

Another strategy as part of our holistic approach is for the community to have available, accessible family planning options. Our Partner the Clarke County Health Department provides contraception through the Teen Center, the central Clarke County Health Department Clinic, the East Athens Health Department Clinic, and a Clinic (initiated through our Teen Pregnancy Prevention strategy) at the new Department of Family & Children Services building.

Several studies demonstrate the correlation between teen pregnancy and prior history of sexual molestation. We have incorporated these findings into our strategies related to teen pregnancy and to service strategies for sexually abused children. The Child Advocacy Center, a relatively new program housed with our partner the Rape Crisis Center, is working with the children and their families to help them understand that the abuse is not the child's fault and to provide support for moving ahead for success in life. Other Partners are including similar awareness in their work with these children, collaborating with the Child Advocacy Center, the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Team, DFCS, the

Police Department, and other key players.

Related to this strategy is the need for treatment services for juvenile sexual offenders. We have developed a model and are seeking funding to implement a comprehensive treatment program for such offenders in Athens. So far, we have received more than \$12,000 from a local church, toward our goal of \$20,000 start-up funding.

Another strategy is to provide mentoring for moms. This has been one of the strongest components of our Family Resource Service, as some of the moms serve as mentors for others. We plan to expand this with other projects as well.

With the leadership of the College of Family and Consumer Sciences, a teen father support group is now being provided. One of its goals is to prevent future pregnancy.

Another strategy involves providing counseling and education concerning assertiveness, appropriate dating behaviors, and related information. Our Family Resource Service includes components on conflict resolution and effective, appropriate ways to be assertive, as well as on appropriate dating behaviors. The Rape Crisis Center, the Health Department (especially through the Teen Center), and other Partners are also providing prevention education.

Another strategy identified at the retreat is peer education. Our Partner the Athens Regional Attention Home established an excellent peer educator group that does role playing, provides skits, and is very effective at communicating messages about teen pregnancy, appropriate dating behaviors, and other issues of concern to high school students. We will continue to support and build on this project. We will also sponsor a teen planning retreat in June.

Another identified strategy is public education through a media campaign. We continue our media strategies, which include appearances on local talk radio, television public service announcements over cable, and print media. Part of this centers around our annual Teen Pregnancy Prevention Week (the week beginning with Mother's Day).

Another strategy is to expand the opportunity for microenterprise development. A microenterprise is a very small business, often a sole

entrepreneurship, often operated out of the home. We actively promote certain microenterprise options (for example, our Partner Care Connection recruits and trains family day care providers). We are continuing to develop other microenterprise initiatives with other Partners. Our Family Resource Service includes an entrepreneurship component for participating youth.

Another strategy is involvement of the faith community. We now have significant church participation in our Teen Pregnancy Task Force. We plan to continue to recruit in this area.

### **Youth Summit – Youth Planning for Their Future**

Plans are under development for a Youth Summit we will sponsor, tentatively scheduled for June 1999. This Summit is being organized by and will be run by and for youth in Athens. Adult involvement will be to support and facilitate, but the agenda will be set by the youth, all substantive discussion will be by youth, and all outcomes will be determined exclusively by youth.

Representatives from a variety of community activities comprise the committee developing this summit. These include members of the Peer Education Group sponsored by the Athens Regional Attention Home, the Rites of Passage project, and many others.

### **Summer Opportunities Program Year 2 – Continued and Growing Success**

The Summer Opportunities Program grew out of our strategic planning as we considered the shockingly high rate of high school dropouts. The work group addressing this issue (led by Clarke Central High School counselor Ed Glauser) recognized that teens drop out because they do not see any hope of going to college and they do not believe completion of high school matters in their lives. The key, the group concluded, was to show the students that in fact completing high school *does* make a difference to them. This was the genesis for what became the Summer Opportunities Program (S.O.P.).

With leadership from Glauser, the Athens Area Chamber of Commerce, the P-16 program (an education reform initiative at the UGA College of Education), Athens

Newspapers, and others, the S.O.P. was conceived, developed, and implemented with fewer than twenty students two years ago. Last year, it expanded and graduated 49 rising ninth graders. This year, we hope for 100 students.

The three-week program works with rising ninth graders who have been identified as being at risk of dropping out of high school. It incorporates a variety of components relating to completion of high school and success in the work force. These components include discussions by industry leaders about what they're looking for in future employees. Students learn that there are jobs paying in excess of \$30,000 – with some local truck drivers making more than \$90,000 – to workers with high school degrees. They learn that functional literacy is required – a fork lift driver at a local plant must be able to use a computer (attached to the fork lift) to track inventory as s/he loads and unloads boxes, for example. They learn how to find out about available jobs, how to write a resume, how to interview, and basic job skills (show up on time, call when you're sick, dress appropriately, etc.).

Then, they spend a week job shadowing at various jobs.

The response from the Chamber and from the business community as a whole has been very positive. Participants in the program also give it very high marks, and we anticipate continuing to expand it. It was one of three Chamber-affiliated programs highlighted for a recent visit by the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education.

All the graduates of the first year's program were offered jobs the following summer. While it is still early, we are gratified that none of the participants have dropped out of school.

### **New Services for Out-of-School Suspensions**

Some students behave so disruptively that allowing them to remain in the classroom is unfair to the other students. Usually, these students are placed in in-school suspension, where they are required to complete their homework and to remain quiet. If they continue to be disruptive, or if their original offense is more disruptive, they receive out-of-school suspension.

Before this year, students suspended out of school were not allowed to receive credit for any work done during the suspension period, which ranged from one day to two

weeks. Since such disruptive students were usually poor achievers in the classroom before the suspension, this could lead to a downward spiral ending in dropping out of school.

Athens Family Connection recognized the need for a structured program that would not only allow suspended students to do their assignments but would require them to keep up with their work while also learning appropriate behavioral skills. The Rutland Psychoeducational Center, one of our partners, succeeding in obtaining funding to implement our proposal for elementary school students.

The last two weeks of school this past spring, Rutland served a group of these students on a pilot basis, and this year, the program is in effect. We are optimistic that it will be successful in saving the educational careers of the students who enter the program. (At the very least, it will remove some students' incentive of wanting suspension so they wouldn't have to go to school!)

Staffing Committee serves as the MATCH Committee for Athens-Clarke County and surrounding areas. Review by such a committee is required by the State before cases can be referred for long term residential placement. Unlike most MATCH committees, the YES Staffing Committee also attempts to staff cases before the juveniles need long-term residential placement, to prevent placement being needed. Out of home placement is the last resort, only referred when all agencies agree and sign a form stating that they have no more services available locally for the child.

Parents and other interested parties are allowed and encouraged to participate in staffing where appropriate.

The committee also provides educational programs for its participants to keep abreast of services available in the community that might help their consumers.

In addition, the Committee identifies needs for these youth for the Partnership to address in our ongoing planning and work.

### **YES Staffing Committee – Addressing the Needs of Adolescents in Trouble**

Our Youth Empowerment Systems (YES) Staffing Committee existed before Family Connection came together in Athens. YES was one of the collaboratives that merged to form Family Connection, and we continue to provide this monthly staffing meeting for adolescents who are in trouble and their families. Its major goal is to staff difficult individual cases involving juveniles; the cases are referred by the more than two dozen agencies that participate each month.

By providing this inter-agency networking and case management, the YES

- ☞ In April 1995, 2005 Athens-Clarke County families were on welfare.
- ☞ Today, fewer than 650 Athens-Clarke County families are on welfare.

Barriers to moving from welfare to work are higher for those remaining on welfare than those who have moved from the rolls. Lack of work skills, illiteracy, substance addiction, physical and mental disabilities, and other barriers will be more difficult to overcome than the barriers faced by most of those who now have jobs. But, with the support of the community and continued commitment by DFCS and others, they will

### **Welfare to Work – Succeeding Beyond Expectations**

When Clarke County agreed to pilot Work First – before Congress passed welfare reform – we were optimistic about decreasing the number of families on welfare. We did not dream that the rolls would go down so far so fast.

An extraordinarily strong economy coupled with energetic work by Clarke County Department of Family & Children Services (DFCS) staff and strong community collaboration have led to an incredible 68% decrease in the welfare rolls in Athens-Clarke County in less than 4 years.

continue to decline.

One of our positive new collaborations is a partnership between DFCS and the Community Services Board for Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse Services (CSB). A new Women's Services program funded by DFCS and housed with the CSB provides assistance to women in ending substance addiction. This assistance includes a variety of required supports (like child care) as well as the treatment itself. This is a new program that emphasizes empowerment of a traditionally disempowered group, and we are optimistic that it will make a difference.

Another major new initiative is a multi-agency/community staffing to work with families who are returning to welfare after being in the workforce. The team works with the families to identify what led to their return (e.g. lack of affordable child care) and then work together to address that cause.

In late October, we hosted a workshop in Welfare Reform and Disabilities, to be presented by the Institute on Human Development and Disability at the University. We continue to work with the Institute to address disability issues for individuals and families receiving TANF.

Other strategies related to this goal include expanded training for provision of child care in nontraditional hours (particularly through family day care) and encouragement of increased employer support for child care. Our partner Care Connection, a child care resource and referral service, is leading these efforts.

### **Medicaid and Nutrition Outreach**

Proper nutrition and required medical care are key to success for all children and families. A component of all Family Connection activities in Athens is to spread the word about nutrition, and to help families needing Medicaid and other services to obtain them.

One way we do this is through direct, person-to-person education. For example, home visits by Healthy Families case workers always include nutrition information and assessment, as well as referrals to appropriate health care services. In addition, we provide nutrition training in a variety of nontraditional settings. The Cooperative Extension Service and the Health Department also provide a variety of nutrition education programs.

Another important outreach service for nutrition, health care, and other services is information and referral. Each year, many thousands of citizens are referred to appropriate services by our Partner and coordinating agency, Community Connection. Community Connection's database contains more than 3,000 listings of services in the Athens area.

### **Other Activities**

Athens Family Connection's activities would take many volumes to report fully. In addition to those listed above, we are involved in other activities:

**Family Assistance Checkup:** This screening instrument, created through our Integrated Services Committee under the leadership of the Institute of Government's John O'Looney, allows families and case workers to determine, through a series of questions, for what services the family is likely eligible. There are both computerized and paper versions.

**Common Access:** Also with Dr. O'Looney's leadership, we have spent years developing an Internet-based common application for services. We are continuing to address regulatory and staffing barriers to its implementation.

**Community computer kiosk:** Another effort led by Dr. O'Looney and the Institute of Government is developing computer kiosks with touch-screens to allow citizens to access information about services that might be available to them. We have obtained 7 computers and will place the kiosks in the coming weeks.

**Web-based information & referral:** Two years ago, volunteers in Atlanta placed part of Community Connection's information and referral database on a web site (donated by Emory University). However, there was no practical way to keep the data updated, and it was a skeleton of the information we had available on Community Connection's host computer. Through our partnership with the Institute on Human Development and Disability and the University of Georgia (and again with Dr. O'Looney's support), the database is now linked directly to the web from Community Connection's servers, so updating can be done on an ongoing basis.

**Georgia Policy Council for Children and Families:** We are a designated community partner with the Georgia Policy Council for Children & Families. This allows us to work with the Council to support systems change for families and children in Georgia.

**Community workshops:** We host quarterly community meetings to provide education about a variety concerns. These have included school success, youth violence, child abuse, and other issues.

**Volunteer Action Center:** We supported the successful development of this new, staffed initiative to promote volunteering for children and youth in Athens. It grew out of Athens' participation in the Presidents' Summit for America's Future last year. The Summit delegation adopted Family

Connection's plan as its own required plan for children and families in the community.

**Weed & Seed:** We participated in development of this initiative of the Athens-Clarke County Police Department. It includes weeding (removing the criminal element) from a targeted area and seeding (promoting youth development and other positive initiatives). Designation was received from the U.S. Department of Justice last summer, and several projects are now being funded.

**Athens Justice Project:** We also participated in initiating this project, which will work with criminal defendants and convicts to address the root causes of what got them in trouble so that, when they get out, they will become productive members of society. It will also provide support to their families.

**Child Watch:** This initiative of the Junior League provided a half-day tour of various community sites to help the "movers and shakers" be moved and shaken by the conditions in which some children live. As a result of this effort, there has been increased involvement in addressing issues affecting children. This spring's Child Watch tour will segue from our November Reduce Child Abuse efforts.

**Evaluation:** We are working with a team of faculty and doctoral students from the University of Georgia School of Social Work to develop more comprehensive, ongoing evaluation of our work. This evaluation will be both qualitative and quantitative. The goal is not only to provide a high quality evaluation, but also to train us to do ongoing, constant feedback evaluation of our work in the future.

*– end of narrative; beginning of our work*