

CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

Strategic Plan

2006-2010

Improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering



ENSURING a *brighter* FUTURE for ALL of America's YOUTH



America is known as the “land of opportunity”—where anything is possible regardless of heritage, background or status. This “American dream” is the hallmark of our society and an inspiration to our citizens and the world. America’s youth have enormous potential to succeed, yet far too many youth do not have the consistent, positive presence of an adult in their lives to help them transition to adulthood. Unfortunately, for some of the most vulnerable, yet promising of our nation’s population—our youth—the prospect of achieving the American dream seems insurmountable. Today’s youth face increasing challenges to becoming productive adults capable of earning a sustainable wage, supporting a family and positively contributing to their communities. Some will turn to drugs, alcohol, tobacco, promiscuity, violence and other risky behaviors. For instance, children who grow up in disadvantaged circumstances are more likely to be at risk of school failure, entry into the juvenile justice system, persistent poverty, and entry into foster care.⁸ If we work together—through faith-based, community, state, national, and local groups, we can provide our children and youth the opportunity to succeed and ensure a brighter future for all.

Many American children and youth need additional support. Youth living in rural and distressed communities face tremendous challenges, making positive youth development difficult. More than 35 percent of fourth graders and at least 25 percent of eighth graders cannot read at grade level. Approximately 15 percent of American children are living below the poverty level and almost 30 percent of children under age 18 are living in single parent or no parent homes. In 1960, less than 10 million children

were not living with their fathers. Today, that number has increased to 25 million.

Children and youth in at-risk environments are particularly susceptible to negative role models and behavior, and thus, have special challenges to overcome to reach their full potential. Among at-risk factors include:⁹

- » Neighborhoods with high poverty rates;
- » Below-grade level performance in school;
- » Teen pregnancy
- » Time spent in the juvenile system or in foster care;
- » Mental and/or physical disabilities; and
- » Incarcerated parent(s).

We will improve the lives of youth by providing meaningful opportunities to serve and by meeting their most pressing needs, whether academic, environmental, health-related, or social.

The Corporation, and many communities, schools and nonprofits around the country are poised to make a significant positive impact. After the release of the Final Report from the White House Task Force on Disadvantaged Youth

in October 2003, the Bush Administration has strongly advocated for collaboration among Federal agencies that affect the lives of youth in at-risk and disadvantaged environments. The report strongly encouraged agencies to respond to the policy of supporting all youth in becoming highly engaged and successful participants in education and civic life. We will leverage our national service resources to develop meaningful partnerships with our federal, state, and community youth service partners. We will also help advance First Lady Laura Bush’s national priority of empowering youth, through which she highlights the need to reconnect youth with their families, schools, and communities. Our goal is

Focus Area Two

to improve the lives of youth by providing meaningful opportunities to serve and by meeting their most pressing needs, whether academic, environmental, health-related, or social.

The Corporation will meet the needs of our nation's youth by:

- » Recruiting and supporting mentors for youth (with special attention towards children of incarcerated parents);
- » Engaging youth in at-risk and disadvantaged environments in meaningful service experiences; and
- » Developing community volunteering to strengthen positive youth connections with family, schools, and community (including faith-based institutions).

As we have done for many years, we will continue to engage youth in national service and volunteering, as well as continue to provide youth as service recipients necessary mentoring, tutoring, and service-learning opportunities. The Corporation will continue to emphasize the importance of connecting youth with adults who can support their academic and emotional development. Such healthy relationships can provide youth with valuable life-lessons that can prove useful to them even as they become adults, perhaps even motivating the youth to themselves begin or continue serving others.

Young people need relationships with caring adults to assist them in their successful transition to adulthood. Connections between youth and their families, schools, and communities (including faith-based organizations) create a strong social construct that enables youth to make positive choices. The Corporation will help to strengthen these positive connections for youth by generating volunteers and building community capacity to engage, train, and manage volunteer mentors. Children of prisoners are particularly in need of positive role models. To address this need, we will mentor and serve 100,000 children of prisoners, in support of the President's initiative.

Parents and families are the first and most important influence in a child's life, providing a system of love

AmeriCorps*NCCC Member Helps Former Truant Succeed in School

The boy's grandmother thought he had been going to school every morning when he left her home in Brooklyn's inner city. But he hadn't. For years, the youth who had come from another country to live with his grandma had been finding other ways to fill most of his days. He was painfully shy and not comfortable speaking English. His school-skipping pattern continued until he was 13, and placed in the sixth grade in a school with crowded classes of 30-40 children per teacher. He couldn't keep up. Because of his reticence and language difficulties, some believed he might be mentally challenged.

This is the youngster who was assigned to Kendra Moore in her first AmeriCorps venture last winter. She and her nine AmeriCorps team members were asked to help lagging students prepare for testing that would determine if they remained in sixth grade, or moved on to middle school. "It took a long time for him to trust me," says Kendra, 21. "He was scared of people. I started by teaching him the alphabet." She worked one-on-one with him and found that he was actually a rapid learner. Gradually, he not only accepted her but tried hard to win her praise. At the end of six weeks, he had made marked improvement and Kendra was asked to make a recommendation on his behalf to the school board. She urged officials to provide continuing one-on-one instruction for him, "and they have."

Source: *The Gleaner* (Henderson, KY), December 2, 2003

and support. We acknowledge and will seek to strengthen and reinforce parental engagement in youth development.

While it is essential that our nation ensure all youth receive the services that will support their positive transition into adulthood, it is also important to appreciate the powerful benefits that youth engaged in service can provide their communities and our nation. Over the next five years, the Corporation will engage over three million youth from at-risk environments in national community service. These opportunities—to become involved in meaningful volunteer and service activities—enable youth to experience the joy and

"Over two million children have a parent who is incarcerated. These children are seven times more likely to become involved in the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems themselves."

satisfaction of laying aside their own needs to meet the needs of others. Such lessons are irreplaceable and help to instill the spirit and value of community, which contributes to their sense of civic responsibility as adults. Retired General Colin Powell, former Secretary of State and founder of the America's Promise Alliance, supported the idea of infusing service into the learning process when he said, "[W]e ought to push our youngsters. . . so that they see that service is an important part of being an American citizen."

Engaging youth in meaningful service has also proven to be a powerful way to help young people improve their academic and social behaviors while increasing their confidence. For example, Alex San Pedro, who at age 18 was a troubled teen admittedly "on the road to nowhere", is now 26-years-old and studying art at Lane Community College. He no longer plans to die young. He became a literacy tutor for youth in at-risk and disadvantaged environments through AmeriCorps. He says, "I saw in those kids' eyes that they were so happy to see me. . . That just made me feel like, hey, maybe I do have something to give. Maybe I should do something more."¹⁰

Without meaningful and coordinated intervention, a large population of American children (particularly children of incarcerated parents, children in foster

Valencia County Foster Grandparent Program, sponsored by SER De New Mexico, Los Lunas

Valencia County FGP operates near a large state penitentiary for male offenders. The prison is a key component of the economy, and a large contingent of the population consists of families of the prisoners – spouses and children who move to Los Lunas to be near their incarcerated family member. The FGP project has assigned Foster Grandparents to provide ongoing support and services to children in the community, including the children of inmates, through schools, the Head Start Center, day care facilities, and community agencies. On an annual basis, as many of 3,000 children of inmates, primarily under the age of 10, receive nurturing, mentoring, love and support from Foster Grandparents.

Source: Senior Corps Children of Prisoners Issues List, June 2005.

care, and children reading below grade level) will face increasingly insurmountable obstacles to becoming productive adults who are capable of maintaining employment, earning a sustainable wage, supporting a family, and positively contributing to their communities. However, we will work with our partners to engage the nation's youngest citizens in meaningful service opportunities that help to provide the necessary tools for America's youth to experience the American dream.

NATIONAL TARGETS FOR 2010

- » Provide mentoring services to 3 million additional children and youth in at-risk environments, up from 2.5 million in 2002
- » Provide mentoring and other support and services to 200,000 children of prisoners
- » Engage over 3 million children and youth in at-risk environments in service

CORPORATION TARGETS FOR 2010

- » Provide mentoring and other support and services to 100,000 children of prisoners
- » Engage 2.2 million children and youth in at-risk environments in national service through Corporation-sponsored programs

For data sources and updates on annual targets, see http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/role_impact/strategic_plan.asp