

Types of Community/Neighborhood Resource Centers (Part II)

This part identifies two types of community/neighborhood resource centers: Family resource centers and neighborhood justice centers. Two examples are provided of family resource centers (Center for Family Life and the Golden Strip Family and Child Development Center) and one of a neighborhood justice center (Red Hook Community Justice Center).

Family Resource Centers

Family resource centers generally have two principal purposes: (1) to make services to families more widely available, more easily accessible, and more efficient; and (2) to provide services that are more supportive of families. In other words, rather than looking only at deficits or “illnesses,” family centers seek to build upon and to enhance families’ strengths and to do so in an atmosphere of mutual support and reciprocal help.¹

As is illustrated by the following two examples, family resource centers often provide a combination of services, family supports, and recreation.

Center for Family Life

Located in the Sunset Park neighborhood of Brooklyn, NY, the Center for Family Life strives to:

- form working partnerships with families;
- avoid defining its services as problem-oriented (rather, the Center works with families to help them recognize and realize possibilities);
- remain engaged in community development activities outside the center; and
- take a developmental approach to families (value is placed on fostering creativity and growth in individuals and their families).

Services and supports provided at the Center include:

- **A community school program**, including:
 - After-school programs for children ages 5-12;
 - Five summer day camps for children ages 5-15;
 - An extended day-care program at a middle school that offers after-school activities in performing and creative arts;
 - Community service club for preteens and teens who volunteer in the after-school programs and elsewhere in the community;
 - Mentoring/academic support, family life and sex education groups, socialization activities, and family recreation activities (such as a family camping weekend); and
 - Two Teen Evening Centers, which open schools to teens for sports, discussion groups, and creative arts activities.
- **Assessment and counseling** services, including:
 - Access to social workers;
 - Counseling, including individual, group, and family counseling; family life education; women’s support groups; and therapeutic and activity groups for children, teens, and parents;
 - Help in addressing children’s school problems and learning disabilities;
 - Individualized assessments, including psychological and psychiatric evaluations;
 - Infant/Toddler/Parent Program, including stimulation and group play for infants and

toddlers, as well as support and parenting groups for mothers.

- **Summer Youth Employment Program**, which provides a combination of paid work experience, education, and support services to young people ages 14-21.
- **Parent education** workshops – these workshops are held primarily in the schools and focus on topics related to raising children and sustaining families.
- **Adult employment** – computer training and job placement services are also provided.
- **Foster Grandparent Program** – the Center links counselors with senior neighborhood residents to provide in-home parenting assistance and support to families.
- **Neighborhood Foster Care** – this is a foster care service placing children from the Sunset Park neighborhood with neighborhood families. Foster families mentor and support birth parents during the foster placement.
- **Storefront Center**, which includes:
 - Thrift store – this is a nonprofit outlet for distributing used clothing, household supplies, and furnishings free of charge or at very low prices;
 - Advocacy Clinic - Center staff help residents secure access to public benefits;
 - Emergency Food Program which is sponsored by a consortium of agencies.

Golden Strip Family and Child Development Center

Previously known as the Golden Strip Human Resource Center, this family resource center in Simpsonville, South Carolina, provides a variety of family support services to residents of Southern Greenville County and Northern Laurens County.

The guiding principles of the Center have been (1) the expansion of programs to educate and support parents,

and (2) the improvement of access to health care for needy area citizens.

Like the Center for Family Life, some services are provided by agencies that have relocated offices to the family resource center while other services are provided by paid staff of the center. Because the Golden Strip area has such strong recreational programs (provided by the YMCA, etc.), the Golden Strip Center relies on existing programs for this service to youth and families.

Services available at Golden Strip include:

- **Emergency help** is provided to families in need of assistance with food, utility bills, medications, and clothing. These services are provided by the Golden Strip Emergency Relief and Resource Agency in partnership with the Greenville Baptist Association.
- **Literacy services** – Basic skills -- reading, writing, spelling, and math – are offered to adults by the Golden Strip Literacy Partnership. One-to-one tutoring also is available.
- **Health services**, including immunizations, WIC, and family planning – these services are provided by SC Department of Health & Environmental Control;
- **Counseling** – The Piedmont Center for Mental Health provides counseling to children with behavior problems, family counseling, and assessments for mental health-related problems.
- **Employment Services** -- The SC Vocational Rehabilitation Department helps people with a disability enter, engage in, or retain gainful employment.
- **Social Services** – The Department of Social Services is available to help families obtain Medicaid coverage and other DSS services.
- **Early Childhood and Family Learning Team** of the Resource Center provides:
 - **4-year-old kindergarten**;
 - **Family learning team** – individualized

instruction is offered to parents of young children in upgrading their skills in preparation for the GED;

- **Parent Education, Preschool Parent/Child Program** – Parenting information and activities are provided to parents of children from birth to through age 4. Voluntary home visitation is also available to assist parents in choosing activities that will stimulate their child’s development.
- **South Carolina Children’s Theatre** – Drama classes are available for children of all ages.
- **Compass of Carolina** – This is a family violence intervention program that individuals attend voluntarily or through court-order.
- **Healthy Families** – This program provides support services for all new parents. Services include voluntary home visitation, parenting seminars, and parent/child activities.
- **Greenville Sexual Trauma Center** – Victims of sexual assault and their families can receive confidential support and help with the medical and legal process.
- **Case Management** – The Resource Center provides this service to families with multiple needs to ensure that service planning and delivery are coordinated.
- **New Horizons Health Services** – This clinic, located at the Center, provides medical treatment for chronic illnesses such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and asthma, as well as for acute illnesses such as ear infections, sore throats, and hospital follow-ups.

Neighborhood Justice Centers

The emphasis on providing justice services that are more responsive to community concerns has prompted some communities to design and implement Neighborhood Justice Centers. These centers typically provide a mix of legal services, social services, and prevention programs with a goal of reducing the likelihood that youth and family

members will become involved in the legal system. The centers also usually provide alternative legal programs to increase satisfaction with remedies in civil proceedings.

Red Hook Community Justice Center

The Red Hook Community Justice Center is located in Red Hook, a neighborhood at the southwestern tip of Brooklyn, New York. The neighborhood has experienced problems over the years with drugs, crime, and unemployment.

The Community Justice Center is located in a vacant school building that has been rehabilitated. The decision to locate the Center in the vacant school building and the needs/concerns to be addressed by the Community Justice Center were defined by the residents of the neighborhood.

The Community Justice Center includes the following components:

- **Legal Services** – The Center includes a multijurisdictional court (e.g., civil and criminal proceedings are handled in one location). A single judge handles cases arising from the neighborhood that previously would have been referred to a centralized court. The program also includes a housing court that resolves disputes between landlords and tenants. An array of alternative legal services are provided, including mediation services (to reduce the need for court involvement) and legal counseling.
- **Social/Human Services** – The Center is designed to provide an array of social services to anyone in the Red Hook neighborhood. Residents do not need to be involved in the legal system to receive assistance. Services provided include drug and alcohol treatment, job training, GED assistance, short-term child care, health screenings for adolescents, domestic violence counseling, mentoring, and community meeting space.
- **Community Restitution** - Offenders sentenced in the court are required to pay back the neighborhood through community restitution. Possible sentences include planting trees, painting over graffiti, stuffing envelopes for local non-profit organizations, etc.

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- **Community mediation** – This service is designed to help neighborhood residents resolve neighborhood disputes (e.g., barking dogs, etc.)
- **Youth Court** - The Center includes a youth court which draws upon peers of youth to resolve low-level offenses (e.g., shoplifting, truancy, minor theft, vandalism, drug possession). Cases are referred to youth court as an alternative to processing in juvenile court.
- **Cultural Events/Activities** – As an example of this type of activity, the Center held a celebration in honor of Martin Luther King Day. Youth learned about Martin Luther King’s ideas of non-violence and volunteerism. Youth also participated in a peace march and in arts projects where they drew images of the civil rights movement. In the afternoon, educational workshops were held for youth and adults on various topics including conflict resolution and domestic violence. An information fair provided information about services in the neighborhood, including the health clinic, public library, and the mediation center. Finally, youth participated in a volunteer drive to recruit other neighborhood residents for their participation in such projects as the youth baseball league; park clean-up; graffiti removal; and community gardening.
- **Public Safety Corps** – In an effort to improve the quality of the community, a public safety corps of 50 local residents has been formed with Americorp funding. The residents work on a variety of crime prevention and victim assistance projects. Projects of note include:
 - Youth Baseball League – the Corps organized Red Hook’s first youth baseball league in 18 years. Corps members and community volunteers serve as coaches. The baseball league helps to fill the gap in recreational programs as well as bringing youth together with adults.
 - Housing – the Corps has worked to improve housing (e.g., replacing broken windows; planting trees, etc.), especially in the housing project.
 - Conflict Resolution – Corps members have taught youth how to resolve conflicts without resorting to violence.

Endnotes

- ¹. Melton, G. B. (January 14, 2001). Family centers are the heart of community. The Greenville News, 3F.

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