

March 9, 2009

In 2005, after discovering that the City had experienced a 54% increase in child abuse and neglect cases reported to Child Protective Services from 2001-2004, Tarrant County Youth Collaboration (TCYC) began the process of mapping all CPS referrals made from within the city reported between July 2004 and June 2005 in an effort to determine where the group's efforts could best be focused. The attendance zones of Smithfield Elementary School and Mullendore Elementary School were found to be the logical target areas based on collected data.

The Tarrant County Youth Collaboration (TCYC) and the City of North Richland Hills formed a partnership with civic and business leaders, the local school district, and the faith community to undertake a child abuse and neglect project, **Building Connections—Building Community (BC2)**.

The program was originally coordinated and managed by the Executive Director of (TCYC), John Ross. John played a key role in the development of the program, specifically core program structure, the recruitment of each of the partners involved, and the administrative and fiscal oversight. BC2 became a unique collaboration of grassroots type organizations with a mission based upon research that indicated parents who abuse or neglect their children are more likely to be socially isolated from formal and informal support systems. BC2 was structured to reduce this social isolation in our community by facilitating two integrated components: a Prevention Component and an Intervention Component.

The *prevention component* seeks to build the social capital infrastructure within the community to help alleviate the social isolation leading to abuse or neglect. The *intervention component* is focused on connecting families at risk of child abuse and/or neglect to natural community resources that will decrease the social isolation of these families and help to strengthen family resiliency *before* CPS involvement becomes necessary.

A key component to the BC2 program was the Family Resource Coordinator (FRC). Recognizing the need to position the FRC within closest reach to those we aim to help, the FRC works directly with police officers and other emergency services personnel so that we can act swiftly as soon as a need is identified.

The Family Resource Coordinator (FRC) receives referrals from police officers, the BISSD School District, and/or CPS screeners which identify families living in conditions leading one to believe the family is *at risk* of child abuse or neglect, but do not yet meet the level necessitating statutorily mandated CPS or other legal intervention. In this manner, the FRC and the North Richland Hills Police Department are now given another means to proactively intervene in the lives of "at-risk" families *before* any injurious conduct is committed. Since joining us in mid-2006, our FRC has received referrals to help over 1,000 families. Of the more than 1,000 referrals received, our FRC successfully contacted over 698 families and, of those, 548 successfully and voluntarily completed their Community Connections plan. After receiving a referral, our Family Resource Coordinator will attempt contact with the family within 48 hours. During that time, the FRC will assess any specific need and simply ask the individual/family if they would like help getting connected not only to social services, but to the community around them. The FRC's job is to convince a parent to *voluntarily* take the first step on the path to family resiliency and then to help them connect with the most appropriate resources to help them do so. The FRC model is a 30-day intervention.

That partnership now includes three geographically distinct teams working within the city and comprised of TCYC, the City of NRH, the Birdville Independent School District, nearly ten different churches and faith organizations located inside the city, and numerous other non-profits and individuals lending support and expertise in creative and various ways.

Following the formation of this BC2 partnership, the city subsequently realized an 8.7% decrease in child abuse and neglect cases reported to CPS by the end of 2005. And although this decrease cannot, and should not, be contributed to the efforts of TCYC or BC2 alone, it may be significant to acknowledge that the Smithfield Elementary School attendance zone experienced a 30% decrease in CPS referrals from July 2005 to June 2006, while the Mullendore Elementary School attendance zone experienced a 34% decrease during the same time period.

BC2 continues to thrive due to its cooperative, synergistic relationships that compose its structure. Each member breathes life to the project and brings an energy that ensures the group continues to look for new and creative ways to combat the social problems associated with child abuse and neglect.



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