



2010 - 2011 Annual Report



“Empowering children and their families to reach their full potential through advocacy, education and services. As Communities In Schools, we surround students with a community of support, empowering them to stay in school and achieve in life”



A message from Executive Director, Allison Jordan

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People often ask how we (the organization) are doing and honestly some days that question is harder to answer than others.

This past year was not easy but as I reflected in preparation for writing this, I realized that overall it was a really good year. We have a strong team of Board Members, staff and volunteers that worked hard to create and provide opportunities for the children and families we work with.

My highlights include both individual moments like whitewater rafting with Summer Camp students screaming about how much they loved paddling through the rapids and working with the Wholefoods Southeastern Leadership team as they renovated the Family Resource Center at Emma. Other highlights are part of a bigger picture for me, such as receiving notice that Project POWER/AmeriCorps was again fully funded and approving our three year strategic plan. Our poverty reduction initiative, The Success Equation, is a combination of the two and perhaps the biggest undertaking our organization has taken on. We are creating a movement to reduce the incidences and impact of poverty on children.

These are just a few of the many highlights in which I am proud to be a part of Children First/CIS. As we move forward we will experience more challenges and highlights along the way. But we will never lose focus of our mission of empowering the children and families we work with.

Thank you for all that you do to help us accomplish this mission.



Advocacy & Community Engagement

Make your voice count for kids! Advocacy and Community Engagement inspires community action to build opportunities for children. When our leaders create policies that are good for children, it leads to better health, education, and safety for our whole community.

Advocacy and Community Engagement covers two areas: public policy and poverty reduction initiative.

This past year's Public Policy campaigns included:

- Raise the Age of Juvenile Sentencing (in partnership with Action for Children NC)
- Promoting a Balanced Approach to the State Budget (in partnership with Together NC)
- Supporting a Fair and Stable Funding for Child Care Subsidy in Buncombe County (in partnership with Buncombe County Cares about Child Care)
- Living Wage for City of Asheville Contract Employees (in partnership with Just Economics of WNC)

The 2011 Annual Child Watch Tour, in partnership with the Junior League of Asheville, focused on raising the age of juvenile sentencing in NC.

Participants heard from local government leaders, parents, social workers, corrections officials, juvenile justice workers, formerly incarcerated, and current students. The tour highlighted the negative impact of sentencing

16- and 17-year olds into the adult system. Raising the age of adult sentencing will allow more youth to access intervention and prevention programs in our community aimed at setting them back on a course of opportunity and appropriate adulthood. Overwhelmingly, the 16 and 17-year-olds convicted in NC are minorities, many low-income. Yet, over 94% of those sentenced are for nonviolent crimes.



“Having an opportunity to see how jail strips a person of humanity and identity motivates me to work harder with our youth at risk to help them avoid getting this experience. I also will keep in touch about how the proposed bill is developing and how budget cuts are affecting JCPC and court counselors and will give my support every time an opportunity comes.” Child Watch Tour Participant

The Success Equation

The poverty reduction initiative's mission is to inspire and sustain a local movement to reduce the incidence of poverty and its impact on children in our county through education, collaboration, and public policy advocacy. The poverty reduction initiative turned into **The Success Equation**, a community movement to end child poverty in Buncombe County.

- Completed focus groups and one-on-one interviews with 113 low-income parents and 41 service providers
- Over 150 participants gathered for a day and a half of conversation, visioning, and planning to reduce the incidence and impact of child poverty specifically in the areas of early childhood, family supports, and economic stability.
- Partnered with Leadership Asheville Team (LA) Team 29.
 - Held a poverty simulation with Just Economics for LA Team 29
 - LA Team 29 organized and conducted 8 focus groups and collected data for a marketing and messaging campaign. They used this information to create the messaging campaign for the Success Equation Summit.
- On-going engagement with a diverse volunteer leadership and summit planning team that includes low-income residents.



“I don't want to take my child to Disney World, I just want to be able to take them to the doctor” Success Equation Focus Group Participant

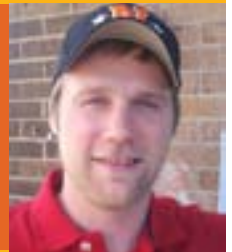


Family Resource Center at Emma

The Family Resource Center at Emma provided services to over 988 English & Latino speaking families (1,502 adults/2,080 children) that prevented a short-term catastrophic financial event (lack of food, eviction, utilities being disconnected, and lack of clothing).

- 774 families received food assistance from the food pantry
- 49 families accessed the clothing closet
- 44 families received emergency financial assistance to prevent eviction or utilities being disconnected
- 121 families (313 children) received holiday assistance
- 17 families received case management to help meet their goal toward self sufficiency
- 267 families received information and referrals to public and private organizations to help meet their needs
- Offered Love & Logic (English) and Motherread (Spanish) parenting classes. Next year, both of these classes will be offered in English and Spanish.

Justin, his wife Patrice, and their beautiful three month old baby girl visited the Family Resource Center at Emma. to get assistance with their electric bill, which was scheduled for disconnection. "I came in feeling discouraged about not being able to provide the necessities for my family," said Justin. "With the assistance from the Family Resource Center at Emma, I was relieved because our needs were met." Justin and his family received a food box, diapers, and emergency financial assistance for their electric bill.



Latino Outreach

The Latino Outreach Program helps immigrant families adjust to the community through community services such as a classes, referrals, case management and emergency assistance.

- 8 Latino Mothers completed the Motherread program and reported increasing their literacy and communication skills in their native language as well as English. All of them read more to their children and are able to navigate their child's educational process. They volunteered and participated in numerous community events, which not only provided a valuable community resource, but also alleviated thier isolation.
- 4 mothers increased their computer competencies through CCA Computer Classes at the YWCA.
- 10 middle and high school students were tutored by Warren Wilson College students through the MANOS program. The Latino Youth and Access to Higher Education workshop provided information to Latino families about scholarship opportunities and how to manuever the college application process.
- 6 Latino adults increased their reading, comprehension and writing skills in their native language through **Plazas Comunitarias**. 4 adult students are continuing to reach their educational goals by completing Middle School through the Institute of Adult Education (INEA) from Mexico.

Nancy, a Latino immigrant and mother of 4, heard of the Family Resource Center at Emma (FRCE), and the Latino Outreach program. Nancy came to the FRCE and picked up school supplies during the annual school supply drive. She didn't want to just take the supplies and leave, she stayed the entire day and made phone calls to both Spanish and English families to let them know their supplies were ready. Later, she came back to the FRCE for assistance in finding a job. After only three appointments where she received tips in job searching, updating her resume and increasing her interviewing skills, Nancy landed a full time job as a caterer. She continues to give back her time as a volunteer at the FRCE.





Project MARCH Learning Centers

Project MARCH Learning Centers strengthen the connection between student, school, parent and community helping at-risk students have a safe haven to learn and succeed in school and life. The program helps 60 elementary school age children living in Pisgah View, Deaverview and Woodridge (two public housing complexes and a Section 8 apartment complex) increase their potential to succeed in school by modifying their behavior and increasing their grade point averages. The after school program includes homework assistance, healthy snacks, enrichment activities, parent involvement and a summer camp.

By providing a structured after school program and summer camp, it also benefits residents of three apartment complexes by decreasing gang relationships, violence, vandalism and drug use within that community.

- 72 students were served by the program.
- 59 students attended on a regular basis.
- 58 out of 59 of our students were promoted to the next grade level.
- 58 out of 67 of our parents have attended at least two workshops and 53 out of 67 of our parents have attended three or more workshops. The workshops focus on becoming more engaged in their child's education as well as opportunities for additional life skills trainings.
- All 67 parents volunteered 687.5 hours at the learning centers.



“Michael” has the appearance of a smiling easygoing 5th grader, but sometimes a smile can hide a lot of pain. Healthy male role models are in short supply for Michael, but that all changed when he met Chris Brandt, or Mr. Chris, as the children call him. Mr. Chris was a Project POWER AmeriCorps member placed as a site leader for the Project MARCH Learning Center at Deaverview. Immediately, the two formed a bond that has left an impact on both their lives. Michael's low grades in school were not a reflection of his intelligence, and Mr. Chris and he worked diligently to bring his grades up. Mr. Chris made sure that Michael knew that he was proud of him, no matter what letter grade appeared on his report card. But on the day Michael walked into the Learning Center and showed Mr. Chris the two “A’s” and three “B’s” on his report card, neither one of them could hide their pride and excitement.



Project POWER/ AmeriCorps



AmeriCorps is a national service program that recruits members to strengthen communities, get things done, build leaders and expand horizons.

Project POWER is the local program of AmeriCorps and had 25 full time members serving in 17 different schools and non-profit agencies across the Asheville-Buncombe County community in 2010-2011.

During this past year Project POWER/ AmeriCorps members:

- Served 748 at-risk students served in Asheville/Buncombe County with enrichment services
- Completed 25 service learning projects involving over 800 students
- Recruited 1,441 volunteers who served 24,464 hours (in schools and at after school sites)
- Recruited 660 mentors
- Improved students attitude by 97.74%
- Helped 98.79% students pass to the next grade level

One example of a service learning project was conducted at ArtSpace Charter School. Members trained interested students to be school mediators, launching an internal means of conflict resolution facilitated and controlled primarily by students. Additional service learning projects tackled student-identified community needs such as: literacy, health and wellness, recycling and homelessness.



In a Project POWER/AmeriCorps Member's Own Words:

Now that the year is coming to an end, I am daily rewarded. I am used to a routine for each day, I somewhat know what to expect as well as what to prepare for. I truly feel that we have created a little family. A years worth of commitment to success and education have created a connection between young and old.

Just the other day a student who has struggled all year with reading came to me

with a note from her teacher. The note expressed the elated teacher sharing that the her student has improved by four reading levels. I could feel the confidence grow in this student. I also felt a sense of accomplishment as I have been guiding the students throughout the year. We are growing together. I can truly say that I have learned more through this year in the work I have done than I could have in any trade. I hope the students will carry this relationship as I will forever. The students hard work has paid off, they are amazing children and I am so excited for them to grow. I am excited that I have been a part of their amazing journey.

Alyson Dells, AmeriCorps Team 13 Member



Volunteer

The success of Children First/CIS is credited to its fantastic volunteers. These volunteers include our Board of Directors but also include community volunteers who come and help with day-to-day activities.

Children First/CIS had 1,832 volunteers that contributed 28,437.25 hours to help the children and families that we serve through direct service programs and advocacy efforts.

Volunteer opportunities with Children First/CIS include:

Advocacy and Community Engagement

- Letter and e-mail writing campaigns, petition drives, and phone banking to help push child-advocacy issues through the legislature.

Family Resource Center at Emma

- Organizing and sorting the Clothing Closet
- Working in the Community Garden
- Packing food boxes and picking up food for the Food Pantry
- Building Maintenance including cutting grass, minor painting, etc.

Latino Outreach Program (Bi-Lingual preferred)

- Computer Tutoring with Latino adults in basic skills and office software programs
- Working with Latino mothers during MotherRead classes
- Translating documents for Spanish speakers

Project MARCH Learning Centers

- Working with K-5 students on their homework and enrichment activities at one of our afterschool Learning Centers located in the Deaverview, Pisgah View, or Woodridge communities

Project POWER/AmeriCorps Program

- Participating in service learning projects, mentoring and tutoring



Volunteers are vital to the success of all of our programs, and they vary in age, cultural affinity, and economic status. We are fortunate to have wonderful relationships with local schools, universities and businesses from which to draw many of our volunteers. For example, over 40 volunteers from Whole Foods Markets spent the day at the Family Resource Center at Emma revitalizing the Community Garden and the center interior. And as the year came to a close, first graders from Carolina Day School came out on a beautiful October day to “put the Community Garden to sleep for the winter.” They harvested the remaining vegetables, tilled the beds, and helped the adults plant a winter cover crop. Volunteers are a vital ingredient in the success of the children enrolled in our three Project MARCH Learning Centers, as they assist with homework and give positive encouragement during enrichment activities. Interns and volunteers are a tremendous asset to the organization while gaining “real world” experience.





If you care for your own children, you must take an interest in all, for your children must go on living in the world made by all children.

Eleanor Roosevelt

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Civic/Faith

Cathedral of All Souls
Central Presbyterian Church
First Baptist Church of Asheville
Jubilee Community
Mt. Vernon Presbyterian Church
St. Eugene Church
Rotary Club of Asheville Breakfast
Rotary Club of Asheville West

Special Event Organizations

Barnes & Noble
Maccabi Academy
Moe's Original Barbeque
Pigeon Community Development Center
Ten Thousand Villages
Vincenzo's

Community Partners

AB Technical Community College
Action for Children NC
ARC
Asheville Buncombe Youth Mission
Asheville Buncombe Youth Soccer Association (ABYSA)
Asheville City Schools
Asheville City Schools Foundation
Asheville Parks and Recreation
Asheville Youth Mission
Atlanta Bread Company
Beth Israel Synagogue
Big Brothers Big Sisters of WNC
Buncombe County Cares About Child Care
Buncombe County DSS – Work First
Buncombe County Schools
Carolina Day School
COLA – Coalition of Latino American Organizations-WC
Center for Participatory Change
Diamond Brand
Earthfare
Girl Scouts
Hands-On Asheville-Buncombe
Health Adventure
INEA National Institute for Adult Education-Mexico
Junior League of Asheville
Just Economics
Knitters Club
LEAF In Schools & Streets
MANNA FoodBank
Mars Hill College
Mexican Consulate

Nature Center of WNC
North Carolina Arboretum
Pisgah Center for Wildlife
RICHERS-Resources in Communities Help Encourage
River Arts District
Short Street Cakes
Solutions
Together NC
Trips for Kids
UNC-Asheville
Warren Wilson College
Western Carolina University
Western Carolinians for Criminal Justice
YMCA of Western North Carolina
YWCA of Asheville