

Introduction



THE NEWSLETTER OF STRONG COMMUNITIES

Keep Kids Safe

Welcome to the first edition of "Keep Kids Safe: The Newsletter of Strong Communities." As Strong Communities has grown, we have come to realize the importance of having a publication to keep our volunteers and supporters informed of our activities and the latest developments within the initiative.

The focus of our newsletter, like the initiative, is to Keep Kids Safe. Strong Communities is a comprehensive initiative to build systems of support for families of young children. Strong Communities builds, strengthens, and renews community norms of neighbors' help for each other, an important step in keeping kids safe.

Many of you have volunteered to directly support a Strong Communities event, a Family Activity Center, Strong Families, or another aspect of the initiative. Others of you may not even realize your volunteer efforts were supporting such a comprehensive community development initiative. You may have simply thought

you were volunteering for your church to provide child care for Parents Night Out. Partners in our endeavors include churches, apartment complexes, fire, police and emergency response departments, local government officials, stay-at-home moms, social service and non-profit organizations, civic groups – and the list goes on.

We would like to express our appreciation to all of those who have supported this initiative, especially those who have volunteered their time to make a difference in lives of children and families in our communities. We hope you find this newsletter to be a helpful resource as you continue to partner with us to build

The vision of Strong Communities is for every child and every parent to be confident that someone will notice and someone will care whenever they have cause for joy, sorrow, or worry. You play a role in making this vision a reality in your community.

Strong Communities and **Keep Kids Safe**.

We want to hear your comments and suggestions about our newsletter. Please direct them to our editor at strongcommunities@clermson.edu or call 864-688-2247.

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Volunteering...

- Boosts self-esteem and energy
- Helps solve community problems
- Isn't nice, it's necessary
- Allows you to meet new people and make new friends
- Is the right thing to do!

Leaving No Family Outside

We have all had experiences in which we have felt left out. This experience itself can be very stressful and overwhelming. Imagine feeling this way at a time when other things in your life are also very difficult. When you are trying to learn how to be a parent or have moved to a new area with small children and feel you have no supports.

The isolation caused by being left out can cause you to feel depressed, anxious and very alone. This isolation and the associated feelings of hopelessness and helplessness can lead to situations that decrease child safety.

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month. We would like

to take this opportunity to remind you that you can play a role in increasing the safety of children in your community by supporting families of young children and ensuring that no family is left outside. You may not realize that child abuse and neglect is not usually “bad parents” doing “bad things” to kids. Rather, it is often parents that find themselves in overwhelming circumstances with little support. They are often trying to cope the best way they know how.

During the months of April, May and June, Strong Communities will be partnering with local faith-based institutions to plan special events and services in honor of Blue

Ribbon Sabbath, Mother’s Day and Father’s Day. These events will serve to encourage all of us to be diligent about Leaving No Family Outside.

These events will also provide many opportunities for you to get involved in supporting families in your community. Some of these volunteer opportunities are highlighted throughout this newsletter. If you have an interest in contributing your time and talent in support of young families or if you would like additional information about Strong Communities, please contact us.

Riley Area Community Garden

A community garden, envisioned as a gathering place designed to enhance the sense of community in southern Greenville County, is being developed by Strong Communities and the Riley Child Development and Family Learning Center. Located between the Riley Center and Ellen Woodside Elementary School, the garden will offer a new opportunity for building community and strengthening families, which are key components to help keep kids safe. The garden will also provide opportunities for educational activities that appropriately support the curricula of area schools. Community volunteers will contribute to the naming, design, implementation, and maintenance of the garden, with assistance provided by Clemson University.

You can get involved by:

- **Agreeing to serve on a committee to design or oversee maintenance of the garden, do fundraising or plan projects to engage area students.**
- **Plowing the field.**
- **Building picnic tables, benches, etc.**
- **Participating in a garden club.**
- **Recruiting individuals and groups to help with initial planting and garden maintenance.**
- **Participating in work days.**



Riley Child Development and Family Learning Center

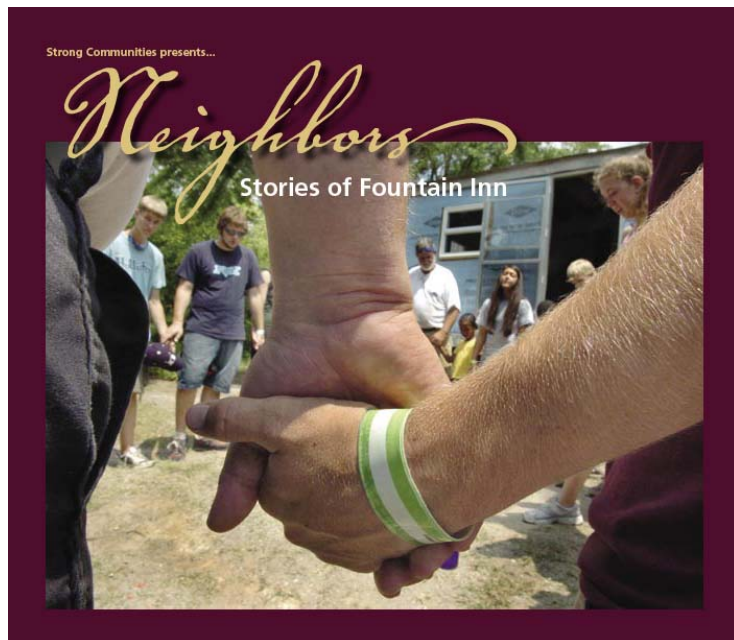
Neighbors: Stories of Fountain Inn

A book writing project about Fountain Inn and created by Fountain Inn offers the town the opportunity to celebrate its unique strength as a caring community.

The community book writing project has resulted in a collection of stories written by Fountain Inn residents and artwork produced by Fountain Inn Elementary School students, illustrating contributors' feelings about family, neighborhood, and community. Sponsored by Strong Communities and edited by Chris Benson of the Strom Thurmond Institute at Clemson, the book of fiction and non-fiction writings presents Fountain Inn as a place where children are safe and cared for and where adults watch out after children. Sharing such experiences helps to further strengthen communities, making them more supportive of families and still safer for children.

During April, Strong Communities plans to unveil the book to the community and to recognize contributors. Strong Communities will make a copy of the book available to every family in the city of Fountain Inn.

In addition to celebrating the generous, neighborly spirit already present in Fountain Inn, the book's distribution is designed to prompt activities that will provide new opportunities for commu-



nity building. For example, artwork produced by young artists that were not included in the book because of space limitations will be reproduced and displayed in locations around Fountain Inn. A Family Scavenger Hunt will be developed around these displays.

For additional details and more activities planned for Fountain Inn, watch the Strong Communities Section of the *Tribune Times*.

“And many people in Fountain Inn look out for children in ways that parents appreciate. I’m not saying you don’t need your parents. I’m saying you need other people, as well, to help you grow, and Fountain Inn has people who are willing to help. Everybody here watches out for others.”

-Excerpt from “The One Place I Know: An Interview with Meredith Bentley” included in *Neighbors*



You have the opportunity to provide time, energy and material resources for this recognition of Fountain Inn and for related activities that will further develop the community spirit reflected in the book.

Volunteers are invited to support this effort in the following ways:

- **Volunteer to help distribute a book to each household in Fountain Inn.**
- **Volunteer to assist with planned events for recognition of contributors to the book.**
- **Volunteer to contribute your time and energy on the community gardening/landscaping project.**
- **Volunteer to support other community activities celebrating your neighbors in Fountain Inn.**

Financial and in-kind donations are appreciated.

Family Activity Centers

All parents feel overwhelmed from time to time and all have questions about how to be a good parent. In the past, parents often relied on extended family, close friends, neighbors, and others to provide advice, emotional support, encouragement and even material assistance during difficult times.

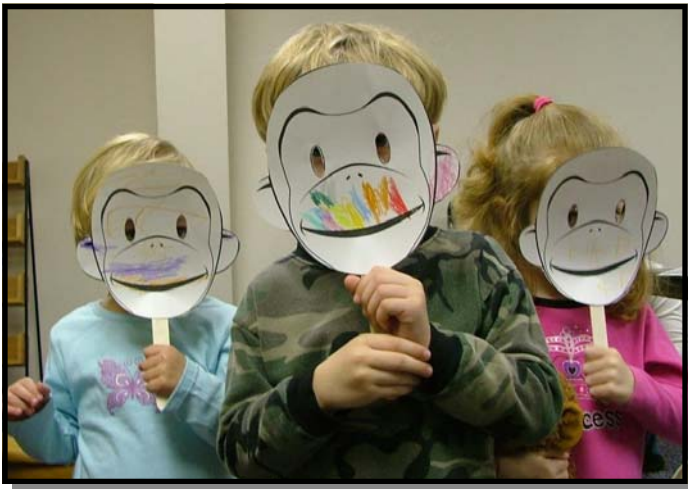
Today, however, increased mobility means that parents may not live near close relatives, friends or facilities that offer opportunities for parents to meet one another and learn more about parenting. Other changes in family life have left greater numbers of parents with less time and resources to devote to their children.

Family Activity Centers (FACs) are a means for increasing the capacity of families with young children to nurture their children, use the resources and opportunities within the community, and join supportive networks to enable families to watch out for one another. Some FACs will have all the activities offered at one location while other FACs are a partnership of several different sites coming together to offer the resource to the community.

Among the activities that we expect to be available through your local FAC are:

- **Kids and Families Playgroups** - Kids play while parents meet and socialize with other parents.

- **Parents' Night Out** - Supervised child care available to engage toddlers, preschoolers and elementary age children in activities while parents get time away.
- **Parent-Child Activities** - Parents spend time with their pre-school and kindergarten-age children in various activities like scrapbooking, hiking, and making crafts.
- **Financial Education and Counseling** - Workshop or one-on-one advice from a professional in financial services to assist parents with budgeting, planning for a home purchase, or career planning.
- **Professional Assistance in Meeting Your Family's Needs** - A trained Family Advocate available to help parents find the service that will most appropriately meet their family's needs.



Children participating in the Giggles and Tales activity at the Lander Memorial Library in Williamston. This ongoing parent-child activity is held every Wednesday at 10:00 am.

If you would like more information about Family Activity Centers in your area, are interested in sponsoring a Family Activity Center or to obtain a copy of the current Calendar of Events for your area, please contact Peg Manikowski (Mauldin, Simpsonville, Fountain Inn) at The Golden Strip Center at 688-2214 or Beth Bagwell (Fork Shoals, Pelzer, West Pelzer, Williamston, Piedmont) at the Riley Center at 243-9568.

Strong Families

Community organizations and individual citizens play a vital role in making every family with very young children feel welcomed and supported in their community. Every birth should be celebrated. Every family with very young children who moves into the area should be welcomed. All families with young children need help and support.

Strong Families works with community organizations to welcome and support families with young children in many ways:

- *Connections for Strong Families* is mailed to families of children birth to 3 with age-related information, tips and activities

for parents and their growing baby and a calendar of activities for families with young children.

- Family Friends are available to any family with a child 6 years old and younger. Family Friends are your neighbors who have volunteered to provide friendship and support to parents with very young children.
- Family Activity Centers regularly offer family activities such as play groups, Parents' Night Out, parent-child activities, general assistance for family problems and financial education and mentoring.
- Family Partnerships is available to families with a 4 or 5 year-old child. Family Advoca-

tates offer parents opportunities to meet each other, prepare children and parents for success in their partnerships with school and provide assistance in meeting family needs.

- Extra Care for Caring Families is available to parents of children under 3. Family Advocates work with the child's medical provider and parents to ensure a child's healthy development and to enhance the information and support available to parents.

If you would like information about how to connect a family to Strong Families or to get involved in welcoming and supporting young families, please contact us at (864)688-2214.



"It is nice to know that there are other people who care about the welfare, health and development of our child. It is also comforting to have someone knowledgeable and caring to go to when we have questions about our baby."

-To Family, Members of the Strong Families Support Network

How Many People Have Contributed Their Time and Skills in Strong Communities?

- More than 4,000 volunteers (about 3% of the total population) have contributed more than 32,000 volunteer hours
- About 200 Churches
- 71 other voluntary organizations (e.g., civic clubs; neighborhood associations)
- 162 businesses
- All of the county and municipal governments and almost all of the public safety agencies in the area



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Strong Communities, IFNL
Clemson University
158 Poole Agricultural Center
Clemson, SC 29634-0132

Phone: 864.688.2214

Fax: 864.967.0288

Website:

www.clemson.edu/strongcommunities

Insert Mailing Addresses Here

Strong Communities seeks to build systems of support for families of young children in southern Greenville, Anderson, and Laurens counties in Upstate South Carolina. The initiative, principally supported by a grant from The Duke Endowment, is designed to give new strength to application of the Golden Rule in communities as they care for their youngest members.

Strong Communities is based on the premise that for children to be safe and families to be strong, they must be able to count on others' noticing their needs and reaching out to help. A community effort to incorporate family support into the everyday life of neighborhoods where children live, study, and play will not only increase child safety but will also enhance neighborhood quality of life, strengthen family well-being, and facilitate children's healthy development and readiness for school.

Volunteers make a difference in Strong Communities.

How can you be involved?

- **Volunteer to support events and services in honor of Blue Ribbon Sabbath, Mother's Day and/or Father's Day.**
- **Volunteer to help with distributing books in Fountain Inn or other activities to celebrate the community of Fountain Inn.**
- **Volunteer to participate in the Riley Community Garden Project.**
- **Volunteer to coordinate a Family Activity Center in your community or provide child care for parents to attend Family Activity Center events.**

For more information about how you can get involved in supporting Strong Communities, please contact us.

Keep Kids Safe is a publication of Strong Communities for Children and the Institute on Family and Neighborhood Life, a public service activity of Clemson University principally supported by a long-term, generous grant from The Duke Endowment. *Keep Kids Safe* is published to keep volunteers and supporters of Strong Communities informed of activities and news related to the initiative. Address all correspondence to Lori Bailey, editor. E-mail strongcommunities@clemson.edu or call (864) 688-2247.