



# Keep kids safe

## Whom do you call on for support?



Over the past several decades, individuals, neighborhoods, communities, and societies have evolved in ways that make “easy society” not so easy to come by. The advent of different styles of working and living, technological advances, and many other societal changes have brought us to the point where we have little connection to one another. Neighbors are less likely to know one another, people are less likely to join social/civic groups, and young adults as well as everyone have become increasingly less likely to get engaged in service groups or activities. For the most part, the trend in people’s engagement with one another and within communities has been downward for more than a generation.

We are more isolated, less engaged in our communities, and less connected to others than ever before.

Parents of young children face different economic and social conditions than did their parents and grandparents, and even when they are financially better off than those who raised them, they are likely to have a much weaker informal support network than did their parents and grandparents. Where a mom in the community used to feel free using the neighbor for help in an emergency and the neighbor felt the same way about the mom, nowadays moms may not know their neighbor.

As people spend more time at work, commuting to and from work, on the computer, or alone, opportunities for meeting others and building networks of reciprocal help dwindle. Parents of young children, who have to add parenting demands to an array of life responsibilities and survival issues, feel more demands placed on

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*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.*

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### Interested in getting involved?



Look for the star inside to find ways you can volunteer to support STRONG COMMUNITIES.

We want to hear your comments and suggestions about our newsletter. Please direct them to our editor at [strongcommunities@clemson.edu](mailto:strongcommunities@clemson.edu) or call 864-688-2247.

## Whom do you call on for support? (continued)

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them than ever. Unfortunately, parents also feel less and less like they know how or where to get the kind of help they need. More often than not, the typical family's needs for help are of the "everyday" kind- another parent who understands what this is like, help with getting the kids to school, or a night away from the children. As demands increase and opportunities for help decrease, parents and their children experience declines in well-being. The occurrence of depression and anxiety symptoms in the general population of children (and their parents) has risen significantly as social isolation has increased.

This "social poverty" increases the likelihood of child maltreatment, in that parents with too many demands and no sense of how to get help are

more likely, in particular, to be neglectful in caring for children. So for instance, a mother with no transportation who has a child with a toothache may feel helpless to get treatment for her child. As a result, this mother may feel less capable as a parent. The child (who has an unmet medical need) could be predicted to become more and more difficult to care for adding to the mother's experience of stress and perception of parental incompetence. However, were this mother in a situation where there was someone to contact who could help her organize care or even help her think through what can be done and in what order, this scenario could change from one of being overwhelmed to one of empowerment and feelings of being able to take care of her family.

Families who believe that they have caring support around them are better able to care for their children, and are less likely to be neglectful. One important predictor of a child's well-being, even in financially impoverished conditions, is whether or not he/she has at least one sustained and caring relationship with an adult other than a first-degree relative. We all need to feel supported and cared for. Connection to others who care and help and to whom we can provide reciprocal care is a cornerstone indicator of family well-being. These types of connections are vitally important in preserving the health and well-being of the family and preventing problems in parenting. Today's families are finding these connections harder and harder to come by.

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## Did You Know...

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- 43% of Americans have either no confidants or just one.
- More than half of Americans (53.4%) do not have any confidants who are not family.
- Over the past 20 years, Americans' social networks have decreased by one third.
- The kinds of relationships that decreased the most were with neighbors and co-members of groups or voluntary associations.

The bottom line: "The number of people who have someone to talk to about matters that are important to them has declined dramatically...we have gone from a quarter of the American population being isolated...to almost half falling into that category."

Source: McPherson, Miller, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and Matthew E. Brashears. "Social Isolation in America: Changes in Core Discussion Networks Over Two Decades." *American Sociological Review* 71 (2006): 353-375.



Take a moment to think about your community or neighborhood, who are the individuals that make up the "half" that are isolated? Do they live next door? Do they have young children in the household? What can you do to get to know these families? How can you make them feel welcome and encourage them to get involved in the life of the community or neighborhood? How can you start TODAY to build a relationship with them so they feel they can call on you for support when needed? Call us for ideas or to learn how you can support what is already happening in STRONG COMMUNITIES.

# STRONG COMMUNITIES: Strengthening Support Networks for Families of Young Children

For more than five years now, STRONG COMMUNITIES has been working to make family support part of everyday life in southern Greenville County and adjacent communities in Anderson and Laurens counties. Many of you have been very involved in this effort through the initial community mobilization phase or through the programs and activities of STRONG FAMILIES.

Since the launch of STRONG COMMUNITIES in the spring of 2002, more than 4500 individuals have volunteered their time and talents. Diverse community organizations have also joined the effort to help keep children safe. There are 275 churches, over 75 civic clubs and other voluntary associations, more than 165 businesses, most of the public safety agencies and all of the municipal governments in southern Greenville County are actively engaged in STRONG COMMUNITIES.



STRONG COMMUNITIES partners with many of these organizations to support Family Activity Centers in our communities. Being developed in local churches, schools, fire stations and other neighborhood sites, FACs provide family activities and support for families with young children. Among the activities that we expect to be available at your local FAC are:

- **Play groups** – Kids play while parents meet and socialize with other parents.
- **Parents' Night Out/Moms' Morning Out** – Supervised child care available to allow parents time away.
- **Parent-child activities** – Parents spend time with their pre-school and kindergarten age children in various activities such as scrapbooking, hiking and making crafts.



- **“Chat with a Family Advocate”** – Assistance to parents in general problem solving, offering neighborly advice and connections to available community resources.
- **Financial Education and Mentoring** – Workshop or one-on-one mentoring to assist parents with budgeting, planning for a home purchase or career planning.

**Look for the Family Activity Calendar to find activities of interest to you being hosted in your community.**



We welcome the opportunity to discuss ways organizations or individuals can partner with us to support a Family Activity Center. Organizations can agree to be a host site. Individuals and groups can volunteer to sponsor activities, provide child care, provide Family Advocate or financial education services, and many other opportunities.

**Please call Lori Bailey, Volunteer Coordinator at 688-2247, to discuss ways you can get involved.**

# Summer Fun in Anderson School District One – Parent/Child Activities

by Doris Cole, Ph.D., Outreach Worker for Strong Communities

“Is it ‘bug day’ yet?” asked four year old Daniel as he hopped out of bed one day this summer. Daniel and his mom, Wendy Watson, had attended their first “Summer Fun in District One” event and had such a great time that Daniel memorized the titles of all the summer events in anticipation of the next one.



Daniel showing off his bug at bug day.

As a partner with Strong Communities, Anderson School District One hosted a series of eight events this summer for parents with children ages 3, 4, and 5 years old. Early childhood teachers presented the free activities which became quickly grew as more parents heard about the summer fun. The response was overwhelming with as many as 30 children and 25 parents attending several events.

Mrs. Watson not only attended the events with her son, but also volunteered her talents by taking photographs of the activities. She says that Daniel still sings the

“5 senses song” from Spearman Elementary and the “alligator song” from Wren. “It made me proud to see him sit on a carpet square as the teacher read a story,” said Mrs. Watson. “What a great opportunity for kids and parents to experience fun at so many schools.”

The benefit of the summer events was three-fold. Parents met other parents and formed friendships that are so important for children and adults. Schools showed their support by welcoming families into their buildings and modeling good teaching for pre-schoolers. And volunteers showed by example how to provide free, informal family events that enhance family life while providing safe places to meet and play.

Watson stated that by attending the sessions she reconnected with two friends from college who live in her community and are raising young children. She also became closer with a neighboring family and now plans times for their children to play

A big thanks to the following teachers: Tanis Veres for “Have a Ball with Books” at Pelzer Elementary; Angie Lowery for

“Down on the Farm” at West Pelzer Elementary; Emily James for “Wild about Watermelons” at Concrete Elementary; Melissa Collins for “Game Time” at Cedar Grove Elementary; Mary Ann Kohl for “Teddy Bear Picnic” at Hunt Meadows Elementary; Keisha Witherspoon for “Eating & Dancing Through the Early Childhood Curriculum” at Spearman Elementary; Brooke Smith for “Bug Off” at Wren Elementary; and Marlene Winchester for “Back on Track” at Palmetto Elementary.

Volunteers who assisted were Teresa Marshall, Cassie Marshall, Jill Finley, Dr. Charlotte McDavid, Dr. Stacy Hashe, Georgia Adams, Nicholas Lowery, Emily Lowery, Mary Ann Woodson, Keith Cole, Caroline Taylor, Frances Crowe, Pat Russell, Allison Bradley, Sheila Graham, Chelsea Winchester, Tiffany Winchester, Amy Gilstrap, and Bethany Simmons.



“Wild About Watermelons”

“Saturdays in the Park” will be the next series involving Anderson District One teachers and principals. On each of the 9 Saturdays in September and October, a free parent/child event will be presented in the Mineral Spring Park on Main Street in Williamston from 10:30 to noon. Current and former district educators along with volunteers will present topics like “Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs” on the rain cycle and “Kid-Coctions” with hands-on science like making flubber and Ooblek. Volunteers are needed to help with sign in, passing out supplies, and caring for little brothers or sisters while parents help pre-schoolers.

**Call Doris Cole at 847-9186 or 617-9237 to volunteer.**

## “Chat with a Family Advocate”

“Chat with a Family Advocate” provides a welcoming community environment for families to ask for help and support in dealing with difficult situations they may be facing. Family Advocates can support the family through problem solving based on the unique strengths and interests of the family, can provide guidance and assistance in connecting with the supports and services available in the community and can offer friendly advice and counsel.

“Chat with a Family Advocate” is coordinated through a partnership with neighborhood community institutions in an effort to increase community capacity to better support families with young children. Family Advocates may be professionals whose time is donated by their employing agency or they may be community members with strengths and skills in the principles of STRONG FAMILIES and knowledge of their community.



Human Service Professionals are needed to volunteer as a Family Advocate through our Family Activity Centers located throughout southern Greenville County. The Family Advocate will provide general support to families of young children in getting connected in their community, finding resources to meet the needs of the family and connecting them to available services.

**Call Lori Bailey at 688-2247 to volunteer or to learn how your organization can donate staff time to provide this service in our communities.**

### “Chat with a Family Advocate” is currently scheduled at the following locations and times:

Center for Community Services Simpsonville	Monday—Friday 8:30 am-5:00 pm
Trinity United Methodist Mission House Fountain Inn	2nd Monday every month 9:00 am –11:00 am  4th Monday every month 11:00am-1:00 pm
Shady Grove Baptist Church Pelzer	2nd and 3rd Tuesdays every month 10:00 am - 12:00 noon
Sue Cleveland Elementary School Piedmont	4th Tuesday every month 3:30 pm –5:30 pm
Riley Child Development and Family Learning Center Pelzer	2nd Tuesday every month 11:00 am - 1:00 pm  4th Tuesday every month 3:30 pm-5:30 pm
Life Church Piedmont	4th Saturday every month 10:00 am –12:00 noon
Upstate Circle of Friends Greenville	September 14, 11 am – 1 pm October 13, 11 am – 1 pm
Belmont Fire Department Greenville	September 19, 1-3 pm October 17, 1-3 pm



## ***Keep Kids Safe***

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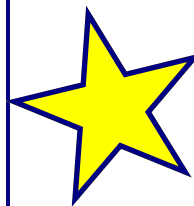
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**STRONG COMMUNITIES** seeks to build systems of support for families of young children in southern Greenville, Anderson, and Laurens counties in Upstate South Carolina. The initiative, principally supported by a grant from The Duke Endowment, is designed 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.**

**STRONG COMMUNITIES** is available to help you initiate or expand projects that serve children and families. We are happy to provide resource information and ongoing assistance regarding one of the ideas found in this newsletter, or we can work with you to determine project ideas tailored to your unique interests and talents.

Please contact us for more information.

**Lori Bailey, Volunteer Coordinator**

**Phone: 864.688.2247**

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