

Narratives

Executive Summary

Family & Children's Service (FCS) was founded in 1909 as a private non-profit 501(c) (3) social service agency whose mission is to assist people during vulnerable times in their lives through education, intervention, care and counseling. Over the past 104 years, FCS has earned a reputation as a trusted and essential resource for tens of thousands of individuals and families in need throughout Monmouth County, New Jersey. We have been at the forefront of social service delivery, creating and administering quality programs that address the needs of a changing society.

FCS provides 11 different programs, delivered by a small, but highly qualified and dedicated staff to more than 18,000 area residents annually. One program, the Retired Senior Volunteer Program or RSVP, nurtures the concept and vision that has been at the heart of the agency since its inception: we inspire people to help people. FCS has been the sponsor of RSVP since 1973, and the agency is committed to maintaining the high quality of service offered by the program.

Through the Corporation for National & Community Service RSVP grant, an estimated 335 RSVP volunteers will contribute their time to helping children in Monmouth County acquire a love of reading, learn more in school and be healthier. The primary focus area of this project, a partnership with local schools, students and community volunteers, is Education and includes Reading Buddies, an early-childhood literacy development program which advances literacy skills and creates enthusiastic, confident young readers in 16 local public schools; and Healthy Buddies, an intergenerational nutrition awareness and physical fitness initiative for students in grades three through five. When children get a daily diet of nutrient-rich foods and are healthy, they are more likely not to miss school and to learn more while they are there. At the end of the three-year grant, 4,800 students in kindergarten through second grade will demonstrate improved academic engagement in the area of literacy through the Reading Buddies program. The CNCS federal investment of \$94,407 will be supplemented by \$43,190 in state and local funding to support the RSVP programs administered by Family & Children's Service.

Strengthening Communities

For more than a century, Family & Children's Service has served Monmouth County as a trusted and essential resource for individuals and families who need a helping hand. The agency has helped tens of thousands of people learn, grow, feel, age and live better. Celebrating 104 years of service, Family & Children's Service (FCS) is the oldest non-profit private social service agency organization in Monmouth County and this longevity is a testament to our ability to address the needs of a changing

Narratives

society with integrity and compassion. By providing a variety of services and solutions, FCS meets the diverse needs of area residents at all stages of their lives. The programs of FCS impact the lives of countless members of the community, from children to seniors. And it is the continued support of our community which makes our programs possible. RSVP, one of 11 FCS programs, nurtures the concept and vision that's been at the heart of the agency since its inception: we inspire people to help people. FCS and RSVP serve Monmouth County, New Jersey. Monmouth County is located in central New Jersey and includes 665.17 square miles of the state's seaside coastline. It is the northernmost county of the Jersey Shore and closest in proximity to New York City. As a result, population and cost of living have been on a rapid increase over the last decade. According to the 2010 US Census Bureau, an estimated 630,380 residents inhabit Monmouth County's 53 diverse municipalities which include coastal towns, farmland and urban cities. The Hispanic population is the fastest-growing segment in the County. According to the United Way Social and Demographic report, Monmouth County has seen a 176% increase in the number of Hispanic residents with the most common place of origin being Mexico. In addition, Monmouth County has the fifth highest number of senior-citizen residents of the 21 counties.

Monmouth County ranks 42nd among the highest income counties in the United States and the 2010 US Census Bureau states that the median household income is \$82,265. By contrast 6.3% of the population, or 42,866 people, are living below the poverty level -- a number that is changing each month. According to the Monmouth County Division of Social Services, the number of applications for food stamps, medical benefits and public assistance has risen by 5,000 since the recession hit four years ago. New social-services clients are middle class couples -- former business owners, construction workers, and teachers who can't find another job. The local community was dealt another blow in October 2012 when Hurricane Sandy devastated much of the East Coast, with seaside communities in New York and New Jersey bearing a disproportionate share of the damage. The Hurricane and its aftermath presented most of Monmouth County residents, many already struggling to meet their day-to-day needs, with extreme challenges from home and job loss to displacement.

In Monmouth County, there is great disparity between wealth and poverty and that is reflected greatly in the education system. For example, in Holmdel, a community with a median income of \$80,533, 76.4% of third grade students in the district are proficient in Language Arts compared to a State Average of 59.7%. By contrast, in Asbury Park, a community with a median income of \$27,746, 22.5% of third grade students in the district are proficient in Language Arts compared to a State Average of 59.7%. Research has shown that students who do not read well by the third grade are less

Narratives

likely to catch up to a basic reading level in later grades and are more likely to drop out of school, leading to higher unemployment and poverty levels. Through our signature Reading Buddies program, RSVP strives to address this issue and bring a love of literature to the students in underserved schools in our community.

The Reading Buddies program was created in response to President Clinton's "America Reads Challenge Act of 1997", which made a promise that every child in America would read well and independently by the end of third grade. The shared reading program, developed by RSVP as a program of FCS, began in 1998 with eight volunteer readers reading to 40 students at Highlands Elementary School. Since that time, the program has continued to be the only in-school reading program in Monmouth County and last year linked more than 200 volunteers with over 1,600 elementary-aged students. FCS is constantly looking to benefit from our community's assets and to strengthen the work of RSVP. One of our top priorities is to create confident, academically engaged successful children. Our Reading Buddies program is the cornerstone on which we build upon this priority.

Currently the program places volunteer readers in 79 classrooms, using a small group read-aloud strategy which augments the school reading curriculum. On a weekly basis, volunteers visit the schools for one hour and read aloud to students in grades K-2. Each school year, the volunteers provide more than 4,600 hours of focused and guided reading sessions. Reading aloud is the foundation for literacy development. It is the single most important activity for reading success (Bredenkamp, Copple, & Neuman, 2000). It reveals the rewards of reading, and develops the listener's interest in books and desire to be a reader. It exposes less-able readers to the same rich and engaging books that fluent readers read on their own. Each week the RSVP volunteer reads to the same four or five students creating a bond, reinforcing vocabulary and literacy skills and enticing them to become better readers.

Teachers, administrators and volunteers provide feedback and data on the program through end-of-year evaluations and surveys. Data is compiled by the Reading Buddies Coordinator, entered into a spreadsheet and reviewed by the Coordinator and RSVP Program Manager. Data collected includes the number of students reading at grade level by the end of the year, the ability for students to make predictions, vocabulary recognition, listening skills and overall increase in exposure to literature. The 2013 end of school year survey indicated that 90% of the teachers in the Reading Buddies program saw an increase in and motivation towards reading from the participating students. Students are also surveyed on the availability of printed materials at home and for most of the participating students,

Narratives

Reading Buddies is one of the only ways they can access reading materials outside of school books. Reading Buddies works directly with economically disadvantaged students in underperforming schools. According to the 2012 NJ ASK third grade test scores, 14 of the 16 Reading Buddies partner schools have literacy scores below the state average of 67% proficient in literacy. Of those 14 schools, 8 have an average score below 50% proficient in literacy. In addition, on average 50% of the students in the partner schools are eligible for free or reduced lunch and in six schools more than 70% of the students are eligible. "The most successful way to improve the reading achievement in low-income children is to increase their access to print." (Newman, Sanford, et al. "American's Child Care Crisis: A Crime and Prevention Tragedy"; Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2000) Through the weekly reading sessions, Reading Buddies brings books to these students to create a community of children who value literature.

As a testament to the program's success, Principal Joseph Jerabek recently said, "Family and Children's Services has truly become a part of our school routine and programs over the years with the Reading Buddies that visit with our Grade 1 students every Thursday. Our first graders look forward to their 'Buddy Readers'" and get disappointed if they have an off day due to a half day or other activities. It is important that students get to experience a variety of reading from a variety of readers and this program brings another dimension to our regularly scheduled small group reading portion of the daily Language Arts block. The senior readers are truly another teacher for our students and a part of our Grade 1 grade level culture."

We are fortunate to work with 16 local elementary schools and have direct access to their administrations and staffs. Their insight into the needs of their communities and their students are valuable as we create and evaluate our programs. Our relationship with the schools ensures that priorities are being met not only through Reading Buddies but also through other FCS programs such as: the Backpack Project which distributes new backpacks and school supplies to local students and Operation Sleighbells which provides food, gifts and clothing for more than 500 local families during the holiday season. We work closely with organizations in the community to ensure that existing programs are enhanced and new programs are created to meet ever changing and growing needs. RSVP staff members participate on a local Regional High School Community Advisory Board, the Advisory Committee on Minority Concerns at the Monmouth County Courthouse and attend numerous senior-focused meetings. By diversifying our networking groups, we are able to interact with a broader cross section of the community and better meet its needs.

When looking for community partnerships many questions come into play. What resources does the

Narratives

organization have that they can offer RSVP? Will this partnership help our program financially? Will this partnership raise our visibility in the community? Is this a short-or long-term partnership? We are careful to examine the impact of each new partnership and the effects on both the community organization and Family & Children's Service. The program's continuing success is due in large part to the generosity of FCS' many individual and community partners, including: Staples®; Panera®; Old Navy®; NJ Natural Gas®; Wells Fargo®; Talbots®; Amboy Bank®; Whole Foods®; Brookdale Community College; Jersey Shore Woman's Club; Women's Club of Colts Neck; United Way of Monmouth County; Red Bank Rotary Foundation; Wayside United Methodist Church; All Saints' Memorial Church, Navesink; St. Anslem's Church, Wayside, and numerous family foundations. Our many community partnerships enable us to provide new backpacks to our Reading Buddies schools and a wonderful holiday season to 1,200 local children. In addition, they provide space for meetings and orientations, awareness of our programs through their publications and public relations and visibility in the community. RSVP sites, and the partnerships that are created, are essential to maintaining the program's success. Currently, we have 53 sites throughout the county where RSVP volunteers are deployed on an ongoing basis and we are carefully reviewing each. When adding a new site, we look for areas that are lacking an RSVP presence and determine whether there are agencies in those areas that fit the mission of Family & Children's Service and RSVP.

The Monmouth County Division on Aging, Disabilities & Veteran Services is the lead agency in the county providing information and referrals to seniors relating to transportation, nutrition, education, housing, counseling, employment and cultural programs. The Division on Aging is a current RSVP site for the State Health Insurance Assistance (SHIP) program. Going forward, RSVP will work with the newly appointed Veteran Services department to create programming for the more than 38,000 veterans and their families residing in Monmouth County. Since Fort Monmouth recently closed it is the ideal time to begin this new step and remember our vision to inspire people to help people.

Recruitment and Development

Family & Children's Service assures high quality service to the volunteers and agencies we serve. It is our intent to help develop skills and leadership and enhance the quality of life for the senior population in Monmouth County. Our volunteers are as diverse as our County. From retired teachers to architects to a former prison warden, our volunteers reflect the changing face of volunteerism. Our volunteers live in low-income senior housing, in multi-million dollar homes and everything in-between. A snapshot of our RSVP program would reflect the community we serve and this is especially important as we work with the younger generation and they can see themselves in the

Narratives

volunteers. General volunteer recruitment is provided through press releases, newspaper stories, VolunteerMatch, speaking engagements, the Family & Children's Service website, civic clubs and senior centers. The Director of Marketing & Communications has taken RSVP into the social media mainstream and we now recruit through Facebook and Twitter. RSVP continues to work with faith-based organizations to recruit Reading Buddies, the State Health Insurance Assistance (SHIP) program counselors and general volunteers. This has been a great source of recruitment as those who participate in faith-based communities have a commitment to service. Baby Boomers are the "ideal" volunteers and we have had success in recruiting Boomers for programs which offer more flexibility and less time commitment during the week such as Reading Buddies, Healthy Buddies and SHIP. It is our goal to continue to create, new programs which will attract a "younger" RSVP volunteer base interested in skill-based programs.

New volunteers are given an enrollment form to complete, are interviewed by the program manager and then assigned to an agency or program after discussing their background, skills and interests. They are given a choice of organizations and programs that suit their skills and to which they feel committed. The choice gives the volunteers the opportunity to grow and develop new skills or strengthen skills they already possess.

Both of the programs coordinated by the RSVP office, Reading Buddies and Healthy Buddies, require training by the RSVP staff. Reading Buddies requires volunteers to attend in-service training sessions each September which are offered at four locations throughout the county. Each session is two hours and includes training in classroom management skills, tips for presenting a story and interactive reading demonstrations during the first hour, to which all readers are invited. In the second hour, we acquaint our new readers with the program requirements/details and reviewing necessary paperwork. The highlight of the new reader orientation is the "Day in the life of a Reading Buddy" which walks them through the volunteer placement from where to park to where the classrooms are located. We strive to have confident and prepared volunteers on day one of the new school year program.

Healthy Buddies, an intergenerational nutrition/activity program, requires volunteers to attend in-service training sessions two to three times per year at the Family & Children's Service office. The Healthy Buddies Coordinator, who is trained in the program curriculum, reviews the nutrition and physical fitness lessons with the volunteers and discusses important nutritional information. Each session is two hours and if volunteers need additional one-on-one training, the Coordinator is available throughout the year.

Starting in 2013, RSVP will recognize all our volunteers at an annual Open House Party at the Family

Narratives

& Children's Service office near the Thanksgiving holiday. Site coordinators, in addition to all active volunteers, are invited to attend. The recognition is a way to connect RSVP to Family & Children's Service and the program staff and the volunteers to one another. In addition we send birthday wishes to all our volunteers in the month of their birthday.

Program Management

The RSVP staff and FCS treat our volunteers like a professional work force. They are held accountable, must adhere to standards and follow procedures: complete evaluations, must call the office if they are unable to volunteer to arrange for substitutes, etc. We respect their feedback and insight into our community, which has led to positive changes in the program and the creation of new programming such as Healthy Buddies. Programs our office develops, organizes and maintains, such as Reading Buddies and Healthy Buddies, also have the greatest impact in the community since they are created to focus on a specific need with a specific outcome.

The Reading Buddies program was created in 1998 in response to President Clinton's "America Reads Challenge Act of 1997", which made a promise that every child in America would read well and independently by the end of third grade. Fifteen years later, the program continues and flourishes by reaching more than 1,600 children each week. It is the ability to see the needs in the community and address those needs that makes the RSVP program an asset in Monmouth County. The program places more than 200 volunteer readers in 79 classrooms, using a small-group read-aloud that augments the school reading curriculum. On a weekly basis, volunteers visit the schools for one hour and read aloud to the same four or five students in grades K-2. Over the next three years, we plan to expand the program into four new schools as local districts continue to request the program.

As the landscape of volunteerism has changed and the importance of performance-based programs has come to the forefront, we have adapted and changed. This year we were able to launch Healthy Buddies an intergenerational nutritional awareness and physical fitness initiative for students in grades three through five. Under the program, RSVP volunteers partner with students to help them develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors to adopt, maintain and enjoy a healthy lifestyle. Volunteers guide students in their lifestyle choices by leading or supporting nutrition lessons, engaging in physical activities and providing healthy snacks. The program represents a unique opportunity to share healthy lifestyle experiences across generations, bringing empathy and compassion to a topic sometimes fraught with anxiety and frustration. We see this as an avenue to engage fit and energetic new volunteers with RSVP and address the issue of childhood obesity. We anticipate that this new initiative will create a program as strong and impactful as Reading Buddies.

Narratives

Each month, all RSVP volunteers complete time sheets for their placement which are forwarded to the RSVP office. The time sheets track hours served and the volunteers' assignments allowing the staff to monitor and ensure that all assignments comply with RSVP regulations. Hours are input into our database by our administrative assistant and tracked by volunteer station. Each volunteer in the RSVP program has a volunteer file which is housed in our office. All enrollment forms, time sheets and other necessary information are kept in the individual files. Current RSVP participants are required to be 55 years of age or over and be in compliance with the RSVP program. Once a volunteer leaves the program, their file is moved into our storage area in the agency basement.

We assess our programs, sites and volunteers on a yearly basis through surveys. Reading Buddies volunteers must complete an evaluation of the program each May in order to remain in the program. They are asked a series of questions regarding the organization of the program, the school response to the program, the books we provide on a monthly basis, the students they work with each week, the implementation of reading and literacy skills and ways to improve the program. We review each volunteer evaluation and use the results to make changes to the program. Last year it was suggested that we do not allow the volunteers to enter the classrooms if they are late and the reading session has begun. The disruption of moving the children from group to group took time away from the reading and this year the policy has worked extremely well. Feedback is a key factor to evolving the program. In the Reading Buddies partner schools, both the school administration and the classroom teachers evaluate the program and the volunteers on a yearly basis. The administration responds to questions regarding the program staff, the strengths of the program, changes they would make and the top three issues facing the students in their school. Last year the top issues included lack of parental involvement at home, limited language skills and poverty. It is the evaluations and feedback from the school administrators that generated the discussion among our community advisors which led to the creation of Healthy Buddies. We are not simply collecting the evaluations and filing them away- we read each form and use the data to create impact-based programs. Healthy Buddies evaluates the students in the program, the school staff and the volunteers as well. Students are given a pre-test the week before the program begins and a post-test the week after the last lesson. The tests are reviewed and compared. School staff and volunteers are asked a series of questions regarding the organization of the program, the effectiveness of the program and ways for improvement in an effort to create a comprehensive and effective program.

The volunteer stations and the on-site coordinators are an important part of the RSVP family. Each of the RSVP sites complete an MOU which is filed in the RSVP office and renewed every three years. The

Narratives

Reading Buddies/Healthy Buddies Coordinator visits each partner school once a month, switching books, monitoring sessions and visiting the volunteers and school staff. We check in monthly with each RSVP site coordinator through email and phone. Recently we instituted a new site visitation policy in which we group the community sites by work plan- visiting all hospitals, then all senior centers, etc. This allows us to see the sites as they relate to one another and make changes to the work plans. We have found this system to be very effective. If there are any problems, the site coordinators know we can be reached at any time since they know us personally. Keeping the sites and the volunteers happy is our number one priority.

The Monmouth County RSVP Advisory Council consists of 10 to 15 members who serve in an advisory capacity in matters affecting planning and program support. Advisory Council membership represents a cross section of the entire county, with members of various ages, occupations, income levels and knowledge or skill sets to help the project achieve its goals and objectives. Those recruited for our RSVP Advisory Council serve as representatives to all RSVP volunteers. Council members advocate for recruitment and community awareness, for RSVP and its sponsor; provide support to the program staff; give recommendations for local project changes and build constructive relationships with community agencies.

The Board of Director's for Family & Children's Service is comprised of 20 members from the community and for-profit and non-profit organizations. The board members provide overall governance, raise money for the agency, bring contacts to the organization, act as ambassadors to the community, evaluate the organization's work and adherence to guidelines, act as a fiduciary body, select the CEO and assess her performance, and ensure the agency is following the mission.

Organizational Capability

More than 100 years ago, a simple act of kindness inspired the evolution of the organization now known as Family & Children's Service. The story began in 1909, when a group of Long Branch businessmen noticed children scrambling in the street for Christmas gifts being thrown from a truck. Moved by what they witnessed, they contributed money to purchase more toys for children in need. The effort became annual, and then broadened over the next few years to involve more members of the community. Before long a permanent organization formed to help satisfy the various unmet needs of children and adults in Long Branch. As the organization took shape, its early years focused on providing such basic items as food, clothing and coal for heating. It evolved over time in conjunction with the needs of the changing society, while remaining committed to its original vision of helping neighbors in need. The programs that began a century ago are still in place today, along with many

Narratives

others, and they continue to better the lives of individuals and families throughout Monmouth County. FCS has been the sponsor for RSVP since 1973 and the agency is committed to maintaining the quality of service offered by the program.

The overall day-to-day operations of the RSVP program are administered by the Volunteer Services Manager and supported by the Administrative Assistant and Reading Buddies/Healthy Buddies Coordinator. In addition, the program has a percentage of time allocated for maintenance staff, HR/Operations and the finance department. Each staff member has an appropriate job description and performance evaluations are completed on an annual basis. Samantha White continues as Volunteer Services Manager, with 80% of her time devoted to RSVP and 20% of her time devoted to other volunteer-based programs that support the intent and purpose of RSVP. A waiver has been filed with and approved by the State office. Ms. White is a Boston College graduate with a degree in Communications and more than five years of management experience. She has been employed by FCS and the RSVP program since 2007.

Lisa Schlosser joined the staff as Reading Buddies/Healthy Buddies Coordinator in March of 2011. Ms. Schlosser is a certified elementary school teacher and has taught throughout Monmouth County in grades ranging from pre-school through 7th. She has also held supervisory positions in before and after-school settings and childcare facilities. Miriam Monroe is the RSVP Administrative Assistant hired in 2009. Ms. Monroe is fully trained to complete data entry, manage all site records, registration forms, mailings and keep the administrative records in order. Ms. Monroe is bi-lingual, speaks Spanish, and has enabled the program to reach the ever-growing Hispanic population in the county. Delly Beekman is the CEO of Family & Children's Service. A member of the FCS Board for more than 24 years, including two as president, Ms. Beekman has an extensive career in nonprofit volunteer management and advocacy. She recently completed a two-year term as president of the Association of Junior Leagues International, Inc., an organization of 293 Junior Leagues in four countries with more than 150,000 members. A member of the Junior League of Monmouth County since 1977, Ms. Beekman also served as its president and most recently advocated with the New Jersey Junior Leagues State Public Affairs Committee. A graduate of Newton College of the Sacred Heart, now merged with Boston College, Ms. Beekman was also on the nominating committee of the Girls Scouts of the Jersey Shore and a member of the board of the Children's Research Triangle in Chicago. For ten years she managed Leadership Shore, a community leadership program offered by Brookdale Community College.

Anna DeJesus, the Chief Financial Officer, handles all transactions and expenditures for RSVP. Ms.

Narratives

DeJesus has worked for Family & Children's Service since 2011. She has a BS in Accounting and 20+ years of experience. Rosemary Cooperstein is the Full Charge Bookkeeper. Ms. Cooperstein has been employed by FCS since 2011 and also has 20+ years of experience.

The RSVP program manager, Samantha White, reports directly to the CEO of Family & Children's Service, Delly Beekman. She attends weekly manager meetings, prepares program reports for the Board of Directors and Advisory Council, reviews the budget on a monthly and quarterly basis with the Chief Financial Officer to review expenditures and has an annual review by the CEO. The Reading Buddies/Healthy Buddies Coordinator, Lisa Schlosser, and the RSVP administrative assistant, Miriam Monroe, report directly to Samantha White. She monitors their work on a daily basis and conducts annual reviews.

Family & Children's Service plays an active role in financing the RSVP program. The CEO, Board of Directors and Development Director research and apply for program grants and donations (both financial and in-kind). In-kind donations of books are a great resource for the Reading Buddies program. Throughout the year, books are collected by local scout troops, businesses, libraries, schools and individuals. During the summer, we collect new backpacks and supplies from local individuals and businesses for the Backpack Project. In total, we are able distribute 600 backpacks from these donations. All funds received by RSVP are tracked and managed by the FCS finance department in conjunction with the program manager, Samantha White. The program manager records all project resources and maintains copies of all financial records

The finance department utilizes MAS 90 accounting software and handles all transactions and expenditures for the RSVP department. Family & Children's Service manages \$1.9 million in county, state and federal grants and has an annual budget of \$3.1 million. In addition, the agency has provided matching funds to sustain the RSVP program for the last 38 years and has an excellent track record in managing the program. FCS provides accounting, clerical and maintenance service, leadership, computer support, Internet and phone service, space and technical support. The Directors of Development and Marketing & Communications work closely with the RSVP program to ensure that we continue to be funded and the programs are marketed.

Other

None

PNS Amendment (if applicable)

Not Applicable