



# 2009 Youth Investment Award Winners



**LAFAYETTE:**  
**FAITH PARTNERS AND FAITH CONNECTIONS,**  
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Wabash Valley



**BLOOMINGTON:**  
**PEOPLE & ANIMAL LEARNING SERVICES (PALS),**  
People & Animal Learning Services (PALS)



**GARY:**  
**MONEY MATTERS,**  
Boys and Girls Clubs of Northwest Indiana



**INDIANAPOLIS:**  
**PARENTS AS TEACHERS,**  
John H. Boner Community Center



**ELKHART:**  
**CARES, Inc.,**  
Elkhart Community Schools CARES



**INDIANAPOLIS:**  
**ST. MARY'S CHILD CARE CENTER,**  
St. Mary's Child Care Center



**ST. LEON:**  
**FAMILY, CAREER AND COMMUNITY LEADERS OF AMERICA,**  
East Central High School and Sunman Dearborn Middle School



**EVANSVILLE:**  
**TEENPOWER,**  
Youth Resources  
TEENPOWER



**WATERLOO:**  
**HELPING OUR PUPILS EXCEL (HOPE),**  
HOPE Helping Our Pupils Excel



**FORT WAYNE:**  
**WELLSPRING SUMMER DAY CAMP,**  
Wellspring Interfaith Social Services

# 2009 YOUTH INVESTMENT AWARD WINNERS



## **LAFAYETTE: BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS FAITH-BASED MENTORING**

A mentoring program in Tippecanoe County demonstrates that teamwork maximizes impact.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Wabash Valley, located in Lafayette, has formed a partnership with the Tippecanoe County juvenile court, the county probation department and dozens of religious congregations to provide mentors for juvenile offenders. As a condition of their probation, low-level offenders between the ages of 11 and 18 have the option of being matched with mentors from local congregations through a program called Faith Partners.

Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) executive director Ronda McKinnis said her organization and the county court system were not the only parties interested in starting a faith-based program.

“We had a number of parents who were requesting a mentor who would model strong faith, so we also developed Faith Connections, a program for any at-risk youth who desire a faith component in the mentoring relationship,” McKinnis said. “It is our desire to give these young people hope for a rich and fulfilling future as they realize their individual worth and grow in their ability to identify their own personal beliefs and values, enabling them to make wise choices and resist negative peer pressure.

And it is working; only 11% of those participating in Faith Connections or Faith Partners between August 2008 and July 2009 reported an increase in delinquency or substance abuse.

Two strategies were used to ensure religious diversity and to protect religious and secular beliefs among participants. First, every religious congregation listed in the Lafayette telephone book was invited to participate. BBBS received responses from mentors representing 47 faith-based organizations including Evangelicals, Catholics, Protestants, Universalists and Native Indian traditions.

Second, program guidelines were established to guarantee that participants would have the option of being matched with a mentor in the Faith-Based program or one of the two other programs offered by BBBS.

Jenny Gossard volunteered to mentor a 14-year-old girl who was failing school after becoming a juvenile offender. “In less than a year, her life has totally turned around,” Gossard said. “She had no one in her life who cared. I’ve brought love and care into her life, and that’s what was needed for her to turn her life around.”

Another mentor, Mike Webster, said the youth he mentors is developing trusting relationships with adults and is becoming more responsible. “If there are things that you like doing that a kid will like doing, then you should be a mentor,” Webster said. “Take a kid under your wing and tell that kid what you know. We all can share what we know.”

**Faith Partners and Faith Connections**  
**Big Brothers Big Sisters of Wabash Valley**  
3805 Fortune Drive, Suite 2 | Lafayette, Indiana 47905  
info@bbbslaf.com | (765) 446-BBBS (2227)  
www.bbbslaf.com



# 2009 YOUTH INVESTMENT AWARD WINNERS



## GARY: MONEY MATTERS

Driving north on Broadway Avenue in Gary reveals a postcard of urban blight. Vacant storefronts cast shadows over abandoned buildings that are turning to rubble as makeshift signs honor the departed hometown son, Michael Jackson.

The only bright lights on the avenue belong to a pay day loan center, a business that offers quick cash in return for high fees and even higher interest rates. Fortunately, the avenue also is home to the Boys and Girls Clubs of Northwest Indiana, which remains in the neighborhood to be part of the solution.

The Boys and Girls Clubs of Northwest Indiana hosts “Money Matters,” a national Boys and Girls Club curriculum teaching financial skills to middle and high school students. More than 100 students at six locations throughout Lake County have learned how to develop short, medium and long-term financial goals. They learned about using a check book, reading a bank statement and about how to properly use and manage credit.

The curriculum also provided advice on how to analyze personal spending and saving habits, develop a realistic budget and how to compare products and services when shopping. Finally, the students learned basic business skills related to supply and demand, negotiation and how to develop a business plan.

“The biggest impact of this program is teaching the kids about setting a budget,” said director of program services Bertha Payne. “This is such a new idea to them – prioritizing their spending, not spending if you’re low on money, and even simple things like choosing generic and store brands at the grocery store.

“We also make kids aware of all of the costs involved with a purchase, including taxes. The kids really have their eyes opened to planning and spending and the wise use of credit.”

The curriculum is taught by volunteers employed by People’s Bank, which also funds the program. Payne said the healthy relationships that form between the volunteers and the students are another benefit of the program.

“One of the kids learned that the bank chairman and CEO they were working with was from East Chicago,” she said. “Later, the child said, ‘You mean he made it coming out of East Chicago?’

“We are making kids aware of what is possible in their lives. If they know the information and know the opportunities, then they know they can be successful. As my mother used to say, ‘If you knew better, you would do better.’”

### Money Matters

**Boys and Girls Clubs of Northwest Indiana**  
839 Broadway, 3rd Floor | Gary, IN 46402  
bpayne@bgcnwi.org | (219) 881-1060 Phone  
www.nwipositiveplace.org



# 2009 YOUTH INVESTMENT AWARD WINNERS



## **ELKHART: CARES, INC.**

Leading with the end in mind is one of the habits of highly effective people and a key strategy of an effective tutoring and mentoring program in Elkhart.

The CARES program emphasizes reading, vocabulary and other literacy skills for students in grades 1-3 in hopes that a strong start in early grades will achieve the long-term goal of increasing high school graduation rates.

Community volunteers are recruited to work with students who have low reading scores. The students meet with their mentor three times each week for 10 weeks, working on activities tailored to the student's specific academic needs.

Halfway through the 10-week program, participating students increase their reading and literacy skills three times faster than peers who are not in the program. By the end of the 10-week session, all students gain significantly in at least one skill related to reading or vocabulary.

"This is such a simple thing to do, and the academic gains of the students are remarkable," said Bill Beck, who volunteers as a mentor. "The success of my student encouraged me to go out and kick butt to recruit more volunteers."

The volunteer strategy was developed after a series of community meetings identified the high school drop out rate as a serious problem.

"We saw the connection between being able to read by the time you're in 4th grade and the likelihood that you'll graduate from high school, so we decided to focus on reading in those early grades," said Darren Bickel of the United Way. "By 4th grade, you're reading to learn instead of learning to read."

Volunteers also mentor children to help them deal with family, social or emotional problems. "Sure, there are specific academic activities, but these kids just need a friend," explained volunteer mentor Jay Weldy. "It's beautiful to see what happens to these kids when they have someone who is consistent in their lives. A child will not learn from somebody who they don't have a relationship with. Developing a relationship with a caring adult is the first step toward learning."

And the kids want to learn. "When I was waiting for my student one day, two other students pulled up chairs and wanted to read to me," said Beck. "You never hear about kids wanting to do their school work."

Principal Arlene Silba added, "There has never been a time when one of the students wanted to leave early instead of staying after school for this program."

**Elkhart Community Schools CARES**  
2720 California Road | Elkhart, IN 46514  
emoore@elkhart.k12.in.us | (574) 262-5944  
<http://www.elkhart.k12.in.us/content.php?id=36>



# 2009 YOUTH INVESTMENT AWARD WINNERS



## **ST. LEON: FAMILY, CAREER AND COMMUNITY LEADERS OF AMERICA**

Balancing family life with career opportunities and community involvement can be a challenge, but failing to find the proper balance can make life even more challenging.

That's the message learned by students involved with the Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) program at East Central High School and Sunman Dearborn Middle School. Nearly 200 students from the southeast Indiana rural community of St. Leon are receiving leadership lessons on how to pursue career dreams and serve in their local community while still giving priority to their families.

"Families are busy today, so we teach the students that you need to stop and prioritize and determine what you're going to do with your family life when you're an adult," said program coordinator Brenda Osman.

Jenny Abplanalp, a student in the program, added, "I've learned about balancing family life with school and our club activities and my part-time job. Family life is so important. It's the best way to keep the kids away from drinking and drugs and other trouble. So while I'm interested in my career, I need to make sure I'm staying involved with my family."

Classmate Britney Callahan agrees. "When you're in high school, you rely on your friends a lot," Callahan said. "But when you graduate, you won't stay in touch with most of those people. However, your family will always be there and can always be a big impact on your life."

FCCLA delivers these life-changing lessons through hands-on projects on topics related to parenting, family relationships, substance abuse, peer pressure, assisting the elderly, nutrition and fitness, personal finance, teen violence and career exploration. The projects are designed to enhance an understanding of family life while building leadership skills that students will use in their careers and as community volunteers.

Hannah Bush, another student in the program, said the primary importance of family life is helping her keep her options in perspective. "FCCLA has taught me a lot about myself," Bush said. She candidly admitted, "We do a lot of activities with children, which has taught me I don't want to have a lot of children."

"I want to go into law and use my public speaking skills. I still want to have a family, but this program has provided me with a lot of focus."

**Family, Career and Community Leaders of America**  
**East Central High School and Sunman Dearborn Middle School**  
**1 Trojan Place | St. Leon, IN 47012**  
**bosman@sunmandearborn.k12.in.us | (812) 576-4811 ext. 11302**  
**www.sunmandearborn.k12.in.us**



# 2009 YOUTH INVESTMENT AWARD WINNERS



## WATERLOO: HELPING OUR PUPILS EXCEL (HOPE)

While Napoleon met his end at Waterloo, the small town of the same name in northeast Indiana is providing a strong start for at-risk students.

The county's school districts host Helping Our Pupils Excel (HOPE), a school-based mentoring program connecting adult volunteers with students able to benefit by having another caring adult in their lives for one hour each week. Nearly 100 students in grades K-5 receive tutoring help in reading, writing and math from caring mentors who also are there to help the students through social challenges at school and at home.

"The students certainly need academic help, but most of the time they just need someone to listen to their stories," said Holly Wright, who is a literacy coordinator at J.E. Ober Elementary School in Garrett. "As teachers, we are busy working on academics for the entire class. A mentor, however, can listen to a student and help in the student's personal life. The mentor makes a connection and talks with the student about what is important to them."

Volunteers receive a 90-minute training on mentoring. The orientation and the resulting mentoring activities are based on standards established by the National Training Institute for School-based Mentoring and on the "Elements of Effective Practice" designed by the National Mentoring Partnership.

Mentors then help students with academic skills, provide support socially and emotionally and help students learn skills in planning, goal-setting and problem-solving.

"The biggest key to success is the one-on-one relationship," said Waterloo Elementary School principal Mark Benbow. "The mentor can interact with the student on a personal level."

Chuck Schmidt, who volunteers as a mentor, notices the difference. "The students respond to the one-on-one attention," Schmidt said. "Plus, they know the mentor is volunteering to be there and is not being paid. That means they know the mentor really cares."

"Many of these kids in poverty are not on a level playing field," Schmidt continued. "They are going uphill all the way, so they need all the help they can get."

According to principal Benbow, Waterloo Elementary is enjoying improvement in ISTEP scores, and Benbow believes the mentoring program is largely responsible.

Program director Judy Sorg said involving more caring adults in the lives of at-risk kids holds the greatest promise for increasing academic achievement. "Schools can't do it all by themselves," she said. "Success in school requires help from the entire community."

**HOPE Helping Our Pupils Excel**  
PO Box 111 | Auburn, IN 46706  
[jsorg@dekalbfoundation.org](mailto:jsorg@dekalbfoundation.org) | 260-925-0311  
[www.hopedekalbcounty.org](http://www.hopedekalbcounty.org)



# 2009 YOUTH INVESTMENT AWARD WINNERS



## **BLOOMINGTON: PEOPLE & ANIMAL LEARNING SERVICES (PALS)**

Saddle up your horses. Children with disabilities have a trail to blaze.

People & Animal Learning Services (PALS) provides equine-assisted activities to children with physical, cognitive and emotional disabilities. The activities improve strength, coordination and balance. The activities also help children develop learning skills along with short- and long-term memory.

One PALS rider, the nine-year-old daughter of Suzanne Donnelly, has cerebral palsy and has been in physical therapy since she was three months old. After riding a horse at PALS for the last two years, “Her balance has improved dramatically, she is running and climbing steps,” Donnelly said. “She moves around completely independently only requiring supervision. Her progress has been phenomenal.”

Participating children are evaluated by a PALS instructor, certified by the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA) as a therapeutic riding instructor. The instructor works with family members, riders and caregivers to develop specific riding and therapy-related goals based on what riders need to achieve during their lessons at PALS. Dedicated volunteers, numbering 150, five NARHA certified instructors and 11 therapy horses assist in implementing the individual goals and provide safe and effective weekly therapeutic riding lessons of 30-45 minutes in length.

As a result, 75 percent of the riders improve their self-confidence, 67 percent demonstrate improved balance, nearly half enjoy increased muscle strength and 41 percent improve their communication skills.

“I definitely see how this helps children with disabilities improve their body strength and their balance,” said PALS head instructor, Jennifer Lung. “It is not unusual to have a child start by needing four people to help them get onto a horse and then work to get to the point where they pretty much can do it on their own.”

Fern Boncheck, PALS founder, executive director and instructor, tells of an autistic child who spoke his first words while riding his horse at PALS. “When you’re on a horse, you need to communicate to the horse and to the others you’re riding with,” Boncheck explained from her makeshift office inside a barn. “During one of the sessions, the boy told his horse, ‘Walk on,’ and that was the most he ever had spoken up to that point.”

Lung, Boncheck’s partner at PALS, added, “The kids know when it’s PALS day. They’re dressed and have their riding boots on, ready to go. That’s different from their normal therapy sessions which the parents tell us they need to drag their kids to.”

Suzanne Donnelly knows why. “With a horse, there are no gender gaps, no racial differences and no disabilities,” Donnelly explained. “The horse treats everyone the same.”

**People & Animal Learning Services (PALS)**  
PO Box 1033 | Bloomington, IN 47402  
pals@indiana.edu | 812-336-2798  
www.palstherapy.org



# 2009 YOUTH INVESTMENT AWARD WINNERS



## INDIANAPOLIS: PARENTS AS TEACHERS

Moving up the academic ladder at school often starts on a floor mat at home.

Parents as Teachers, a free in-home program offered by the John H. Boner Community Center, provides parents education and family support which not only prepares children for kindergarten, but also helps build stronger bonds between child and parent.

Each month, parent educators visit homes of low-income families in Indianapolis and provide materials to show parents how to teach their child using simple, quick and easy techniques. The educators – with play mats, learning materials and clean-up supplies in hand – get onto the floor with the family’s pre-schooler. By teaching the child, the family educator also aims to teach the parents how to identify their child’s learning style, helping the parents to become fully involved with their child’s education.

“In low-income communities, education often is not a priority because it does not meet an immediate need,” explained Regina Trout, the Boner Center’s children and youth director. “When you’re living in crisis on a day-to-day basis, you’re not going to see the long-term benefits of education. School is nothing more than a safe place to send my child for the day.

The program has numerous benefits, such as parents learning how to use basic activities and household items to help build a child’s skill set and increasing a parent’s knowledge of and reinforcing the importance of early childhood development and parenting practices. The result is that children will be better prepared and more successful once they enter school and parents receive information, support, and encouragement needed to help their child develop during these key years of life.

“We try to break through all of that by forming relationships. By getting down on the floor to work with the child helps you to start building trust. That also is why we meet in the family’s home and not in our local community center,” said Trout.

Families are referred to the program through Healthy Families, churches and schools. After an initial assessment of the child’s abilities, the family educator visits the family’s home on a weekly basis, working with the child in the presence of the parent.

“The child’s teacher at school will be different each year, but the parent will be with the child each year,” said Terri Bailey, the Boner Center’s deputy executive director. “If the child doesn’t have that parent involved, being their advocate and checking on their homework, that will make school so much more challenging for the student.”

Parent educator and social worker Crystal Johnson sees improvement. “The biggest progress I see is the change in the parents, especially in convincing them that education is important,” Johnson explained. “So many of the parents don’t think education is important.”

Proof is found on a nearby billboard purchased by the local school district which identified the need to remind parents to send their kids to school on the first day of the new school year.

“We’re breaking down barriers for parents who have a stigma about being at school,” Bailey added. “When parents were students, everything about school was negative. The program emphasizes the positives about education so that parents will get more involved with their child’s homework and their child’s school.”

**Parents as Teachers**  
**John H. Boner Community Center**  
2236 E. 10th Street | Indianapolis, IN 46201  
tbailey@enn.org | 317-633-8210  
www.enn.org



# 2009 YOUTH INVESTMENT AWARD WINNERS



## INDIANAPOLIS: ST. MARY'S CHILD CARE CENTER

A group of students walking along the downtown canal in Indianapolis with clipboards and research questions could be attending the nearby college campus shared by I.U. and Purdue. Or, they just as likely could be low-income four-year-olds from a local child care center with an innovative strategy.

St. Mary's Child Care Center, serving a student body living in poverty, uses internationally-acclaimed teaching methods developed in Reggio Emilia, Italy. The strategy emphasizes that all children – regardless of family or community background – are strong, competent and capable, and these attributes are taught and strengthened through child-directed research projects.

“In this environment, the teacher no longer is the person with all of the power or all of the answers,” explained center director Connie Sherman. “Instead, the teacher is a co-researcher with the students on their projects.”

Sherman says pre-schoolers enter the program one-to-two years behind their age group in academic and social skills. After attending St. Mary's for two years, 88 percent of the students are developmentally ready for kindergarten.

“You don't have to eliminate every risk factor before a child can improve,” Sherman insists. “Every child can learn. We accept no excuses.”

Students work together on research projects that they help design. They collaborate on developing a series of questions and then work together to find answers. While this may sound like a lot of independence for pre-schoolers, Sherman says behavior problems are minimal because kids become fully engaged in their projects.

St. Mary's provides transportation and social work services while also trying to involve parents through monthly “Family Nights.” Importantly, the child care center serves meals and ensures that food always can be seen in the classroom.

“Children from poor families often are worried about food, so much so that they will hide food around their houses to make sure they always have something to eat,” Sherman explained. “So we make sure food always is visible in our classroom. The kids know they will be able to eat, so food does not become a distraction.”

During a recent research trip to the Indianapolis neighborhood of Fountain Square, the students examined the ornate fountain at the center of the community. One student completed the examination by wondering, “If the fountain is round, why do they call this Fountain Square?”

Great question from a child who is developing self-confidence and self-worth with skills that can lead to life-long learning and life-long success.

**St. Mary's Child Care Center**  
901 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Street | Indianapolis, IN 46202  
csherman@stmaryschildcenter.org | 317-635-1491  
www.stmaryschildcenter.org



# 2009 YOUTH INVESTMENT AWARD WINNERS



## EVANSVILLE: TEENPOWER

An annual summer camp in southwest Indiana is converting peer pressure into peer power.

Youth Resources, based in Evansville, hosts annual TEENPOWER camps for middle and high school students who learn life skills concerning positive body image, dealing with peer pressure, preventing bullying and youth violence as well as suicide prevention. With the camps held on the campuses of the University of Evansville and the University of Southern Indiana, the students also are exposed to the possibilities of college studies and college life.

The intensive week of keynote speeches, workshops and small group activities is designed by teenagers and produces dramatic results. “I was shy and quiet when I was a teenager, but TEENPOWER taught me about myself and helped me build confidence in myself,” said Stephanie Roland, who now is an executive with Old National Bank.

“People see me now and think I was always this way, working as a successful professional. But that is not the case. TEENPOWER made all the difference in the world to me.”

Zach Kovack, went through the camp in high school, graduated from college and now serves as a camp counselor. Kovack said the life-transformation that occurs during the week of camp is extraordinary. “Kids come to camp as regular kids,” he said, “but they leave as leaders in their schools and as servants in their local communities.”

The camp also provides students with an opportunity to deal with serious challenges they are facing. “I can’t tell you how many times one of the kids will say, ‘I never told anyone this before, but...,’” said Nina Bernardin, who serves as a camp counselor. “They end up talking about heavy stuff in their personal lives, and they often find people who have dealt with the same things and can help them deal with that, too.”

Students also improve communication with their parents. “I came home and couldn’t stop talking about all that I did,” said Carolyn Jones, who now is in college. “I had been so shy and not interested in too much, but I was completely changed. My mom said, ‘What have you done with my daughter?’”

And as Emily Strahle of Youth Resources notes, “Improving communication with parents is one of the best predictors of a kid staying off of drugs.”

**Youth Resources TEENPOWER**  
PO Box 3635 | Evansville, IN 47735  
krista@youth-resources.org | 812-421-0030 ext. 12  
www.youth-resources.org



# 2009 YOUTH INVESTMENT AWARD WINNERS



## **FT. WAYNE: WELLSRING SUMMER DAY CAMP**

A remarkable collaboration between Wellspring Interfaith Social Services and downtown religious congregations is providing a cure for the summer time blues.

The Wellspring Summer Day Camp provides seven weeks of summer camp in many Ft. Wayne neighborhoods struggling with a poverty rate of 18 percent – 5 percentage points higher than the national average. Research from the National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) reveals that two-thirds of the academic achievement gap suffered by low-income children is created during the summer, when students are out of school. Wellspring is helping fill that gap.

“We focus on the kids who otherwise would not be in a structured summer camp,” said Wellspring director Frank Zirille. “The kids in our camp have somebody paying attention to them, and they know someone cares about them. If not for our camp, they’d be sitting around and doing nothing, or just watching TV.”

Wellspring provides transportation each day to five different camp sites donated by local congregations. The students enjoy weekly instruction on art, dance, music and yoga. All campers then gather at a local public park for lunch and physical activities.

Each week includes a field trip to locations such as the local zoo, the roller skating rink, the bowling alley or the local putt-putt golf course. In addition, Zirille says the campers work on community service projects.

“We do community service projects to teach these low-income kids that they have something to offer. Yes, them,” Zirille explained. “They have something they can give to others and to their local community.”

Zirille finds strength in the program’s diversity. “Our kids are Black, white, Latino, Asian, bi-racial. Our camp is like the United Nations,” he said. “Our camp allows kids to mix with kids from other cultures.”

Diversity also is evident among Wellspring’s partners. The camp is supported by a collaboration of 16 religious congregations – Jewish, Catholic and Protestant.

“Wellspring and local congregations are committed to serving the core of Fort Wayne,” Zirille said. “By partnering we are able to provide needed services and programs for youth, seniors and families.”

All of Wellspring’s programs are offered at no cost.

The camp’s activities are designed in the context of the 40 Developmental Assets, and Zirille says one strategy in particular is key. “We treat kids with dignity and respect,” he said, “so they learn how to treat others with dignity and respect.”

**Wellspring Youth Summer Day Camp**  
**Wellspring Interfaith Social Services**  
1316 Broadway | Fort Wayne, IN 46802  
fzirille@wellspringinterfaith.org | 260-422-6618  
www.wellspringinterfaith.org

