

**Boys & Girls Club of Greater Goshen, Inc.**  
**2003 Indiana Achievement Awards**  
**Award Category: Sustainability/Large Organization**  
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**Award Sponsor: The Sycamore Foundation**

**Organizational Mission:**

To inspire and enable all young people, especially those from disadvantaged circumstances, to realize their full potential as productive, responsible and caring citizens. The Club establishes on-going relationships between the children and caring adult professionals, and provides hope, opportunity and a safe place to learn.

**Organizational Overview:**

The Boys & Girls Club of Greater Goshen serves 1,860 youth from families living in Elkhart County. Besides Goshen, it serves youth from both Nappanee and Middlebury, and is anticipating expansion into other Elkhart County communities. It has three primary facilities, five off-site educational service locations, and an annual operating budget of \$1.2 million.

In 1994, as part of a program of thorough-going reforms precipitated by a financial crisis, new leadership was brought in. The new management recognized that children have greater needs than simple recreational programming can adequately address, and that the Club needed to broaden the services it offered to young people. As a result, the Club initiated its transition from a dreary clubhouse where youth "hung out," to a comprehensive youth development organization. Today, in an upgraded, safe and supportive environment, and under the direction of caring and trained adults, the Club provides awareness, understanding, and competence instruction, intended to enable its young members to effectively manage their life situations.

As Kevin Deary, president and chief executive officer says, "It's not about recreation. It's about guidance. We don't care why they come through the door, we just care that they DO. The Club exists to see that all children are given the gifts of time and individual attention from adults, in a safe atmosphere. Activities, from the simplest game of pool to the more advanced substance abuse prevention programs, promote character development as well as behavioral proficiency and knowledge. We believe the world can be changed one child at a time. The staff monitors and encourages each child, giving them a secure base from which to view the world, offering them hope and the opportunity to dream."

Year 2000 statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau show that, of the population served by the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Goshen, thirty-nine percent of heads of households do not hold a high school diploma. Of that thirty-nine percent, fifteen percent have not

advanced educationally beyond 9th grade. In addition, thirty-five percent of all households in the Boys & Girls Club's service population list a grandparent as a primary caregiver. Twenty-four percent of this population is Hispanic, and these children often struggle with language barriers and lack of academic success. Over half do not pass the state ISTEP examinations.

Heads of households often struggle with one or more low-paying jobs, and that often means leaving children unattended for several hours after school. Typically, this is when children are vulnerable to substance abuse and other at-risk behaviors, and become participants in, or victims of, crime.

The Club's mission is to provide a safe and supportive environment free of such temptations and dangers, offering educational and academic assistance, social and interpersonal skills and athletic and recreational programs.

In 1994, following the change of leadership, the Club faced several significant challenges. The Boys & Girls Club of Greater Goshen had become unstructured and disconnected from its mission. United Way was at that point contributing 71 % of Club operating funds, and it had given the Club six months to remediate its deficiencies or suffer the loss of United Way financial support.

In response to this crisis, the new leadership developed and implemented a strategic plan:

- First, new board members were selected, chosen because they believed in the Club mission statement and were passionate about the well-being of children. The new Board was enlisted with the clear understanding that organizational success would come only with the active participation and hard work of all Board members. It was made clear that no one wishing to be a figurehead need apply. The organization's subsequent, successful transformation owes much to the many hard-working members who were willing to join the Board of Directors then and through those subsequent years, knowing that they would be expected to devote considerable time, energy and resources to the work of the organization.
- The second part of the strategic plan required transformation of the Club from a building where some recreation was available into a safe, "fun" place to learn, play and form positive relationships with staff and other children. Structured programming, expanded staff, additional volunteer workers, and development of strong relationships with local schools and area businesses all were part of the plan, and all contributed to an explosion in membership, which continues today.

- If the Club was to raise the resources and generate the support required in order to allow it to deliver the expanded services, the public needed to be made aware of its existence and availability, and the nature of those services. Accordingly, the third part of the new strategic plan focused upon publicity and public relations, accomplished largely through extensive presentations by Club staff at area schools, businesses, service clubs and other organizations, and on resource development. Several annual fundraising events and campaigns were established during this time. These efforts, together with positive feedback from parents of Club members, helped in the development of positive relationships with, and improved coverage by, the local media. That coverage in turn created a positive climate for fund development.

Club growth achieved through adherence to the strategic plan eventually resulted in the building of a \$3.8 million facility in Goshen (1998) and the establishment of two additional primary Club units, one in Nappanee (1998) and one in Middlebury (2002).

### **Program Description:**

Programs to support members' academic achievement are now a primary Club focus. Tutoring and general academic assistance are offered both in-house and off-site at five Goshen and Nappanee elementary schools, in an effort to reach children who may be unable to travel to Club facilities. Learning Centers at each Club unit are supplied with up-to-date computer technology and print material libraries; and a qualified professional staff provides after-school homework help and academic assistance. Similar support is offered at the five off-site facilities, a program feature that has led to a strengthening of ties between the Clubs and local schools.

The new emphasis on academic support requires substantial funding, and during the past year, the organization has hired a full-time Development Director and a half-time Development Opportunity Associate. These positions are charged with creating and implementing plans that will ensure the availability of adequate financial resources. Under the direction of the Development Director, the Club engages in a variety of fundraising events and projects. The Director and Associate are also responsible for the growing endowment fund, and for obtaining contracts and grants. Finally, they are charged with managing "Back-A-Kid," the organization's annual operating campaign.

The employment of development staff has not replaced the emphasis upon the responsibilities of Board members. Quite the contrary; as members retire, every effort is made to ensure that their replacements are as passionate about serving children and as committed to the organization as the member being replaced. Board members are expected to promote the Club at every opportunity, and to seek out fundraising opportunities to support added staff and programs. As the Club has expanded into Nappanee and Middlebury, similar Boards have been established for those satellite facilities. The centrality and importance of Board participation continues to be a core tenet of the Clubs.

### **Program Results:**

The management reforms instituted in 1994 have paid handsome dividends. Before 1994, total membership in the Boys & Girls Club was 211, and the annual budget was \$93,000. Current membership stands at 1,860 young people, and the annual budget has grown to \$1.2 million. In 1994, the total staff consisted of one full-time and one part-time position, assisted by sixteen volunteers. This year, staff numbers thirteen full-time and 25 part-time positions, and those employees are aided by over 350 volunteers.

Similar growth can be seen by comparing past and present revenue sources that sustain the organization. In 1994, all income came from three sources: individual and business contributions, which accounted for twenty-nine percent, and the United Way, which accounted for seventy-one percent. This year, the Club can point to interest income from a healthy and growing endowment fund, an annual campaign targeting individual and corporate/business donors, a number of special events (including an annual auction), grants from the federal government and from private foundations, and continued support from the area United Way.

Initial success in Goshen has led to replication in other Elkhart county communities. The Nappanee club opened in 1998, and currently serves 410 members. The Middlebury club, which opened in 2002, had 260 members after only two months of operation. Each expansion to a new community has been accompanied by the development of working relationships with individuals, businesses, schools and service clubs in that town. Those relationships in turn generate money and membership. The establishment of the satellite facilities has not come at the expense of the first club; instead, it has strengthened the sustainability of the original club by building additional partnerships and acquainting more people with the mission and program of the organization.

### **Program Impact:**

The primary evidence of impact is in the numbers, especially the number of children and youth served—from 20 youth per day prior to 1994 to a current membership of 1,860. This growth in membership, however, cannot be separated from the change in program emphasis, the growth in financial support or from the upgrading of facilities. Each element has supported and reinforced the others, enhancing the stability and sustainability of the organization.

Prior to the change in leadership that initiated the new approach to service delivery, local area schools had been less than supportive of the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Goshen. The school located nearest to the Club, the Chamberlain Elementary School, had even sent warnings to parents about the poorly supervised and rowdy members who liked to "hang out" at the Club. Evidence of the magnitude of the change is that Chamberlain Elementary now distributes flyers promoting Club activities, and the Club works closely

with other schools in its service area. Coordination with the public schools is a critical element in the Club's ability to do its job, and the current good working relationship and mutual respect provides added evidence of impact and sustainability.

### **Potential as a Model:**

The Club's potential as a model is obvious from the replication that has already taken place within Elkhart County. Among the important lessons about sustainability that the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Goshen can teach are:

- The critical importance of a good strategic plan tightly tied to the organizational mission. In 1994, when the Club was facing a crisis, the response was to create strategies that would allow the Club to survive by refocusing on its mission, and making that mission absolutely central to all changes made. The mission thus drove the plan, and provided an essential justification for the steps subsequently taken.
- The equally critical role of the Board of Directors. One of the problems identified by the new leadership in 1994 was the composition and involvement of the Board. That problem was addressed by creating new and stringent criteria for membership on the Board: a passion for children and the Club's mission, and a willingness to assume the duties expected of an active Board member. These expectations were clearly communicated to people *before* they came on the Board. This focus on the importance of the Board has continued, and a great strength of the Club-and predictor of sustainability-is that it insists upon a *working* Board of Directors.
- The importance of the right staff leadership, with the courage to make difficult decisions. The crisis in 1994 could easily have resulted in the demise of a needed social service. Instead, new leadership was found that was committed to the organization's mission, and willing to make the program and personnel changes that fidelity to the mission required.
- Recognition of the interrelationship of public education and development. The strategic plan put in place in 1994 was based on an understanding that in order to raise financial and volunteer resources, an organization requires good public relations. When an organization engages in public education and outreach, it is cultivating future financial support. Too often, the job of public education-which can be time-consuming and which does not offer immediate rewards-is seen as a luxury, expendable when staff is spread thin or engaged in service provision. This is a mistake that the Boys & Girls Club did not make, and the results confirm the wisdom of the chosen approach.