

Grant Update

A Summary of Grant Activity

Governor's Crime Commission

NC Criminal Justice Analysis Center

The Reidsville Teen Center

Recent events in North Carolina have raised our awareness of gang violence and juvenile delinquency. Gang activity is increasing, not only in metropolitan areas, but also in smaller towns and rural areas of the state. In 2007, the City of Reidsville applied for a grant to fund a 'Teen Center' to provide a safe place for youth to meet, with the goal of preventing juvenile delinquency and gang participation.

Chief Edd Hunt of the Reidsville Police Department established the Youth Advisory Board in an effort to address these problems in the Reidsville area. Approaching the problem head-on, the board met with a group of middle and high school students to ask them about the problems they faced and what solutions they could suggest. The students told the board they had no place to go and nothing to do. They asked for a safe place to meet, where they could take part in recreational activities, work on homework and just hang out. Most programs available were either athletic in nature or unaffordable for many of the youth. The community needed a youth center, focused on non-athletic recreation and social activities, educational opportunities and prevention programs. A great deal has been done since that first meeting and the Reidsville Teen Center has proved to be an asset to the city.



The Reidsville Teen Center was relocated to its current location at 506 Sprinkle Street in 2007. This larger facility serves approximately 30-50 youth daily by providing recreation, organized activities and adult supervision six days a week.

The Problem

Juvenile crime and juvenile delinquency are escalating in Reidsville and the surrounding area. During 2006, a total of 538 complaints were made against 409 different juveniles who were subsequently charged with committing an offense. In 2006, 11 gangs were known to be operating in Rockingham County, while the Reidsville Police Department identified nine known gangs in the city alone. Dropout rates and absenteeism were increasing in area schools. Local juveniles spent their evenings on the streets, unsupervised, where they were exposed to gangs, drugs, violence and other criminal activities.

The Grant

The Reidsville Teen Center works with the Reidsville Police Department and other community organizations to prevent juvenile delinquency and gang participation. It offers a place for young people between the ages of 10 and 17 to meet where they can use the services, programs and information to help them make better life choices. The center provides them with a positive alternative to delinquent activities

Grant Update: The Reidsville Teen Center



Left, Harry Brown, Director of Parks and Recreation for the City of Reidsville; right - Nick Aceves, Reidsville Teen Center supervisor, in the main recreation room at the Teen Center.

and gang participation. Many of the youth come from single parent homes while others are looking for role models and guidance in their lives. The bond between staff and young members provides additional support to help them to make better decisions in their lives.

Goals and Objectives

The goal of the Reidsville Teen Center is to reduce juvenile delinquency, juvenile crime, the school dropout rate, school absenteeism, and youth/street gang participation by providing positive

alternatives for youth through supervised learning programs, recreational activities, behavior-based programs and life skills programs.

Operations

The Teen Center is open Monday through Saturday. Hours vary daily to accommodate school schedules and extended hours are offered during the summer months. Five part-time staff members assist the Teen Center Supervisor, Nick Aceves, with mentoring and supervising attendees and delivering program services. In November 2007, the Teen Center moved into a new facility on Sprinkle Street that allows the center to serve up to 75 youth daily, a dramatic increase from the previous capacity of 25 at the older facility. The new facility has a kitchen and snacks are provided at a nominal cost. There is a separate computer room and a game room, as well as office space for the staff.

The center focuses on preventing juvenile delinquency by providing productive alternative activities in a safe environment, including after-school homework assistance, a computer lab for research and school projects, and recreational and social activities. Specialized programs such as drug and alcohol awareness, anger management, teen wellness/prevention, life skills, bicycle safety, gang awareness and the “Campus to Campus College Discovery” program are well attended and help reinforce and sustain the protective factors identified in the Juvenile Crime Prevention Council (JCPC) annual county plan. The center offers four video game systems, two pool tables, a foosball table, a stereo system, an air hockey table, and a VCR/DVD combo system for recreational use. Special events such as field trips, pool and video game tournaments, and holiday parties are scheduled monthly to keep members involved.

The Teen Center does not charge admission or membership fees and is accessible to participants from all income levels. All potential members must apply for membership and are required to adhere to a strict code of conduct. Rules are enforced by the members of the Teen Center. Members are not allowed to attend if they have been suspended from school. The staff of the Teen Center keeps an open line of communication with teachers and school administrators, so they are aware of grades, attendance and problems that occur during the school day. A variety of activities encourage participation by parents, such as field trips to games and a parent’s night. Special events are scheduled for members, including pool tournaments, video football tournaments and separate Girls’/Boys’ Nights.

“The Teen Center has made more of an impact on my life that I can ever explain. The staff provided vital support for me. They helped supply me with some of my basic needs. They offered support and counseling for me. With all the help and encouragement I get at the Teen Center, I know I will be the best I can be.”

— Ronje Irving

Grant Update: The Reidsville Teen Center

Community Involvement

The Reidsville and Rockingham County communities are actively involved in the activities and direction of the Teen Center. The center collaborates with the Rockingham County JCPC, Rockingham County Youth Involvement, the Reidsville and Vicinity Ministerial Alliance, the Department of Social Services, Rockingham County Sheriff's Office, Reidsville police and fire departments, and the Reidsville YMCA. The Advisory Committee represents a cross-section of the community, including local businesses, youth service organizations, the police and fire departments, schools, faith-based organizations and other groups. The committee meets with the center staff and advises them on all aspects of operation. Reidsville Parks and Recreation Department Director Harry Brown serves as project director. The committee is currently chaired by the Reverend Clarence Johnson.

"... it's a home away from home. It's also a place where you can express your feelings and get stuff off your chest. If I didn't have that bond with the staff members, I don't know what I would have done."

— Jermaine McCain

The Reidsville Police Department is particularly involved with the Teen Center. Officers meet with youth informally on a regular basis to discuss gang prevention and related problems. The department also provides ongoing surveillance via cameras set up in each area of the center. These cameras are monitored to ensure the center is safe and secure at all times.

Accomplishments

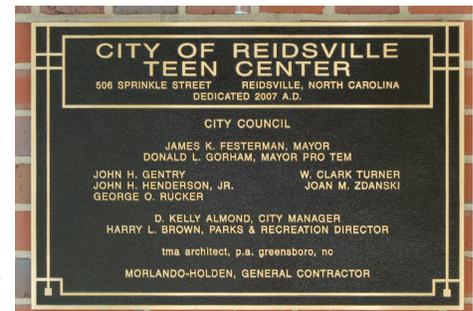
During the 2006-2007 grant cycle, 357 youth were served at the Teen Center, with a total of 6,080 visits, an average of 17 visits per member. Allowing for members who have aged out, moved or stopped attending for other reasons, 46 percent visited the center at least once a week. Each quarter, members averaged 150 hours of homework assistance and 318 hours of specialized services in such areas as anger management, gang awareness, drug abuse, and wellness issues. Overall, 92 percent showed an improvement in at least two subjects on report cards. Over the year, three members were involved in delinquent behavior, but no charges were filed. Only one member has been asked not to return to the center.

Chief Hunt stated that the city has seen some positive changes since opening the Teen Center. Overall, juvenile delinquency rates have gone down and the dropout rate has been reduced. While these changes are the result of a combination of factors, the Teen Center has played a significant role in these achievements. Chief Hunt adds that the impact of the Teen Center on the youth of Reidsville has been a positive one for the city as a whole.

Summary

In June, 2008, Reidsville was named one of ten cities nationwide designated as an All-America City. One of the contributing factors in receiving the award was the Teen Center. Three members of the center participated in the final presentation in Tampa, Florida and spoke to the judges about their experiences.

The Teen Center is unique in that facilities of its nature are not usually found in cities the size of Reidsville. Since its implementation, it has gained the support of the community who recognize the value of the center as a safe place for youth to meet and to provide services and support to those who might not otherwise receive it. The City of Reidsville has recognized the value of the Teen Center and is committed to the continuing success of the program.



The new Teen Center was dedicated in November 2007. The center almost doubled in size and tripled its capacity from its previous facility.

"Thanks to the Teen Center and its staff, I am proud to say that I am a 2007 honors graduate of Rockingham County Senior High School and a 2007 Chancellor's Academic Scholarship recipient at Winston-Salem State University."

— Jasmine Clyburn

The Reidsville Teen Center

GRANT SUMMARY

Area Served: City of Reidsville and Surrounding Area

Implementing Agency: City of Reidsville

Project Director: Harry Brown, Parks and Recreation Director
Nick Aceves, Teen Center Supervisor

Funding: Total: \$159,274.40 Federal Funds: \$119,455.80

Overview: The goal of the Reidsville Teen Center is to reduce juvenile delinquency, juvenile crime, the school dropout rate and youth gang participation by providing positive alternatives for youth through supervised learning programs, recreational activities, behavior-based programs and life skills programs.

Accomplishments: Juveniles participating in the teen center program averaged less than one unexcused absence over the school year.

Ninety-nine percent of the juveniles participating in the teen center program were satisfied with and benefited from services and events at the center.

Forty-six percent of the members average attending the center at least once a week, following the rules of conduct that allow them to continue membership.

The center provided services to 357 youth during the grant period — with a total of 6,080 visits to the center over the year.

Each member of the Teen Center staff received four hours of training to increase their knowledge of juvenile delinquency prevention.

One-hundred percent of the families stated that they were satisfied with the program in the areas of staff relations, general program operations, facilities and services.

Teen Center members participated in more than 400 hours of recreational programming, 150 hours of educational programming (except during the first quarter), and 318 hours of specialized services (anger management, drug/alcohol awareness, gang awareness/prevention, teen pregnancy prevention) per quarter.

Accomplishments from additional objectives that were part of the grant, but not mandated, include:

Of the 357 juveniles attending the Teen Center in the past year, only four (1.1 percent) were involved in delinquent activities and none were charged with a complaint. Only *one* member has been asked not to return to the center.

Forty percent of the participating members have attended gang awareness/prevention sessions during the grant period.

Ninety-two percent of the juveniles using the Homework Assistance Program showed improvement in at least two academic subjects during the school year.