

# **Family Connection**

## **Community Three-Year Strategic Plan**

FY 2006 – FY 2008  
(July 1, 2005 – June 30, 2008)

### **Plan Cover Sheet**

County: **Forsyth** Region: 2

Submitted on March 29, 2005

**Name of County: Forsyth**

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### **TYP – I A. County Description**

Forsyth County is located in North Georgia just 30 miles north of Atlanta. Fulton County serves as one of Forsyth's borders to the south, Lake Lanier serves as its primary border to the east and the North Georgia Mountains serve as Forsyth's border to the north. Because of Forsyth County's proximity to Atlanta and the mountains, the attraction of lake recreation, and the fact that it is served by a major transportation corridor, GA Hwy 400, Forsyth County has become the preferred home to over 125,000 people. In the last 25 years, the population of Forsyth County has more than quadrupled due to families wanting to live in a more rural community with a high quality of life yet still maintain easy access to Atlanta and the metro area. Forsyth County continues to be one of the top three (3) fastest growing counties in the state and nation. It is projected that the public school system will increase the number of enrolled students in the next five (5) years (by 2010), by the same amount that enrollment was increased in the past ten (10) years (since 1995). With this growth, Forsyth County has experienced an increase in cultural diversity which has been a new challenge for the community since Forsyth County has historically had little or no diversity.

Overall, Forsyth County has adapted and responded well to the rapid growth and changing demographics. The county has experienced some challenges regarding the availability of affordable housing, infrastructure, blue collar job opportunities, and a maxed out education system. With these challenges, however, the county has managed to meet the majority of the needs of the community primarily because of the affluent population of the county. The average household income in Forsyth County for 2003 was \$81,189.00. This has provided a large tax base for the education system and discretionary income from the citizens to help fund agencies and non-profits. Evidence of this is the fact that the 2004 United Way Campaign just cleared the \$1 million mark only 10 years after United Way's formation in the county.

The citizens of Forsyth County tend to be very proactive and committed to making this a better community. The community is very fortunate to have people within the Juvenile Justice System, Board of Education and Forsyth County Schools, United Way, civic organizations, and other organizations that are willing to make sure programs and non-profits are established to meet the needs as they are identified. With all of this said about the wonderful county and community, there are still challenges and needs which will be addressed in Section 1D.

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### **TYP – I B. Collaborative Description**

The Forsyth County Community Connection is a 501 c (3) organization. The below outlines its history:

- 1993, representatives from the Forsyth County School System and Juvenile Justice System realized the need for a forum which encourages the exchange of information and resources among community agencies – the Cumming/Forsyth County Council on Youth is created and incorporated October 1994.
- 1993, first funding from United Way of Forsyth County.
- May 1995, first annual Rising Star Luncheon recognizes students making personal improvements.
- July 1997, after three failed attempts for inclusion, Forsyth County's collaborative begins its strategic planning process as a Family Connection Partnership; an executive director is contracted.
- April 1998, the collaborative is designated as a 501 c (3) non-profit agency by the IRS.
- July 1998, implementation and evaluation of the community plan begins; the plan expands to over 50 different programs, activities and services.
- January 2000, a lease is signed between Georgia Baptist Health Care Foundation and the collaborative to renovate the former hospital facility into a family resource center; expands to include offices for 17 different social service agencies and public meeting space.
- January 2002, Board of Directors retreat changes the name to Forsyth County Community Connection to better reflect the role in community and revises mission and vision statements.
- October 2003, Family Center sold to Ninth District Opportunity, Inc. as managing partner.
- March 2004, community-wide strategic plan adds third goal of family stability and self-sufficiency to those of child health and students succeeding in school.
- November 2004, executive director of seven (7) years leaves the Connection. The Collaborative Board revises the mission and vision statements.
- January 2005, new executive director hired to help refocus the Connection on its new vision and mission and strengthen collaboration with community leaders.

## TYP – I C. Family Engagement

Family members (including parents, guardians, youth, and consumers) are defined as persons who represent their own individual perspective or experiences. They do not attend meetings, speak for, or commit resources on behalf of formal agencies, programs or organizations.

**Check activities that are currently in force; enter the year first implemented (column 1).  
 For activities planned over next three years, enter year to be implemented (column 2)**

Code	Activities	1. In force; year first implemented	2. Year to Be Implemented
FE1	Collaborative assesses itself on family support principles and family engagement		2006
FE2	Collaborative participates in training about family engagement		2006
FE3	Collaborative develops plan for effective family engagement		2006
FE4	Collaborative by-laws provide for parent/family positions on governing body <i>and</i> family members participate in that role		2007
FE5	Family members participate as <i>members</i> of collaborative committees, task forces, etc.		2007
FE6	Family members participate as <i>leaders</i> or co-leaders of committees, task forces <b>within</b> the collaborative		
FE7	Family members participate as leaders or co-leaders of committees, task forces <b>of collaborative partner(s)</b> .		
FE8	Collaborative meeting times and locations are convenient for family participation		
FE9	Collaborative provides leadership development opportunities for families such as training, peer mentoring, etc.		
FE10	Collaborative establishes a family advisory board		
FE11	Family members serve on interview committees to hire <b>collaborative staff</b>		
FE12	Family members serve on interview committees to hire staff <b>in programs of collaborative partner(s)</b>		
FE13	<b>Collaborative</b> hires family members as staff		
FE14	<b>Collaborative partner(s)</b> hire family members as staff		
FE15	Collaborative involves families in planning process and in designing strategies		2008
FE16	Collaborative supports family participation in collaborative meetings and in events (examples: transportation, child care, stipends, meals)		
FE17	Collaborative actively seeks input of family members (examples: surveys, focus groups, community assessment)		
FE18	Family members provide their opinions about services or programs <b>within the collaborative</b>		
FE19	Family members provide their opinions about services or programs <b>by collaborative partner(s)</b>		2007
FE20	Other (specify):		
FE21	Adult family members are involved in programs and activities for their children and youth		

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## **TYP – I D. Community Assessment Description**

The Forsyth County Community Connection used several methods to assess the community at the end of 2004 and the beginning of 2005. Those methods included holding a Community Forum in September 2004, considering information from the United Way Community Needs Assessment, conducting individual interviews with community leaders, and holding additional smaller evaluation sessions in November 2004 and February 2005.

The Community Forum held in September 2004 was in conjunction with our 10 year anniversary celebration. Representatives from the Network, Collaborative Board, Chamber of Commerce, Forsyth County Schools, Northside Hospital – Forsyth, United Way, and other groups attended. The Forum participants identified several essential questions that needed to be explored. Most of these questions centered on how the Connection could better Collaborate and communicate within the community in order to positively impact children and families. Other questions centered around two additional areas of concern: 1) child abuse and neglect and available resources, 2) Substance abuse of adults with Meth. One common factor to be considered among all the questions raised was how to handle these areas as it relates to our growing multicultural community.

In 2004, United Way of Forsyth County collaborated with the Chamber of Commerce and the Certified Literate Community Program (CLCP), with cooperation with the school system, to conduct an extensive Community Needs Assessment. Unfortunately, the Forsyth County Community Connection was not included in this collaboration due to the lack of a strong relationship with United Way and the other parties involved. The Needs Assessment provided a great amount of information about the community, and fortunately, the current executive director for the Connection was involved in all aspects of the assessment in her previous employment at the Chamber of Commerce. The top five (5) needs/issues/concerns identified by the assessment were; 1) Child Abuse Services, 2) Affordable Medical Services, 3) Domestic Violence, 4) Emergency Shelter and foster care, 5) School dropouts. It is important to understand that due to how the questions on the survey were written the areas of concern represent perceived needs and may not be actual needs. Through the interpretation process of the needs assessment results, involving over 60 individuals from the community, several recurring themes were identified: 1) Forsyth County is fortunate to have many programs and services in place to serve the needs of the community, however, there is a great lack of awareness of these programs/services by both those individuals in need and those able to provide resources; 2) there is a need for a coordinated volunteer resource center to enhance and enable our existing programs and services within the community; 3) there needs to be an increased focus on the Hispanic and multicultural community; 4) there needs to be more resources for people with disabilities.

In the late Fall of 2004, the President of the Collaborative Board and other Board members conducted interviews with the following community leaders: Lynn Jackson, Administrator for Northside Hospital – Forsyth; Joni Owens, President and CEO of the Cumming – Forsyth County Chamber of Commerce; Paula Gault, Superintendent of Forsyth County Schools; Ruth Goode, Executive Director of United Way of Forsyth County. Each of these leaders expressed their concern that neither they, nor the community, understood what the function of the Community Connection was in Forsyth County. The Connection did not appear to be the collaborative force it should be for the

county nor to have a strong working relationship with the leadership of the community. Each individual expressed the need for the Community Connection to establish its identity and to hire an individual with strong relationships within the community.

The last aspect of our Community Assessment included smaller versions of the Community Forum. These strategic planning meetings held in November and February assessed the information from the above methods and resources with the help of a Family Connection Partnership Facilitator. The February meeting included additional community leaders such as the Juvenile Court Judge, a County Commissioner and the interim director for DFCS. At this meeting, the group was able to hear about the challenges within DFCS and the community regarding child abuse & neglect and foster families. Not only are there internal issues within DFCS that have been discovered with the recent retirement of the former director, but there is a great disconnect with how our community agencies and programs work together on these issues. After much brainstorming and discussion of all the assessment material, this strategic planning group recognized the fact that Forsyth County is very unique compared to other counties in the state of Georgia in that our statistics are higher than the state average in almost every category. Some of the primary contributing factors to these favorable statistics are the secondary education levels and affluence of the overall population.

As a result of all of the information gathered in the Community Assessment, the Forsyth County Community Connection's Collaborative Board and Network has established the Three – Year Strategic Plan as outlined in this document. Primary areas of focus are: 1) Increase community awareness of the Forsyth County Community Connection; 2) Increase credibility and representation of the Collaborative Board; 3) Increase Collaboration within the community as it relates to issues surrounding child abuse and neglect; 4) Increase the number of beds within the county for foster placement; 5) Increase the community's focus on students who are Hispanic and / or disabled.

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### **TYP – I E. Vision**

**Vision:** Forsyth County is a community where all children and youth are healthy and safe, supported by strong, self-sufficient families.

**Mission:** The mission of the Forsyth County Community Connection is to identify community strengths and needs; develop goals and community strategies; provide a structure for planning, evaluation, and financial responsibility in order to implement a community agenda for children, youth and families.

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### **Section II: Goals and Benchmarks**

**TYP - II A. Collaborative Development** (relates to strengthening and sustaining the governance body)

#### Goals, Benchmark Objectives

Goal 1: To ensure that the principle leaders of the community are represented on the Collaborative Board.

Benchmark Objective 1.1 To increase representation of the nine (9) recommended sectors of the community on the Collaborative Board, from four (4) in FY 2005 to eight (8) by the end of FY 2006.

Code CL4

Goal 2: To ensure that the Collaborative Board accurately reflects the diverse representation of the community.

Benchmark Objective 2.1. To increase the membership of the Collaborative Board from one (1) minority representative in FY 2005 to a minimum of two (2) minority representatives by the end of FY 2006.

Code CL4

Benchmark Objective 2.2 To increase the representation of families on the Collaborative Board from none in FY 2005 to at least one (1) family or consumer member by the end of FY 2007.

Code CL4

Goal 3: To ensure that the Collaborative becomes a financially sound organization.

Benchmark Objective 3.1 To develop a long-term plan that includes collaborative financing strategies by the end of FY 2006.

Code CL10

**TYP - II B. Systems Change** (relates to improving policy and practices in decision making, service delivery, financing and budgeting)

Goals, Benchmark Objectives

Goal 1: In collaboration with “Hands On Georgia, Inc.”, the Forsyth County Community Connection will facilitate the coordination, development, and training of community volunteers.

Benchmark Objective 1.1. Establish and develop the “Hands on Forsyth” volunteer program in conjunction with Leadership Forsyth and United Way of Forsyth County by the end of FY 2006.

Code SA7

Benchmark Objective 1.2. Secure outside funding for the hiring of additional staff to coordinate the “Hands On Forsyth” program by the end of FY 2006.

Code SA15

Benchmark Objective 1.3. Maintain an average of 100 volunteers per year, starting by the end of FY 2006 and continuing through the end of FY 2008.

Code SA7

Goal 2: The Forsyth County Community Connection will develop stronger collaboration among organizations and agencies in order to accomplish the vision & mission of the Forsyth County Community Connection.

Benchmark Objective 2.1. Establish, by the end of FY 2005, and sustain a Strategy Team on Child Abuse and Neglect, consisting of the Child Advocacy Center, CASA, DFCS, Juvenile Justice, Forsyth County School System, and other interested agencies, that will foster discussion, cooperation, and improvement of prevention and intervention programs within the community by the end of FY 2006.

Code SY8

Benchmark Objective 2.2. Inventory and categorize resources, e.g. parenting classes, so that agencies can direct clients to appropriate resources, redundancies can be identified and new programs can be developed to fill the gaps by the end of FY 2006.

Code SY7

Benchmark Objective 2.3. Work with the Forsyth County School System to conduct surveys, and focus groups to further identify the needs and gaps in programming for students who are Hispanic, Emotionally & Behaviorally Disabled (EBD), and are Significantly Learning Disabled (SLD) regarding school completion by the end of FY 2006 and to implement programs to meet these needs by the end of FY 2007.

Code SY9

Goal 3: The Forsyth County Community Connection will be viewed as a professional and credible organization within the community in order to accomplish its vision & mission.

Benchmark Objective 3.1. Show measurable improvement of community awareness of the Forsyth County Community Connection as assessed by a Community Survey conducted in FY 2008.

Code SY5

Benchmark Objective 3.2. Increase engagement with the Juvenile Justice System, Department of Family and Children Services, United Way, Forsyth County Family YMCA, and the city and county governments in order to strengthen relationships to help better serve our community as assessed by a survey of collaborating agency representatives conducted in FY 2007.

Code SY3

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**TYP – II C: Results for Children and Families**

(One goal per page; duplicate pages as needed)

**Goal # 1: All Children in Forsyth County will experience a good quality of life.**

(Check one) Result Area:  Healthy Children  School Readiness  School Success  
 Strong Families  Self-Sufficient Families

Benchmark Objective 1.1: **Increase the percentage of foster children placed in homes within the county from 41% in March 2005 to 71% in March 2008. (Data Source: Monthly data report FY '05 Department of Family and Children Services)**

Code SF5

**Overall Three-Year Strategy # 1.1:**

(Check one)  Child Development  Youth Development  Family Development  
 Academic Development  Physical Health Development  
 Mental Health Development  Economic Development  Other

**Description of Strategy: Create additional placement availability locally through family, foster, and group homes.** Programs and activities will include increased community awareness of the need for foster care, the development and support of a boys' home through the juvenile justice system, the establishment of receiving homes, effective placement of children with relatives, and the development of foster family training that is accessible and consistent.

**Target Groups:** Adults over age 30

**Supporting Evidence for the Strategy:**

- The placement of foster children with relatives can be a good alternative to foster care if policies are in place to follow up and support the children. – *When Children Cannot Remain Home: Foster Family Care and Kinship Care* by Jill Duerr Berrick, The Future of Children. 1999 ([www.futureofchildren.org](http://www.futureofchildren.org))
- Foster Care settings may not be limited to foster families and relatives but may include short term receiving homes, group homes and emergency shelters. Code of Federal Regulations, Title 45, Volume 4, Part 1355, Section 57.
- Georgia requires 30 hours of pre-service training and 15 hours of in-service training. (DFCS has not held consistent training classes due to staffing and an alternative provider for training is desired.) State Foster Parent Training Requirements. ([www.fosterparenting.com](http://www.fosterparenting.com))

**Overall Three-Year Strategy # 1.2:**

(Check one)  Child Development  Youth Development  Family Development  
 Academic Development  Physical Health Development  
 Mental Health Development  Economic Development  Other

**Description of Strategy:** Ensure that resources and supports are accessible to those providing foster care. Programs and activities will include the enhancement of foster parent support groups, foster/relative respite care and transition management. Also included will be the development of accessibility to services, enhanced level of care training for foster/relative care givers, an appreciation event for foster families, and a support and encouragement program for foster/relative care givers.

**Target Groups:** Foster families and relatives providing foster care

**Supporting Evidence for the Strategy:**

- There is a “need for increased foster care training and support in order to help reduce foster parent strain, keep parents satisfied with their experience of foster care,...”. “Foster Care: Importance of Training and Support”, by Data Trends – Summaries of Research on Mental Health Services for Children and Adolescents and their Families. ([www.rtc.pdx.edu/DataTrends/pgDT26.shtml](http://www.rtc.pdx.edu/DataTrends/pgDT26.shtml))
- “Respite Care is often a very critical component of family preservation (and successful foster care) efforts.” “Respite Care” Adoption.com ([www.fosterparenting.com](http://www.fosterparenting.com))
- “When we recruit families to be foster or adoptive parents we must remember to put forth more effort to retain them than it took to recruit them.” *Retention: An Integral Part of Recruitment* by Sara West, ([http://sswnt7.sowo.unc.edu/fcrp/fp/fp\\_vol7no1/retention.htm](http://sswnt7.sowo.unc.edu/fcrp/fp/fp_vol7no1/retention.htm))

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**TYP – II C: Results for Children and Families**

(One goal per page; duplicate pages as needed)

**Goal # 2: Every youth in Forsyth County will have the opportunity to become a self-sufficient citizen.**

(Check one) Result Area:  Healthy Children  School Readiness  School Success  
 Strong Families  Self-Sufficient Families

Benchmark Objective 2.1: **Improve the school completion rate for Hispanic students in Forsyth County Schools from 64% in May of 2004 to 70% in May of 2008. (Data Source: DOE 2003-2004 State of Georgia k-12 Report Card)**

Code CS12

Benchmark Objective 2.2: **Improve school completion rate for students with Emotional & Behavioral Disabilities and Significant Learning Disabilities from 68% in May of 2004 to 75% in May of 2008 (Data Source: Forsyth County School System)**

Code CS12

**Overall Three-Year Strategy # 2.1:**

(Check one)  Child Development  Youth Development  Family Development  
 Academic Development  Physical Health Development  
 Mental Health Development  Economic Development  Other

**Description of Strategy: Ensure students most likely at risk of not completing high school receive mentoring services to support their academic success in school.** Programs and activities include continued support of the Forsyth County School System's mentoring program and Big Brothers Big Sisters. Also included will be an enhanced effort to match student needs with mentors and the establishment of benchmark assessments to determine success of student/mentor partnerships.

**Target Groups:** students in grades 1 - 12

**Supporting Evidence for the Strategy:**

- "Research and anecdotal evidence show specifically that BBBS one-to-one mentoring helps at-risk youth overcome the many challenges they face. Little Brothers and Sisters are less likely to begin using illegal drugs, consume alcohol, skip school and classes, or engage in acts of violence.<sup>1</sup> They have greater self-esteem, confidence in their schoolwork performance, and are able to get along better with their friends and families." Big Brothers Big Sisters website. ([www.bbbsa.org](http://www.bbbsa.org))
- Research shows that mentoring programs, especially in the school, help students stay motivated and focused, deal with daily obstacles, and develop career and economic skills. About Mentoring ([www.mentoring.org](http://www.mentoring.org))

**Overall Three-Year Strategy # 2.2:**

(Check one)  Child Development  Youth Development  Family Development  
 Academic Development  Physical Health Development  
 Mental Health Development  Economic Development  Other

**Description of Strategy: Provide students and families with needed information and counseling resources necessary to encourage them to remain in school.**

Programs and activities will be to support existing counseling, intervention, and support programs, increase appropriate referrals, and expand programs if necessary.

**Target Groups:** students in grades 6 – 10, students with problems of substance abuse, family conflict, emotional and behavioral disorders, discipline, learning disabilities, and/or pregnancy

**Supporting Evidence for the Strategy:**

- Personal/affective intervention, including individual counseling, is considered a key component of drop-out prevention. *Part I: What do we know about Dropout Prevention? What are key Components of Dropout Prevention Programs*, by the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition.  
(<http://www.ncset.org/publications/essentialtools/dropout/part1.5.asp>)
- The focus of helping students address personal and family issues through counseling and access to social services has been evaluated to be key components of interventions designed to decrease dropout/increase school completion rates. *Table 2: Key Component of Interventions Designed to Decrease Dropout/Increase School Completion*, by the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition.  
(<http://www.ncset.org/publications/essentialtools/dropout/part1.5.asp>)

**Overall Three-Year Strategy # 2.3:**

(Check one)  Child Development  Youth Development  Family Development  
 Academic Development  Physical Health Development  
 Mental Health Development  Economic Development  Other

**Description of Strategy:** Partner with the Forsyth County School System to develop alternative routes to graduation. Program and activities will include development of a non-traditional high school with Lanier Technical College and the Communities In Schools program, enhancement of vocational instruction and transition programs, and identification of other alternative methods to traditional graduation.

**Target Groups:** students in grades 9 - 12

**Supporting Evidence for the Strategy:**

- “Every student can learn! And every student should have the opportunity to learn and to achieve a quality of life they desire based on their educational efforts and achievements. If every school board member, school administrator, teacher, parent, community and business leader believes that statement, then alternative schooling is not an option in America--it is an absolute requirement in every community. Alternative schooling opportunities will be needed to accommodate the educational needs of its youth because the traditional school system, and particularly the traditional high school, can no longer serve the needs of the students and their family lifestyles common in the 1990s. It has even been suggested that society might want to consider allowing students to drop out and then provide alternative schools for them to complete their GED (Dynarski, 1999).” *Alternative Schooling* – National Dropout Prevention Center/Network ([http://www.dropoutprevention.org/effstrat/alt\\_school/altsch\\_over.htm](http://www.dropoutprevention.org/effstrat/alt_school/altsch_over.htm))
- Numerous studies have shown that active learning positively contributes to increasing the school completion rate. *Active Learning* – National Dropout Prevention Center/Network ([http://www.dropoutprevention.org/effstrat/active\\_learn/active\\_learn\\_over.htm](http://www.dropoutprevention.org/effstrat/active_learn/active_learn_over.htm))
- Communities In Schools is considered a promising program for at-risk youth for dropping out of school. Proven and Promising Programs – Promising Practices Network. (<http://www.promisingpractices.net/program.asp?programid=65&benchmarkid=7#programoverview>)

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**TYP – III A. Funding and Resources**

The administrative and program costs of the Forsyth County Community Connection are primarily funded by the Family Connection Partnership Grant, United Way of Forsyth County, and funds acquired 3-4 years ago from Anverse, Inc.. These funds from Anverse Inc., a foundation based in Cartersville, GA, have been invested in a CD and a Money-Market account and have been used to supplement operating costs not funded by the FCP grant and UW. The Forsyth County Community Connection currently has approximately \$65,000.00 of these funds remaining as of March 2005. The Collaborative Board realizes that these funds could be depleted within the next three (3) years, therefore, Collaborative “Goal 3: To become a financially sound organization” has been established. Along with this goal is “Benchmark Objective 3.1 To develop long term collaborative financing strategies by May 2006.” In order to accomplish this goal and benchmark, a new Treasurer with a strong financial background will be named with the re-creation of our Collaborative Board in April 2005. A Finance Committee will also be established July 2005.

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**TYP – III B. Community Engagement**

The Forsyth County Community Connection will engage the community through its monthly Network meetings, quarterly Strategy Team meetings, and speaking engagements to civic organizations and other groups in the community. The Connection will be able to engage businesses, the faith community, Home Owners Associations, and other citizens through the Hands On Forsyth program. In addition, the Connection will partner with the Chamber of Commerce to present public forums on “Building A Better Community” in each of the five (5) governmental districts in the county by the end of FY 2006.