

August 2009

Dear Community Partner,

It's hard to believe that another fiscal year is upon us! While this past year has brought challenges to all of us, it has also made us stronger. As an agency we are deeply rooted in our mission 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.

Now, more than ever, it's about the power of the Network. The Forsyth County Community Connection works with over 200 community partners. This includes government entities, non-profit organizations, businesses, churches, and civic groups. Each day we seek to forge new partnerships and strengthen existing ones to promote resource development and collaboration within our community. It takes many people at many levels to effect change in the lives of our children and families.

We want to ensure that you are well informed on the work of our organization and produce this report to give you a snap-shot of the big picture. Our staff is always available to answer any questions you may have or provide you with more in-depth information on a specific topic. We are proud to serve this community and look forward to our continued work with you.

All the best,

Nicole McCoy  
Executive Director

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**Staff**

Nicole McCoy, Executive Director

[nicolemccoy@connectforsyth.org](mailto:nicolemccoy@connectforsyth.org)

Kerry Rosewall, Volunteer Coordinator

[kerryrosewall@connectforsyth.org](mailto:kerryrosewall@connectforsyth.org)

Sean Wallace, AmeriCorps Member with the Hands On Forsyth Program

[seanwallace@connectforsyth.org](mailto:seanwallace@connectforsyth.org)

**Location**

133 Samaritan Drive

Cumming, GA 30040

770.205.1701

### Who we are...

The Forsyth County Community Connection is a private, non-profit Family Connection Partnership. As a nonprofit intermediary organization, we work closely with community and state partners to:

- provide **training and technical assistance** customized to meet our community's common and unique needs and support efforts in making better decisions locally;
- build and maintain **relationships with public and private agencies** to share and combine resources, promote public policy, and improve services and supports for families;
- enhance **public awareness, understanding, communication, and commitment** to improve results for children and families; and
- promote "what works" using **research and evaluation practices** that have proven to be effective, while showcasing community successes.

We provide leadership through our commitment to:

- holding ourselves accountable for improving conditions for children,
- providing family supports and services with a family focus,
- fostering collaboration among public and private organizations, and
- promoting local decision-making.

### 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.

### Vision

Forsyth County will be a community where all children and youth are healthy and safe, supported by strong, self-sufficient families.



### **Focus on the Strategic Plan**

In Fiscal Year 2008, our organization led several months of planning to develop strategies for improving indicators that community partners felt were vital to the overall success and wellbeing of children and families in Forsyth County. This plan runs from fiscal year 2009 to 2011. We established focus on two key goals:

**Goal #1:** All children will succeed in school.

**Benchmark Objective:** Improve on-time graduation rates from 83% in 2007 to 88% in 2010. (Data source: Forsyth County Schools, [www.forsyth.k12.ga.us](http://www.forsyth.k12.ga.us), 2008)

**Indicator:** Students who graduate from high school on time

**Benchmark Objective:** To decrease the number of students who are absent 15 days or more from 8.6% school year 2006-2007 to 5.6% by school year 2009-2010. (Data source: Forsyth County Schools, [www.forsyth.k12.ga.us](http://www.forsyth.k12.ga.us), 2007)

**Indicator:** Children absent more than 15 days from school

**Strategy:** Ensure that those students who are most likely at-risk of not completing high school receive services to support their academic success in school. Types of programs and activities will include targeted attendance programs, Graduation Coaches, mentoring, volunteer in class tutoring, truancy officer, Kick It Up clubs (group based sessions around goal setting, time management, and self awareness for middle and high school)

**Progress Update:** Great work is being accomplished early in this plan!

**1. Mentor Me North Georgia has started four Kick It Up Clubs at target schools to empower and motivate students to stay focused, set goals, and work towards goal attainment.** Mentor Me is a valuable community resource in making this program successful. A full independent evaluation of the in-school portion of this effort is being conducted by The Center for Community Studies and will be released in September. Two conferences were held in April and May to celebrate students in the programs. Students heard from adults that had overcome a multitude of challenges and worked in small groups with caring community members on topics such as motivation, peer pressure, and planning for the future.

**2. The Forsyth County Community Connection, in partnership with Communities in Schools of Georgia and Forsyth County Schools, piloted the state's first coordinated effort to recruit Community Coaches at the middle school level.**

The "Community Coach" concept was created in 2007 as a result of Governor Perdue's challenge to Georgia's business community to support education in our state by assisting the Graduation Coach by enlisting community support, recruiting volunteers, sharing ideas, providing real world experience to students, and serving as a community-based advisor. Forsyth County was fortunate to have a Community Coach placed at all middle and high schools for school year 08-09. Due to budget cutbacks at a state level with the Graduation Coaches, this program is changing. We are still committed to connecting interested community people to our local schools to help leverage the resources of the business community.

**Goal 2:** All children in Forsyth County will be raised in a safe and healthy environment.

**Benchmark Objective:** Reduce the number of mothers with children being re-referred to DFCS for domestic violence incidents by 5% in 2011 based on data collected in 2009 (locally developed indicator). (Data source: Forsyth County DFCS, 2009)

**Indicator:** This is the first time that we will be establishing a baseline indicator for this benchmark objective.

**Strategy: Ensure that women with children referred to DFCS for Domestic Violence situations improve their stability by having access to support services.**

Types of programs and activities will include counseling resources, basic needs (food, shelter, and transportation), job training, translation services, emergency shelter, and legal services.

**Progress Update:** At the beginning of fiscal year 2010 we will partner with Forsyth County DFCS to determine the re-referral rate for domestic violence incidents. At that time the strategy team of key community partners will meet to determine best course of action to improve rate.

## **KIDS COUNT**

The Annie E. Casey Foundation this year celebrates 20 years of KIDS COUNT, which tracks nationally and across 50 states, how well children are faring in health, education, and economic well-being. The Foundation is strong in its conviction that data-driven decision-making is a powerful, but underutilized, method to achieve positive results for children. It has invested millions of dollars in collecting reliable data and bringing the evidence to policymakers, advocates, and the public to inform decisions and drive the work on behalf of children and families.

KIDS COUNT was pivotal in moving state leaders to action when they learned in 1991 that Georgia was ranked 50th in the nation in child well-being. They established, and continue to support, the Georgia Family Connection initiative to address the serious issues facing children and families. This public/private partnership supports at-risk children by implementing a strategic approach and community based decision-making. By tracking and measuring indicators of child, family, and community wellbeing, **Georgia Family Connection has enhanced cross-agency collaboration in all 159 counties** in efforts to improve the quality of life in this state. Trends in health, education, and economic indicators show varying degrees of progress.

However, Georgia has consistently remained in the bottom ten states for two decades. The gains we've made pale in comparison to existing—and emerging—challenges and disparities. As we examine some of these trends and challenges, we must consider their impact on the viability of our state.

Featured KIDS COUNT Indicators for the state:

Low Birth weight (2006) 9.6%

Teen births, ages 15-19 (2006) 54.1 (rate per 1,000)

Students who graduate from high school on time (2007) 72.3%

Substantiated incidents of child abuse and/or neglect (2006) 16.1 (rate per 1,000)

Featured KIDS COUNT Indicators for Forsyth County:

Low Birth weight (2006) 7.2%

Teen births, ages 15-19 (2006) 22.3 (rate per 1,000)

Students who graduate from high school on time (2007) 85.8%

Substantiated incidents of child abuse and/or neglect (2006) 8 (rate per 1,000)

### **Additional advocacy work...**

- The Forsyth County Community Connection has worked to provide a venue for collaboration on state grants that would help to expand the resources of our community. We partnered with several non-profits and agencies including the Juvenile Court, CASA, DFCS, Forsyth County Schools, Mentor Me and UGA Cooperative Extension to develop a plan for a system of care that would reach underserved families with coordinated case management. This system would help to stabilize families and hopefully prevent appearance to Juvenile Court and DFCS. Grant notification will take place in September, but this team is committed to moving forward regardless of grant award.
- We have partnered with Forsyth County Juvenile Court to provide a monthly networking opportunity open to all community partners with an educational portion of the meeting focusing around a timely issue.
- This year we have undertaken efforts to update our Community Resource Directory, a 150 page comprehensive listing of social service organizations in Forsyth County. This document is available as a PDF at [www.connectforsyth.org](http://www.connectforsyth.org).
- Worked with the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners to establish the Social Services Committee. This committee is charged with preparing a thoughtful protocol on service agreements and fund disbursement to non-profit organizations that provide direct services to the county. The Commissioners will have the recommendations of this committee to help guide decision making through the funding process.



Hands On  
FORSYTH

The Forsyth County Community Connection is home to Hands On Forsyth, a volunteer recruitment initiative. Across the state, Hands On Georgia and its affiliates promote the power of service - how it weaves together communities, supports vital nonprofit organizations and transforms both those serving and those being served. Hands On Forsyth encourages people to do good things and also to reflect on the reasons why those good things need to be done. While volunteering empowers people in communities to improve the quality of life for all, it also develops more informed and inspired citizens.

Hands On Forsyth calls upon the citizens of our county to help tackle tough issues in our community through volunteer service and engaged citizenship. We need strong civic participation from our residents in order to make our schools work effectively, to keep our environment healthy, to nurture children whose family support has broken down, and to bring Georgia's citizens together across divisions of region, race, and economic lifestyle through the common platform of service.

Volunteers Registered at [www.handsonforsyth.org](http://www.handsonforsyth.org): **2,462**

Projects, affiliate managed and referral, from July 1, 2008 to June 30, 2009: **215**

Volunteer Hours recorded via website from July 1, 2008 to June 30, 2009: **8,788**

Economic Impact of volunteers to the community  
from July 1, 2008 to June 30, 2009: **\$171,279.00**

