



SWAG Family Resource Center

TLG Innovation Award Nomination

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SWAG (Southwest Advocacy Group) Family Resource Center & Clinic

Describe the Program/project/service innovation:

The SWAG Family Resource Center provides programs, services, and activities for the local community that otherwise might be inaccessible due to income and transportation limitations. The SWAG Family Resource Center was made possible through determination, support, and partnerships between the County, nonprofit organizations, and the community itself. The totality of the partnerships and positive impact on the community will be felt for many generations to come.

The Southwest Advocacy Group (SWAG), a grassroots group of local concerned citizens, filed for nonprofit status in 2010. Later that year, the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners approved up to \$225,000 to purchase and renovate a building in the heart of the SWAG neighborhoods. The County decided to purchase two residential 'quadplexes' that were in foreclosure and, if left unmanaged, could have resulted in additional blight to the neighborhood. The first building, 3,100 sq. ft., was renovated to meet commercial (plumbing/electricity) and public accessibility standards over a period of four (4) months. It opened to the community in July 2012. The nonprofit Partnership for Strong Families (PSF) provides the Resource Center's operational staff and funding.

The Partnership for Strong Families is the lead community based agency for the Eighth Judicial Circuit, including Alachua County, and is contracted by the Florida Department of Children and Families to deliver comprehensive child welfare services and to work with at-risk families to prevent child abuse. At the Resource Center, PSF offers and coordinates programs such as:

- the Bookmobile,
- Clothing Closet,
- Homework help,
- HIV testing,
- GED classes,
- and a location for other providers to offer needed community services in a clean and safe location.
- Food Pantry,
- Resume Assistance,
- a Farmer's Market,
- Story Time,
- community meetings,

Additionally, the Rotary Clubs of Gainesville awarded the Resource Center \$57,000 for furnishings, appliances, and computers. They have committed another \$60,000 for the Clinic through their annual fundraiser, the 2013 Wild Game Feast.



(SWAG Family Resource Center)

The second building, also 3,100 sq. ft., is in the process of being renovated and will house the SWAG/Rotary Clinic of Alachua County. This building is being renovated and staffed through a partnership between SWAG, the Rotary Foundation, Blue Cross & Blue Shield, the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners, and the Alachua County Health Department. The building will contain five examination rooms and offer primary care to adults and children including: immunizations, well check-ups, and health screenings. The clinic will offer on-site prenatal care and family planning services for low income women and will work to reduce low birth rate babies and teen pregnancies. When the building is renovated and open to the public, anticipated for summer 2014, the clinic will serve an estimated 6,000 residents annually and will be staffed by the Health Department, a subdivision of the State of Florida.

Description of the importance, internal impact, and community benefit:

The Family Resource Center programs focus on three areas; Valuing Children, Strengthening Families, and Engaging the Community.

The SWAG Family Resource Center supports the physical and emotional safety and health of children by promoting well-being through health screenings, child development classes, safety information, school readiness programs, tutoring, mentoring, and after school and summer activities.

The SWAG Family Resource Center provides opportunities for families through self-sufficiency, parenting, relationship, problem solving, and crisis prevention programs.

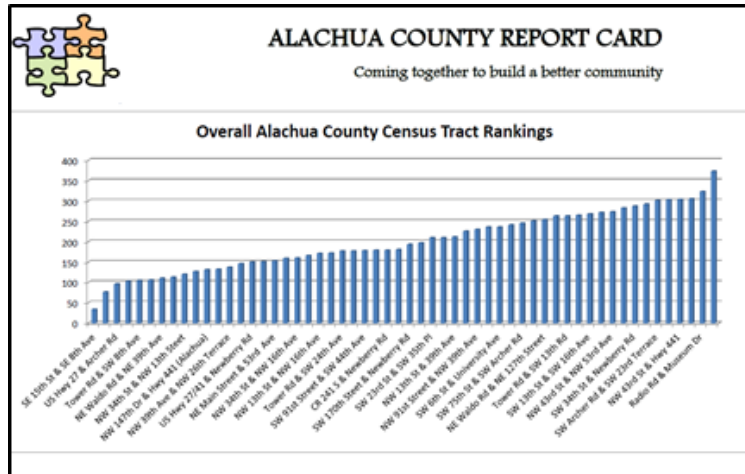
The Center continues to embrace their partnership with the local community by hosting neighborhood meetings, pot luck get-togethers and various other community building activities.

The City of Gainesville hired a consultant to consider the status of children in Gainesville, the county seat of Alachua County. The Alachua County Health Department and the United Way of North Central Florida partnered with the City's consultant to broaden the study to consider adults also.

That study focused on four categories of indicators: Health, Finance, Safety, and Education. Results of the study showed that the SWAG neighborhood area had the following:

- the highest percentage of people receiving Cash Assistance or SNAP benefits at 18%
- the second highest number of births to mothers on Medicaid at 82
- the fourth highest number of calls to 911 for domestic violence at 179 calls in 2010-2011
- 14% of residents within that zip code are uninsured, compared with the county-wide average of 12%
- and an infant mortality rate of almost 10 per 1,000 births, higher than the county average

When combining all factors, this neighborhood area rated in the bottom quartile of all neighborhoods evaluated.



(SWAG area {Tower & 8th} is 3rd overall lowest rated area on composite indicators)

The majority of the SWAG residents do not own cars. Most social services are housed within the downtown area or the east side of the county at least ten miles away, where the Community Services Building and Health Department are located. The high residential density areas of the SWAG neighborhoods are up to a five (5) hour round trip bus ride to the Health Department, involving transferring to at least three (3) different buses.

Additionally, county court statistics have shown that the SWAG area, referred to as the ‘Mike’ zone by the Alachua County Sheriff’s Office, has the highest arrest and recidivism numbers when compared to other zone averages. As such, the SWAG Family Resource Center has partnered with the Sheriff’s Office to provide transitional service to those released from jail. Services to recently released residents include GED classes, free clothing, hygiene products, resume and job assistance services through Florida Works, mental health and substance abuse counseling through Meridian Behavioral Health, and other related services.

What makes this a quantum leap of creativity:

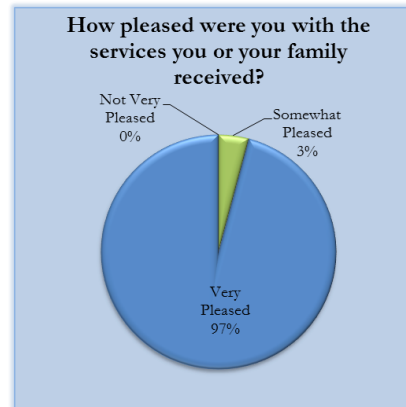
The SWAG Family Resource Center and Clinic is a great example of partners and stakeholders joining with local governmental agencies to address the needs of citizens. The Southwest Advocacy Group (SWAG) officially formed as a nonprofit in 2010 with the goal of addressing specific needs in the southwest communities. Not on the radar more than five years ago, this community lead initiative with county support is off the ground and is already showing positive results. This is truly a program lead by the citizens with financial/facility assistance from the County.

Who benefits:

The main purpose of the program is to provide services and activities that connect community members with resources and opportunities that would otherwise be inaccessible due to a variety of reasons, including income, transportation, and knowledge base (the citizens often don’t realize the services and resources available).

Specifically the residents of the SWAG area benefit from the SWAG Family Resource Center. Between the center's opening in July 2012 and October 2013, there have been over 15,000 total visits. Through a Patron Satisfaction Survey:

- over 97% were pleased with the services they received,
- 93% would recommend the SWAG Family Resource Center to others, and
- more than 96% would return for additional services



(Patron Visits & Customer Satisfaction January – October 2013)

However, ultimately the entire community will benefit by reducing the draw on community resources, promoting safe & healthy communities, and enhancing early childhood education.

- Access to books, tutoring, homework help, and computers should increase early education classroom success rates and the high school graduation rate
- GED classes and resume and job placement assistance should improve the employment rate
- Prenatal services and family planning counseling should reduce the rate of premature and low-weight births
- Clinic services, immunizations, and health management activities should reduce the visits to the local hospital emergency departments

With all of these factors, the community hopes to improve self-sufficiency and quality of life and reduce the arrest rate within this neighborhood.

How was it initiated and implemented:

The SWAG Family Resource Center was a community lead, grass roots initiative. The idea was developed and vetted through members of the community who are closest to the issues of concern. The idea gained momentum in 2010 through a local nonprofit, the Southwest Advocacy Group (SWAG). The buildings were purchased and renovated by the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners. Furnishings and necessities for each building were provided by grants from the Rotary and Blue Cross & Blue Shield. The Family Resource Center, opened in July 2012, is run and managed by the nonprofit

Partnership for Strong Families (PFS) and the Clinic, scheduled to open in summer 2014, will be managed and staffed by the Health Department, a subdivision of the State of Florida.

What risks were taken:

Alachua County committed a large, up-front investment with the purchase and renovation of two buildings. There was a great amount of risk if the partners did not come through with their stated obligations to furnish and manage the facilities. To this day, Alachua County is still facing economic and fiscal challenges due to a slow recovery, adding the staffing and management of these two facilities to our operation would have resulted in reduced operational capacity elsewhere or raising taxes, both would be difficult decisions for our Commissioners and staff.

What, if any costs/savings:

Costs:

- Alachua County: \$225,000 to purchase and renovate two 3,100 sq. ft. buildings
- Rotary Foundation donation: \$120,000 to furnish the Family Resource Center and the Clinic
- Partnership for Strong Families: \$100,000 annually to staff and manage the Resource Center and for operational supplies
- BCBS Donation: \$300,000 to cover Clinic start up and operating costs for three (3) years

Benefits:

The benefits to this program are almost immeasurable. As stated in the “Who Benefits” section of this application the anticipated outcomes and benefits are far reaching, from unborn children to senior citizens. We often ask ourselves, how do we measure the benefit of one additional child reading at or above grade level, one more adult achieving their GED, one citizen receiving convenient mental health counseling, or one less adult returning to jail?

Lessons Learned that other governments can learn from:

As Abraham Lincoln stated, “Government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the Earth.”

What a great quote to reference when detailing the lessons learned.

In this situation, a group of citizens, very closely tied to the neighborhood, formed a nonprofit and developed an idea through to implementation. Those very citizens did not envision a facility and program fully run by the County, nor did they expect the County to foot the entire bill. Those citizens understood the needs of the community, which was supported by loads of data. They communicated the needs and dispelled the myths, as most perceived the impoverished and at-risk areas to be in the eastern communities, not the affluent southwest area. That citizen group also led the applicant process and communications with other nonprofits, foundations, and community organizations to develop additional funding, resources, and programming.

In this case, the County listened to the needs of the citizens, supported the mission of the group, and let them lead the way through the process.

In times of declining discretionary budget, this program enhanced services and provided a need for a disadvantaged community at no reoccurring expense to County taxpayers.

In this case, the County learned that those closest to the problem often times have the best handle on potential solutions as well as the drive to see results.

What department championed the innovation:

The innovation was truly championed by the nonprofit SWAG organization and Partnership for Strong Families. Once embraced by the Board of County Commissioners, the Facilities Division spearheaded the acquisition and renovation of the two buildings and the Community Services Department lead the transition of the facility programming and management to the PSF. The Health Department is the agency leading the development and operations of the Clinic.

Any additional info:

N/A