

Youth Village is an after school program and summer camp founded in 1999 and located in Ft. Walton Beach, Florida. The program serves all children ages 5-16 and is open during the school year from 2:00pm-6:00pm and during the summer months from 7:30am-6:00pm.

Nellie Bogar began the after school program in the fall of 1999 after working as a volunteer for Jimmy James, who is a probation officer with the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, and is currently the Vice Chair of the Youth Village Board of Directors. Nellie Bogar stated to Mr. James during one of her volunteer training sessions that she would really like to open an after school program for low-income children. Immediately Mr. James provided her with a Request for Proposal package from the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice.

Ms. Bogar applied for and was awarded the Prevention Grant in 1999. The grant was renewable on a yearly basis and after reapplying each year, it was awarded to Youth Village (formerly known as Youth, Bring a Friend) until June 30, 2007.

The Youth Village after school program offers help with homework, computer literacy, tutoring, mentoring and bullying prevention techniques.

The Youth Village Summer Arts/Education Camp consists of academics (reading, science and math) during the morning sessions and The Arts during the afternoon sessions. The Arts consist of various workshops which include writing, acting, dancing and singing that inspire creativity, confidence and character building as well as an appreciation of and respect for various cultures and their respective art forms. At the conclusion of each summer camp, the children perform a free community-wide musical production to showcase their talents.

Mission Statement: Our mission is to lend our individual and organized aid to support, teach and uplift the youth of our community in an educational, spiritual and moral manner by providing them with a place to meet, fellowship and learn in a safe, adult-supervised environment.

Youth Village is solely engaged in direct services and we admit all children without regard to race, color, sex, religion or national origin. Thus far, we have served over 650 children in our community.

Youth Village is located in a low socio-economic neighborhood where at least 55% of the children are eligible for free or reduced price lunch and more often than not the parent/parents work one or more jobs and have no access to services that are needed.

According to the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, Youth Village is located in a "High Risk Zip Code Area", where many of the children are know as "latchkey children" who have no regular supervision.

The medium ages of the youths in our program are 15 and younger, which is the age stated in "The 8% Solution" by Schumacher/Kurz (Sage Publications, Inc. 2000), as being the age most likely to become chronic juvenile offenders than those who begin offending as older children. Over 60% of our students are females, which are a growing number of delinquency referrals. Approximately 65% of the children are African-American, 20% Bi-Racial, 10% Caucasian and 5% Hispanic.

There is currently no place in the immediate area where youths can gather under adult supervision to receive help with homework or have recreational facilities in a community setting. There is also no other program in the area that offers a Summer Arts/Education Program.

With no adult supervision, no assistance with homework and no positive role models, the youths are prone to get into trouble by getting involved with gangs, use drugs and alcohol and engage in other undesirable activity during the high-risk hours of 2:00-6:00pm and during the summer months when most juvenile crime occurs.

The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice is committed to targeting resources toward programs that will specifically address those life conditions that most influence and affect the direction “at- risk” children will take. At least 40% of the children admitted to our program exhibit at least 2 out of 3 “risk factors” as defined the by The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice.

These include:

- high absenteeism from school;
- retention in the same grade for one or more years:
- school/at home misbehavior
- low academic achievement;
- lack of parental control;
- prior criminal history of the parents, guardians or siblings;
- individual behavior to include repeatedly stealing, running away and associating with children with delinquency behavior

Since July 2007, funding for Youth Village has been solely dependent upon local foundations, community support and private donations to help defray tuition payments for the majority of the children.

Education is the main purpose of the program and it comes in many different forms.

Academics: We strive to help the children improve his/her grades in school and encourage enthusiasm for learning. At Youth Village, there is a strong focus on reading and reading comprehension. In the 2008-2009 school year, approximately 4,000 children scored BELOW proficiency in reading in the Okaloosa County School District! Also, 1,743 students were retained in the District for the 2008-2009 school year. There is a desperate need for funding for after school programs and summer camps.

Education also includes improving social skills & social behavior, establishing moral responsibility; provide Service Learning Opportunities, developing lifelong goals and ambitions, helping to increase their conflict resolution skills, help with demonstrating

respect for others and their cultures, and many other life skills that our children need to help them grow into responsible, self-sufficient adults and become productive citizens of the community.

Service Learning Projects are also part of our curriculum. For example, in partnership with Cox Communication, a 30 minute film on bullying prevention, entitled “Stop! No Bullies Allowed in Here”, was written by the Youth Village staff & starred the Youth Village children. The film aired on Cox Channel 6 in Okaloosa County and Cox Channel 2 in Escambia County. We also made a 30 minute film in cooperation with the Okaloosa County Anti Drug Coalition entitled “We’re Too Smart to Do Drugs” which also starred the Youth Village children. These films are available to clubs, churches and organizations at no charge. We use Service Learning Projects as a tool to help the children build stronger academic skills, foster civic responsibility and develop leadership skills.

Childhood obesity is a growing concern in The United States.

Youth Village dedicated their 10-year anniversary (2009) and beyond, to educating the children and their families on the advantages of daily exercise and proper nutrition. Our Service Learning Project: *“The Fitness Kids...getting’ our bodies and minds in shape!”*

Our program has been chosen as a *We Can!* Community Site to Combat Childhood Obesity!

In just 3 decades, overweight has more than doubled among children ages 2-5 years and adolescents ages 12-19 years, and more than tripled among youth ages 6-11 years.

(Ogden CL et al. Prevalence and Trends in Overweight Among US Children and Adolescents, 1999-2000. Journal of the American Medical Association. 2002;288 (14): 1728-1732.)

*We Can!* has engaged community sites around the country, including Youth Village, to take an active role in creating healthier hometown environments that promote a healthier weight and lifestyle. Thus far, Youth Village is the only site chosen in Okaloosa County.

Ways to Enhance Children's Activity & Nutrition, or *We Can!* , is a national public education program from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to help prevent overweight and obesity among youth ages 8-13.

For more information on We Can! visit their website at [www.wecan.org](http://www.wecan.org)

Through *We Can!*, we are able to provide a variety of resources and materials, including a community toolkit, parent handbook, parent tip sheets, posters, print ads, and wristbands to the children and their families, which will help them understand how to maintain a healthy weight by balancing ENERGY IN (calories from food and drinks) and ENERGY OUT (calories burned through physical activity).

We are also members of the Emerald Coast Tennis Council and the United States Tennis Association. We offer free weekly tennis lessons provided by a USTA Certified Developmental Instructor as part of our Fitness Theme.

Also, we have a staff member on-site who, in addition to being our Arts Director, is a Certified Group Fitness Instructor (Aerobics and Fitness Association of America) and will provide daily exercise sessions for the children.

According to the Sunshine State Standards for Florida, students in Middle Schools are only required to take P.E. classes for 2 years out of a possible 3 and in High Schools; the students are only required to take P.E. classes one year out of a possible four. We intend to fill in the gaps during non-school hours.

Our Fitness Program directly addresses the problem of obesity and the harmful and sometime life-threatening effects associated with obesity.

Several of our program children have been diagnosed ADHD. A 2001 State University of New York, Buffalo study showed the positive benefits of exercise on ADHD children. Behavior changes were generally noticeable two to four weeks after beginning an exercise program and children with oppositional behaviors made the greatest

improvements with exercise. Aerobic exercises are particularly helpful for weight control and reducing ADD/ADHD medication dependency.

Our students will learn to exercise at levels, which will be the most efficient for improving to maintaining their personal fitness.

Our tennis lessons will emphasize physical and mental skills which will also enhance the importance of teamwork, honesty, self discipline, strategy, leadership and fun.

The purpose of this Project is to give the children the opportunity to participate in life-changing physical and nutritional education and to become aware of the importance of personal health as it pertains to them physically and emotionally.

Our goal is to provide a variety of direct services to the children of our community to help them improve his/her grades in school and encourage enthusiasm for learning. We also strive to help them improve their social skills and social behavior, establish moral responsibility, increase student community service and develop lifelong goals and ambitions. We also strive to increase their conflict resolution skills, help them gain respect for other and their cultures and learn positive life skills that they will need to help them grow into responsible, self-sufficient adults.

We also strive to help them pursue a healthy lifestyle by teaching them the importance of exercise and healthful eating habits.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Merchelle Hixson-Wells: Chair  
Assistant Principal: Bruner Middle School
  
- Jimmy James: Vice Chair  
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- Valerie Bogar: Board Member  
Performing Arts Director: Youth Village
  
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- Kathy Foster: Board Member  
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- Al Gardner: Board Member  
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- Joel T. Knight: Board Member  
Chief Engineer, 672<sup>nd</sup> Armament Systems Squadron, Air Armament Center,  
Eglin Air Force Base
  
- Tanya Michetti: Board Member  
Community Volunteer
  
- Barbara Wall: Board Member  
Retired, member ISP \* (Institute for Senior Professionals)

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\* The ISP is sponsored by Northwest Florida State College and provides review and consulting support on issues relevant to the Okaloosa Walton community. The ISP membership is comprised of senior military, medical, executive and management professionals of the community.