



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

2012 Annual Awards Program

Program Excellence Awards Nomination Form

Deadline for Nominations: March 16, 2012

Complete this form (sections 1 and 2) and submit with your descriptive narrative.

SECTION 1: Information About the Nominated Program

Program Excellence Award Category (*select only one*):

- ☐ Community Health and Safety
☒ **Community Partnership**
☐ Community Sustainability
☐ Strategic Leadership and Governance

Name of program being nominated: Making a Connection Camp (MAC Camp)

Jurisdiction(s) where program originated: Urbandale, IA

Jurisdiction population(s): 39,463

Please indicate the month and year in which the program you are nominating was fully implemented. (Note: All Program Excellence Award nominations must have been fully implemented by or before January 31, 2011, to be eligible. The start date should not include the initial planning phase.)

Month: June Year: 2010

Name(s) and title(s) of individual(s) who should receive recognition for this award at the ICMA Annual Conference in Phoenix, Arizona, October 2012. (Each individual listed MUST be an ICMA member to be recognized.):

Name: A.J. Johnson

Title: City Manager Jurisdiction: Urbandale, IA

Name: _____

Title: _____ Jurisdiction: _____

Name: _____

Title: _____ Jurisdiction: _____

SECTION 2: Information About the Nominator/Primary Contact

Name of contact:	<u>A.J. Johnson</u>		
Title:	<u>City Manager</u>	Jurisdiction:	<u>Urbandale,IA</u>
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Problem Assessment:

The City of Urbandale has experienced rapid and diverse growth in the past decade to become the twelfth largest city in Iowa, at a population of approximately 40,000. As is often the case, the local school districts are among the first to notice the effects of an influx of immigrant populations. The Urbandale Community School District found that its Karen Acres Elementary School experienced such an influx in 2009/2010. The District brought this issue to the attention of the City's Parks and Recreation Department, which also provided Community Education services for the District. The problem identified was how to address a growing number of immigrant and lower income children who were undernourished, unsupervised, lacked positive outlets; and for many, learning English as a second language. This problem was of particular concern during the summer months, when this vulnerable population, who relied heavily on the District's resources, was left without these services when school was out of session.

Program Implementation and Costs

In response to this need, the Parks and Recreation Department created the **"Making a Connection (MAC) Camp"** in 2010, in cooperation with the District, the Urbandale Police Department and local businesses. Staff from Karen Acres School selected 40 lower income and immigrant children in grades 1 to 5 (ages 6 to 12 years old) who they believed could benefit the most from the MAC Camp experience. The MAC Camp provided a safe and positive environment, and engaged these children in activities that focused on arts, reading, math, recreation and life skills to help their transition into the community and to learn the English language.

To focus on core school skills, the MAC Camp hired teachers from Karen Acres to provide an hour of reading and math each day. To solve transportation issues, the MAC Camp activities were held in the nearby Karen Acres Park or at the school, based on the belief that the children would feel more comfortable and willing to participate in a program close to where they lived. To keep the children coming back each day, the MAC Camp provided a mix of educational, recreational and fieldtrip opportunities. In addition and most importantly, each child was provided a nutritional breakfast and lunch every day of the camp, which ran Monday through Friday, from 8:00am to 1:00pm. Each child also received 2 t-shirts with the MAC Camp logo, which provided them with clothing and a sense of belonging.

The inaugural 2010 MAC Camp was launched with a \$4,000 Prairie Meadows Racetrack and Casino regional grant and supplemented with a \$4,000 donation from Police forfeiture funds. This total funding of \$8,000 enabled the 40 children to go to the MAC Camp for free, at a program cost of \$40 per child per week, or \$200 per child for the 5 week program.

Based on the overwhelming success of the first MAC Camp, which will be described in the next section, the 2011 MAC Camp was expanded to 50 children over a 7 week program. In addition, the 2011 MAC Camp enhanced its program to teach the children appropriate social skills, dealing with conflicts, setting life goals, respecting others and valuing diversity. The children also learned to give back to the community by cleaning Karen Acres Park weekly as a MAC activity, and by inviting residents in the neighborhood to the MAC Party in the Park. Additionally, the Police Department

provided Officers to the MAC Camp, who participated in field trips and events, and interacted with the children daily.

Funding for the 2011 MAC Camp consisted of \$2,000 from Polk County, \$4,000 from the Urbandale Jaycees, and \$18,000 from the local Gabus Family Foundation. Additionally, food for the program was provided at cost by a local Hy-Vee grocery. This total funding of \$24,000 enabled the 50 children to go to the MAC Camp for free, at a program cost of about \$70 per child per week, or \$480 per child for the 7 week program.

Tangible Results or Measurable Outcomes of the Program

Educational research shows that one of the challenges many children struggle with during the summer is a regression of reading and math skills. The MAC Camp participants also have the added challenge of little or no parent involvement or supervision, which the District staff attributes to a noticeable regression in behavioral and social areas.

After the inaugural 2010 MAC Camp, the Karen Acres Reading Resource Teacher determined that the children involved in the MAC program **showed marked improvement in reading and math** in 2010/2011. Unlike previous years, instead of dropping one to three reading levels over the summer, a third of the MAC students improved two reading levels, a third of the MAC students improved one reading level, and the remainder maintained their reading level.

In addition, there were **positive behavioral changes** for the children involved in the 2010 MAC Camp, as confirmed by Patty Schlotterbeck, Principal. *"Prior to MAC Camp, by May 1st, 2010, Karen Acres had 98 office referrals for behavior. The following school year of 2011, Karen Acres had 45 office referrals for behavior, a*

decrease by 54%. From August through January, 2012, Karen Acres has only had 15 office referrals, and 6 of the 15 referrals have been the same student that we did not have at Karen Acres last year."

Lessons Learned:

Lessons learned from the MAC Camp were many, varied and ongoing. First, the Urbandale community, which has a median income above the state average and is viewed as an upper middle class suburb of the state's capital city, has become aware of the challenges many children face in Urbandale. This awareness led to more individuals, organizations, and businesses volunteering and providing grants, donations and other funding assistance to the MAC Camp. In addition, the Urbandale Food Pantry added evening hours as a result of the 2010 MAC Camp's documentation, to further meet the needs of parents who worked during the day. The success of the MAC Camp has led other non-profits, such as the Urbandale Community Action Network (UCAN), faith based groups and Endow Urbandale, to provide assistance at other times of the year to children in need.

A second lesson learned was the critical need for positive role models and mentors for children within the community. *"MAC Camp has proven that positive reinforcement can change a youth's behavior"*, noted Mollie Wilhite, with the City's recreation program. MAC Camp participants were seen emulating MAC Camp staff and the Police Officers, who became to them role models that encouraged appropriate behavior and activities. During the first few weeks of the 2011 MAC Camp, an 11 year old exhibited extremely poor and disruptive behavior. Through positive reinforcement by the camp supervisors and encouragement to develop natural leadership skills, the youth

became one of the best behaved and most responsible participants in the Camp. This past school year, the individual ran for and won the Student Council President position at the Urbandale Middle School.

A third lesson learned is that modest educational instruction daily can prevent the decline of core educational skills, such as reading and math. By providing just one hour a day, five days a week, the MAC Camp participants retained or improved in reading and math over the summer months. In addition, the MAC Camp had a positive influence on behavior and social skills that led to improved performance in school.

One final lesson to list is that the use of Police Officers, first incorporated into the program for authority, became avenues to breakdown the negative barriers associated with law enforcement. The involvement of the Police Department's Community Relations Officer and other Officers, who helped with the field trips and daily programming, allowed the children to learn the Police were there to help. This fostered positive relationships between the participants, their families and the Police.

Conclusion:

The overwhelming success of the MAC Camp program has only begun. Its recognition as a Dan Chavez *"Beyond the Horizon Award"* and as an IACP/Motorola *"Webber Seavey Award for Quality in Law Enforcement"* has secured additional foundation grants. The City's Parks and Recreation Department has enough support for the upcoming third MAC Camp to again fund the five day a week program entirely with grants and donations. We are enthusiastic that the 2012 MAC Camp will expand to two schools with over 100 children for 8 weeks, and that it will continue to remain free to the children!