



Child and Family Network Centers

VPP Investment Partner Series



■ Child and Family Network Centers (CFNC)

In 1984, the mothers of 17 children living in the one public housing development in Alexandria, Virginia learned that their children had failed kindergarten. They were told that their sons and daughters would not be allowed to attend first grade because they lacked fundamental social and cognitive skills. These mothers were bewildered, dismayed, even angry. But they followed their instincts to protect and provide for their children. They created a center in a small office space at the recreation center and found a teacher willing to help prepare their youngsters for school. There were only six children in that first class of preschoolers. Remarkably, all of them were classified as “gifted” when they entered the public kindergarten the following year.

Today, Child and Family Network Centers reaches almost 200 three-and-four-year-old children living in Alexandria’s and Arlington’s poorest neighborhoods. Many of their parents do not speak English and need many support services. So, in addition to preparing children for kindergarten, CFNC is a guide for the parents, showing them how to parent, how to find jobs, and how to navigate a complicated social service system. Like the mothers who started that first preschool, CFNC is preparing children—and their families—for learning and for life. Says CFNC Executive Director Barbara Fox Mason, “We have these children for just so many hours; they spend most of their time at home. So, to make a lasting change for children, we have to work with the entire family.”



■ Profile

Child and Family Network Centers provides free and fully accredited preschool education and family support, literacy, job training, and health programs to families in Alexandria and Arlington.

Facts

Founded: 1984

Executive Director: Barbara Fox Mason

Chair, Board of Directors: Steve Nearman

2005:

Budget: \$2.6 million

Children Served: 172

Mission and History

The mission of the Child and Family Network Centers is to provide caring, high-quality free education and related services to at-risk children and families in their own neighborhoods to prepare and empower them for success in school and life.

The Child and Family Network Centers was started in 1984 by a group of mothers living in Alexandria public housing who were dismayed that their children had failed kindergarten. Recognizing that their youngsters needed help in preparing for school, the mothers hired Barbara Fox Mason, a talented teacher who shared the parents' resolve to improve the circumstances for at-risk children. Mason started the preschool program with six children in one room of a housing project.

Today, Mason oversees seven accredited preschool programs for three- to five-year-olds in Alexandria's poorest neighborhoods. Over the years, CFNC has prepared more than 1,000 children to enter elementary school. In addition to getting children ready to succeed in school, CFNC provides support services to the families of those children.

Services

The Child and Family Network Centers operates seven preschool sites with thirteen classrooms. All of the preschool centers are located in Alexandria neighborhoods with high concentrations of families living in poverty and one Arlington neighborhood. Over the years, CFNC has adapted its services and staffing to meet the changing needs of the communities in which it is located.

- **Early Childhood Education:** Free nationally accredited early childhood education and comprehensive services for children ages 3 and 4, all considered at-risk for school failure. CFNC's Preschool Program is designed to give children living in poverty the skills they need to enter kindergarten prepared to learn.
- **Family Support:** By helping parents to achieve self-sufficiency, CFNC's Family Support Program gives children what they need most: strong capable families. Social Workers and parents set targets and milestones together which lead to: positive parenting, stable living environments, English language acquisition and healthy families.

- **Health Services:** CFNC's Health Services Program enables parents to support the healthy development of their children, resolve issues that have an impact on the health of their families, and access community-based services. The Health Services Program is staffed by a Nurse Practitioner who is available to parents at all sites. The Nurse schedules hearing, vision and dental screenings, refers children who need follow up care and screens all children's health forms for up-to-date immunizations. Additionally, the Nurse assists families in obtaining health insurance.

Notable Awards and Honors

- Barbara Fox Mason awarded Washingtonian of the Year, by *The Washingtonian*, 2005
- Barbara Fox Mason received the Community Enhancement Award, from the Excellence in Virginia Government Awards, 2005
- CFNC received the Annie E. Casey Foundation Families Count Award, 2003
- Received a leadership award from the Washington Area Women's Foundation, 1998



■ Performance Summary and Fact Sheet

Summary

The Child and Family Network Centers (CFNC) is a stronger and more effective organization than it was in 2001. CFNC continues to be a leader in addressing early childhood development and has become a catalyst for action in Northern Virginia. Its effectiveness and sustainability have increased as well. CFNC has expanded both the reach and depth of its programs, added key leadership senior positions, and established innovative partnerships with the city of Alexandria and Arlington County.

Key Information

- *Date, years, and stage of VPP Investment:*
December 2001; 3.7 years (later-stage; fully funded)
- *Capital committed and disbursed by VPP:*
\$600,363 committed and funded
- *Estimated children to be served in 2010:* 505
- *Revenue increase & % budget growth:* \$1.1 to \$2.6 million – 140% increase in 4 years
- *Leveraged funding:* \$1.3 million
- *Expansion to new places and coverage:* 7 classrooms, 4 sites

Aspiration and Goals

The Child and Family Network Centers seeks to be recognized as an organization that provides the best community-based preschool and comprehensive family services in the country. With a VPP investment, CFNC envisions expanding the organization to increase the number of at-risk children receiving high-quality, free preschool education and to demonstrate its program as a regional and national model for community-based family service. Research has shown

that preschool preparation for at-risk children results in powerful positive outcomes for those individuals throughout their lives. One study by the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation found that at age 27 individuals who had attended a high-quality preschool had higher incomes and educational levels and lower rates of school dropout, arrest, and welfare dependency than a comparison group who did not attend preschool. The CFNC model of locating preschools and related services in the neighborhoods where at-risk children and their families live enables it to reach children and families in a non-threatening environment. The planning process that VPP supported helped CFNC management and their Board define a clear direction and a scale of growth they feel is achievable. The projected growth and expansion for the organization was more constrained than originally envisioned when the initial VPP planning investment was made. Therefore, the scope of funding and support is scaled appropriately to their refined vision and expansion plans. We respect the planning process CFNC went through and continue to value and support the high quality of services CFNC provides to children of low-income families in Alexandria.

CFNC's aspirations and long-term goals are to:

- Expand from eight classrooms serving 140 families in Alexandria to seventeen classrooms serving 270 families through expansion to the West End of Alexandria and South Arlington;
- Improve the current organization structure, particularly in the areas of development, communications, outcomes, technology, and human resources;
- Enhance programmatic initiatives including converting to full-day preschool education, expand support services through partnering or direct service (i.e. before/after care, health care, legal/immigration, mental health, financial/banking advice, etc.).



Investment Rationale

CFNC provides preschool and social services to needy families that are not able to obtain these services through traditional, preschool, and social service programs. Affordable preschool slots for low-income children are woefully inadequate in Alexandria and the surrounding area, elevating the need for CFNC's services in these communities. While CFNC is focused on providing a quality preschool experience for children, its programs extend to the needs of the family as a unit. This community-based, integrated model is the key to the success and impact that CFNC has been able to attain with the children and families it serves. CFNC is well positioned for growth. It relocated and consolidated operations, which allowed it to begin functioning more efficiently as an organization and deliver its services more effectively. CFNC is taking formidable steps to position itself to further address the unmet needs of Alexandria and its adjacent communities. Finally, the organization has demonstrated performance. CFNC's growth since inception has been deliberate and managed. Over the past 18 years the organization has expanded from a two-hour preschool serving six children to providing full-day preschool services to almost 200 children, while expanding its impact on children by providing a variety of support services to the family.

Key Accomplishments

CFNC's greater effectiveness led to an almost 100% increase in the number of children served from 120 to 218 over four years and program expansion into two new neighborhoods. CFNC greatly increased the impact of its programs by transitioning all remaining half-day

programs to full-day, and adding health services and financial literacy programs. CFNC maintained and/or attained accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children at all locations. It has been recognized as a model program by Montgomery County Department of Human Services and the Maryland Department of Education. CFNC's students' average overall developmental growth far exceeded the national average, particularly for children whose first language was not English. Other noteworthy accomplishments that contributed to improved capacity and increased effectiveness include:

Planning and Focus: Completed business planning in early 2003 resulting in a detailed expansion plan to open new sites, strengthen existing programs, and add new programs. Rebuilt a stronger, more engaged board united around new growth plans.

Human Capital-Board and Management: Added a Chief Operating Officer and Development Director, transitioned to a management team structure, and clarified roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes.

Outcome Assessment: Adopted The Rensselaerville Institute's model outcome approach to achieve and define key outcomes to be measured on an organization-wide basis.

Increased Visibility: Receipt of \$500 thousand Families Count award from Annie E. Casey Foundation highlights achievement on a national scale.



■ Leaders

Barbara Fox Mason

Executive Director



In 1984, Barbara Fox Mason joined a group of women living in a housing project in Alexandria, Va. and founded the Alexandria Community Network Preschool (now the Child and Family Network Centers, CFNC). From that

humble beginning she has been the driving force behind CFNC's growth from one preschool serving 6 children to a model program, accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, serving 140 young children and their families.

Mason created the preschool's teaching program, introducing the High/Scope curriculum, which is nationally recognized as especially effective for at-risk children in multi-cultural settings. She also brought in services to diagnose and treat learning delays, speech/language therapy, psychological assessments, social skills groups, occupational therapy and dental, hearing and vision screenings for students. Mason organized a family support program that encourages parent's involvement in their child's education and helps families' move toward self-sufficiency. This program includes job training, case management, family counseling, parent workshops, parent advisory groups, and English as a second language/literacy classes.

Mason is recognized as a strong advocate for programs for at-risk children and a community leader. She has served on Alexandria's: Special Education Advisory Board, Community Health Coalition, Economic Opportunities Commission, Early Childhood Task Force, Early Childhood Development Commission, Preschool Intervention Project Advisory Board, the Task Force on Alexandria City Contributions to Nonprofit Human Service Agencies and The White House Conference on

Childcare. She is also an active member of the Alexandria Council of Non-Profits, Northern Virginia Human Services Coalition, Northern Virginia and National Association for the Education of Young Children, Alexandria Director's Association, the Virginia Preschool Initiative Planning Committee and The Non-Profit Round Table of the greater Washington Area.

Mason has made presentations at: the Annual Conference of the Virginia Association for Early Childhood Education, Annual Conference of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum, American Bar Association, Virginia Conference on Preschool for At-Risk Children, George Washington University's summer institute, and the Second Annual Conference on Welfare Reform. Her community leadership and professional expertise have been recognized by, the Alexandria Commission on Women for "Outstanding Achievement in Public Education", the Sertoma Club for her "Service of Mankind" and by the Washington Area Women's Foundation for her leadership.

Steve Nearman

President of the Board

Steve Nearman is President and CEO of Nearman Financial Consulting Inc., which provides financial advice and planning, investment advice, and management, as well as life, health, dental, disability, and long-term care insurance to individuals and small companies. Fee-based advice is managed by Jefferson Pilot Securities Corp., a registered investment advisor. He also has been a sports columnist with The Washington Times since 1991, as well as a freelance sportswriter for print and online publications since 1982. In addition to his role as President of the Board of Child and Family Network Centers, he also serves as a board member of Alexandria Chamber of Commerce and is a Masters Athlete with USA Track and Field. He has a Bachelor's degree from the University of Rochester, and an MBA from George Washington University.





1201 15th Street, NW ■ Suite 420 ■ Washington, DC 20005

Tel: 202.955.8085 ■ Fax: 202.955.8087

info@vppartners.org ■ www.vppartners.org