

## Community Unites to Help Youth Become More Active

### *Issue*

Since 1961, the Smith Jones Community Center (SJCC) in Conway, S.C. has been a vital part of the community because it was where many African-American youths played softball and basketball and took part in other outdoor activities after school. In 1997, the facility closed because the building was in bad condition. It was condemned and eventually demolished, leaving many young people without access to a safe haven for physical activity after school.

S.C. Kids Count for Horry County reveals 33% of boys and 48% of girls said during a week they had not engaged in 20 minutes of vigorous activity for three days and at least 30 minutes of moderate activity for five days. The S.C. Youth Risk Behavior Survey in 2003 revealed that 27% of high school students felt that they were overweight, and 43% were trying to lose weight.

However, more than half of all South Carolinians do not get adequate amounts of physical activity or are totally inactive. According to The Department of Health and Environmental Control's "Healthy People Living in Healthy Communities" Report of 2005, the state's obesity-related medical costs topped \$1 billion in 2005.

As a result of inactivity and limited access to facilities that promote physical activity with in the community, many youth are becoming overweight and/or obese. Regular physical activity reduces the risk for many diseases, helps control weight, and strengthens muscles, bones, and joints, thus allowing for youth to lead healthier lives.

### *Intervention*

To increase access to facilities that promote physical activity after school hours, the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control's Chronic Disease Risk Reduction manager in Conway and the SJCC Board of Directors worked together to make the community aware of the need for after-school activities for the youth. Block grant funds (10%) were used towards staffing and resources for this project. The following was accomplished:

- The board surveyed residents, made presentations to community churches, Conway City Council, the city's recreation department, Horry County Council, and the Conway Kiwanis about the importance of getting playground equipment on the center's old site.
- Members of the community, the City of Conway, Horry County Council, and the Kiwanis gave funds for the project, which included purchasing swings and other playground equipment; resurfacing the baseball field; and building a new fence, bleachers, dugouts and a water fountain.

### *Impact*

Since the equipment was installed, families and children often visit the center's playground where they walk, use the gym set, and play games on the basketball and tennis courts. Though the center isn't officially opened, securing playground equipment was a vital first step toward getting funds to construct a new building. In turn, this will help decrease many health issues not only for youth but also for the community at large. Six year-old James put it best when he said, "I come out here every day with my daddy and play until dark." A 10 year-old added, "I am glad we have someplace to come and just be kids."

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