

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: FEBRUARY 25, 2010

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF APPLICATION FOR 2010 AMERICORPS STATE GRANT TO FUND A CHILD WELL-BEING AND FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM AT BRENT PLACE

ISSUE: Application for 2010 AmeriCorps grant from the Virginia Office on Volunteerism and Community Service (OVCS) to fund the Department of Human Services' ChildThrive!, a child well-being and family support program to be administered on-site at Brent Place.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council:

- (1) Authorize the submission of an AmeriCorps grant application to request funding for the ChildThrive! Program; and
- (2) Authorize the City Manager to execute all necessary documents.

BACKGROUND: ChildThrive! would utilize an AmeriCorps grant and their organizational structure to accomplish the goal of enhancing the well-being of children and families who reside at Brent Place. Brent Place is owned and operated by the nonprofit housing development organization, Homes for America. It is home to over 120 children and approximately 190 families, many of whom are foreign born and adjusting to the American way of life. The complex is a subsidized 14 story apartment building located at 375 South Reynolds Street in Alexandria. It is comprised of 207 apartments consisting of 50 one bedroom, 105 two bedroom and 52 three bedroom units. While up to eleven units may be rented without income limitations, at this time all of the households residing at the property have incomes at or below 60 percent of the area median income, including a large number of households with income far below that range.

Brent Place has been identified as having serious issues with violence and crime. Each year since 2006, Brent Place has had the most police calls for service of any residential building in the City, with an average of 280 calls per year. Since 2006, Brent Place has also been the leading residential building for domestic violence calls, with an average of 51 calls per year. By

providing on-site services it is hoped that the quality of life and the living environment can be significantly improved, especially for the children and youth. In calendar year 2009, the Alexandria Department of Human Services received and investigated 28 referrals of child abuse and neglect at Brent Place.

In the City's strategic planning process, the need for decentralized services, particularly in the West End was noted. This underscored earlier findings of the comprehensive assessment of Alexandria's human services system, commissioned by the Alexandria Council of Human Service Organizations.

AmeriCorps is a national service network that provides part-time and full-time service opportunities for participants to serve their communities and build the capacity of organizations to meet local needs in the areas of education, healthy futures, clean energy/environment, veterans, and opportunity. In Virginia, the AmeriCorps State program is administered by OVCS which receives an allocation each year from the Corporation for National and Community Service to provide grants to organizations to operate AmeriCorps programs throughout Virginia.

DISCUSSION: The purpose of ChildThrive! is to enhance the well-being of children and families residing in Brent Place. In order to accomplish this goal, the program will focus on building and strengthening the existing community and providing a variety of on-site easily accessible decentralized services. To accomplish this goal ChildThrive! will recruit and maintain five AmeriCorps members who will assure robust and comprehensive supports and linkages for children and their families. The City of Alexandria's Human Services Department remains committed to cultural diversity within its workforce and will focus recruitment methods on recent college graduates who best reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of the families residing at Brent Place. ChildThrive! recruitment will be based on the Teach for America Model, which targets highly accomplished college graduates from a variety of disciplines to work in urban and rural low-income communities.

Five AmeriCorps members stationed at Brent Place will be available to provide family support, prevention services, recreational and educational services and crisis intervention to strengthen and enhance the Brent Place community. Currently there are several limited programs on-site and some part-time staff, including a bilingual Therapist I from the Alexandria Community Services Board. The Alexandria City Public Schools operate a Family Resource Center, which provides tutoring assistance, and the Alexandria Police Department has a satellite station located at the facility. In collaboration with these partners, ChildThrive! plans to expand on-site services to include, but not limited to:

- Screening for public assistance benefits
- Employment counseling and training
- Domestic violence counseling
- Recreational services, on and off-site, for children and families
- Educational support for school-aged children
- Citizenship education and assistance

Representatives from Homes for America have indicated their support for the project and have identified services that they see as vital to enhancing the lives of their residents. If the grant is awarded, Homes for America and community partners such as the Community Services Board, Office on Women and the Alexandria Police Department will join with the Department of Human Services to develop a comprehensive service program at this site.

The Casey Foundation and the Center for the Study of Social Policy have expressed an interest in this project and further discussions will be held in order to explore any role they may play in the design and implementation of the project. One role under consideration is providing assistance in developing and implementing the program evaluation.

FISCAL IMPACT: The project has a total operating budget of \$80,600 per year with a required cash or in-kind match of 24 percent. The grant request is for \$65,000 with a \$15,000 in-kind match, which is included in the Department's operating budget. The match will consist of staff supervision/leadership, and agency space and resources. The grant period is twelve months. Grants are renewable for up to two additional years. No new positions will be created by this program.

STAFF:

Debra Collins, Assistant City Manager for Community and Human Services

Michael Gilmore, Executive Director, Community Services Board

Lisa Baker, Director, Office on Women

Suzanne Chis, Director of Social Services, Department of Human Services

Kendel Taylor, Financial Management Coordinator, Office of Management and Budget