Boys & Girls Club Created Through Collaboration
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After years of hard work by the local community and the Washington County Archway Partnership, the Boys & Girls Club of Washington County officially opened its doors to local youth on August 20, 2012. This event was significant for the community as the City of Sandersville partnered with the Georgia Department of Defense for use of the local National Guard Armory. The community had previously established a need for a youth organization to foster the growth and development of the area’s young people.

The City of Sandersville was granted use of the formerly vacant National Guard Armory by the Georgia State Properties Commission to provide educational and recreational services to Washington County’s youth. In cooperation with the Georgia Department of Corrections, skilled work crews spent weeks transforming the Armory into a place where young people can learn and have fun. “This is something that was very desperately needed, and it is something that we will be proud of for years and years to come,” said Jimmy Andrews, Mayor of Sandersville.

The collaborative process to create a local Boys & Girls Club began in 2007 when Washington County citizens and stakeholders came together as part of the Archway Partnership to discuss their community’s most pressing needs. As a result of that partnership, a study was then conducted in 2008, which found that approximately 3,000 students in Washington County live at or below the poverty line. It additionally found that many children live with their grandparents and that of those grandparents, 47.2 percent of them were the children’s primary caregivers. Based on the findings of that study, concerning rates of sexually transmitted illnesses (STIs), and juvenile court commitments, the community saw a desperate need for after-school and summertime activity programs to foster the growth and achievement of local youth.

After discussion and planning meetings, the community conducted a readiness assessment to identify available resources and to determine how well the needs of area youth were being met. These initial meetings were facilitated by the Washington County Archway Partnership, which provided a mechanism for those community conversations to create real results in the establishment of a steering committee in September of 2009. Upon deliberation, the local Archway Executive Committee and current Archway staff decided that a local Boys & Girls Club would be a great way to help young people reach their full potential in a nurturing community environment. A local Advisory Board was then established in September of 2010 to create an operating agreement with the Boys and Girls Club of the CSRA to provide programs, manage policies, find a suitable building, create a budget, and raise funds.

The Advisory Board of local leaders worked with staff from the Boys & Girls Club of the CSRA to raise awareness of what they were doing and to generate support for a local club. Exploring multiple sites for the club and ultimately raising the needed $125,000 in the initial Founders Campaign, the Advisory Board formed the perfect partnership with the City of Sandersville for use of the National Guard Armory.
The Archway Partnership, as a University of Georgia (UGA) outreach platform, delivers higher education resources to local Georgia communities to address economic and community development needs. Archway has worked with the Washington County community for over five years to bring local residents and stakeholders to the table to address community identified needs. These needs were then translated into specific goals and over the years, many UGA faculty, staff and students have been involved in the process of establishing a Boys & Girls Club in Washington County. Students from the Institute for Nonprofit Organizations assisted in conducting the initial research that led to the identification of a Boys & Girls Club as a potential solution to the community’s concerns as well as locating and writing grant applications. Additionally, a Master of Public Administration student prepared community statistics on teen pregnancy, poverty indicators, STD rates, juvenile crime, educational attainment and family status.

On community partnership between the city, the Georgia Department of Defense, the Department of Corrections, the Boys & Girls Clubs and the Washington County Archway Partnership, Mayor Andrews stated, “It’s been a great team effort.”

**Advancing Community Priorities**: Based on the community’s need to provide a nurturing environment for area youth, the Washington County Archway Partnership collaborated to create a Boys & Girls Club. This effort not only unified the community around a common goal, but provided a much needed resource for local families.