AHC’s Resident Services program started 21 years ago with a simple idea – give kids something productive to do in the afternoons. Today the program has evolved into a thriving community-based effort that touches hundreds of children, teens, adults and senior citizens each year.

The Resident Services program is one of the reasons the Moye family has lived at Woodbury Park for 11 years. All three of the family’s children participate in the after-school and teen programs. “I really love the community center and how the programs have helped our children,” says Lakicia Moye, a teacher’s aide. Moye, who is studying to become a teacher, also appreciates the way Resident Services puts families in touch with other community resources.

Helping residents connect with community services is one of Resident Services’ key priorities. With long-time roots in the Arlington community, AHC has formed dozens of partnerships with community organizations that focus on a wide range of issues, from education to health to financial planning. Recently AHC students participated in a Care for a Change Parade and Color Run sponsored by Arlington’s Department of Parks and Recreation Kids in Action after-school programs. The goal was to increase and encourage greater empathy among youth. Along with learning about anti-bullying efforts and the importance of friendships, students loved running through rainbows of color.

AHC’s education programs are a centerpiece of Resident Services. Many of AHC’s students grow up in the program and feel like it’s an extended family. The close knit support is a big part of the program’s success.

Since 2008, 100 percent of AHC’s teens in the program have graduated from high school. More than 80% have gone on to college.

“AHC has been like a family to me,” says Dawitt Jabessa, a rising freshman at George Mason University who plans to major in engineering. “It’s taught me to have perseverance, resiliency and patience. It will support me through life. It will always be my family.”

AHC Inc. is a nonprofit developer of affordable housing in the mid-Atlantic region that provides quality homes and education programs for low- and moderate-income families. Based in Arlington, VA, AHC Inc. was founded in 1975.
After-School Program: Reading is #1 Priority

AHC’s After-School Program focuses on improving literacy for elementary students. Staff and volunteers build reading, writing and vocabulary skills through a variety of educational and cultural activities.

Building and nurturing reading skills is the top priority in AHC’s After-School Program. AHC has a variety of tools to improve and increase literacy skills, including word identification games, reading incentives and highly skilled reading specialists who work one-on-one each week with students who need extra help.

The focus is paying off and students are thriving. Ninety-two percent of the students assessed at the beginning and end of the year improved their reading level by at least one full grade and/or are reading at or above grade level.

Five struggling readers improved by two levels!

Project-Based Learning. This active, dynamic classroom approach has become a cornerstone of AHC’s After-School Program. Students actively explore topics by choosing projects, researching and presenting information to fellow classmates. This past school year, students worked on three major themes – financial literacy, the arts, and nature and exploration.

A particularly successful financial literacy project was a fundraiser created by Fort Henry students to raise funds for a local animal shelter. Students made the goods (lemonade, painted cars, baked treats) or services (painting nails) they wanted to sell and had a lot of fun organizing the whole event. The animal shelter benefited as well – students raised $150.

Paws to Read, which gives youngsters an opportunity to read to friendly dogs, exemplifies making reading fun for children. The premise is that children will build their confidence reading to a furry – and non-judgmental – audience.

Reading Club. To encourage the idea of reading as a fun recreational activity, the Gates of Ballston staff introduced a new Reading Club for students between the end of school and summer camp. The drop-in program provided snacks, books and cozy spaces to curl up and read. Students were welcome to read independently, with a buddy, or with a staff member. The pilot program drew 10 to 13 kids each day.
AHC’s program for middle and high school students aims to keep teens in school and help them maximize their options after high school. The program includes one-on-one tutoring, mentoring, college visits, SAT test prep, help with scholarship and financial aid applications, and a variety of enriching experiences.

AHC’s comprehensive Teen Program nurtures and encourages students to not only graduate from high school, but to also maximize their own potential and become productive community members. The combination of enriching field trips, one-on-one mentoring and community service projects broadens students’ world view and inspires them to reach for the stars.

The formula has proved very successful. One hundred percent of the seniors in AHC’s teen program have graduated from high school – a total of 61 – since we began tracking the program in 2008. More than 80 percent of these students have continued on to college.

Some of this year’s highlights include:

13 Graduates – 11 College Bound. This year AHC celebrated the successful high school graduation of 13 students. Some of the students’ intended majors include forensic psychology, education, engineering and communications. Of the two teens not entering college, one is joining the military and another is moving abroad with her family. Overall, students received more than $35,000 in scholarships – an AHC record!

Feeding the Homeless. Teens in the Woodbury Park/Frederick program applied for and received an Arlington Community Foundation grant to provide healthy meals for residents of a local homeless shelter once a month. The teens researched nutritional ingredients, budgeted food purchases, and prepared food for nearly 50 residents. It was a fantastic experience and the teens are hoping to repeat the program next year.

Meaningful College Trips. Each year AHC’s teens visit several local colleges to open their eyes to the experience. This year’s college trips were carefully designed to make them more meaningful to students and to expose them to a variety of majors and career possibilities.
Summer Camp: Making Learning Fun

AHC’s Summer Camp program is designed to prevent learning loss – a particular challenge for low-income students – through both educational and enrichment experiences.

Last year’s Summer Camp was awesome, and this year’s promises to be even better. Planning started back in January for the Outdoor Exploration theme. Students are exploring such concepts as outdoor recreation, (hiking, backpacking, etc.), survival skills and first aid, different environments and the plants and animals that live in cold versus warm environments, and Native Americans. The program combines field trips, project-based learning activities and lots of outdoor and creative time.

Highlights include:

Celebrating progress.
This summer, students are tracking their own academic progress to celebrate successful milestones. Staff is communicating more frequently with parents to highlight individual successes and any opportunities for improvement. The kids are including notes to families as well with prompts like: I learned… I read…

Theme-based field trips. This year, more excursions were chosen to reflect the camp’s Outdoor Exploration theme. For instance, the visit to the Botanical Gardens gave students a chance to explore plants that survive in different environments as well as plants that are used for medicinal purposes.

Healthy habits. Another emphasis this year is “Healthy habits that encourage physical and emotional health.” Topics include sleep, exercise, hygiene, nutrition and screen time. Staff will choose to focus on one activity each week.

Making learning fun.
Turning learning into fun activities is something our staff does beautifully. Word games and creative activities reinforce learned concepts. Bingo with sight words is a popular game among the campers and a wonderful way to help children learn the 100 or so words AHC is hoping they will learn this summer.
Volunteers and Partners: Key to Success

Volunteers and community partners form valuable relationships with students and are an integral part of the programs’ success. Here’s a look at some of the wonderful ways community members are adding immeasurably to our children’s educational experiences.

Creating a college scholarship. Long-time (11 years!) volunteers Joanna Miller and Roger Brown created a scholarship just for an AHC student. This spring, they presented the first-ever merit scholarship to Sivia Campos, who has participated in AHC’s education programs since 2nd grade. Sivia plans to attend the University of Mary Washington in the fall.

The scholarship fund, which is managed by the Arlington Community Foundation, provides $2,000 a year for four years to a student in AHC’s educational program. “We felt like we wanted to do something else to help the students as they reach this milestone and move on to the next stage of their lives,” said Miller. Brown and Miller hope others will contribute to the fund to provide additional scholarships in the years ahead. For more information, contact the Arlington Community Foundation at 703-243-4785.

Sharing the joys of gardening. Jen Dismukes spotted the Berkeley’s green space while riding her bike along Four Mile Run and thought it would be a perfect spot for a garden. Two years later, she has nurtured not only a healthy garden, but a thriving educational program for AHC’s After-School students. The children love learning about seeds, germination, photosynthesis and what the names of plants mean. With vegetables, flowers and even mini-pumpkins, the garden is lots of fun for the kids to watch evolve. As Jen says, “The garden is an encyclopedia about life.”

Building long-term relationships. Each year dozens and dozens of volunteers work with our middle and high school students as tutors. Sometimes the relationships blossom and become long-term connections. For Adriana Galdo, a rising freshman at Northern Virginia Community College, tutor Patricia Martin has been a consistent and supportive part of her life since 6th grade. “It’s nice to have a relationship, and get to know her on a personal level, says Adriana. “Now that I’m graduating, she’s seen me grow up and finish school.”

Partnering with local universities. AHC was fortunate to partner with both Marymount and George Mason this year. Marymount students studying to be English as a Second Language teachers were a tremendous help with seniors’ financial aid and college applications. George Mason social work interns dedicated 16 hours a week to AHC’s education programs as part of getting their BSW or MSW in social work. They all contributed immensely to our program!
Please consider helping a child start the school year off right with the supplies and tools they need to succeed. Each year AHC provides filled backpacks to children in our communities to help them participate fully in the school day – and to do their homework well, too.

It costs AHC $18 for a fully loaded backpack. Help set the tone for a child’s school year – help fill a backpack. Use the envelope inside to donate today or donate online at www.ahcinc.org.