The Anniston Civil Justice Fund: Investing in a Community’s Future

Beasley, Allen, Crow, Methvin, Portis & Miles
Shelby Roden
Cochran, Cherry, Givens & Smith
Norris & Davis/Burr Forman
The Anniston Civil Justice Fund was administered by the Alabama Civil Justice Foundation, a statewide grantmaking organization. Founded in 1992, the Alabama Civil Justice Foundation has awarded nearly $9 million to nonprofit organizations that assist children, families and seniors as well as to organizations that provide civil legal aid to the poor.

For more information about the Alabama Civil Justice Foundation, visit www.acjf.org or call 334.263.3003.

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Preface by Sue H. McInnish,
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My first official visit to Anniston as the representative of the soon to be established Anniston Civil Justice Fund was on December 17, 2003. At the invitation of Ed Gentle, who was managing the disbursement of the settlement funds in the Tolbert vs. Solutia case, I attended a public hearing for the Tolbert clients.

The Alabama Civil Justice Foundation (ACJF) had just learned that the four plaintiff law firms would be establishing a one million dollar fund at ACJF to improve the educational opportunities for the children living in areas impacted by PCBs. And here I was in a huge, old building with what appeared to me to be over 1,000 claimants—each one happy that some help was on the way, yet, still filled with questions and anxiety over their future.

My first realization was how devastating these chemicals were to individuals, families and this community. My heart broke for them. One woman in the back of the room told me about the struggle to keep her children from eating the pecans from the trees in their backyard. My parents were the owners of a pecan shelling plant, and we picked up pecans in our own yard every year throughout my childhood. Interestingly, in the midst of serious health problems and destroyed property, this woman’s pecans penetrated my emotions and hit home for me the extent to which this devastation had invaded their lives. They had been betrayed, and they sensed it every minute of every day.

Yet, because of the generosity of the attorneys who had fought in court on behalf of these and many other residents, I had a job to do that could mean much more than any level of sympathy. With the funds contributed, the attorneys had asked ACJF to use its expertise in the Anniston community to oversee how best to improve educational opportunities.

I was so impressed with these attorneys. First, they gave their own money—strictly charitable contributions—back to this community. They asked that these funds be spent in a way to leverage additional funds; thus, multiplying their dollars’ impact. Secondly, they recognized the importance of focusing on education to restore hope for the future, and they gave us the time to really engage with the people of Anniston and seek their input. The attorneys, too, afforded us the flexibility to pursue directions that would build a strong foundation and not always a visible monument to their generosity. They weren’t interested in handing out checks in front of a crowd but in doing their part to build a stronger community.

Over the seven years, we worked closely with the law firms through a Disbursement Committee made up of three attorneys who responded to my emails, held conference calls, and read dozens of grant proposals and reports. To Bob Roden, Rhon Jones, and Lea Bone, ACJF owes a great deal of appreciation. We, also, leaned on the advice of the ever patient Ed Gentle and his law firm that pursued fair distribution of funds and who gave back much to the community itself.

But all our work began and ended with the engagement of many wonderful caring people from this community. We listened and learned from so many who were generous with their time, expertise and real understanding of the community’s needs. Especially helpful were other funders in Anniston who sat with us to map out strategies that brought more advice and resources to the table.

Throughout the course of these seven years in Anniston, many decisions were made, but the best decision for Anniston came soon after the ACJF Board accepted this responsibility. We asked Mary Allen Jolley to be my partner with this endeavor. Mary was an ACJF Board Member who had a lifetime of professional endeavors with communities throughout Alabama and beyond our state. She understood community development, community and human dynamics, and she possessed the ability to bring people together to meet goals.

Mary and I spent many, many days in Anniston, especially during the first years, and we got to know many in the Anniston community as friends and colleagues. Mary brought to every encounter a genuineness that endeared her to this community in a special way. Her expertise, ideas and concern for the people of Anniston are evident in what the Anniston Civil Justice Fund was able to accomplish.

The Alabama Civil Justice Foundation has prepared this report for the Tolbert attorneys and all Anniston partners to celebrate the accomplishments the Anniston Fund has had in this east Alabama town. Nikki Tucker Thomas, ACJF’s Communications Director and project director for compiling this report, has done a valuable job to help us tell a portion of Anniston’s story. It is our hope that it brings a better understanding of the people of Anniston, the attorneys who helped them inside and outside the courtroom, and the importance of strong nonprofits and government in meeting the needs within a community.
Anniston, Alabama—located approximately midway between Birmingham and Atlanta—is a city of natural beauty that is steeped in a rich past that includes the Civil War and the Civil Rights Movement. Named the “Model City” in the late 1880s because of the city’s design, Anniston proudly housed a major military base, Ft. McClellan, and was an industrial hub in east Alabama that allowed for economic growth and expansion.

But, as with other cities and localities in Alabama, Anniston—with its special history entwined in a rich tradition and “down-home” flavor—found itself also marred by a catastrophic event that has had lasting repercussions for its citizenry.

In 1935, Monsanto purchased a factory from the Theodore Swann Company that in the 1920s had begun to produce PCBs, a class of man-made compounds that were manufactured and used extensively in electrical equipment. Located in the western part of the city, the factory was a vital part of the city’s economy and a reliable source of jobs.

The factory was located in a thriving community surrounded by homes and churches where families had vegetable gardens, fished in the local stream and children played. But as the years progressed, many in the community became ill and were suffering from illnesses. It became known some decades later that poisonous toxins from the Monsanto plant (later known as Solutia) had infiltrated water sources and the soil causing disastrous affects to the ecological system and to the residents.

After years of multiple lawsuits filed on behalf of the residents who had lived on the contaminated ground, drank contaminated water and ate contaminated food, a multi-million dollar settlement was reached in one of the cases, 

Tolbert vs. Solutia, and it has impacted Anniston in a positive manner that few initially thought it would.
In 2003, four plaintiff law firms—Beasley, Allen, Crow, Methvin, Portis & Miles; Shelby Roden; Cochran, Cherry, Givens & Smith and Norris & Davis/Burr Forman—successfully negotiated a settlement for thousands of individuals with abnormally high PCB levels in Anniston—then those firms made charitable contributions to benefit children and families of that community. The firms each contributed $250,000 to establish a $1 million fund at the Alabama Civil Justice Foundation asking that the Anniston Civil Justice Fund (Anniston Fund) be deliberately and strategically disbursed in order to have the greatest effect on educational opportunities available in impacted areas of the community.

The establishment of the Anniston Fund helped make it possible for some to envision a new future for their community—particularly about the future of their children. Many of the programs that were put into place opened the doors for the future by investing in the education and well-being of children from birth to college.
After the establishment of the Anniston Fund, Sue McInnish, Executive Director of the Alabama Civil Justice Foundation was tasked with the mission of directing the Anniston initiative. She had been involved in statewide grantmaking since 1987. Prior to working with ACJF, she had been Executive Director of the Children’s Trust Fund. Additionally, she had been a public education and child advocate since 1983 through her work as Executive Director of the Alabama Parent Teacher Association.

She asked Mary Allen Jolley, an ACJF Board Member, to assist her. Early in her career, Jolley had worked with Alabama Congressman Carl Elliott and assisted him in drafting the National Defense Education Act of 1958, which improved science, foreign language and technology education nationwide and provided low-interest loans for college and graduate school for needy students. From 1984 to 1994 she was Director of Economic and Community Affairs for The University of Alabama. After her retirement, she became a valued consultant to numerous communities in the areas of economic development and human services. She has also served as the director of the Alabama Network of Family Resource Centers.

They made many visits to West Anniston to seek out individuals and programs that were vital and essential to any good community. Jolley and McInnish toured the area to assess the physical environment and looked for community assets such as nonprofit organizations, schools, community centers, parks, playgrounds and thriving businesses.

“We saw the desolation surrounding the Solutia Chemical plant and traced the flow of Snow Creek that carried PCBs throughout the community. We saw major foundry operations that were closed years ago, with abandoned buildings quietly adding to the desolate landscape,” Jolley said.

Further beyond, the smokestacks of the U.S. Army Ordinance Works were silent reminders of the massive amount of deadly chemical weapons still in storage and awaiting safe disposal.

Day care centers were observed and visits were made to the limited number of social service agencies situated in the West Anniston area.

For the consultants, it was important to identify areas of strength in the community where resources from the Anniston Fund could help to improve and expand programs where there was reason to expect success. Visits to facilities and interviews with individuals revealed windows of opportunity for investing. Detailed program information was collected and time was spent to create trust and good working relationships.

To focus in on the area of education, exploratory work was done to identify areas where good practices could be brought to bear. Examples of community engagement to strengthen the role of parents and the total community in school improvement were the subject of meetings and discussions with leaders throughout the Greater Anniston community. State Department of Education officials and public interest groups such as A+ Education Foundation were consulted regarding best practices for improving math and reading skills. Visits were made to community organizations and governmental agencies to find ways for investing in after-school programs and other areas of need.

One of the major challenges of moving forward with identifying potential programs was the distrust that some in the Anniston community felt. There was a climate of fear of the unknown as it pertained to their personal health, their families' health and their community’s health.

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Support for the early childhood focus was particularly strong in conversations with Wayne Carmelloc-Harper of the Calhoun County Community Foundation (presently the Community Foundation of Northeast Alabama) and Bill Manning of the United Way of East Central Alabama. Both were encouraged by the work being done in this area across the state and the connections that the Anniston Fund could make for the community. The three funders called together a small group of community leaders to assess their support for focusing on early childhood. The group included Chip Howell (then-Anniston mayor), Dr. Sam Felton (then-Anniston Schools superintendent), Rep. Barbara Boyd and Dr. Bill Meehan (Jacksonville State University President).

“Although we had one million dollars, we wanted to avoid raising expectations that we could make the massive investments necessary to solve deeply rooted problems needed to improve education on a broad scale,” McInnish said. “It was important to use our resources to shape programs that could successfully seek other funding resources. The additional funds leveraged by Anniston Fund grants were among our greatest successes.”

After much discussion throughout the community, the decision was made to recommend to the attorneys and the ACJF Board to initially focus on early childhood education and parenting. These were areas of great need in the community, vital to any community that had strong educational opportunities, offered potential for additional funding, and of interest to many in the community. Over the next seven years, other areas of need where investments could make a difference were pursued. The story of how the Tolbert attorneys gave back to this community was written.

### Early Childhood Systems Planning and Service Delivery

Support for the early childhood focus was particularly strong in conversations with Wayne Carmello-Harper of the Calhoun County Community Foundation (presently the Community Foundation of Northeast Alabama) and Bill Manning of the United Way of East Central Alabama. Both were encouraged by the work being done in this area across the state and the connections that the Anniston Fund could make for the community. The three funders called together a small group of community leaders to assess their support for focusing on early childhood. The group included Chip Howell (then-Anniston mayor), Dr. Sam Felton (then-Anniston Schools superintendent), Rep. Barbara Boyd and Dr. Bill Meehan (Jacksonville State University President).

The Anniston Fund introduced a process being used by other communities to build consensus around priorities for preparing young children for school. This process—Blueprint for School Readiness—would bring all interested stakeholders to the table and allow them to access the most important early childhood needs and develop a concise, comprehensive plan to ensure that every child has the opportunity to succeed. This document would also serve as a starting point for directing resources from funders.

The Anniston Fund introduced its early childhood partners to Gail Piggott, Executive Director of the Alabama Partnership for Children (APC). APC is the statewide organization for birth-to-five issues that initiated the Blueprint process in Alabama. After enthusiastic support from child service providers and advocates in the community, the Anniston Fund provided an initial grant to the APC to convene local stakeholders to develop this comprehensive plan. Between 2004 and 2006, the Anniston Fund contributed $23,000 for work around the Blueprint. This was an exciting process that brought together a broad-based group of service providers, advocates, community leaders, and other stakeholders to examine the “state of young children” in Anniston and select priority strategies to improve child well-being in the local community. The Blueprint outlined the necessary components to achieve better child outcomes and school readiness through: ready families + ready communities + ready services (health and early education) + ready schools = ready children.

The work of developing the actual Blueprint and transition materials began in 2005 with more than 50 stakeholders actively engaged in the planning and implementation of the Blueprint. The Blueprint document itself provided the foundation from which years of early childhood work has continued. The community used the Blueprint process to identify and document the community’s needs and then to identify action steps to help families and young children.

One of the major aspects and purposes of the Anniston Fund was to encourage other entities to invest in the needs specific to the West Anniston community. Since that initial investment in the Blueprint, the Community Foundation of Northeast Alabama, which participated in the first meetings...
with the Anniston Fund, has continued investment in the *Blueprint* and has helped move the program forward.

In 2008, the Community Foundation awarded a grant to the APC and since that time, core components of the *Blueprint* have been achieved or advanced. The Community Foundation’s efforts have lead to more in-depth research and analysis related to early learning. It has also engaged physicians and child service agencies to raise awareness about the needs of young children and how investing in children’s lives is beneficial for positive teen and adult outcomes.

The *Blueprint for School Readiness* has also moved the Anniston Fund towards the implementation of initiatives related to early childhood education and development as described in the next section of this report. There has also been additional work in the area of early childhood by other funders. The Community Foundation especially invested in advancing the suggestions in the *Blueprint* and did much of this in partnership with the APC.

Their work included:
- School Readiness Transition Team
- Blueprint for School Readiness Kindergarten Transition Materials
- Social and Developmental Evaluation
- Additional Data Gathering and Analysis
- Broad Community Awareness
- Parent and Community Leaders Forums

APC has remained active to this day in the Anniston community’s early childhood effort and continues to expand.

“The Anniston Civil Justice Fund provided the cornerstone funding for our work in Anniston. With those funds, we were able to build the foundation that attracted other funders to this important work. We are grateful to the Anniston Fund for making this work possible in Anniston,” Gail Piggott said.

Due to the work in Anniston on the *Blueprint* expansion, three additional communities in Alabama have developed their own community *Blueprint* and Transition Team. Smart Start materials that were developed for Anniston have expanded to other communities in Alabama. The work begun by Tolbert attorneys in Anniston keeps on growing.

### Parents as Teachers

Understanding that early childhood development is the key to progress for children, the Anniston Fund decided to help expand the Parents as Teachers program (PAT) at Concern for Children to include more families in West Anniston. PAT recognizes that parents are, indeed, a child’s first teacher and puts into place curriculum to help the parent and child.

According to the national Parents as Teachers organization, the curricula supports “a parent’s role in promoting school readiness and healthy development of children through a relationship-based approach with learning experiences that are relevant and customized for the individual needs of each family and child.”

Parents of children from birth-to-3 years old learn the different aspects of child development in the areas of emotional, social and behavioral skills through this free program. The home visits allow the parent educators to talk with parents and children about monthly plans and examine different milestones and expected outcomes.

Using the national model, the Parents as Teachers program is highly sought after and many times has a waiting list of those in the community who want to participate.

The uniqueness of the program is the monthly home visits that are conducted by the parent educator along with the parents’ group meetings that allow parents to share their children’s progress and ask questions about concerns. For the families, it is helpful that the parent educator interacts with the family in the home environment.

“We go into the homes and train parents on the developmental things to look for as the child grows,” Marivia Smith, Parent Educator, said. “I serve parents by bringing tools and sharing information about how to stimulate the child depending on the particular range of development in that child.”

The Anniston Fund provided $87,453 to Concern for Children to support PAT. With the merger of Concern for Children and Family Links, an organization whose mission is to provide a continuum of support services for children and youth, PAT has continued through Family Links to be available in the community.
Keeping Up With the Joneses

Tim and Cheryl Jones, along with their son Nathaniel, participate in the Parents as Teachers program. Marivia Smith serves as their Parent Educator. After seven years of marriage, the Jones family welcomed their pleasant “surprise,” and Cheryl finds the program very beneficial.

“I feel that the program has made me a more attentive mother. It has made me more aware of just how much attention a child needs. I tell people about it all the time. I think it will make you a better parent,” she said.

Nathaniel is a very active, bright and outgoing 2-year-old little boy. During this visit, he successfully completes his lesson which focuses on problem solving. The purpose of the activity is to help Nathaniel understand that pieces make up a whole which is the foundation to solving problems. Both Cheryl and Nathaniel are active in the lesson’s activity and it is easy to see the bonding that happens between the two during the activity.

Marivia also talks with Cheryl about nutrition and helping children have and make healthy transitions.

Using Parent Handouts from the Parents as Teachers Curriculum, Marivia discusses how to help Nathaniel make successful transitions and discusses the importance of offering a child various nutritious foods on a regular schedule as well as how to make mealtime pleasant and healthy.

“As parents, it is easy to wonder if we are doing the right things for our children. We can second guess ourselves about even the simplest decisions. Many times the information we receive is not something we don’t know, it reaffirms that we may be on the right track with our kids,” Jones said.

“It (Parents as Teachers) is empowering. The parents realize that the most important things that their children can ever learn in life come from them. The parents set the pace for learning, for success academically and self confidence,” Smith said.
School readiness is an important part of the work that has been done by the Anniston Fund. As recommended by the Blueprint for School Readiness Committee, the Anniston Fund funded the implementation of a national model program: Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY). HIPPY provides parents of three, four and five year old children with 30 weekly home visits per year for three years to help parents prepare their children for school.

Many of the parents who participate in the Parents as Teachers program move their children into the HIPPY program to assist in school readiness. It is this advancement from one program to the other that helps support the foundation for early learning that children need for school preparedness.

Parents role play five lessons per week with their parent educator and then work with their child to complete one lesson per day. Parents receive free lesson plans and school supplies as well as the support of the parent educator during the weekly home visits and an opportunity to receive support from other HIPPY parents during monthly parent meetings hosted by Family Links.

Much of the success of the HIPPY program, both nationwide and locally, is due to its mandate to have consumers of service deliver the services whenever possible. For example, one of the HIPPY Parent Educators was a single mother of young twins, and they lived in public housing. Family Links was very fortunate to have a caring committed mother working on behalf of HIPPY to not only help her own children to succeed in school, but also to help other families be successful.

Partnerships with other organizations have been critical to the successful implementation of HIPPY. HIPPY has worked closely with the Alabama Partnership for Children. Additionally, the Blueprint for School Readiness work, funded by the Community Foundation of Calhoun County, brought together a comprehensive group of professionals working toward better outcomes for young children. The partners in the group included United Way, Concern for Children, Head Start, other Early Learning providers, Family Services Center, local businesses and local politicians, the Health Department, Jacksonville State University, Gadsden State Community College, Children’s Rehabilitative Services and local churches.

Part of the success achieved by Family Links was due to the creative use of AmeriCorps slots to fill HIPPY and other program positions. AmeriCorps is a federal program that offers adults the opportunity to serve with local and national nonprofit groups to address needs in their community.

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Of the West Anniston residents who served as AmeriCorps members in the project, three have been promoted to program coordinator positions with Family Links. Collectively, West Anniston residents who worked in this project have received AmeriCorps education awards to further their education and to pay off student loans.

According to Robin Mackey, former Family Links Executive Director, a benefit of the Anniston Fund’s involvement with Parents as Teachers and HIPPY programs is that it helped open doors to parents in the West Anniston community.

“We were having a difficult time recruiting participants from different areas and the Anniston Fund helped us with those efforts,” she said.

The Anniston Fund gave Family Links the strength and flexibility to triple funds for the programs. Family Links has obtained additional grant monies that will help their programs offer fundamental services to parents and children in the city.
For Kenya Ball Parker, a mother of two, HIPPY has played an important role in her youngest daughter’s life. When Kenya lost her job, she found herself at home with her 5 year-old daughter, Tamara, pondering how to continue educational services for her daughter. Tamara had been in daycare much of her life, and her mother’s recent job loss caused the family to reevaluate the cost of daycare services versus other family needs. Additionally, there were extended waiting lists for some daycare centers and educational programs. It was imperative to Kenya that her daughter have a good, solid educational foundation before she entered kindergarten in the upcoming year.

It was while Kenya was in the midst of making decisions about her daughter’s educational future that her sister suggested the HIPPY program. As a former Pre-Kindergarten teacher and school administrator with a degree in Sociology and Psychology, it was of vital importance to Kenya that her daughter have a good, solid educational foundation before she entered kindergarten in the upcoming year.

“My sister had been through the program with her family and she encouraged me to look into the program,” Kenya said.

She enrolled in the program and she now believes that it has changed her life as well as that of her daughter’s.

“I learned so much about Tamara through this program that I probably wouldn’t have learned if she was in daycare. The program allows me to be hands-on with her and if something else is needed, then, the parent educator can help. It has really strengthened our mother-daughter bond,” she said.

Ginger, the parent educator who works with the Parker family, comes to their home weekly to go over the lesson that Kenya will teach to Tamara. In the program, parents role-play five lessons per week with their parent educators then work with their child to complete one lesson per day.

“Not only is this information good for my daughter, it will be good for me when I get back into teaching. I have told others about this program and everyone loves that the parent educators come to the home. There is no struggle and no guesswork in the lessons. It makes you feel good and you don’t have to have a teaching background to be successful,” Kenya stated.

Prior to the HIPPY program, Tamara knew how to spell her name and had other fundamentals under her belt. Kenya has noticed that since Tamara has been in the program, she has more confidence and that she is excited about her work. Additionally, she says that the home-school program does not mean that she is missing anything.

“Tamara gets to socialize with other kids, especially when we have our HIPPY group meetings. The HIPPY kids are always talking about their lessons to each other. For them, it is like a social gathering.”

Kenya believes that her daughter will be better prepared for kindergarten in the upcoming school year because she and her parent educator have the same goals.

“My parent educator wants the same thing that I want, which is the best education for my child. I enjoy the teamwork and family atmosphere. Ginger is top-notch and Tamara likes to show Ginger her work before she shows me. It has really been a blessing for my family,” Kenya said.
Shannon Roper lives in Anniston, but teaches kindergarten in a Georgia school system. She, too, has been a Pre-K teacher and she knows the value of the program in terms of school readiness for children. Her 4-year-old son, BJ, participates in the HIPPY program with Denise Bryant as the family’s Parent Educator. In the coming school year, BJ will enter a Pre-K program, which made the HIPPY program attractive to Shannon.

“When I taught Pre-K, I had students walk into the classroom who didn’t know colors or didn’t know shapes. Many times, parents approach me to ask how they may best work with their child, and the advantage of this program is that it lays everything out for you to do; plus, you have somebody to explain it. Also, they supply you with what you need; the parent doesn’t have to purchase anything to do the program,” Shannon said.

One of the areas that Shannon felt BJ needed help with was his communication skills.

“I especially had to work on the speech aspect because I knew he wasn’t responding the way he was supposed to be at his age. His speech was not that great and neither were his responses. This gave an opportunity to ask questions and to get better responses from him. It was important to not only give the correct response, but also getting him trained to respond correctly to things. Now, I do feel he is prepared for Pre-K,” she said. During BJ’s home visit, he took

his post-test which measured the progress he made during the program. After a series of questions by Denise which included identifying colors, shapes, foods, animals and recognizing emotions on faces, BJ successfully completed his 30-week program.

“This program gave me opportunities to work on his fine motor skills, to help him with understanding the classroom environment and I recommend the program. I have talked with neighbors telling them to get their kids involved because it gives you things to get your child prepared for school,” Shannon said.

“When the parent is empowered, he or she feels like a healthy contributor to the household and to their children’s development and that relieves stress. If there’s no stress, there’s a limited possibility for abuse. Also, it creates the family bond which fosters confidence in the child. When the child is confident, then they have a better chance to maximize their potential when they’re encouraged,” Marivia Smith, who also serves as a HIPPY Program Coordinator, said.

There’s No Place Like Home

BJ and Denise Bryant, Parent Educator
In late 2004, three major nonprofits that provided services to Anniston families approached the Anniston Fund with a strategic plan to focus on providing valuable training and support for West Anniston parents. These organizations—LINC (later to be named Family Links), Community Enabler/Developer, and Concern for Children—called this plan the PEAK Initiative. They proposed coordinating the birth-to-five parenting programs in Anniston—First Steps and Parents as Teachers—along with a parenting program with a proven track-record for parents of children from elementary through high school.

PEAK was modeled after Parent Project® which had a track record of success with school age children. Robin Mackey, Executive Director of LINC, and a certified parent educator worked with the authors of Parent Project® to implement the curriculum as a prevention program under the name of PEAK. It was a 10 to 16 week program aimed at equipping parents with the skills shown to help kids improve their behavior and motivation and, in turn their educational outcomes. Parent Project provides tools to identify, prevent or stop risky child and adolescent behavior and was recognized by the American Bar Association as the strongest parent involvement program for adjudicated youth in the nation.

The PEAK Initiative began with a strategic process to engage community members and school personnel in expanding capacity to provide the outstanding program. Although there were some Parent Project classes in the Anniston area prior to the PEAK initiative, relatively few West Anniston families participated in the Parent Project program. The goal of the PEAK Initiative was to expand this valuable program into PCB contaminated areas of the community which was of primary importance to the Tolbert attorneys.

The first step was to prepare more than 50 Anniston leaders to conduct these sessions. A week-long leadership training session was led by the authors of the curriculum. During the sessions, it was exciting to witness the laughter and tears on the last day of the training when hope was expressed by all of the participants that this initiative may just change their community. They saw the potential to improve academic success and parent-child relationships, as well as reduce the school drop-out rate, drug use, and other indicators.

Two main challenges to implementing the program were community distrust and participation, but with the assistance and support of one of the leaders Ms. Maudine Hollaway, Executive Director of Community Enabler/Developer and a trusted community leader, people began to learn more about the program and how it would help their children and grandchildren have a brighter future.

Over the course of several years, there were more than 500 Anniston and Hobson City citizens that participated in the program, and by the time the grant funds were spent, the capacity to serve families of West Anniston and Hobson City remains stronger than ever.

The dedicated leadership of the PEAK team paid off and many caring hard working people made the PEAK mission their own mission. During its implementation, the PEAK Program employed and engaged citizens of West Anniston and the community at large. The team of people working on PEAK included staff members, volunteers and AmeriCorps members.
A New Beginning

The *Blueprint for School Readiness* work led to some strategic expansion for LINC. The Anniston Fund brought in a nonprofit consultant and funded the development of a Strategic Planning Process for LINC in 2006. The strategic planning process was to prepare the organization for the expansion necessary to successfully implement the Anniston Fund’s early childhood initiatives. Among many substantial changes, LINC became known as Family Links as they greatly enhanced their capacity to serve the children and families of Anniston.

In 2009, Family Links, worked with the Board and staff of Concern for Children, Inc. to bring all staff and programs and funding of that organization under Family Links to create a seamless continuum of early childhood services, parent support services and tobacco, alcohol and drug prevention services. Family Links also opened The Success Academy, a school providing full therapeutic and educational services to students as well as opened an adolescent substance abuse treatment program with initial funding provided by the Community Foundation of Northeast Alabama.

Family Links and its staff were, indeed, strategic partners and important to the Anniston Fund’s early childhood and parenting programs.

“Their insight into how to solve problems on a community level were instrumental to the systematic changes made through our efforts,” McInnish said.

“I am so grateful for the opportunity to have been a part of the work accomplished by the Anniston Fund. The funding and support given has certainly provided a brighter future for the children of Anniston,” Robin Mackey, who was Executive Director of LINC and Family Links until 2010, stated.
Partnering with the local school system to improve educational opportunities for children was of great importance in order to help the Anniston community thrive. Many possibilities had been considered but the right opportunity had not been found.

The timing turned out to be right in 2008. Joan Frazier was new to her role as the system’s superintendent when the Anniston Fund went knocking on her door and discovered what was keeping her “awake at night.”

It was a patchwork of technology throughout the system that went from being unusable to out-of-date. The school system had access to individuals and businesses that donated computers, software and other technology needs, but the system was finding it difficult to get that technology into the schools. The problems impacted learning in the classrooms and important administrative tasks for the entire system.

Frazier wanted to bridge the digital divide; however, she knew that goal was very costly, and it seemed like a bridge too far. In addition, she had no idea how to make it happen.

“We were using limited technology at the time. Most of the classrooms had just one computer,” Sonja Brown, current Anniston City School System Technology Coordinator, said.

The Anniston Fund’s $200,000 grant was critical to making needed updates and additions, but as important was providing the system with additional technical expertise and support to oversee the major changes. Jolley introduced Tim Lewis of TALA Professional Services to the Superintendent. TALA is a well recognized technology consulting company that had worked with other school districts for more than 20 years. The Anniston School Board contracted with TALA to manage the grant.

“What that grant really did was not only enable us to have some money, but it also was instrumental in allowing me to make some business connections, particularly with Tim Lewis’ organization, whom we are still using to help us with installation and planning and getting the ‘best price’ for what we want to do,” Frazier said.

TALA and Lewis worked with the school system to help determine the best methods to get the schools internet accessible, and allowed the system to equip all schools with internet access. Once the schools had increased internet accessibility, the next objective was to establish computer labs.

“We focused more on labs to offer a classroom setting. Now, every elementary school has a functioning computer lab. Students can do more educational programs and activities as a whole class instead of one student at a time,” Brown added.
All schools now have the capacity for video conferencing. In fact, last year, students at Cobb Elementary connected with school children in Japan. The video-conferencing, which allows for distance learning is enhancing the system's curriculum.

“One of the things we added last year was Advanced Placement English at the 12th grade level. It was just five to seven years ago that Anniston High School had no Advanced Placement courses,” Frazier said.

On the middle school and high school levels, students can participate in the State Department of Education’s First Choice program that offers online methods for academic credit recovery and credit advancement. Many high school classes are now 21st Century classrooms with Smart Boards and projectors.

“That grant laid the foundation for us to begin bringing technological and instructional opportunities to what will ultimately be all classrooms in the Anniston City School System,” Frazier said.

To date, the school system is finishing audio visual conferencing capabilities, setting up more computer labs and laying the groundwork for fully wireless capabilities in all schools. There, too, is the hope that ultimately there will be laptops or some type of personal computing device for every student and every teacher.

“The work that is being done through this grant is already bringing about changes in our system that I could never have imagined. Other than learning to read, I consider it of paramount importance that students in the Anniston City School System be immersed in Technology—both in application and in the continuous quest for knowledge. I believe it brings improvements to every child, faculty member and administrator in this system,” Frazier said.

In the past two years, Frazier has asked the Anniston business community to financially support the school system with a goal of $500,000. To date, it seems that goal is being exceeded and many businesses are recognizing the importance of the students and the school system to the city.

“In spending all of the grant, I was able to—through the business connections that I made—procure some more money for the initiative. Most of that money has come from local donations,” she said.

Just as in other cases when the Anniston Fund has made initial investments, the grant to the school system has brought in additional funds. In addition to the funds from the Anniston business community, Frazier credits the initial grant with securing a $15,000 grant from Alabama Power that allowed the school system to continue one of the projects that adds on to the student management system to have the school-to-home connection. That project means that parents will be able to log on a computer and see what their child is doing in terms of schoolwork, what their teachers’ lesson plan is as well as take a look at the student’s grades and discipline.

Frazier also states that individual teachers are picking up the challenge to find innovative ways to bring technology into their classrooms by applying for grants on their own.

“Therefore, those funds will help us keep on going with what we’ve been able to do with the establishment of 21st century classrooms. The school system itself utilized federal money and leftover stimulus money to keep on going, to bring that classroom by classroom as much to fruition. We still have some classrooms that are left over; others have committed to helping us finish that,” she said.

The technology system improvements have also paid off in teacher and student morale.

“The students love going to the lab. For the most part, at all of our schools, there are enough computers for students to work on. The teachers love it. They are using them (computers) and they are really happy with it,” Brown said.

“The students have been wonderful. As one student told me, ‘it gives me a reason to brag about my school.’ We’re not quite finished, but we certainly are making strides in the right direction and probably within the next year or less, will be totally finished,” Frazier said.

She adds that once all aspects of the technology plan are implemented, anyone who visits an Anniston City School classroom or school “on any given day will see technology in motion.”
Not only did the Anniston Fund invest in established projects, it also played a significant role in creating programs that would have a positive impact on the community. Out of some of the meetings about which programs and projects to fund, many had called upon the Anniston Fund to provide scholarships for students in the West Anniston area. Instead, the Anniston Fund established the College Gateway program to help students navigate the college application and financial aid process.

“We found that there were more scholarships available in Anniston than in most communities. Also, the scholarships would have needed to be large multi-year funding that would only help a few students. We sought to make a substantial impact with the Anniston Fund; therefore, we looked at other means to help students go to college,” McInnish said.

According to McInnish, they recognized that there were financial aid opportunities that were available for students because of their backgrounds and financial situations, but students needed to learn how to access those opportunities and how to demonstrate their needs.

“We wanted to help remove hurdles that would prevent them from continuing their education in order to encourage the kids to go to college,” she added.

Through conversations with community leaders, McInnish and Jolley met with Steven Folks who at the time served as Director of the George Washington Carver Community Center in West Anniston.

As the Center’s director, Folks looked for ways to positively impact the children who would visit the center. He had seen the devastating effects of youth who were on a negative path in their lives. He had watched as youth had come into his center full of zeal and purpose, only—for a myriad of factors—to become hardened, drop out of school and in some instances turn to illegal activities.

“We wanted to help remove hurdles that would prevent them from continuing their education...”

He wanted to make a real, structural and systematic change in their lives. He knew that keeping youth in school was integral to that change. His center was already offering after school and summer programs with success. So, for him, it was a matter of building upon that success. In 2005, the Anniston Fund awarded a grant to Anniston’s Parks and Recreation Department that established College Gateway. This initial grant allowed for the purchase of computers at the Carver Center and other on-going expenses. College Gateway was operated under the leadership of Mattie Miller, a retired teacher who had relationships with many of the students and their parents.

“There were times when students wanted to go on to college, but they had no idea how to move along in the process. For instance, they didn’t know how to fill out the financial assistance forms or other vital forms. Many times, they didn’t have anyone who could help them because their parents may not have known or they weren’t getting help from the school system,” Folks said.

Through College Gateway, students had one location where they could find and obtain financial resources that not only included Pell Grants, but also information about state, regional and national scholarships for various schools of interest. In addition to helping students understand how to navigate the college application process and financial aid process, College Gateway helped students academically prepare for college.

“Whenever you’re working on one thing, you see another need. We found that College Gateway was giving students encouragement, but they really needed to be able to pass the High School Exit Exam and their classes. That need became highlighted and College Gateway began to offer tutoring so that kids would then be eligible for the financial assistance they were finding,” McInnish said.
For many neighborhood youth, the Carver Community Center and Mr. Folks are a refuge. Many who go to the Center have family backgrounds that include family troubles and strife. Two people who learned as children about life's hardships are Kia English and Ralpheal Graves.

Kia and Ralpheal share a similar background. Kia was raised by her grandmother because her mother was not able physically or mentally to take care of her. Ralpheal was raised by a single mother in a household that was surrounded by gangs and he had seen the consequences of gang violence.

“I was in the 6th grade when I first began going to the Carver Center. I could look all around my neighborhood and see the bad things and negative influences that my peers were encountering. I didn’t want that kind of life,” Kia English said.

Both Kia and Ralpheal found that the Carver Community Center was, indeed, a place where they could learn and flourish. Their time at the Center allowed them the opportunity to participate in academic and recreational activities that helped alleviate some of the issues that they dealt with at home.

Today, Kia is a 1st Grade Teacher at Oxford Elementary School in Oxford, Alabama and Ralpheal is the Head Basketball Coach at Sacred Heart Catholic School. Both participated in the College Gateway Program, and both enthusiastically talk about the positive impact it made on their lives as well as the lives of other students who have walked through its doors.

College Gateway also offered ACT Prep Courses with the support of funding from the court settlement.

Folks, who now serves as the City of Anniston’s Director of Parks and Recreation, has had several students pass through the halls of the Carver Center and he can boast of many success stories. Many of those who have participated in the program have successfully attended 2 year or 4 year colleges or universities.

“College Gateway helped us a lot. It was a very good resource for students. It not only helped me in high school, but also, it helped me while I was in college,” Ralpheal said.

“It was a good place where I could get away and do my work. It was where we could come for after-school tutoring. I have been in this room since I was 12 years old,” Kia said.

Kia and Ralpheal have never left the College Gateway or the Carver Community Center behind. Like others who have passed through the Center’s doors and participated in the program, they continue to volunteer to work with the kids to be positive influences just as their mentor, Mr. Folks, is.

“College Gateway’s success, the program has received many in-kind contributions from the City of Anniston through its Parks and Recreation Department, through personal and business contributions and through the Community Education Foundation of Anniston.

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In 1995, the Good Choices Program was established to offer at-risk children and youth between the ages of 5 and 18 positive options opposed to the negative ones they face daily. With the support of parents, local agencies and various community leaders, the program has been able to expand its outreach by offering participants activities that include sporting events, drug awareness, academic tutoring, standardized test preparation, educational field trips and mentoring programs.

In 2011, the Anniston Fund gave its very last grant to the Good Choices Program Summer Youth Work Training Program. The need for the summer training came from the overwhelming response the Parks and Recreation Department got when it hosted a job fair for youth.

“To our astonishment, over 250 young men and women showed up on a Saturday morning at 9 a.m. in search of employment. Unfortunately, for those 250 plus youth and an additional 150 plus applications we received, there were only approximately 50 jobs available for summer employment,” Steven Folks, Parks and Recreation Department Director, said. “Equally depressing is that the City of Anniston is the only organization that consistently offers summer youth employment opportunities for community youth.”

The new summer work training program for youth ages 16 to 19 offered job placement training that included interview techniques, resume writing and placement in a job that would hone skills for future employment. The program estimated that it would impact approximately 50 to 100 needy youth and provide the necessary resources to remain focused on education.

The program ran from April until August and offered three phases: job training, selection process and securing job positions, and employment placement and volunteerism.
Early Mornings

Those in the Good Choices summer program found their days beginning at 6:30 a.m. during the week and on weekends for the job phase of the program.

Andrew Bothwell, Jr. said the program allowed him to better prepare himself for his future.

“It’s helping me a lot. We did a resume, and I didn’t know how to do it at first. Now I know how to do it, so when I get ready to go to college or apply for jobs, I’ll be already ahead of the others,” he said.

Andrew is an Honor Roll 10th grader at Anniston High School who aspires to be an Architectural Engineer. He is active in student government (9th Grade Student Council Representative) and sports (9th Grade Calhoun County Basketball Champion and Bulldogs Basketball Team member). He believes the Good Choices program helps kids stay focused.

“If you’re out in the streets, the only thing facing you is trouble. It’s basically staying out of trouble and helping you get ready for when you grow up because if you don’t know how to do things like this, if you don’t know how to work when you’re young, you’re not going to know how to work when you grow up,” he continued.

His fellow participants agree. Antonio Sledge attends Saks High School, is a member of the National Honor Society and counts among his honors the Highest Grade Average in English in 2010.

“I have learned numerous things. It has influenced me to stay in school and work harder to achieve my goals. I feel good about it because I dedicated my time to something constructive,” Antonio said.

Dast Sturkie, Jr. attends Anniston High School and believes the program helps students make good decisions. Dast worked at the Wiggins Community Center doing activities with kids and cleaning the facility grounds.

“While I was cleaning outside, I walked past a homeless man. I thought to myself, ‘I don’t want to be like him.’ Overall, this experience taught me to be responsible and to stay in school,” he said.

Another component of the program was for participants to volunteer their services. Younger children volunteered by cleaning up local parks and neighborhoods. Older youth worked on a construction project with World Changers, a volunteer opportunity of mission education and mission involvement. World Changers provides “hands-on” mission involvement through participation in home construction/renovation work. It partners with community agencies to identify residents in need of home repair who have limited or no resources.

“I helped others, learned from others and received life lessons throughout the duration of the program,” Antonio said.

Marquitta McMurray, who participated in the College Gateway program, served as a Good Choices leader for the program. A senior at Selma University majoring in Biology and Physical Education, she is on the President’s List, the Women’s Basketball Team and reigning Miss Selma University.

“These programs make a real difference in kids’ lives. Working for the City of Anniston Youth Program has been a blessing. I wouldn’t call it giving back because at the end of the day, I received wisdom from people all around me young and old,” she said.

“The real impact of College Gateway and the Good Choices program can be seen in these kids. There are younger kids who are eager to participate in the program because they have seen other kids be successful. That is the real impact,” Folks said.
The Hobson City Public Library

Founded in 1899, Hobson City is Alabama’s oldest African-American incorporated city. According to the 1900 Census, the population was recorded at 242. Hobson City grew to approximately 1,500 people in the mid-1900s, but in 2009, the Alabama Historical Commission placed the community of 878 residents on its annual list of “Places in Peril.” Among the problems facing the residents of this community was environmental damage from the Solutia plant. Hobson City was the home of many Tolbert claimants.

The Anniston Fund learned that it was the goal of Mayor Alberta McCrory and other citizens to have a viable public library. With assistance from the Alabama State Library Service and Alabama Representative Barbara Boyd, a professional librarian was hired, and the library had opened in June 2010.

In September 2010, the Anniston Fund awarded $25,000 to the Hobson City Public Library allowing the library to move forward with its plans. Prior to the grant, the library had issued 36 library cards, checked out 40 books, and only had 250 books on the library automation system. Since the grant, more than 150 library cards have been issued, nearly 1,250 books have been checked out, more than 1,700 books have been added to the computer system and the public computers have been used nearly 1,100 times—up from 87 uses.

Money from the Anniston Fund was used to fund the librarian’s salary, purchase library materials as well as paint and supplies, purchase new computer desks and chairs, install a dedicated phone line for the library and purchase a domain name for the internet.

Community support has also been a major factor in the success of the new library. The Junior League also provided funds that helped with remodeling the library. Through a fundraising drive, individual donations have increased along with book donations. Moreover, the library has received and applied for several grants to augment the Anniston Fund’s grant.

The Hobson City Public Library is located on the main street in Hobson City, in a couple of rooms in the back of the Hobson City Senior Center. In June 2010, when the library opened it had a smorgasbord of mix-match furniture—old shelves, chairs and tables that were donated as schools in the area closed or relocated. Much of the shelving and furniture was in poor condition, unpainted, scratched or bent.

Old books were donated as well. Most of those donated books were worn out or outdated. More importantly, the existing books did not reflect the community’s needs or interests. The existing collection did not contain important African-American authors such as Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou or Toni Morrison. Perhaps the most important deficiency was the lack of children’s books with stories and characters that reflected the African-American experience.
That was just a few of the reasons there was a strong desire for the library to have a community presence as stated in the library's grant application: “Considering the struggles that Hobson City has had over the past years, it would be nice for the citizens to visit one place in the community that isn’t ‘second hand.’ Of course, gently-used books and other items will always be welcomed. But it would be truly wonderful for the library to be a place of pride for the community. The Hobson City Public Library can make it possible for the children in the community to have books in their home.”

Today, the Hobson City Public Library is a crown jewel in the heart of the community. The library is now bursting at the seams with activity. Many children from the surrounding area can be found there either reading a book or working on the computer.

“The progress I’ve seen is that the level of attendance has grown tremendously. We have spruced up our library, made it a more inviting place to come and read and learn more about things that build the literacy of the kids who live here in the area. The kids have really begun to enjoy the library,” Melvin Smith, Hobson City Public Library Board Member, said.

Since its opening, the library has hosted several events for the community and other activities to raise awareness about the library. In addition to weekday hours of operation, the library is now open on two Saturdays each month. More importantly, the library has become another way for family bonding. Grandparents and parents are enjoying the family time that the library affords.

“By providing that service here, I think the morale of the citizens has improved. We offer things that are needed to help our children, especially the children in this area, to have a place that they can continue to learn,” Smith added.

Elijah Moore, a retired conservationist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, agrees. He often brings his 5-year-old granddaughter, J’Lynn, to the library.

“The library is good for the children, good for the community and I would like to see it expand. It gives them a good place of structure to go to. You know where they are and they’re learning something worthwhile,” Moore said.

Although the library has many programs and services for children with special story times and a successful Summer Reading Program, adults find the library beneficial as well.

“Ever since I was a little girl I have loved to read, and I still love to read. Sometimes, I get about 10 books a week. If I get them on Monday, they’ll be back on Friday,” Dianne Houston, the library’s top adult reader, said.

At 56, Houston states that the convenience of the library’s location makes it a valuable resource. She, too, makes it a family experience because her grandchildren also go to the library.

“I live right across the street and I can walk over here. I used to check books out in Anniston and Oxford, but this is close. I can just check them out, go back home and start to read. It’s helped the community a lot. I see a lot of kids coming down with their parents and grandparents. I’m really glad it’s here,” she added.

Much of the library’s success can be attributed to not only Mayor McCrory and board members, but also to Shirley...
Taylor who was the Library Director. Under her guidance, the library was remodeled and programs and services were created and offered. She believed the Anniston Fund grant came at a critical time for the library.

“This infusion of cash has been a key element in the growth of the library. Much like oxygen to a body, this money has enabled the library to move forward,” Taylor said.

In mid-July 2011, Taylor moved to Iowa causing many to wonder how the library would be affected. While there was a search for a new director, during the summer, the library was operated by Gwen Smith, a school librarian from a neighboring school system. Now, the new Library Director is Donna Ross, who states that her goals are to create activities that encourage collaboration in the community as well as offer programs that will involve different age groups.

“Libraries show that there’s more than just our little place in the world—that we’re a part of a greater global community. It gives the kids a place to come where they can connect.

It’s positive, it’s clean, it’s healthy and everybody is smiling and happy when they’re here. I think it’s just another good environment to offer our children and adults, especially the children,” Ross said. There is much pride in the progress that has been made, and board members have plans to make it continue to thrive.

“I would like to see us actually offering computer classes or setting up a media room for adults that will be an incentive for something for them also,” Board Member Denise DeRamus said.

“I'd like to see the library get even better. It is small or a reasonable size, but I’d like to see growth. I think that we can do that. We just have to work towards that,” Smith said.

Carolyn Swain, the Housing Authority’s staff member who directs Resident Initiatives, had worked in the early stages with the Anniston Fund on several programs. It was from her that the Anniston Fund learned about the Housing Authority’s need for computer labs.

The computers were needed to assist many of the Housing Community’s young people whose reading skills were below their grade level and who had difficulty in comprehending basic math and language skills. Some computers were also needed for use by adults enrolled in a General Equivalency Diploma program and who did not have access to a computer for their class work.

In 2006, the Anniston Fund awarded the Housing Authority a $30,000 grant to purchase 28 computers for three separate labs located in Constantine, Norwood and Glen Addie housing complexes. Two of the labs were located at Boys and Girls Clubs in the housing complexes. In addition to the Boys and Girls Club partnership, the plans also included partnering with local universities to provide educational instructors and interns for technical assistance with the computer labs.

The new labs were unveiled at a press conference held at one of the Boys and Girls Clubs. As a surprise, the Housing Authority had painted a mural on the wall celebrating the new computer lab.

Following the press conference, The Anniston Star told about one of the children using the lab who lived with her family at Constantine Homes. “Phateena Jones chants her multiplication tables in front of a new computer. ‘What’s 10 times 12?’ the 10-year-old says, stopping and looking at the screen. ‘This is how I learned my times tables, fractions and division,’” she said to the reporter.

Phateena is one of many children who, over the past five years has gotten help from the computer labs. Today, Ms. Swain reports that the computer labs are still being used.

“Over this past summer between 50 and 60 children a day were enjoying them,” Swain said. “I can’t thank the attorneys enough for coming to our aid. These labs have helped our residents so much.”
Anniston Civil Justice Fund
Short-Term Projects

Throughout the years that the Anniston Civil Justice Fund was active in the community, there were several short-term projects that were supported. In comparison to the major Anniston Fund initiatives, these grants were for smaller amounts and resulted in less impact; however, they were important to the overall strategy of improving the learning environment within the community.

The Anniston Fund supported the following areas:

Academic Enrichment

• Provided **$5,000** of support for the **Independent Reading/Counseling Services** in 2008 to provide one-on-one and small group afterschool instruction in reading and language arts for children in grades K-8 who were below their grade level in reading.

• Connected with **The Brownfield Institute and Jacksonville State University** during our early years in Anniston to support a project they sponsored for 14 to 18 year olds that would combine outdoor and environmental activities with interactive math and science learning activities.

• Joined in with several local funders and service agencies during 2007 to focus on improving the **Anniston Middle School** facility through two special projects. One of which was for the front office and teacher lounge which was painted and some new furniture was purchased.

• Supported an unusual, yet, meaningful project to purchase top quality bleachers for the **Anniston Middle School** gymnasium. This facility had not been used for basketball games for several years partly because it lacked bleachers. The purchase of the bleachers began as a class project of a 2006-07 8th grade class that evolved from their relationship with the Community Foundation staff. The students initiated, planned and raised more than **$30,000** to purchase and install new, retractable, aluminum bleachers in the gymnasium. The Anniston Fund supported the students’ efforts by contributing **$5,000**. Future middle school students have been able to use the new bleachers. The acts of kindness that resulted in giving back to others were a lesson worth learning from this project.

*Junior High Bleacher Project: Representatives from funder and community organizations that assisted the 8th grade class.*
Job Training

• Supported Community Against Pollution to provide certified Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response job training in 2007 for more than 100 individuals with a high school diploma or GED with a $10,000 grant.

Nonprofit Community

• Responded to the need within Anniston’s nonprofit sector for organizational support and training by working with the Community Foundation in the development of a local presence of the Nonprofit Resource Center of Alabama (now the Alabama Association of Nonprofits) and sent individual nonprofit leaders to attend the Annual Nonprofit Summit in Birmingham. As we searched for organizations and individuals to lead new initiatives to increase educational opportunities, we saw that Anniston, like most Alabama communities, had a big need for increased nonprofit capacity. Approximately 40 separate nonprofits were helped in numerous ways through these efforts.

• Provided $5,000 for grant writing training and support for a coalition of nonprofits in Anniston during 2005 enabling them to apply for grants as a coalition and individual organizations to enhance their work on behalf of Anniston’s children. As a result, the coalition of service providers used the $5,000 from the Anniston Fund to apply for $550,000 of which they were awarded $376,000 to enhance the work being done in the community on behalf of children: $200,000 for a Computer Lab at Jacksonville State University for drug prevention and treatment, $50,000 for a Governor’s Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools grant, $96,051 from the National Children’s Alliance, and $30,000 for an AmeriCorps Planning Grant.

Great Return on an Investment

The coalition of service providers used the $5,000 from the Anniston Fund to apply for $550,000 of which they received $376,000 to enhance the work being done in the community on behalf of Anniston’s children.

• Brought in a nonprofit consultant and funded the development of a Strategic Planning Process for LINC in 2006 to prepare the organization for the expansion necessary to successfully implement the Anniston Fund’s early childhood initiatives. Among many substantial changes, LINC became known as Family Links.

• Participated in efforts around two public engagement projects:

  • One was the ARCH Initiative (Anniston Reconnecting: A Catalyst for Healing), a reconciliation project that attempted to begin a collaborative change approach for members of the community. The project was initiated by the Tolbert Healthcare Project that secured funding from the Andrus Family Foundation. The Anniston Fund contributed more than $1,500 to ARCH.

  • The Anniston Fund also collaborated with community leaders, including Brandt Ayers of the Anniston Star, in discussions about beginning a “Yes We Can” campaign in the local community to support the Anniston City Schools. The purpose of the public engagement campaign is to create a commitment to academic excellence and to provide a long-term accountability system to ensure positive change occurs.

• Provided $5,000 so that Anniston’s Big Brothers Big Sisters could purchase a badly needed copy machine and support an increase in their school-based mentors.
There is much pride about the work that has been done by the Anniston Civil Justice Fund and the impact it has made on the city.

Thanks to the generosity of the four law firms of Beasley, Allen, Crow, Methvin, Portis & Miles; Shelby Roden; Cochran, Cherry, Givens & Smith; and Norris & Davis/Burr Forman new doors have been opened, new bridges have been built and new journeys have been undertaken. The success that has been attained can be attributed to the hard work and dedication of those individuals who helped the Anniston Fund in its early stages until present day.

We appreciate everyone who has taken the time to meet with us, share with us and give advice to us. We are thankful for the new and lasting friendships that have been made over the past few years as a result of working toward a common goal of improving the quality of life for Anniston residents.

Thank you so much for your support and dedication in partnering with the Anniston Fund to ensure positive results that have helped the community and the City of Anniston.

Special Thanks

Beasley, Allen, Crow, Methvin, Portis & Miles
Shelby Roden
Norris & Davis/Burr Forman

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