



## Catholic Charities

Archdiocese of Hartford

**To:** Senator Tony Harp, Representative Geragosian, members of the Appropriations Committee  
**From:** Tiffany Murasso, Catholic Charities, Centro San Jose Youth Program  
**Re:** Neighborhood Youth Centers line item in OPM budget  
**Date:** 2/8/09

Centro San Jose, a program of Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Hartford, and a Neighborhood Youth Center funded through OPM, is the only provider of afterschool/youth programming in Fair Haven that is offered at no cost to youth and their families. Since CSJ does not charge a fee to youth/families to participate in programming, it serves exclusively economically disadvantaged youth. **Without CSJ the 140 youth we serve annually would not be able to attend youth programming due to the financial constraints of their families, and would be at increased risk to engage in activities that negatively impede their development and harm their community.** Without a Neighborhood Youth Center grant, CSJ would be forced to eliminate its Neighborhood Youth Center, severely and dramatically reducing the availability of services in a neighborhood experience persistent, intergenerational poverty.

CSJ is unique in Fair Haven because it exclusively targets youth between the ages of 12 and 18, offering programming appropriate to their age, maturation level, gender, culture, and community needs. Research shows that youth between these ages are in different developmental stages and thus possess different needs than younger students, and according to research cited by the State of Connecticut Department of Education, high school and middle school aged youth need afterschool programming just as much, if not more than students in the elementary grades. CSJ serves some of the state's neediest youth. Not only do all youth come from economically disadvantaged households, many of the youth served by CSJ have behavioral/emotional issues and are involved in the child welfare system.

Neighborhood Youth Center programming has a significant impact on the entire traditionally underserved Fair Haven community. Fair Haven has a significant youth population. Of its 13,753 reported residents 34.4% are 18 years old or younger (4,731). (Data Haven) CC/ CSJ has been proudly serving this community for more than 50 years and is viewed as a valuable resource by parents with young children and youth including families involved in the immigration system, and families who do not speak English or speak English as a Second Language.

In Fair Haven, unlike many communities across the state, when youth leave school for the day, many have no place to go. The number of stable and consistent, year round youth programs are limited, and many do not have a stable home environment providing basic human needs such as food and shelter, but also adult guidance and support. The traditional family structure in many of the Fair Haven homes is not present and combined with the limited number of after school programs the streets become an attractive option. Of those households in the Fair Haven neighborhood that do have both parents present, the situation is more often than not that both parents must work, and in some instances at

least one of the parents, if not both have a second job. Although these instances demonstrate a strong work ethic, it does strain the development and maintenance of the traditional family, putting youth at risk. Without parental guidance and support, and enough available community resources, many of these youth become involved in crime.

The New Haven Police Department's Fair Haven District Manager reports that drag racing/reckless driving, graffiti, and problem behaviors on vacant properties (i.e. vandalism, drug activity) are major concerns facing Fair Haven youth. (New Haven Independent, 7/2008) With an increasing number of vacant properties in the neighborhood, opportunities for youth to engage in violent behavior and illegal drug activities are dramatically increasing. In a December 6, 2009 presentation about crime in the city New Haven Police Chief James Lewis noted the need for youth programs in the city. He stated that one of the two major challenges to keeping crime down is addressing the needs of "lost" youth. Chief Lewis reports that there are "too many kids who are not completing school." "They don't talk about their IRAs going up or down. They have a 25-year" lifespan in mind. (Bass, P. New Haven Independent, 12/7/2009)

**Data from the New Haven Independent Crime Log reveals the afterschool period of the day has the highest number of incident reports in Fair Haven, further emphasizing the need for community-based youth programs which use evidence-based approaches to achieve the goal of preventing violence and illegal drug use.** Data from the month of October 2009 revealed within ¼ mile area surrounding the center of Fair Haven there were 343 incidents reported in this area alone, including breach of peace, attempted suicide, criminal trespass, drug overdose, theft, and assault with a dangerous weapon.

Perhaps our largest accomplishment is seen in the youth we serve. Past participants have come back as adults and credited many of their successes to CSJ. Teachers and other community members have reported that the youth who participate in our programs stop being followers and become youth leaders. The youth who come to CSJ report negative experiences at school, but once they engage in Neighborhood Youth Center programming, they report more positive experiences. Youth also experience significant long term improvements in key areas such as communication, leadership, personal life, and problem solving skills.

We respectfully request that the above information is considered during this budget process. Thank you for your time and consideration for this very serious matter. Thank you.

<b>Educational Risk Factors for New Haven students &amp; their families</b>	<b>City of New Haven</b>	<b>Connecticut</b>
Child Poverty Rate (2006)	27.6%	10.7%
4 year cumulative high school drop out rate (2005)	17%	7%
Students Eligible for Free/Reduced-price Meals (2005)	62%	27%
Students with non-English Home Language (2005)	29%	13%
Families Headed by Single Mothers (2000)	27.5%	10.3%
Teenage Births -- Rate per 1,000 -- 3-year rolling average -- Age 15 to 17 (2004)	42	15
Crime -- Juvenile Arrests -- Rate (per 100,000) -- Violent Crime (2002)	919	284