

**DES MOINES WEED AND SEED EVALUATION  
FINAL REPORT  
June 1999**

**Prepared by:  
THE CHILD AND FAMILY POLICY CENTER**

**in collaboration with  
THE DIVISION OF CRIMINAL AND  
JUVENILE JUSTICE PLANNING  
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**DES MOINES WEED AND SEED EVALUATION  
STATISTICAL ANALYSIS CENTER PARTNERSHIP PROJECT**

**FINAL REPORT  
June 30, 1999**

Des Moines, Iowa was officially recognized as a Weed and Seed site by the U.S. Department of Justice in December 1995 and received its first Weed and Seed grant award in October 1996. Since that time, \$475,000 of Weed and Seed funding has been received to implement a comprehensive strategic plan that is designed to address drug-related and other criminal activity, improve outcomes for children, youth and families, and foster neighborhood revitalization in one of the most distressed areas of Des Moines. The City of Des Moines serves as the grantee for the Des Moines Weed and Seed site, which is currently in its third full year of project implementation.

A central component of the Des Moines “seeding” strategy, as required by the federal guidelines, is the designation and operation of a “Safe Haven” in the target area. Described in the guidelines as a neighborhood-based, multi-service center that provides a variety of opportunities and resources for the community in a safe environment, a community YMCA in the heart of the target area was identified as the primary Safe Haven for the Des Moines Weed and Seed site. In addition, four additional locations in the target area were named “Safe Havens.” Approximately 70 percent of Des Moines’ Weed and Seed funding over the first three funded years of the project has supported activities or services related to the Safe Havens.

The Des Moines Weed and Seed evaluation examined the history and evolution of the Des Moines Weed and Seed site and analyzed current resources and needs in the community, with particular attention to the Safe Haven component of the strategy. This report summarizes the information gathered and includes recommendations for ongoing planning and implementation by the Des Moines Weed and Seed site to strengthen the project.

***EVALUATION BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY:***

In September 1997, the Justice Research and Statistics Association provided an opportunity for State Statistical Analysis Centers to conduct local site evaluations of Weed and Seed projects that had been recognized and funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Executive Office of Weed and Seed. The State Statistical Analysis Center in Iowa, the Criminal and Juvenile Justice Planning Division, brought this opportunity to the attention of the U.S. District Attorney for the Southern District of Iowa who is active in the Des Moines Weed and Seed project.

After discussions with local Weed and Seed leadership and key staff, it was decided that the proposed evaluation should focus on the evolution of the Des Moines Weed and Seed project and, specifically, those aspects of the project related to the Safe Haven where a significant share of Weed and Seed

funding was being expended. The Child and Family Policy Center, a local

research organization with knowledge of the Des Moines Weed and Seed project and experience in evaluation methods, was selected to perform the evaluation in collaboration with the Iowa Statistical Analysis Center.

The evaluation involved primarily a retrospective examination of the original intent and focus of the Des Moines Weed and Seed project and how the project changed over time from the planning stage through the first three years of implementation. The evaluation also reviewed current services and gaps related to Safe Haven programming. The following activities were conducted as part of the evaluation:

- Materials and documents dating back to 1994 related to the original Des Moines Weed and Seed comprehensive planning process were reviewed, as well as contractual documents and progress reports that have been prepared for the Weed and Seed project;
- Available demographic and law enforcement data were analyzed to provide site-specific context information for the project;
- In-person interviews with twelve key informants involved in the planning and/or implementation of the Des Moines Weed and Seed project were conducted (list attached as Appendix A);
- Directories and resource guides related to existing programming for youth in the area were analyzed and youth-serving agencies were contacted for information about current services; and
- Focus groups were held with four youth groups and two community meetings were attended to assess current youth and community concerns.

This report will be provided to the Des Moines Weed and Seed Steering Committee to help inform their ongoing decision-making about the allocation of resources and direction of the Weed and Seed plan. In addition, the experiences and “lessons learned” from the Des Moines Weed and Seed site may be useful to program administrators and other sites as they plan and implement similar strategies.

### ***NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT -- A DESCRIPTION OF THE DES MOINES WEED AND SEED TARGET AREA***

The intent of the federal Weed and Seed initiative is to select a defined geographic area of manageable size in which to focus attention and resources to affect significant change in terms of reducing drug-related and other criminal activity and increasing positive developmental and economic opportunities. For purposes of Weed and Seed, such disinvested neighborhoods are identified as “target areas.” With evidence mounting that neighborhood characteristics have a significant impact on the outcomes of children and youth, several other major initiatives are using a similar “place-based” strategies in an effort to impact concentrations of negative indicators and poor outcomes.<sup>1</sup> To begin to evaluate the efficacy

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<sup>1</sup> Another federal example of a major, comprehensive “place-based” strategy currently underway is the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community initiative. Other similar

of such approaches, it is important to have a clear understanding of the context in which the initiatives are being implemented. For this reason, a relatively detailed description of the Des Moines Weed and Seed Target Area is provided here.

***Geographic Location and Demographic Information:*** The Des Moines Weed and Seed target area is an approximately 2.1 square mile section of Des Moines, located about one mile directly north of the downtown area of the city. The area is comprised of three census tracts (12, 49, and 50), and is bounded on the west by Martin Luther King, Jr. Parkway, on the north by Hickman Road, on the east by the Des Moines River, and on the south by I-235, a major freeway separating the area from downtown. The same area has been designated as an “Enterprise Community” by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

The area is primarily residential, but two commercial corridors (2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue) run north-south through the area. One of the oldest neighborhoods in Des Moines, a portion of the Weed and Seed target area has been designated as an Historic Preservation area, and several historically significant properties have been identified in the community. The City of Des Moines recognizes five distinct neighborhoods in the target area, each of which is represented by a Neighborhood Association.

The population of the area, based on the 1990 census, was approximately 9,000 or 4.6 percent of the total population of the City of Des Moines. Of the target area population, 2,622 or 29% are under age 18. Nearly half of the children 17 and under in the target area live in a single parent household. The area is one of the most ethnically diverse in the city. Of the area’s population, 44.8% are White, 43.6% are Black, 10.9% are Asian and 1.1% are of Hispanic origin. This is in contrast to the city’s population which is 89.2% White, and only 7.07% Black, and 2.3% Asian, based on 1990 census data.

***Economic Characteristics:*** Several indicators of economic disadvantage among residents of the area are evident. These and other indicators were used by the Des Moines Weed and Seed planning committee in its selection of this section of the city for its target area. Median household income for the area, for example, ranges from \$12,219 in census tract 50 to \$20,156 in census tract 12 in the target area; compared to median household income for the city of Des Moines of \$26,703. Per capita income for the area is \$8,382 compared to per capita income for the city overall of \$13,710. Educational attainment among adults in the area is low, with 27 percent of adults (18 and older) having less than a high school education (compared to 14% for the city).

The poverty level in the Weed and Seed area is almost four times that for the city of Des Moines -- 43% compared to 12%. Within the target area, 17% of households have public assistance income, compared to only 7% for the city. Using the presence of interest, dividend or net rental income as an indicator of economic security, most households in the target area (79%) lack such security. While the recent strong economy and low unemployment in Des Moines and surrounding areas has relieved these conditions to some extent, it is generally believed that a significant portion of residents of the target area continue to face numerous barriers to economic stability and security.

***Physical Environment:*** Among the major concerns cited by the planners of the Des Moines Weed and Seed project were the deteriorating infrastructure and poor housing conditions in the target area. More than 75 percent of housing units in the area were constructed prior to 1949. Only 32 percent of housing units were owner-occupied, and 19 percent of housing units were vacant, as of the 1990 census. Vacant lots and abandoned houses are scattered throughout the residential neighborhoods. Neighborhood residents further identified the need to repair or replace sewers, streets, curbs, and street lighting as major concerns, as well as the need to clean up the area from overgrown lots, junk cars, and debris. Again there is evidence that progress is being made in these areas, through new housing construction and rehabilitation of existing homes, but the community remains concerned about the physical environment in which they live. There were ongoing concerns about the appearance of the neighborhood expressed in community meetings held as recently as this year.

***Institutional Capacity:*** There are a substantial number of resources available in the target area, including two public elementary schools, an alternative middle/high school, a relatively new, full-service library, and a community YMCA that recently underwent a \$3.2 million renovation and expansion that added an indoor pool and modern fitness center to the facility. Services are available from several non-profit, community-based organizations located in the target area, as well as public agencies and the local United Way campus. The Des Moines Area Community College has a campus in the target area, and a private, four-year college (Drake University) is located just to the west of the area. Broadlawns Hospital, the public hospital serving the county, is just to the north of the area, and Mercy Hospital and Medical Center is located within the target area.

## ***HISTORY AND EVOLUTION OF WEED AND SEED IN DES MOINES***

*(A brief chronology of the Des Moines Weed and Seed process is presented in Appendix B.)*

***Origins of Chemical Dependency Council:*** In the late 1980s, drug abuse and related issues were at the forefront of public policy discussions throughout the country. In Des Moines, a Blue Ribbon Commission on Drugs was appointed by Mayor Pat Dorrian to examine the issue and make recommendations to the City. This Commission included several prominent business leaders from the community. Following the release of the Commission's report, the City created the Chemical Dependency Council to help it address the issues raised by the Commission's study and to seek new federal resources to respond to the issues of substance abuse and addiction. Two business leaders, Jack Taylor, CEO of the Taylor-Ball construction company, and Gail Stilwill, Community Relations Director of Meredith Corporation, were named to co-chair the Chemical Dependency Council.

***U.S. Attorney Involvement:*** Simultaneously, the U.S. Department of Justice was developing its Weed and Seed initiative and promoting it through its network of U.S. Attorney offices. Don

Nickerson, the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Iowa which includes Des Moines, brought the Weed and Seed opportunity to the attention of the Chemical Dependency Council in late 1993 and became actively engaged in the development of the local initiative.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The previous U.S. Attorney had also explored the Weed and Seed opportunity with officials in Des

***Business Community Leadership:*** Viewing Weed and Seed as an initiative that would address drug-related crime and other substance abuse issues and potentially bring significant new resources to Des Moines, leadership of the Chemical Dependency Council aggressively pursued it. Co-chair Jack Taylor met in Washington, D.C. with federal Weed and Seed officials to discuss the possibility of Des Moines becoming a Weed and Seed site, and a representative of the Weed and Seed office also visited Des Moines to provide technical assistance later in the process.

This early leadership and involvement of the business community and the U.S. Attorney were identified by several of the stakeholders interviewed as critical components of the early planning for the Weed and Seed project. This involvement elevated the status of the project and gave high visibility to the effort both within city government and generally in the community. Further, with the city-appointed Chemical Dependency Council involved, the City and its resources were brought to the table to support the planning process. This combination of the business community, U.S. Attorney's Office, and City was instrumental in finally getting momentum behind the Weed and Seed planning effort. The City's resources also made it possible to hire a full-time consultant to manage the planning process and generate the required material to apply for Weed and Seed recognition.

***Emphasis on Drug-Related Crime:*** Participants involved in early planning also indicated that the original interest in the project was prompted primarily by a desire to reduce drug-related crime in Des Moines. While there was general support of the concept of "weeding" and "seeding" in combination, the major focus of the original leadership was on addressing the "crime" problem. Community residents involved in the process also viewed Weed and Seed as a vehicle for generating a more visible police presence in their neighborhoods to address drug-related crime which was considered "out of control" by many in the community. The Weed and Seed effort did contribute to greater cooperation between local and federal law enforcement agencies, particularly with the Drug Enforcement Administration, according to local officials, which has been a positive outcome.

***Planning Process:*** Several of those interviewed were critical of the lengthy planning process required to develop the Weed and Seed strategy and the cumbersome nature of the federal guidelines that were imposed. Multiple meetings were held over a period of several months, often with little tangible results, and the length of the process made it difficult to sustain momentum. Some of the participants involved indicated that the emphasis on the process often seemed to overshadow the content of the plan. Frustration also mounted for local participants in the planning process when there was indecision from the Department of Justice on the future of the federal initiative and the ability of new sites to apply for designation. This indecision caused several delays in the local planning process during the summer and fall of 1994, when efforts were "put on hold" pending federal decisions. In fact, there was about a six month delay from the time the Des Moines Weed and Seed plan was essentially completed and the opportunity to apply for official recognition became available again in the summer of 1995.

***Broad-based and Resident Involvement:*** This frustration with the process was balanced with an appreciation for the broad-based involvement of the community in the effort. A great deal of

information was shared and the community learned from the experience of collaborative planning. The Weed and Seed effort represented a major, broad-based planning effort in Des Moines, involving public and private sectors, law enforcement, human services, health care, education and others in developing a comprehensive plan to address community needs. Moreover, residents of the target area were viewed as part of the solution and included in the planning process. This inclusive approach was viewed as a major strength of the initiative, and such collaborative planning is now frequently used in the community.

***Financial Incentive:*** A critical element supporting the momentum of the early planning was the potential of garnering substantial new resources (anticipated to be at least \$750,000 per year based on the grants awarded to the first Weed and Seed sites) for the community. In the words of one of the participants in the planning phase, *“the planning and coordination in itself was good, but the potential for new money was what brought and kept people at the table.”* The apparent abandonment of Weed and Seed by the federal government in the fall of 1994 resulted in almost a complete loss of involvement and momentum at the local level. When the process was eventually reopened by the federal office, available funding was substantially less than what was originally anticipated. Another participant noted that the change in the scope of funding left the community with a *“million dollar idea for which \$125,000 in funding was available.”*

***Merger with the Des Moines Enterprise Community:*** A major development during the Weed and Seed planning phase was the approval of the City of Des Moines’ application to HUD for an Enterprise Community (EC) grant. Both efforts involved substantial community involvement, resulted in comprehensive plans, and targeted the same area of the city. The two plans were generally consistent and complementary. The law enforcement elements of the Weed and Seed plan added another dimension to the EC plan, and the EC plan had greater emphasis on social and economic development. Concerns were raised about the potential for significant administrative duplication and the capacity of the community to manage and sustain support for two separate initiatives, if both initiatives continued independently.

While the overlap between the two efforts was clear, the decision to combine the two initiatives was somewhat contentious, with some participants very reluctant to combine the two. A great deal of effort by the Weed and Seed planning committee had been put into selecting a target area, which was a smaller, geographic area within the boundaries of the Des Moines Enterprise Community. A first step to merging the two efforts was the Weed and Seed planning committee’s decision to enlarge its target area to be consistent with the boundaries of the Des Moines Enterprise Community.

Moreover, key stakeholders in the Weed and Seed effort had a strong interest in the drug-related crime and substance abuse issues, which were viewed as core elements of the Weed and Seed plan. It was feared that this focus would be lost and the potential impact on this issue lessened if the Weed and Seed effort merged with the more comprehensive and diffuse Enterprise Community plan.

With the potential for official federal recognition as a Weed and Seed site in doubt and the designation as an Enterprise Community official, however, the merger did proceed. As the community-based governing structure of the EC was established, slots on the governing board were reserved for Weed

and Seed representatives. Oversight of the Weed and Seed plan was placed with the Community/Neighborhood Environment, one of four working groups established to direct the EC initiative. Similar and complementary goals and objectives of the two plans were identified and combined. Administrative responsibility of the Weed and Seed plan was assumed by the Community Development Department of the City of Des Moines, which was also administering the EC grant, and the Weed and Seed initiative came officially under the auspices of the Des Moines City Council. When the opportunity to apply for official Weed and Seed recognition re-emerged in the summer of 1995, the Community Development Department took the lead in updating and submitting the Weed and Seed plan.

The merger of the Weed and Seed and EC efforts reinforced the “seeding” elements of the Weed and Seed initiative. At the same time, however, the law enforcement elements of the plan received less attention, local law enforcement became less involved, and the priority on crime and substance abuse related issues was diminished. The involvement of the business community was also lost as a result of the delays, the merger of the two efforts, and resulting decrease in emphasis on crime and substance abuse issues. The U.S. Attorney has, however, stayed actively involved on the Enterprise Community/Weed and Seed Steering Committee and continues to play a role in the oversight of the Weed and Seed project.

**Emergence of Methamphetamine:** Another significant development that has impacted the implementation of Weed and Seed in Des Moines has been the emergence of methamphetamine as a major drug in the area. According to law enforcement officials, “meth has added a whole new dimension to drug trafficking in Des Moines.” It is easy to make, readily available, and more scattered throughout the area, rather than concentrated in certain neighborhoods. The “meth epidemic” has diverted law enforcement resources away from other criminal activity, much of which had previously been concentrated in the Weed and Seed target area.

At the same time, the Weed and Seed target area has witnessed a reduction in crime (see Appendix C for a comparison of law enforcement data for the target area from 1994 to 1997). Gang problems in the inner city have diminished greatly, as leaders of gangs have been successfully prosecuted and new leaders have not surfaced. Finally, law enforcement officials cite the forced closing of several taverns in the area that had been magnets for drug trafficking and other criminal activity as having had an impact on reducing crime in the target area. While there has been progress in reducing crime, the target area still has a disproportionate share of criminal activity relative to the City as a whole, and certain properties within the target area still generate repeated police calls.

Within the community, there is a perception that there is increased visibility of law enforcement in the area and that it has had an impact on crime and has improved neighborhood conditions. While one segment of the community has welcomed this increased police presence in the neighborhood, another segment of the population views the police presence as unnecessarily excessive and intimidating. These conflicting interpretations within the community suggest that continued work to improve police/resident relations is necessary.

**Recent Developments:** Two relatively recent developments have the potential to have a positive

impact on the ongoing implementation of the Weed and Seed plan in Des Moines. The first is the participation of a team of representatives from Des Moines EC/Weed and Seed Steering Committee in technical assistance being provided by the National Congress for Community and Economic Development. This technical assistance recently enabled the EC/Weed and Seed Steering Committee to revisit and articulate its vision, mission, and role in the community. This effort, which is very consistent with the original Weed and Seed strategy, may help refocus and reenergize community leadership around these issues. Secondly, the City of Des Moines is currently piloting a new approach to city services--Neighborhood Based Service Delivery. Under this approach, teams of city officials will be working more closely with community residents to jointly identify and resolve problems in their selected neighborhoods. One of the neighborhoods participating in this three-year pilot project is in the Weed and Seed target area.

### ***SAFE HAVEN COMPONENT OF DES MOINES WEED AND SEED PROJECT***

***Original Safe Haven Objectives:*** One of the original requirements of the federal Weed and Seed initiative was to designate a facility in the target area, such as a high school, as a Safe Haven. The Safe Haven was to be in a secure environment, provide multiple services, and offer a variety of activities for youth and adults in the community. A comprehensive high school was not available in the Des Moines Weed and Seed target area, so the John R. Grubb Community YMCA was selected as the primary Safe Haven. This facility had been a community center under the Model Cities project in Des Moines, but had recently been acquired by the YMCA which was in the process of a major renovation and expansion of the facility. It also met the other guidelines for a Safe Haven, such as being open early in the morning to late at night, providing a safe environment, offering several activities for youth, etc. For a variety of reasons, four additional locations (three schools and a community-based organization) were identified in the community to serve as “satellite Safe Havens.”

Des Moines’ original application for Weed and Seed recognition included a specific goal and objectives related to the creation of the Safe Haven as part of its Prevention, Early Intervention, and Treatment element, as follows:

*Goal: Enable Weed and Seed youth and adults to engage in healthy, productive activities in a safe environment through the establishment of a neighborhood-based, multi-service center.*

*Objective 1: Refine initial plans for the creation and operation of a Safe Haven in the Weed and Seed area;*

*Objective 2: Begin co-locating additional services and programs at the Safe Haven by 1/30/96; and*

*Objective 3: Develop formal plan for W/S Steering Committee approval related to ongoing Safe Haven operations by 4/96.*

These objectives reflect the tentative nature of the relationship between Weed and Seed and the YMCA Safe Haven at the time of application. The original application also discussed the provision of information and referral services at the Safe Haven and the creation of a Teen Advisory Board for the

Safe Haven.

Another goal and objectives of the Prevention, Early Intervention and Treatment element of the plan also dealt with services and opportunities for youth. These objectives are directly related to the Safe Haven goal, and included promoting positive youth development through the provision of a range of developmental activities for youth at the Safe Havens. Activities mentioned in the plan included tutoring services, recreational and educational opportunities, case management services, culturally appropriate delinquency prevention activities; peer counseling, outreach, mentoring, school-to-work, and employment services. Within the community, plans were underway to provide such services, and the Weed and Seed plan incorporated those activities that would enhance opportunities for youth in the target area.

The Safe Haven aspects of the original plan did not generate as much discussion or attention from the community as those that addressed the law enforcement elements. There was, however, according to many involved in the process, general consensus that the concept of a Safe Haven was sound and made sense for the community. The Weed and Seed planning committee generally understood and supported the principle that programming needed to be in place to offer young people in the community alternatives to drugs and crime. A subsequent random sample survey of residents in the target area in 1996 reinforced the assumption that the community would support these activities. Respondents to that survey rated “increased activities for youth” highest on a list of sixteen items (80.8% ranked as very important) of things to do to improve the neighborhood.<sup>3</sup> During the Weed and Seed planning, the community did not indicate a strong desire to increase traditional social services in the area, and many community residents continue to believe that there is an over-concentration of “social services” in the area.

**Implementation of Safe Haven Objectives:** As Weed and Seed funding became available to the Des Moines site, a considerable proportion of funding was designated to support various activities for youth at the Safe Haven facilities. A full description of the Safe Haven activities carried out in 1997 and 1998 was included in a progress report recently submitted to the Department of Justice. An excerpt from that report is attached as Appendix D. Overall funding for Safe Haven and Related Activities is summarized in the table below. Generally, funded activities occurred in the year following the grant award. Approximately \$50,000 of each year’s award has been used to pay off-duty police officers at the primary Safe Haven to ensure safety and to interact with young people.

**Safe Haven Expenditures as Proportion of Weed & Seed Funding\***

Year of W/S Award	Total W/S Grant Award	Amount Supporting Safe Haven	Percent of Total Award for Safe Haven
1996	\$125,000	\$107,500	86%

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<sup>3</sup> *The AmeriCorps Enterprise Community Survey*, September 1996. Survey report available from the Child and Family Policy Center, Des Moines, Iowa.

1997	\$175,000	\$116,600	66%
1998 (planned)	\$175,000	\$108,500	62%
3-Year Total	\$475,000	\$332,600	70%

Other efforts in the community have leveraged additional public and private resources for services at the Safe Havens. Major funding streams that have supported programming at Safe Havens in addition to Weed and Seed have included: the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention Community Coalition grant; U.S. Department of Education 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools and School-to-Work grants; and AmeriCorps; among others. These programs have often been the result of collaborative efforts of agencies and organizations working together to provide services in the target area.

**Primary Safe Haven–John R. Grubb Community YMCA:** As mentioned above, the community YMCA located in the target area was designated the primary Safe Haven in the original Weed and Seed plan. The facility, which was previously a community center, underwent a \$3.2 million renovation and expansion that was completed by the YMCA in early 1997. Since its official “grand opening” in February 1997, the expanded John R. Grubb Community YMCA has experienced increasing utilization. As tracked by the YMCA, daily uses of the facility increased from 10,215 uses in 1997 to 30,517 uses in 1998. Memberships at the Grubb YMCA totaled 1,700 by the end of 1998. YMCA personnel report that the vast majority of people utilizing the Grubb YMCA reside in the target area. Approximately 80% of the memberships at the Grubb YMCA are subsidized in some way.

The transition of this facility from a free community center to a YMCA membership- and fee-based facility has caused some ongoing discontent and frustration among some community residents. Annual membership fees range from \$45 for a youth membership (9-17 years old), to \$228 for an adult membership, to \$300 for a family membership. The Grubb Y also offers the option of a minimal daily per use fee, but limits the number of visits for an individual using such a payment method. Although the Grubb YMCA’s stated policy is that it will not turn anyone away because of an inability to pay, the “needs based” eligibility process to receive a “financial scholarship” has discouraged some community residents from taking advantage of the facility.

The Grubb YMCA offers traditional health, fitness, and recreational activities, including numerous activities for youth such as sports leagues and clinics, martial arts classes, camping, swimming, after-school programs, a teen club, and late-night basketball. The YMCA has collaborated with the Des Moines Public Schools to provide child care for elementary-age children attending school in the target area after-school and during school breaks at minimal cost to families. In addition, a privately-funded GED program for high risk youth and young adults is operated by the YMCA at the facility. More recently, the facility has provided space for three staff of the Des Moines Enterprise Community School-to-Work project. This project will provide services to at least 30 out-of-school youth in the area. The YMCA facility is also made available to community groups for meetings and events, generally at no charge. Safety and security at the facility is enhanced by the presence of the off-duty police officers who are paid for by the Des Moines Weed and Seed project. The presence of the off-duty police has also provided opportunities for positive interaction between police and young people, helping to build trust and positive relationships among the two groups.

Although not clearly described in the original strategy for the Safe Haven, the close working relationship that was envisioned between the Weed and Seed committee and the Grubb YMCA in its capacity as the primary Safe Haven has not emerged. Nor is the Weed and Seed project a visible or easily identifiable component of the operations of the Safe Haven. There are examples of a positive working relationship (e.g., the presence of the off-duty police in the facility), but in hindsight, the ability of the Weed and Seed Committee to develop and approve operational plans for the Safe Haven, an independent agency, was probably unrealistic.

Nor has the co-location of multiple services at the Safe Haven been implemented as originally planned. As the Safe Haven component evolved, it became clear that this type of facility was not suitable for information and referral or some of the other traditional social services for families originally suggested in the plan. The capacity to provide such services was not inherent in the organization, and in general, residents were unlikely to access such services at this location.

At the same time, the original goals and objectives related to having a community-based facility with a variety of activities available for youth and adults offered in a safe environment have been realized. Moreover, additional resources have been leveraged to expand the services that are needed in the community (e.g., child care, teen club, etc.) at the Safe Haven. Moreover, it appears that the primary Safe Haven in Des Moines is providing opportunities for youth that have been linked to positive outcomes for youth, such as providing a sense of safety, interesting activities, and supportive relationships with adults.<sup>4</sup> There was general consensus among the individuals interviewed that the Grubb YMCA/Safe Haven has “added value” to the community and is an important community resource. There was also general agreement that the early Weed and Seed funding was an important source of financial stability for the YMCA and that it has helped leverage other resources.

***Satellite Safe Havens:*** The role of the satellite Safe Havens was never clearly described in the Weed and Seed strategic plan or application materials. Reportedly, the satellites were included to expand the range of services available and to ensure that residents had at least one “Safe Haven” facility that they were comfortable accessing. While some Weed and Seed funding has supported programming at the satellite Safe Havens (e.g., enrichment activities for students), most services available at the satellite Safe Havens are supported through other funding. And, although the services and activities available at the satellite Safe Havens are consistent with the strategy, they are not identified as Weed and Seed initiatives. This has hindered efforts of the Weed and Seed Committee to increase the visibility of the effort in the community.

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<sup>4</sup> A full evaluation of the contributions of Safe Havens to positive youth development was conducted by Public/Private Ventures in five sites. The evaluation identified and developed measures for seven developmental experiences youth are likely to encounter at Safe Havens. These are: sense of safety; challenging and interesting activities; sense of belonging; supportive relationships with adults; leadership; input and decision-making; and community service. For a complete explanation of these developmental areas, see Gambone, Michelle Alberti and Amy Arbretton, “Safe Havens, The Contributions of Youth Organizations to Healthy Adolescent Development,” Public/Private Ventures, Philadelphia, PA, April 1997.

## ***YOUTH PROGRAMMING AVAILABLE IN THE COMMUNITY***

As part of this evaluation, the Weed and Seed committee requested that other youth programming in the community also be identified and the degree to which there was overlap or gaps in youth services be assessed. A resource directory being developed by the Enterprise Community School-to-Work project was utilized to identify those youth-serving organizations or programs located in the Weed and Seed target area or primarily serving target area youth and young adults.

***Programs Specifically for Target Area:*** Not including the school facilities, five community agencies and two school-sponsored programs were identified as being located in and/or providing services specifically for youth and young adults in the target area. These agencies or programs include:

*AmeriCorps:* Administered by the Des Moines Public Schools, the AmeriCorps project has targeted its services in the Des Moines Enterprise Community/Weed and Seed target area for the last three years. Among its priority areas is a “School Success Corp” which provides tutoring, mentoring, and summer youth programs, among other services in the target area. Youth and young adults can be involved as AmeriCorps volunteers or receive services from the program.

*Children and Families of Iowa (CFI):* A multi-service agency headquartered in the target area but serving a large portion of the state of Iowa, CFI provides a variety of prevention, intervention and treatment services, including residential care, foster care, family counseling and substance abuse treatment for adolescents. Among its youth programs are tutoring services, the PRYDE group (a drug prevention program), and before- and after-school and summer programs for younger school-age children.

*Creative Visions:* A community-based organization in the target area, Creative Visions has been in operation for approximately three years. Creative Visions engages disenfranchised youth and young adults in a variety of programming and promotes youth involvement and empowerment approaches. Among the programs offered are job readiness and employment support, men’s and women’s support groups, and a drop-in center. This agency attracts primarily (but not exclusively) older youth and young adults from the African American community in the target area. Many of the young people attracted to Creative Visions have a history of involvement in gangs or criminal activity.

*Enterprise Community School-to-Work Initiative:* Educational and job placement programs are available for youth ages 14 to 24 and their families who live in the target area. Access to the services are coordinated through six community-based sites, each of which has been equipped with computer hardware and software related to education and job preparation. The program anticipates serving 30 out-of-school youth in its first year of operation.

*John R. Grubb Community YMCA:* The primary Safe Haven described above provides a wide range of recreational opportunities for youth. A Youth Development Center offers GED classes and support services to older youth and young adults who have dropped out of school. A teen leadership club engages primarily middle-school age youth from the community in a variety of activities. A majority of youth participants at the YMCA are African American. A

wide range of ages of participants are served, from child care for younger school-age children to senior citizens.

*Spectrum Resources:* A relatively new agency in the target area, Spectrum Resources provides apprenticeship training in the construction industry for older youth and young adults. The agency provides employment opportunities and job placement assistance for participants. Leadership and character development components are included as part of the curriculum. The Des Moines Weed and Seed project contracted with Spectrum Resources in 1998 to provide job training to at-risk youth in the target area. Nineteen youth participated over a six-month period.

*Urban Dreams:* Designated as a satellite Safe Haven in the target area, Urban Dreams provides a variety of youth and family services, many of which are through fee-for-service contracts for Department of Human Services and Juvenile Court referrals. Youth aftercare, family unification, and self-sufficiency programs are provided. The agency recently launched a youth baseball league in the target area and will receive a small amount of Weed and Seed funding to support and expand its implementation. This agency also draws largely from the African American community in the target area.

***Other Youth-Serving Organizations:*** An additional 25 agencies or programs (not including traditional youth organizations such as Girl/Boy Scouts, Camp Fire, etc) that serve youth with particular needs from the Des Moines area were also identified. These services are available to target area youth, but are not specifically established or intended for them. Included in this group are agencies such as the Young Women's Resource Center, which provides counseling and support to girls and young women in need of assistance; Youth Emergency Services and Shelter, which provides emergency housing and support services for runaways; and a variety of developmental or prevention programs that operate through schools or other community organizations that target "at-risk" youth.

The school system also provides a significant amount of services and offers multiple opportunities to area youth and families. In late 1998, all three schools in the target area (two elementary and one alternative middle/high school) received funding through the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Schools program. These additional resources will be an asset to the community and should lead to expanded services for children, youth and adults, which become available through the schools.

While not a focus of this analysis, these agencies and programs are important resources for young people, and there are indications that information about these resources is being made available to youth. In particular, the School-to-Work project will be including its Resource Directory on its website, and a Community YouthMapping project planned for this summer in Des Moines will also catalogue and facilitate access to this type of information.

***Overlap and Gaps in Youth Services:*** In the Des Moines Weed and Seed target area there are approximately one thousand youth ages 10 through 17. There are another one thousand or so young adults ages 18 through 24. Given the demographic and economic characteristics of the target area, almost all of these youth would likely have one or more internal or external factors placing them at risk

of poor outcomes. Almost all would likely benefit from actively participating in well-designed, quality youth programming that enhance protective factors.<sup>5</sup> Without ongoing financial support for the types of programming and opportunities that have been made available, many of these youth would likely be unable to engage in many of the educational and enrichment activities that have been supported by Weed and Seed.

There is a substantial supply of youth-serving programs and organizations serving the Weed and Seed target area, but each organization appears to make a fairly unique contribution to the community, either in the characteristics of the population it targets, the specific services it offers, or the activities and opportunities it provides. Focus groups with young people participating in some of these organizations revealed that youth who are attracted to one community organization are often not interested in or comfortable accessing the other options available. They have found the specific program or organization that meets their needs. From the youth's perspective, the organizations are not interchangeable or duplicative. Most youth also expressed frustration with what they perceived as a lack of opportunities and activities for youth and young adults in the community. More interesting and challenging activities were in high demand among the youth who participated in the focus groups.

Another specific gap in services for youth in the target area identified through this analysis was the lack of programs or organizations specifically for Asian or Latino youth. While these youth are not "excluded" from other organizations and supports, there may be a lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate and competent programming available for some youth.

Programmatically, there were limited opportunities identified for youth in the target area to be involved in community service activities and to be given leadership and decision-making responsibilities. Providing opportunities for youth to make a contribution, to give back to their communities, is a common principle in the youth development literature. A few opportunities of this nature were identified, but could be expanded.

Finally, the youth programs available directly in the target area primarily serve either younger, elementary age children through more traditional after-school child care programs, or older youth and young adults through GED, job readiness and job placement services. Programs and opportunities for middle-school age youth appear to be in shorter supply in the community. This shortage is compounded by the lack of a middle school in the target area. Middle-school children are bussed outside their immediate neighborhood to attend school, making it difficult for many to take advantage of any school-based programs that might be available.

## ***CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS***

Sustaining momentum for a broad-based community plan is often difficult, as issues, people and priorities change. In general, however, the Des Moines Weed and Seed site has followed its strategic plan fairly closely over the first few years of implementation, but perhaps without the intensity or focus

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<sup>5</sup> For information on risk and protective factors, see Hawkins and Catalano, *Communities that Care, Risk-Focused Prevention Using the Social Development Strategy*, 1993, Developmental Research and Programs, Inc., Seattle, WA.

originally envisioned. While some specific tasks discussed in the original plan submitted in 1995 have not been carried out and others added as funding, needs and priorities changed, the overall direction of the effort has remained the same.

The most significant changes came as a result of the combination of the Weed and Seed planning effort with that of the Des Moines Enterprise Community. While the merger of the two efforts was logical and, in some ways, necessary at the time to sustain the Weed and Seed initiative, the subsequent loss of the private sector leadership and diminished focus on drug-related issues significantly changed the complexion of the initiative in Des Moines and lowered its visibility. As the Weed and Seed plan has been implemented, it has been overshadowed by the larger, Enterprise Community effort. The Weed and Seed initiative is therefore not as visible as it might have been had it continued independently. At the same time, combining the two efforts has ensured consistency and coordination of these major initiatives and has provided a vehicle for ongoing neighborhood involvement in the Weed and Seed effort.

Further, changes in law enforcement demands and priorities have shifted some “weeding” activities away from the target area. At the same time, the Weed and Seed initiative has enabled the Des Moines Police Department to secure Asset Forfeiture Funds, which have supported a bike patrol in the target area during the summer months. An analysis of data available from the DMPD reveals that crime decreased significantly in the target area from 1994 to 1997. This decrease is likely the result of a combination of factors, with the Weed and Seed efforts among them.

The Safe Haven element of the plan has “added value” to the target area, according to several people interviewed for this evaluation. The Weed and Seed initiative has leveraged its limited resources in several ways. Weed and Seed funds are often used to supplement other funding streams, and are infrequently the sole source of funding for a program. By building on existing programs and partnering with other organizations, the Weed and Seed funds have been stretched to provide a wide variety of services and opportunities, such as arts programming, job training, and educational services, that would otherwise be very limited, if present at all, in the target area.

Further, new federal funding streams have been identified and secured to generate new services in the target area. Des Moines has successfully used its designation as both a Weed and Seed site and Enterprise Community to leverage these new funds. For example, a federal grant awarded from the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention in 1996 emphasized the need for and targeted services to the Weed and Seed area. The recently-awarded School-to-Work grant for out-of-school youth specifically targeted the Enterprise Community/Weed and Seed area.

While there appears to be a general perception that conditions have improved in the Des Moines Weed and Seed target area and that the combination of various initiatives have had positive results, most also agree that more needs to be done. As discussed above, additional structured activities or programs for middle-school age youth, and opportunities that provide leadership

experience and decision-making responsibilities for youth are needed. Ongoing and even greater coordination among the multiple service providers is also essential.

It is also important that the strategies being supported be of sufficient intensity and duration to have an impact. While there is a tendency to respond to the most pressing, immediate needs in the community, that may lead to inconsistency and ineffectiveness in the long-term. Continuing to build the capacity of the Safe Haven, and sustaining quality programming over time should produce better results.

**DES MOINES WEED AND SEED EVALUATION  
STATISTICAL ANALYSIS CENTER PARTNERSHIP PROJECT  
FINAL REPORT**

**LIST OF APPENDICES**

- APPENDIX A: Key Stakeholder Interview List**
- APPENDIX B: Chronology of Major Events related to Weed and Seed in Des Moines, Iowa**
- APPENDIX C: Law Enforcement Data Analysis**
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**APPENDIX A: KEY STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW LIST -- WEED & SEED EVALUATION**

NAME & TITLE	WEED AND SEED INVOLVEMENT
<p><b>Don Nickerson</b>  <b>U.S. Attorney</b></p>	<p>On original planning committee and has stayed involved as a member of the EC W/S Steering Committee. U.S. Attorneys play a pivotal role in the Weed and Seed initiative nationwide. Has both a big picture perspective and is knowledgeable about specifics.</p>
<p><b>Bill Moulder, Chief of Police</b>  <b>Des Moines Police Dept.</b></p>	<p>On original planning committee and very knowledgeable of law enforcement trends and activities.</p>
<p><b>Dave Discher</b>  <b>Director, HSCB</b></p>	<p>On original planning committee and chair of the “Seed” Committee. HSCB currently manages most Safe Haven subcontracts. Has followed the progress of the W/S and DMEC initiative since the beginning.</p>
<p><b>Alicia Claypool</b>  <b>The Interfaith Alliance</b></p>	<p>Served as W/S Coordinator during planning phase. Was involved in development of specific goals and objectives, Safe Haven selection, etc.</p>
<p><b>Kathy Kafela</b>  <b>City of Des Moines</b>  <b>Community Dev. Dept.</b></p>	<p>W/S and DMEC Coordinator. Was not involved during original planning phase, but is responsible for overall effort and has directed the applications for W/S funding. Well-informed on community issues and knows specifics of W/S activities.</p>
<p><b>Neila Seaman</b>  <b>Employee &amp; Family</b>  <b>Resources</b></p>	<p>Chair of the Community/Neighborhood Environment Work Group of DMEC, which directs W/S activities. Was not actively involved in planning, but has been a key player in W/S implementation and requests for funding.</p>
<p><b>Gail Stilwill</b>  <b>Meredith Corporation</b></p>	<p>Co-Chair of original Weed and Seed Executive Committee--big picture person on planning phase. Has not been involved in implementation phase.</p>
<p><b>Sy Forrester</b>  <b>John R. Grubb YMCA</b></p>	<p>On-site director of Primary Safe Haven; somewhat involved in initial planning, but would have a good sense of implementation issues and needs in the community.</p>
<p><b>Kathy Kahoun</b>  <b>City of Des Moines</b>  <b>Community Development</b></p>	<p>On original planning committee and seed committee. Supervisory role now on Weed and Seed grant; familiar with history and current implementation.</p>
<p><b>Laura Hudson</b>  <b>King-Irving Neighborhood</b>  <b>Association</b></p>	<p>On original planning committee and still a resident of the area. Resident perspective on planning phase and current needs in the community.</p>
<p><b>Kittie Westin-Knauer</b>  <b>Principal</b>  <b>Casady Alternative School</b></p>	<p>Principal at one of the Satellite Safe Havens. Familiar with needs of youth in the community and services available. Has utilized W/S funding to support life skill and enrichment activities for high-risk students.</p>
<p><b>John Jones</b>  <b>DM Police Department</b></p>	<p>Active on original planning committee for “weeding” activities. Knowledgeable about planning process and implementation related to “weeding” elements.</p>

**APPENDIX B: CHRONOLOGY OF WEED AND SEED IN DES MOINES:**

- Initial Planning began in 1994 by the Des Moines Chemical Dependency Council

Co-Chairs: Jack Taylor and Gail Stilwill  
 Facilitator: Alicia Claypool  
 35 Member Steering Committee  
 Seed Committee Chair: Dave Discher  
 Weed Committee Chair: Al Overbaugh

- Decision was made to incorporate Weed and Seed with the Des Moines Enterprise Community in late 1994, identifying the same geographic boundaries and similar goals and objectives.
- Planning was temporarily suspended in late 1994 when it appeared the U.S. Department of Justice might discontinue the program.
- In May 1995, the Department of Justice reopened the process to apply for “Official Recognition” as a Weed and Seed site.
- In September 1995, Des Moines submitted its application for “Official Recognition” which was approved; however, carried no guarantee of federal funding.
- Weed and Seed Strategy has four required components:

<u>Weeding Elements</u>	<u>Seeding Elements</u>
Law Enforcement	Prevention, Early Intervention, Treatment
Community Policing	Neighborhood Restoration

- The “*seeding*” side of the federal Weed and Seed initiative is based primarily on the “Risk and Protective Factors” model and “Social Development Strategy” developed by Hawkins and Catalano.
- Federal funding for Des Moines’ Weed and Seed strategy began in 1996:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Project Period</u>
FY 1996	\$ 125,000	October 1996 - September 1997
FY 1997	\$ 175,000	October 1997 - September 1998
FY 1998	\$ 175,000	October 1998 - September 1999
FY 1999	\$ 175,000 ( <i>pending</i> )	October 1999 - September 2000

- Des Moines has also received \$100,000 in Asset Forfeiture Funds in FY 1997 and in FY 1998. Application for additional Asset Forfeiture Funds is pending.

**APPENDIX C: LAW ENFORCEMENT DATA ANALYSIS**

**Des Moines Enterprise Community/Weed and Seed Target Area (W/S)**

**Source: Des Moines Police Department**

<b>Type of Offense</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>Percent Change 1994 - 1997</b>
<b>Total # of Offenses</b>			
City	34,907	30,068	- 13.86%
W/S	3,947	2,906	- 26.40%
W/S as percent of City	11.3%	9.66%	
<b>Total Violent Crime*</b>			
City	1,022	883	- 13.6%
W/S	183	167	- 8.7%
W/S as % of City	17.9%	18.9%	
<b>Murders**</b>			
City	11	15	+ 36.36%
W/S	3	6	+ 100.0%
W/S as % of City	27.27%	40.0%	
<b>Aggravated Assault</b>			
City	448	433	- 3.3%
W/S	93	79	- 15.0%
W/S as % of City	20.7%	18.24%	
<b>Drug/Narcotic Violations</b>			
City	1,037	1,179	+ 13.7%
W/S	365	268	- 26.6%
W/S as % of City	35.0%	22.73%	
<b>Robberies</b>			
City	316	345	+ 9.2%
W/S	73	64	- 12.3%
W/S as % of City	23.1%	18.55%	
<b>Destruction, Damage &amp; Vandalism</b>			
City	4,772	3,313	- 30.57%
W/S	424	225	- 46.9%
W/S as % of City	8.9%	6.79%	
<b>Weapons Violations</b>			
City	306	105	- 65.68%
W/S	84	34	- 59.52%
W/S as % of City	27.5%	32.38%	

\* Violent Crime includes Murder, Forcible Rape, Robbery, and Aggravated Assault

\*\* In 1999, the number of murders in the Weed and Seed target area returned to 3. There are an insufficient

number of crimes of this nature to perform reliable trend analysis. Caution is urged in drawing conclusions based on this small number.