



# 2008 Annual Report



Middle Earth, Inc.  
P.O. Box 8045, Bridgewater, NJ 08807  
(908) 725-7223 \* e-mail: [MddlEarth@aol.com](mailto:MddlEarth@aol.com)

## LETTER FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In 2008, Middle Earth continued to work with Somerset County's most vulnerable youth to guide their development towards a more promising future. However, in addition to maintaining this focus on its target population, Middle Earth also embraced a parallel effort that defined the agency's own evolution for a sustainable future. Did the agency face challenges? Of course it did, and still does — many of the same difficulties facing individuals, organizations, countries and the world — but, consistent with the spirit of Middle Earth, the challenges did not deter significant accomplishment.

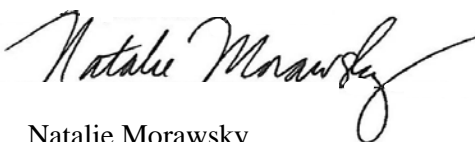
As is outlined throughout this report, by working with local county agencies and other community partners, Middle Earth delivered on its core programs serving a similar or greater number of adolescents compared to 2007. The agency made progress in defining and tracking outcomes of the programs, which will continue through 2009. The goal was to not only capture the number of youth participating through each program, but to develop a more tangible understanding of how individuals benefited from the intervention. An unplanned outcome of the growing economic concerns at the end of 2008 was an increase in demand for Middle Earth's service, particularly for one-on-one support, which makes sense as children react to the greater anxiety levels in the adults around them.

In the last quarter of 2007, Middle Earth expanded its service to youth by setting up a federal grant-enabled 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center within the Bound Brook school system. This was the first full year of the program's implementation during which the agency worked with students, parents and teachers to improve the academic performance of 74 middle school students. At the end of the year, student surveys showed that program participants believed the program activities helped them learn teamwork. Teacher surveys of those participants showed an improvement in studying skills, staying on task and reading fluency. Beneath the excitement and enthusiasm of successfully tackling a new challenge and of attracting a new youth population, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center (CCLC) initiative lined up directly with Middle Earth's mission. It provided young people a safe environment, caring adults and the opportunity to enhance academic performance — all characteristics identified as fundamental resources required for executing the agency's objective of helping children grow into healthy, independent, responsible adults. Based on the results, the program was funded for continuation in 2009.

Driven by the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grant, the operating income of Middle Earth grew by 70% in the past three years. At the same time, the agency was able to control administrative costs in order to apply 90% of every dollar directly to programs.

Middle Earth's expansion in size and scope raised broader considerations for the agency's prospective development. As a result, in 2008, Middle Earth undertook an initiative to revisit its long term strategy to help chart the agency's future direction. To assure continued alignment between Middle Earth's services and the community's needs, the agency stakeholders convened with community stakeholders to confirm Middle Earth's standing in, value to and impact on the communities in which it operates. Building on the community's input, a strategic plan was advanced by Middle Earth's Board, executive management and employees. The underlying theme focused on strengthening the long term sustainability of the agency and on enhancing its operational excellence commensurate with ever more stringent regulatory requirements. Completion of the plan and subsequent implementation will take place in 2009.

Middle Earth's sights are set on the future, but not at the expense of forgetting the past. A glimpse in the rear view mirror shows an organization that has been engaging middle and high school children for nearly 40 years. Over that time, we have seen economies fail and recover, wars start and end, and crises emerge and recede. It is our hope that the current economic crisis recedes rapidly and that circumstances improve for our communities and our neighbors. In the meantime, Middle Earth commits to remaining a constant and positive influence for the youth of the community.



Natalie Morawsky  
Board President



Daniel J. Puntillo, Jr.  
Executive Director





*The mission of Middle Earth is to provide prevention, intervention, and crisis services assisting individuals, primarily youth, to develop into responsible and productive members of the community.*

### 2008 Middle Earth Board of Trustees

Natalie Morawsky, <i>President</i>	Bon Vivant
Ash Shah, <i>Vice President</i>	Maggiano's Little Italy
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Dawn Desmelyk	Affinity Federal Credit Union
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## 2008 MIDDLE EARTH PROGRAMS: DESCRIPTIONS AND OUTCOMES

### 21ST CENTURY COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTER

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center (CCLC) is a comprehensive after-school program, which supports students' academic, behavioral, emotional and social growth. The 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC program serves 6th, 7th and 8th graders from Bound Brook and South Bound Brook and operates year-round. The program, located at



Smalley Middle School, provides students with a variety of activities and opportunities. Each child receives: 45 minutes of snack, social time, games and outdoor time; 60 minutes of academic remediation, tutoring, and character education; and 90 minutes of academic enrichment, cultural and artistic enrichment, positive youth development, and health, nutrition and fitness activities. The program also offers monthly community service activities, quarterly guest speakers, bi-monthly educational field trips, and weekly visits from counselors and the police department. Partners for the program include Family & Community Services of Somerset County, Somerset Council on Alcoholism & Drug Dependency, Raritan Valley Community College, Jointure for Community Adult Education, Somerset County 4-H, Bound

Brook Recreation, Bound Brook Police Department, Family Crisis Intervention Unit and Somerset County Youth Services Commission. Collaborators include Bound Brook Smalley Middle School, South Bound Brook Robert Morris School and Holy Family Academy. The program is funded in part with federal funds from Title IV, Part B, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers program in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 awarded to the New Jersey Department of Education.

In 2008, the program served 74 youth. Teachers of program participants were surveyed at the end of the school year and they believed that, compared to the non-participants, program participants were better able to stay on task, improved their study skills by following directions and taking notes in class, and became more academically proficient in reading fluency, punctuation, and drawing conclusions from written material. The general consensus in focus groups with program participants was positive.



## ADVANTAGE PROGRAM

The Advantage Program is a comprehensive therapeutic after school program that provides a structured environment for adolescents who are involved in the Juvenile Justice System. The program provides transportation, therapy (individual, group, and family), recreation, community service, character education, life skills education, academic support/tutoring, parent education, substance abuse assessments and education, case management, 24-hour response, and advocacy. The program is a collaborative effort with Middle Earth as the lead agency, working closely with Family and Community Services and Somerset County Probation Department.

In 2008, the Advantage Program served 21 youth. One hundred percent of all participants performed community service (287 hours), such as Adopt-A-Road clean up, writing letters to soldiers in Iraq, raking leaves for the elderly, and much more. Of those in need of substance abuse treatment, 100% began therapy. In addition, 80% did not re-offend, 86% attended school, 50% of those youth seeking employment found jobs, 80% of those youth that owed fines made payments, 85% of those with school attendance issues improved their attendance and 80% of youth with behavioral issues improved in those areas. The program held 342 life skills education groups, which included topics such as employment skills, cooking, budgeting, current events, racism, gang violence and positive decision making.



## ADVANTAGE PLUS PROGRAM



The Advantage Plus Program provides the same services as the Advantage Program with the following additional services to program participants: daily after school supervision; intensive case management; urinalysis screenings; and electronic monitoring. All youth have individualized treatment plans outlining their goals for successful completion from the program. The program works collaboratively with Family and Community Services and the Home Detention Program.

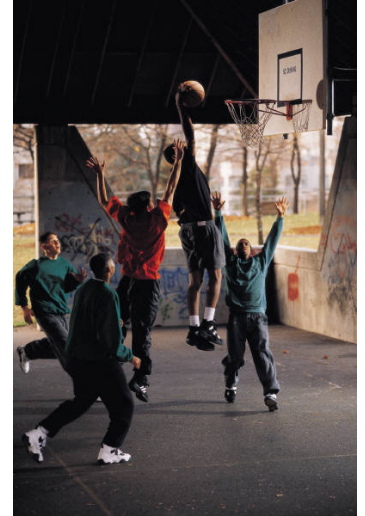
In 2008, 7 youth were served in the Advantage Plus Program. One hundred percent of these youth performed community service (218 hours) and received counseling through our on-site therapist. In addition, 50% of those youth seeking employment found jobs, 85% of those youth that owed fines made payments, 68% of those with school attendance issues improved their attendance and 80% of youth with behavioral issues improved in those areas. The program offered 249 life skills education groups for the youth.

## COMMUNITY YOUTH CENTERS

Middle Earth's two Community Youth Centers provide a safe and supervised place for youth to gather and interact positively with their peers. The Centers help to reduce delinquent behavior, guide youth towards positive development, and address various contributing factors that youth are facing. Youth receive life skills education, recreational and volunteer opportunities, crisis intervention, mentoring and adult role modeling, tutoring/educational assistance, informal counseling, information and referral services, and 24-hour support.



In 2008, the Bound Brook Community Youth Center received 2,679 visits from 189 unduplicated youth, and offered 448 life skills activities, including homework assistance, employment assistance, cooking, cleaning, anger management, and computer assistance. The Somerville/Bridgewater Community Youth Center received 1,436 visits during 2008 from 174 unduplicated youth, and offered 261 life skills activities. Of the 363 total youth that visited both centers, 126 youth attended six summer trips and 74 youth participated in community service activities. Surveys of the centers indicate that 70% of those surveyed felt they could go to staff for help and 45% of youth reported going to staff in times of crisis. In their comments, one youth reported that “ME helps me stay out of trouble” and another stated “I like the fact that it’s a place where nothing but positivity is upheld.”



### EMPLOYMENT READINESS PROGRAM



Middle Earth received a new grant in 2006 from the Workforce Investment Board to provide services to youth on probation who are no longer attending school due to either graduating or dropping out. The services provided included: enrollment in adult night school/GED programs; driver’s permit preparation/written test; career searches through Coin3 (internet based computer program that allows youth to assess their aptitudes and career interests); TABE testing; tutoring; resume information/construction; employment application information/completion; County ID acquirement; and job searches.

In 2008, the Employment Readiness Program served 11 youth. Seventy-three percent of youth successfully completed the program and 100% showed improvement in their occupational skills. Forty-five percent obtained employment.

### LINKAGES’ SCHOOL BASED PROGRAM

Linkages’ School Based Program brings local agencies together to offer health, employment, counseling, and recreational services to Somerset County Vocational and Technical High School students. Middle Earth’s role is to provide the recreational component through the use of a community youth center at the Vo-tech and offers recreation and outreach services to the students in order to identify youth at-risk or in need of services. Our component also offers supervised trips throughout the summer to provide the youth with safe and constructive recreational activities. In 2008, Middle Earth’s component had 8,748 visits to its center.



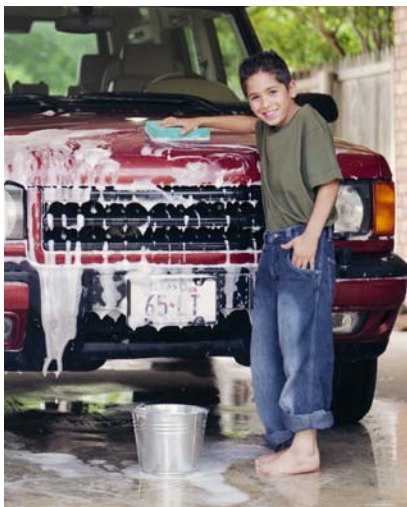
## OUTREACH PROGRAM

The Outreach Program helps to keep families intact and to provide stability to youth and their families by offering individualized one-on-one services. Through this specialized program, youth who are at risk of an out-of-home placement or who are returning to their home and family from an out-of-home placement are offered mentoring, case management, counseling, life skills education, advocacy, recreation, and 24-hour support services. The most unique aspect of this program is that it is not time-limited; mentors remain committed to these families until the services are no longer needed or requested.



In 2008, the program served 29 youth with mentors providing 2,363 hours of service. In addition, 63% of the youth worked towards attaining their program plan goals. Fifty-eight percent of the youth improved their social skills, 55% showed improvement in their school performance and 61% reported and/or showed improved self-esteem. Of those youth who identified employment as a goal, 25% obtained employment. Sixty-seven percent successfully graduated.

## STATION HOUSE ADJUSTMENT PROGRAM



The Station House Adjustment (SHA) Program serves first-time offenders who commit minor offenses. Participants complete community service as a consequence for their behavior, which helps to keep youth from re-offending. When appropriate, support services are provided to youth and their families.

In 2008, 48 youth were provided with an immediate response of community service to their commission of a crime. Participating youth performed 509 hours of community service, plus collected 5,000 pounds of food. Eighty-three percent of the program participants successfully completed the program (17% were still enrolled at the start of 2009). More importantly, 98% did not have police contact after completion of the program.

**\* To protect privacy, none of the photos in this report are of youth at Middle Earth.**

## MIDDLE EARTH HONORS JOAN GLEASON

On March 7, 2008, Middle Earth presented the Margery and Tom Corrigan Humanitarian Award to Joan Gleason. Joan is a true community activist, serving the people of Somerset County for over 30 years in different volunteer capacities. She has been a supporter of Middle Earth for years and has provided invaluable service to Middle Earth during her tenure on our board of trustees.



## MIDDLE EARTH SUCCESS: ONE TEEN'S STORY

The Bound Brook Community Youth Center, located on Main Street, serves a wide variety of adolescents, all of whom have their own unique story. There are many stories of success — youth gaining employment, learning life skills, learning how to cope with life's difficulties — but one particular teen, Richard\*, is a testament to both the ability of Middle Earth's Community Youth Centers to change lives, as well as the resiliency and character of the population Middle Earth serves.

Richard first came to the Bound Brook Community Youth Center last summer looking for a place to hang out. Most youth first visit our Centers because of the activities we offer (i.e. video games, pool, computers, arts and crafts). As the summer drew to an end and the school year began, Richard's visits became more frequent. The staff taught Richard air hockey, and by continuing to play this game with Richard, the staff began to get to know Richard and his story and gain his trust.

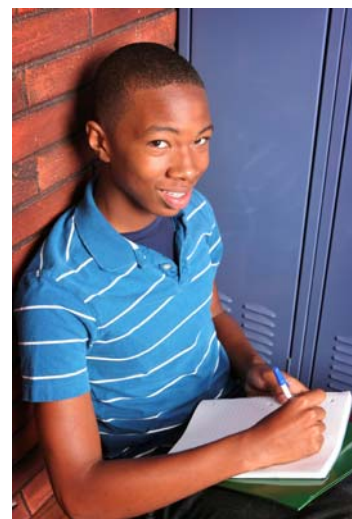
Richard comes from a single parent home and has several siblings. For Richard, Middle Earth was at first a way to escape from his family and the poor influences that they played in his life. Although congenial, Richard seemed like a youth with some major issues. Among them, and probably the most prevalent, were: poor male role models, poor anger management, and a younger brother who Richard felt he had to look after. These problems, both individually and jointly, have led to his arrest and suspension from school on more than one occasion. It should be noted that all of this information, like much of the information we hear from our youth, was conveyed while playing his favorite game with staff.

Richard saw Middle Earth as an escape from the difficulties he was facing in life. When hanging out at the Center with his friends, he could unwind and just enjoy being a teenager. As his comfort level with staff rose, Middle Earth became a place where he could face his problems and try to work on them. He invited his brothers to come to the Center. The issues that he had previously described were strikingly clear. By bringing his family members, Richard used the Center to face and overcome his obstacles, instead of running from them. Whenever a dispute would arise between siblings, a staff member was there to mediate. The process of talking through a situation has led to a remarkable improvement in the relationship between Richard and his brothers, as well as recognition of his anger issues. He continually uses Middle Earth and its staff to talk about his family, social, and school related issues. By learning new methods in conflict resolution and increasing positive relationships with peers, family, and staff members, there has been a major shift in Richard's attitude and behavior. Since coming to the Center, Richard has been staying out of trouble and has improved in school. The staff is currently working with him to find a summer job and ensure he is eligible to play football in the Fall. Also, by building friendships with other Center youth, Richard has developed new passions that he otherwise may not have experienced. He has learned to use his free time constructively.

Richard's story demonstrates that Middle Earth's Community Youth Centers offer a safe place where adolescents can be themselves while they learn (knowingly or not) how to develop into mature and productive adults. The warm and welcoming atmosphere allows for a trusting relationship with positive role models, which greatly affects the lives of those who visit.

Richard's story also speaks to the character of the youth that we serve. While Middle Earth may have been influential in Richard's "turn-around", it was Richard's change in attitude concerning how he used the Center that allowed him to face and overcome his difficulties. His own conviction and abilities brought about the positive changes in his life. Our staff believes that all the youth we serve have the capability to learn to be responsible and productive when they have someone in their life who believes in them, guides them in positive directions and builds on their strengths.

\*To protect privacy, names and identifying facts have been changed.



## 2008 Middle Earth Financial Statement

### Cash on Hand

Beginning as of 1/01/08:	\$ 63,941
Ending as of 12/31/08:	\$ 89,486

### Accounts Receivable

Beginning as of 1/01/08:	\$ 22,680
Ending as of 12/31/08:	\$ 63,715

### Accounts Payable

Beginning as of 1/01/08:	\$ 4,059
Ending as of 12/31/08:	\$ 9,198

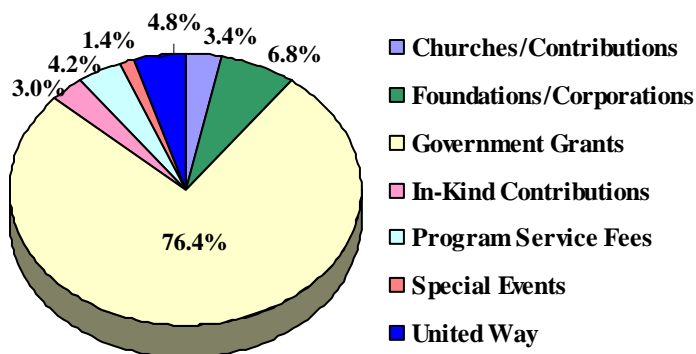
### 2008 Income

Churches/Contributions	\$ 40,727
Foundations/Corporations	\$ 81,825
Government Grants	\$ 914,211
In-Kind Contributions/Services:	\$ 35,657
Program Service Fees	\$ 50,475
Special Events	\$ 16,545
United Way	\$ 57,200
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$1,196,640</b>

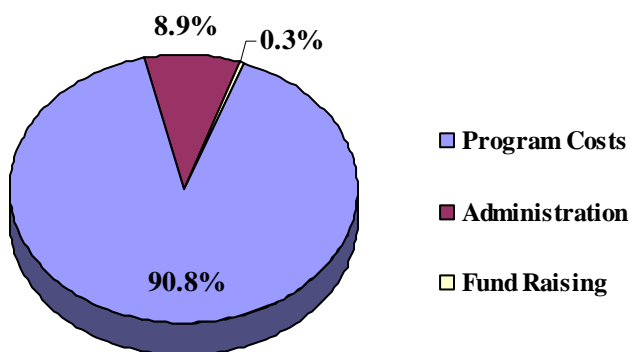
### 2008 Expenses

Program Costs	\$1,063,735
Administration	\$ 104,227
Fund Raising	\$ 3,132
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$1,171,094</b>

### Income



### Expenses



*Note these financials are unaudited.*

## 2008 Middle Earth Staff

Brian Bakes, Outreach  
 Gema Castaneda-Martinez, Outreach and 21st CCLC \*  
 Manual Castellanos, Community Youth Centers \*  
 David Damaschke, Bound Brook Youth Center \*  
 Isaiah Davenport, Linkages  
 Amy Di Iorio, Administration \*  
 Brian Ferfecki, Community Youth Centers \*  
 Bill Heath, Station House Adj. Program and Outreach \*  
 Megan Houser, Employment Readiness Program \*  
 Janeen Kinney, Advantage Programs \*  
 Pamela Krachun, Outreach  
 Michelle Mazzagatti, Advantage Programs, Bridgewater Youth Center and Employment Readiness Program

Margaret Navatto, 21st CCLC and Outreach  
 Gina Petrusky, 21st CCLC \*  
 Daniel J. Puntillo, Jr., Executive Director  
 Jolee Roberts, Administration \*  
 Alyssa Simmonds, 21st CCLC  
 Maria Strada, Director of Program Services  
 Cheryl Torres, 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC  
 Michelle Weber, 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC \*  
 Katie Warner, Employment Readiness Program  
 Christopher Young, Advantage Programs and Employment Readiness Program

\* Denotes part-time