

ORANGE COUNTY  
BOARD OF EDUCATION

AGENDA ITEM ABSTRACT

Meeting Date: March 5, 2012

AGENDA ITEM No. 12-03-11

ACTION: (Y/N) N

SUBJECT: Boomerang Program Report

INFO. CONTACT: Dr. Denise Morton/Steven Weber PHONE: 919-732-8126

ATTACHMENTS: 1. Boomerang Quarterly Review and Data Report  
2. Boomerang: The First Five Years Overview Report

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**PURPOSE:** To provide the Board of Education a report on the Boomerang Program for information purposes.

**BACKGROUND:** Boomerang is a community-based program located at the Chapel Hill YMCA. It opened its doors in 2006 as a pilot program whose purpose was to serve short term suspended students from the high schools in Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools. Since then, the program has been expanded to serve all middle and high schools in Orange County. Orange County School began using the services of the program in 2010. The Boomerang program operates at no cost to students and families.

Boomerang's overarching mission is designed to help reduce school suspension rates as well as provide early intervention for youth who may be at-risk for dropping out. The Boomerang program has served 34 students from the middle and high schools in Orange County during the 2011-2012 school year. These students are referred by their school-based administrators. Typically, there are 5 to 8 students served by the program on any given day. The maximum daily capacity is 10 students.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT:** For the 2011-2012 school year, Orange County Schools provided \$10,000.00 (from dedicated at-risk funding) to Boomerang as financial support for the program.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The Superintendent recommends the Board of Education receive and discuss the Boomerang Program Report.



# **Boomerang:**

## ***Report for Orange County School Board***

***March 5, 2012***

***Tami Pfeifer and Laura Short  
Co-Directors***



**Boomerang is the only program offering an alternative to short term suspension for youth in Orange County.**

Out-of-school suspensions for middle and high school students are often unsupervised, are perceived to be punitive measures, can lead to additional delinquent behavior, and amplify the feelings of disconnection felt by the suspended student.

*Boomerang recognizes that the needs of suspended youth are not always immediately resolved upon their return to school and the potential cost to the community if these needs remain unmet is very high.*

Boomerang's programming is intentionally designed to meet the needs of disconnected youth during out of school time, both during suspension from school as well as after school. Boomerang continues to target services to advocate for traditionally underserved youth and form trusting relationships that lead to continuous circulation of youth through our voluntary program components.

*Since inception in 2006:*

- We have transitioned from a pilot program serving just two schools to **servicing two school districts.**
- What began as a three day, part time program now offers **opportunities five days per week for youth.**
- We have developed a core group of committed **volunteers and staff who connect with and build meaningful relationships with disconnected youth** in a brief time period by offering youth alternate visions of themselves as successful.
- We have contributed to a **lower suspension rate in CHCCS.**
- After tracking the considerable amount of students who attend the program voluntarily during after school hours, we have **expanded programming to include afterschool opportunities.**



**Boomerang operates at NO COST to students and families. All Orange County middle and high school youth are eligible to attend.**

A Typical Referral to Boomerang's Alternative to Suspension:

*Before Boomerang:*

1. Student is suspended by Assistant Principal and parent is provided with appropriate paperwork.
2. If suspension is between 3-10 days, student is given the option of attending Boomerang.
3. If student is court involved, attending Boomerang is court mandated and court counselors are contacted.

*During Boomerang:*

1. Student arrives on their first day and is oriented to Boomerang rules and expectations. Student provides information about their current school progress and an email is sent to all teachers.
2. Student participates in one hour of mandatory academic work daily with the assistance of 1:1 tutors.
3. Student participates in physical activity and is provided free breakfast and lunch
4. Student works 1:1 with social workers to develop strengths assessment, family history, and assessment of current supports
5. Student participates in skill building workshops on topics including: conflict resolution, self expression through spoken word poetry, healthy relationships, youth activism and substance use.
6. Student participates in a Wrap Up meeting with a school representative, family member, and court counselor (if applicable).

*After Boomerang:*

1. Boomerang staff send school social workers and assistant principals service notes documenting a student's stay at Boomerang (see attached template).
2. Boomerang staff continue contact with students and families through social media, email, and focus group opportunities.

After Boomerang students are eligible to participate in the following afterschool activities:

1. Civic engagement through service projects
2. Post secondary education exploration, job preparedness, as well as life skill building through participation in our WHAT'S NEXT? workshop series
3. Brief crisis counseling and individual support and referrals by clinical social workers during Open Doors hours.
4. Afterschool academic support through tutoring opportunities and technology access.
5. Access to healthy physical activities during out of school times by providing youth with passes and memberships to the Y.



**Boomerang has served over 800 referrals in our alternative to suspension program and has had over 600 after school visits.**

The youth Boomerang serves present with amazing strengths, resilience and depth. Still, many of the youth served often present with multiple risk factors including:

- Involvement in the justice system: **20% are court involved** in either the adult or juvenile justice system at time of service (either currently, or pending charges).
- From 2008-2011, **12% of referrals were for substance use**. Additionally, one quarter of youth served during 2011-2012 school year were identified as having a high probability of substance use or dependence based on a substance use assessment.
- 59% of parents who reported, shared that their **annual family income is \$25,000 or less**.
- Boomerang serves a majority of 9<sup>th</sup> grade youth (one third of dropouts occurred in 9<sup>th</sup> grade in 2008-2009).
- **Over 70% of youth served are racial/ethnic minority students.**
- **Over 15% of youth were referred for skipping/leaving campus** between 2008-2011 (absenteeism, skipping class, truancy and consistently not completing work are related to academic disengagement)
- **Fighting, weapons, and disrespect accounted for 62% of our referrals** from 2008-2011 (involvement in high risk/antisocial behavior such can significantly increase the risk that a student will leave school, Battin-Pearson et.al 2000, Ensminger et. al. 1996) SA



## **Boomerang benefits students, families, schools, and the community**

### *Students:*

- Boomerang benefits students because they are considered to have attended an alternative learning environment.
- Students are supervised and have the opportunity to engage in positive and healthy activities.
- Students engage in thoughtful discussion and reflection about their values, goals and strengths and participate in skill building groups.
- Students complete a substance use assessment and connect with teachers, administrators and other resources.

### *Families:*

- Boomerang provides supervision during out of school time.
- Families are provided with a community setting to interact with school representatives.
- Families have the opportunity to learn about additional school resources and are given referrals to community agencies.
- Family members are engaged in conversations with their student about their negative behaviors, challenges, needs, strengths and goals.

### *Schools:*

- Boomerang is an innovative partnership serving disconnected students and is the only program serving short term suspended youth available to Orange County students.
- Boomerang can help reduce school suspension rates as well as provide early intervention for youth at risk of drop-out.
- Boomerang is a neutral environment for students to open up and staff can provide schools with in depth assessment and observation of students.

### *Communities:*

- Program services are based on identified community needs.
- Youth are supervised during out of school time, both during suspension and afterschool, thus reducing likelihood of crime.
- Boomerang provides youth with knowledge of and access to community resources, creating a community of wrap around services.
- Through internal and external evaluation, Boomerang tracks community trends and youth needs.



## **Boomerang in action: Case stories from Orange County Schools**

**“Sam”** had a 10 day suspension related to substance abuse and was sent to the Boomerang program. He was a polite student who engaged in all of our activities. He talked candidly about his substance use and made goals to decrease negative behaviors. While the staff felt he was sincere about his commitment to change, they could also see his growing anxiety about returning to school. Sam worried about his safety at school because he had provided names of other students during the investigation prior to his suspension. On his last day in the program he decided he would not be returning to school. Staff and his mother worked together to have Sam participate in a meeting at the school a few days later. The high school personnel, parent, and Boomerang staff partnered with Sam to develop a plan in which he felt safe coming back to school. Sam returned to school and has reported back to the program about his increasing grades and his continued commitment to stay away from drugs. ***Boomerang gave Sam time to process his experience and future goals as well as collaborate with the school to prevent him from dropping out.***

**“Chris and John,”** were sent to Boomerang after a fight on the school bus. Chris and John were, at first, not able to be in the same room because of their anger toward one another. Immediately a mediation was conducted by Boomerang staff. By the end of their stay, both had gotten to a point of interacting in a polite and friendly manner. Additionally, John was assessed to be struggling with understanding some basic social skills and awareness (this had contributed to the initial incident) and staff were able to pass referral information to the family for continued support. John’s family was grateful for the additional referrals and support. ***Boomerang helped defuse a student conflict before they returned to school to contribute to school safety and pass on a needed resource to a family so that the student had more opportunity for success after his suspension.***

**“Jessie,”** a middle school student, came to Boomerang after a substance abuse infraction. During his stay, Jessie made a great connection to staff and decided that he would use the opportunity to open up about his feelings and behaviors. He disclosed the severity of his drug use and the use of self harm to deal with his sad feelings. Jessie reported to staff that he had never been so honest and that he felt like it was a time to make a change before he really hurt himself. Partnering with his school counselor, Boomerang staff supported Jessie as he told his mother of his behaviors at the Wrap-Up meeting. Therapist referrals were given to his mother and a plan was made to have him check in with the school counselor regularly. Since his departure, Jessie has come back to the YMCA to complete community service and staff has checked in with him at his school. ***Boomerang gave Jessie a safe and supportive environment to disclose deeper issues to staff, to his school counselor and to his family, allowing him to get help.***

*For these are all our children... We will all profit by, or pay for, whatever they become. - James Baldwin*

## Boomerang Quarterly Review - Orange County

\* From August - February 2012

<u>YTD (2011 - 2012)</u>		<u>Past Year (2010 - 2011)</u>	
Total # of Referrals	48	Total # of Referrals	13
Total No Shows	14	Total No Shows	5
<b>Total # of Referrals Served</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>Total # of Referrals Served</b>	<b>8</b>
<u>OCS / Breakdown by Offense Category</u>		<u>OCS / Breakdown by Offense Category</u>	
Bullying	1	Bullying	0
Disrespect / Insubordination	4	Disrespect / Insubordination	5
Fighting	13	Fighting	0
Skipping / Excessive Tardiness	0	Skipping / Excessive Tardiness	2
Substance Possession / Abuse	12	Substance Possession / Abuse	0
Theft	0	Theft	0
Weapon	2	Weapon	1
Other	2	Other	0
<b>Total:</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>Total:</b>	<b>8</b>
<u>OCS / Referrals by School</u>		<u>OCS / Referrals by School</u>	
Cedar Ridge	6	Cedar Ridge	0
Gravelly Hill	7	Gravelly Hill	0
Orange High	19	Orange High	1
Partnership	1	Partnership	1
Stanback	1	Stanback	2
Stanford	0	Stanford	4
<b>Total:</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>Total:</b>	<b>8</b>
<u>OCS / Referral by Grade</u>		<u>OCS / Referral by Grade</u>	
Grade 6	2	Grade 6	0
Grade 7	6	Grade 7	3
Grade 8	1	Grade 8	2
Grade 9	10	Grade 9	2
Grade 10	2	Grade 10	1
Grade 11	11	Grade 11	0
Grade 12	2	Grade 12	0
<b>Total:</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>Total:</b>	<b>8</b>
<u>OCS / Referral by Race</u>		<u>OCS / Referral by Race</u>	
African American	10	African American	7
Caucasian	20	Caucasian	1
Hispanic	3	Hispanic	0
Mixed Race	1	Mixed Race	0
Asian	0	Asian	0
<b>Total:</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>Total:</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Total that completed the program</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>Total that completed the program</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Total Completed Wrap-ups</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>Total Completed Wrap-ups</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Total Wrap-ups with School Rep</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>Total Wrap-ups with School Rep</b>	<b>1</b>



2006-2011

BOOMERANG : The first five years



## **Contents:**

- Mission
- History
- Typical Day
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# Did you know?

- **1 out of every 10** Students in North Carolina is suspended from school.
- North Carolina has the 4<sup>th</sup> highest number and the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest rate of K-12 suspension in the US.
- Students with emotional, behavioral, or learning disabilities are more likely to be suspended than students without disabilities.

- Higher rates of suspension are related to higher rates of future antisocial behaviors and involvement in the juvenile justice system.

## Boomerang

### Mission:

Boomerang seeks to engage disconnected youth and their community by providing a supportive alternative environment for out of school time, offering resiliency based training for professionals and other adults, and advocating for community change that has enduring benefits for all adolescents.

# Boomerang's Mission

"I love the way Boomerang staff  
accepts you from the beginning "  
Boomerang student 2008-2009

Boomerang was created as a YMCA program in 2006 in response to a community identified need for alternatives to suspension for youth.

Boomerang began as a pilot program in January of 2006 serving short term suspended students from two Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools. During the pilot phase, Boomerang served **49 students**.

The response to the program's pilot phase was overwhelmingly positive, and the program became fully operational for the 2006-2007 school year, serving all middle and high schools in the CHCCS system.

Today, Boomerang serves youth in both Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools as well as Orange County Schools.

Our model and activities are based on **resiliency theory** and the principle that youth who have more protective factors than risk factors are more likely to have positive outcomes in life. By focusing on strengths instead of risks, and engaging family and community support, we help youth develop a vision of their future and seek/receive support to meet their goals.

# Boomerang's History

## 2006-2011

- 2005** Boomerang is conceived through an invested group of community partners, including the Chapel Hill – Carrboro City School District and the Chapel Hill – Carrboro YMCA.
- Jan-Jun 2006** Boomerang launches as a pilot program serving two CHCCS schools. Resiliency-based workshops are conducted for parents and youth serving professionals.
- 2006-2007** Boomerang completes its first full academic year. Priority placement is given to court-involved youth and CHCCS Middle and High Schools. Referrals also are accepted on a case-by-case basis from schools and/or students' families outside of CHCCS.
- 2007-2008** In response to a request from the Department of Juvenile Justice, court-involved youth from the Orange County School system also receive priority placement. Boomerang hosts a resiliency conference attended by school and community agency representatives.
- 2008-2009** Boomerang serves our greatest level of suspended students to date (mirroring statewide trends). Boomerang tracks the students returning voluntarily during after school hours (over 200). Boomerang has a shared MSW intern with Carrboro High School who provides on-going follow up for students upon their return to school. Staff attends the National Youth Resiliency Conference.
- 2009-2010** In response to the previous years' trend of students returning to Boomerang during the after school hours, Boomerang creates a formalized afterschool program that includes service opportunities for youth. Boomerang hosts a follow up resiliency-based workshop for educators. Boomerang contracts with an external evaluator.
- 2010-2011** In January, Boomerang begins receiving referrals from Orange County Schools. Boomerang begins our "What's Next?" post high school planning series and hosts two field trips. Boomerang partners with Empowerment Inc. to place a student at the YMCA Meadowmont pool for a summer job internship.
- 2011+** The 2011-2012 school year marks the first year that Boomerang will serve both CHCCS and Orange County Schools. Boomerang has also expanded service delivery from four days/week to five.

*In 2008-2009 one in six high school students in North Carolina received at least one out of school, short-term suspension*

# Boomerang's Typical Day

Suspended students missed nearly  
**one million days** of classroom  
instruction in 2004 (NC Child Advocacy, 2005)

## Alternative Learning Environment: 8:45am-2:00pm\*

**8:45-9:00** – Students arrive, meetings with parents, assessments

**9:00-9:30** – Welcome (introductions, icebreaker, review of expectations, breakfast provided)

**9:30-10:30** – Academics (students are paired 1:1 with volunteer tutors, teachers are emailed)

**10:30-11:30** – Group activity (staff engage youth in multi-sensory activities focused on values, choices, decision making, etc)

**11:30-12:15** – Physical activity (students and staff engage in exercise options available at the YMCA)

**12:15-12:45** – Lunch (students are provided with healthy food options, staff engage with students in positive conversations)

**12:45-1:45** – Guest speaker / group activity (Staff contract with local professionals to provide skill building groups on topics including: conflict resolution, healthy dating, poetry/expression, substance abuse, job skills)

**1:45 – 2:00** – Closing group reflection (Staff led ritual to complete the day)

**1:30-3:30** – Students Wrap Up meetings (Student, parent(s) and school staff meet with Boomerang staff and a student on their final day. Students review their strengths assessment, referrals are made, and recommendations are discussed.)

## After school Program: 2:00-6:00 Tuesday-Thursday

**Service opportunities:** Students are invited to complete court or school required service hours.

**Individual support:** Students can receive one on one therapeutic support and referrals from staff.

**Exercise:** Students can receive daily passes or memberships to the YMCA to engage in physical activity.

**Reunion:** Monthly social gathering of current and former students and their friends.

**What's Next:** 10 week long workshop series on post high school graduation preparation.

# The first five years

## 2006-2011

Boomerang has received an average of 200 referrals to our Alternative to suspension each year, typically representing 175 individual students. These students attend the program for a variety of reasons and with a variety of needs. Boomerang has observed the following trends during our first 5 years of service:

- More males are referred than females.
- Over 70% of referrals have been students of color.
- The majority of students are referred for fighting or disrespect.
- Students served often exhibit one or more of the following factors: Involvement in juvenile or adult justice system, low school performance, behavior problems, negative peer groups, or family discord.
- Students in transition, either from family relocation or school changes, tend to be suspended.
- Many referred students have identified learning disabilities or exhibit learning differences.
- Students served in all components have often experienced or are currently experiencing traumatic circumstances (loss of caretakers, foster care placement, abuse, neglect, etc).
- Approximately 20% of students served are court involved

# The first five years

## 2006-2011

### Boomerang Services Provided:

- Supervision in a positive environment
- Assessment (client functioning, strengths, substance abuse, family dynamics, current support system)
- Skill building groups and pro-social activities
- Brief, solution focused counseling with Licensed Social Workers
- Identifying and connecting families with community resources
- Advocating for students and families during and after suspension
- Engagement in multi-sensory group processing activities
- Crisis intervention and coordination of care
- Opportunities for service and self reflection
- Assisting with student transitions back to school

Boomerang is primarily a grant funded program and operates at **no cost to families and students served.**



# Collaboration

Boomerang was developed from community collaboration and continues to partner with others to deliver quality services to youth and families in Orange County.

During our first five years of operation, Boomerang has collaborated with the following agencies, groups or individuals:

The Barksdale Foundation  
Blue Ribbon Mentor Advocates  
Brain Explorers  
Carolina Outreach  
Center for Creative Leadership  
Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools  
Dispute Settlement Center  
Durham Tech Community College  
El Centro Hispano  
El Futuro  
Empowerment Inc.  
Family Advocacy Network  
The Jackson Center  
Juvenile Crime Prevention Council  
Legal Aid of NC  
North Carolinian's Against Gun Violence  
Orange County Collaborative  
Orange County Health Department  
Orange County Human Rights Commission  
The Optimist Club  
Orange County Schools  
Sacrificial Poets  
Strengths in Focus  
UNC School of Social Work  
UNC Teaching Fellows  
UNC APPLES Service Learning Program  
Volunteers for Youth

Thank you Boomerang!  
Your wonderful staff  
enriched my son's life  
immeasurably.  
Everyone, students  
included, helped me  
through a very difficult  
crisis. Every community  
needs a Boomerang.

Boomerang parent

# Program Impact

## Boomerang's Desired Impact:

- Decrease the % of suspensions for minority and low-income youth.
- Increase high school completion rates for high risk youth.
- Increase individual and community resilience.
- Create wrap-around services that facilitate an increase in social connectedness between youth and their community.

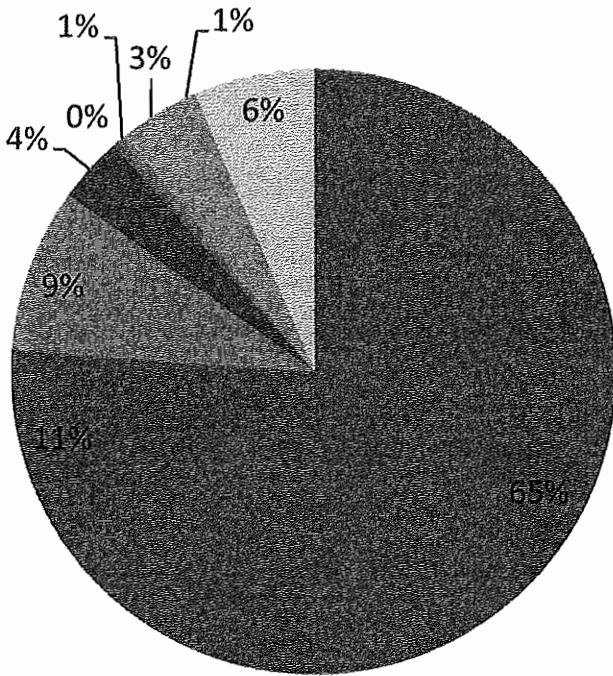
## During 2006-2011:

- 2/3 of students attend the Alternative to Suspension program just once during a school year.
- An average of 80% of student Wrap Up meetings are attended by a parent.
- An average of 25 students attend Boomerang's reunions each month.
- Youth have completed over 500 hours of service annually.
- 44 individual students attended Boomerang's "What's Next?" program during its pilot phase.
- Over 150 youth visit Boomerang during afternoon "Drop In" hours.

Acknowledging the often pervasive external risk factors confronting youth, Boomerang recognizes youth in our community need access to supportive adults, safe places, and positive activities, to promote healthy growth and engagement. By focusing on strengths instead of risks, and engaging family and community support, we help youth develop a vision of their future and seek/receive support to meet their goals.

# Investment

## Boomerang's Budget: \$255,000 Projected 2012



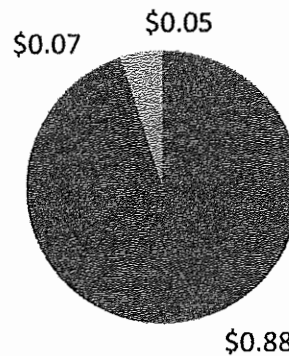
- Personnel
- Fringe Benefits (FICA, insurance)
- Contracts
- Supplies
- Transportation
- Training
- Food
- Special Events
- Retirement (Paid for by YMCA)

Boomerang has received financial support from the following funders during our first five years of service:

- AARA Gang Grant
- Beane-Wright Foundation
- Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools
- Chapel Hill-Carrboro YMCA
- Community Backyard
- DPI-Drop-Out Prevention Grant
- Governor's Crime Commission
- Juvenile Crime Prevention Council
- Morgan Creek Foundation
- Oak Foundation
- Optimist Club
- Orange County Collaborative
- Orange County Human Service Grant
- Orange County Schools
- Private Donations
- Strowd Roses
- Town of Chapel Hill Human Services Grant
- United Way
- YMCA of the USA

Students can be served by any or all of Boomerang's components: Alternative to Suspension, What's Next and Community Service. The average cost per student is \$650.

## For Every Dollar spent at Boomerang...



- Alternative to Suspension
- What's Next?
- Community Service

# Boomerang: A YMCA Program

For decades, community-based organizations such as the YMCA have been recognized as viable entities that promote positive outcomes among youth and their communities (Hartmaan, Watson, & Kantorek, 2001). The ability to be responsive and highly adaptable to the changing needs of the communities in which these YMCA's exist has contributed to their sustainability. Additionally, YMCA's have engaged community stakeholders in the design and implementation of intervention programs, an important component of an ecological intervention model (Casey & Lindhorst, 2009). Given this, there is much to be learned about how effective YMCA intervention programs are in youth development and how program processes may or may not align with an ecological model. The Carrboro-Chapel Hill YMCA's Boomerang Program is designed to not only promote the YMCA's continued commitment to youth and their community but also serve as an intervention program for short-termed suspended and court-ordered youth.

"This place is awesome – you get the help you need. The staff is really nice and friendly. I just feel comfortable being here. Some of my friends that have been here before told me this place is great, but I never imagined it was going to be this helpful."

- Boomerang student

- Boomerang Researcher

# Boomerang: The Model

If the male graduation rate were increased by only 5%, the US would see an annual savings of 4.9 billion in crime related costs (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006)

Since inception, Boomerang has had local and national interest in our program and our resiliency based model. We have met with interested school systems from Wake, Alamance, Durham, and Catawba counties.

Our staff has presented at local and national conferences about our program, model and success in connecting with youth. Boomerang has been featured in publications, including being cited as a promising program by MDC Inc's 2008 research study "Disconnected Youth in the Research Triangle Region."

Research demonstrates that a resiliency based approach increases a youth's ability to learn, receive information, build relationships, and to bounce back from adversity.

**In 2008, the Center for Creative Leadership took Boomerang's Tree exercise to Ghana and had local village members complete their own strengths assessment!**



A Boomerang Student's Tree



A Chief in Ghana's Tree

# Sustainability

Since inception, Boomerang has maintained financial investment from a variety of stakeholders. We have received funds from the local school systems and JCPC, despite budget cuts, and will continue to request funding from our core partners. We are committed to continuing to operate at no cost to families. Boomerang was fortunate to receive start up funding from the Governor's Crime Commission for four years. As we have transitioned from a start up program to an established community resource, we must now seek additional, stable revenue sources to support our services.

During our first five years of service, funding has supported our program's growth from 3 service days to 5, from one school system to two, and from offering students an alternative to suspension to offering students a positive alternative environment both during and after school hours. We recognize that our continued success and sustainability rest on our ability to maintain current funding while also researching and requesting new investment opportunities.

We would like to thank all those who have supported our program's inception and growth and who continue to support our program today. We look forward to continuing exiting relationships and building new partnerships as we enter our 6<sup>th</sup> year of service.

- Boomerang staff