

## Fascination Place: Generations at Risk

With names like Enchanted Hills and Fascination place, this area sounds like a “fantasy land” for kids to grow up in. Some residents live on roads with names such as Humpty Dumpy Lane, Wizard of Oz Way, Treasure Island Road, Camelot Lane, and Pixie Parkway. In reality, this is not an enchanted place to live at all. The kids living in this area are isolated from the rest of their peers living in Kosciusko County. The following tells the tales of what life is really like in Enchanted Hills and Fascination Place.

On Thursday, February 23, 2006, a 53-year-old woman is dead after allegedly being stabbed to death in her residence by her teenage son. Drug paraphernalia and more than 30 knives reportedly were found inside the home shortly after the stabbing. This incident occurred near the Enchanted Hills development which includes a mobile home park, known as Fascination Place. This area has demographics characterized as high unemployment, low income, disadvantaged, high rate of domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, high level of alcohol and drug abuse, and a relatively high crime rate.

In 2005, statistics tracked 37 burglaries, 26 drug related arrests, 19 complaints for loud music, 28 Driving Under the Influence (DUI), over 100 domestic disputes or fights, and 159 animal complaints all from the Enchanted Hills area, most located in Fascination Place itself. Police reports indicate that these issues are growing and have progressively worsened over the years. 18% of children attending Wawasee Middle School come from the Enchanted Hills area. Of those, 22% are failing at least 1 major subject; 37% are on the free or reduced lunch program; 25% have received referrals for disciplinary reasons; and suspensions or expulsions are at 18%. The youth raised in these families lack

positive role models, access to healthy recreational resources, develop poor social/interpersonal skills and do not see a very positive future ahead of them.

Specialized counseling and support services for these areas are in high demand. 80-90 % of the cases handled in the Syracuse Bowen Center outpatient office are from the Enchanted Hills area. Social Service reports show that children in this area are receiving assistance, test positive for marijuana and/or methamphetamines. With so many children testing positive for drugs it is an indicator of the prevalence and availability. Law enforcement has referred to this area as the meth capitol of Kosciusko County. In addition, Social Services reports that Turkey Creek Township is # 2 in the county for abuse and neglect cases and investigates 4-6 new charges of abuse and neglect each month. Again, this data focuses on the mobile home park, Fascination Place located in the Enchanted Hills area.

The Enchanted Hills pilot program began on December 5, 2005 with seven (7) children and is currently run at the Actor's House in Enchanted Hills. The Bowen Center secured a six (6) month grant from the Kosciusko County Community Foundation, Inc., which pays the rent and utilities, while programming is being provided by Bowen Center staff. Since the program began, it has grown significantly serving approximately 22 children in any given month. This pilot program runs Monday through Thursday from 12:00 pm – 7:00 pm in which kids are scheduled into two age groups; the younger kids attend in the early afternoon and the older kids attend in the early evening. The Bowen Center works on the following activities/skills with the kids: homework, social skills, life skills, large group activities, and therapy. Free time and snacks are also provided. Staff of the pilot program are receiving positive feedback from kids, parents, and teachers.

The future of the pilot program, now known as the Syracuse Club House, is uncertain. This program needs a permanent location in the vicinity of Enchanted Hills, obtain funding, volunteers, recreational equipment, transportation and offer a variety of programming. In January of 2006, meetings were held to obtain community involvement to help sustain the project. The following individuals attended: Local and County Law Enforcement, Kosciusko County Probation Officers, Wawasee School Corporation, Department of Child Services, Syracuse Park Department and Trustees, Syracuse Town Officials, Turkey Creek Township Advisor and Trustees, Bowen Center, Baker Youth Club, Boys and Girls Club, Camp Crosley, Kosciusko Community YMCA, North Webster Community Center, Lakeland Youth Center, the Pastor of Wawasee Lakeside Chapel, Oakwood Academy, and Wawasee Mentoring Program. These local organizations need to continue collaborating and finding ways to sustain the pilot program for the future of the kids living in this area and Kosciusko County. Because the children and families living in this “un-enchanted” hills area are isolated and their financial income is limited, this restricts their access to resources, as well as their ability to participate in activities offered in Syracuse and other surrounding areas. To help sustain this project, many ideas were researched and could be utilized in the future, including leasing existing buildings found in the immediate area, locating vacant land to purchase and build and the formation of a township park.

As long as we continue to look the other way as if this is not our problem, the children living in Fascination Place will continue to be abused and neglected. They will live in a community that has prominent issues with domestic violence, alcohol/drug abuse, and high crime rate. These are the same children that are going to school every

day with many of our own children, impacting our own lives with increased potential for drugs and violence. This cycle will continue for generations to come. These children will never have the opportunity to live a real “enchanted” life or have the possibility of living the “American Dream,” unless we give them the resources to develop social/interpersonal skills and help them see a positive future.

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