

Advocate

Serving Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, Putnam and St. Johns counties | April 2009 - October 2009

Record enrollment in summer work, education program for youth

While many teens spend the summer months hanging out with friends, playing sports or video games, going to movies, and pursuing other youthful, carefree interests, more than 200 teens throughout Duval, St. Johns, Flagler, Putnam, Baker and Nassau counties instead chose to spend part of their summer break learning computer and employment skills through the Northeast Florida Community Action Agency (NFCAA) Data Busters program.

“By participating in the program, teens realize they can go beyond their current circumstances and achieve whatever they want out of life.”

- John Edwards,
 Executive Director of NFCAA.



Students celebrate their graduation from Nassau County's Data Busters program.

A nine-week summer program made up of 14-17 year-olds, Data Busters combines classroom instruction on job and life skills such as goal setting, money management, conflict resolution, and interview preparation, along with real-world, paid work experience.

The program also stresses the importance of mastering computer skills. To achieve this, students learned skills in several Microsoft Office programs throughout the weeks.

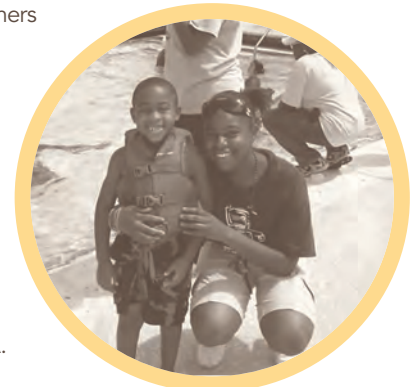
After the program's completion, parents, students and educators gathered in their respective counties to recognize graduates and top performers in several categories, including best classroom participant, best worker and best PowerPoint. Top overall achievers received new desktop computers and second place participants were awarded handheld personal organizers.

“Data Busters sows positive seeds in the lives of our youth through education, work experience and nurturing. By participating in the program, teens realize they can go beyond their current circumstances and achieve whatever they want out of life,” said John Edwards, executive director of NFCAA.

With the expansion of Data Busters to Nassau, Putnam and Baker counties this year, the program had 59 percent more students than it did in 2008. Next year, NFCAA hopes to bring Data Busters to Clay County and increase enrollment to 250 students.



Te'Sean Glass took great pride in his work with the Council on Aging. In addition to serving lunches to seniors, he prepared food for the Meals on Wheels program serving seniors who were unable to travel to the Council on Aging for meals.



This summer, Data Buster Tamprus Findley worked at St Paul AME summer camp as a counselor in training. He is pictured interacting and mentoring a camper during a field trip to the Solomon Calhoun Community Center pool.

A note from the executive director:



I cannot think of a more rewarding summer than 2009 because Northeast Florida Community Action Agency (NFCAA) enrolled a record number of 210 youth in its 9-week Data Busters program, now in its 23rd year of operation.

NFCAA was fortunate to receive a \$262,000 grant from WorkSource. This grant extended the program from six to nine weeks, thereby enabling youth to practice work maturity skills at a variety of workplaces in Baker, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, Putnam and St. Johns counties.

2009 was the first year Data Busters was offered in Baker, Nassau and Putnam counties. Without exception, we received great reviews and evaluations about Data Busters participants in all six counties. In fact, because of their outstanding performance, several youth in Baker County were hired by the Baker County School Board for the 2009-2010 school year.

Sheriff John Rutherford of the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office was the keynote speaker for Duval County's Data Busters graduation. In his speech, Sherriff Rutherford stated that he sees Data Busters as an outstanding crime prevention program. He also offered jobs and college scholarships to students who want to become law enforcement officers.

Through Data Busters, youth reduced at risk behavior, and increased educational, pre-employment and work maturity skills. The youth demonstrated mastery of competencies throughout the Data Busters program. Congratulations to all youth and parents. We look for this program being more effective at achieving measurable outcomes for the 2010 year.

Back-to-School events prepare students for a new academic year



Northeast Florida Community Action Agency recently distributed more than 1,300 book bags filled with school supplies to in-need students during two annual back-to-school events held in St. Johns and Duval counties. Several public and private organizations joined together to provide onsite support, school supplies, carnival games, free food, refreshments and more.

In St. Johns County, attendants had the opportunity to sign up for library cards at the St. Johns County Public Library Book Mobile. Families also learned about free dental and physical programs offered to qualified families through The St. Johns County Health Department.

In Duval County, The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office volunteered their time to grill and pass out free food to people who attended the event. People also enjoyed live entertainment, and recreational activities including rock climbing.

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Data Busters cheer Jacksonville Jaguars thanks to Honor Rows

On September 20, approximately 100 graduates from NFCAA's Data Busters program rooted for the Jacksonville Jaguars in their season opening home game against the Arizona Cardinals. They had the opportunity to attend the NFL game for free thanks to the Jaguar Foundation's Honor Rows Program.

Offered through NFCAA's Duval, St. Johns, Baker and Nassau Data Busters programs, Honor Rows rewards students for setting personal goals, avoiding risk taking behavior and improving their health. Students complete written and oral book reports, and attend violence prevention and parent-child communication classes to participate in Honor Rows.

School official shares experience with Data Busters

Excerpts from a letter to John Edwards, executive director, NFCAA

"I am the Director of Auxiliary Services for the Baker County Public School District. My department is responsible to a large degree for the preparation of school during the summer in advance of students and teachers returning for the next academic year.

"I was made aware of Data Busters during the course of the summer and was offered assistance from these student workers...The Data Buster students performed at very high levels. Their productivity and quality of work was surprising given their age and level of experience...We saw high energy, focused and positive student employees at the work site each day. The Northeast Florida Community Action Agency staff supporting the program was

competent and extremely professional. They facilitated the students at the work site in every appropriate manner possible.

"The Data Buster students performed at very high levels. Their productivity and quality of work was surprising given their age and level of experience."

- John David Copeland

"The highest commendation I can give on behalf of the school district is the fact that I now employ two of the student workers from the group of Data Busters that worked in our district this summer... They are performing well and positively representing your organization in the workplace.

"Please accept my sincerest encouragement and thanks for your ongoing support of these kinds of programs."

Sincerely,

John David Copeland

Director of Auxiliary Services and School Safety, Baker County Public School District



Data Buster Scott Rhoden spent part of his summer assisting with various administrative tasks in the front office of Baker County Middle School.

Data Busters seeks corporate sponsorships

Northeast Florida Community Action Agency is seeking partnerships with local corporations to support Data Busters. If you know of a business interested in sponsorship opportunities or donating new or used computers in support of Data Busters, call (904) 398-7472. People may also provide monetary contributions online at www.nfcaa.org/volunteer/donate.asp.

St. Johns County office relocates

The Northeast Florida Community Action Agency relocated its St. Johns County office to the Solomon Calhoun Community Center, located at 1300 Duval Street in St. Augustine. Office hours are Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Northeast Florida Community Action Agency wins statewide award

Northeast Florida's most in-need residents may find solace knowing they can turn to the best community action agency in the state when they need help. The Northeast Florida Community Action Agency (NFCAA) was recently named Florida's "Agency of the Year" by The Florida Association for Community Action for successfully helping low-income families and individuals achieve economic independence. NFCAA was chosen tops among 30 other Florida agencies. This is the second time NFCAA has won the statewide award; the first was 2007.

Last year NFCAA helped more than 14,000 Northeast Florida residents improve their health, housing, savings, education and employment outcomes.

"Florida has been hit especially hard by the economic downturn, prompting an increase in demand for services provided by community action agencies," said Wilma McKay, executive director, Florida Association for Community Action. "NFCAA's progressive approach to providing assistance serves as a model for demonstrating how other agencies can work to meet increased needs in their communities."

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The Florida Community Action Agency of the Year award criteria includes demonstrating how

the agency changes lives and creates self-sufficiency among residents; improves the community for low-income citizens through advocacy, collaborations, partnerships, community involvement or public service; assists in employment placements; engages in strategic planning; and maintains a three-year record of financial statements with no material findings from audits or state monitoring reviews.

"We're honored to receive this award," said John Edwards, executive director of NFCAA and chairman of the National Community Action Partnership. "But the real accomplishments to recognize are the initiative and dedication our clients demonstrated as they worked to improve their lives and achieve their goals."

New on NFCAA.org

Ability to donate online -

By partnering with JustGive.org, NFCAA.org now offers a safe and secure option for donating online. You may donate using your American Express, Discover, MasterCard, or Visa card. Once your donation has been processed, JustGive.org will send you a tax receipt via e-mail.

NFCAA'S 2007-2008 report to the community -

In addition to financial statements, the report highlights the experiences of customers who have chosen options and attained their goals by partnering with NFCAA. Read the complete report to the community on the newsletters & publications section of NFCAA.org.

NFCAA welcomes new board members and staff

The Northeast Florida Community Action Agency welcomed several new staff and board members between April and August, 2009. Each brings unique experience to the agency and all have proved to be valuable contributors to NFCAA.

Board Members

Vicki Beaudry
Heather Beaven
Tanya Chong
Marie Jones
Kathy Jorgensen

Energy Assistance

Program Specialists
Danielle McDaniel
Romel Green
Thalia Williams
Glendora McCargo
Carlton Steward
Dwight Carter
Martha Simms

Youth Development Specialists

Sabrina Strawter
Donna Rizzuto
Deena Raysor

Accountant

Melody Gissentanner

Family Development Specialist

Judy Marek

Family Service Specialist

Janeecce Johnson

Family and Community Services Manager

Lisa Mohn

Advice from keynote speakers

Each Data Busters graduation featured a keynote speaker who shared words of wisdom and encouragement with students. While topics varied, all speeches served as inspiration.

Jacksonville Sheriff John Rutherford:

"Give 110%. No one wants to be #2. Go the extra mile. You'll get out what you put in."

Former Miami Hurricane player Willie Cooper:

"Football and sports won't last forever. No one can take an education from you. I cherish my education."

Jr. Sgt. Jason Shaw, Palatka Police Department:

"Find your passion, search your heart to identify your dream, set your goals, and make a 5-year plan to reach them."

Bill Delbrugge, superintendent, Flagler County Public Schools:

On the top five things you need to be successful: "Surround yourself with quality and positive people; learn to be internationally competitive with other students; be careful with your finances; never forget about your family; and take care of yourself."

Sherrie Raulerson, superintendent, Baker County Public Schools:

"Success comes from within. You must will success into existence."

Arva Butler, NFCAA board member and business owner:

On what it takes to start a business: "Invest in continuing education courses like business communication and marketing; have a business plan set in place; and recognize you may have to spend money to make money."

Top Data Busters awarded with new computers

In this digital age, computer proficiency is a foundational skill for job placement and success. To prepare students for this technology-driven environment and to recognize outstanding work in the classroom and on the job, NFCAA awarded the top ten percent of participating Data Busters with a Hewlett-Packard desktop computer, 17" LCD monitor, speakers and HP 3-in-1 printer.

"Many students who participate in Data Busters can't afford this equipment – which is valued at approximately \$1,000," said Ron Howell, program manager, NFCAA. "Our goal in providing these workstations is to give students the opportunity to practice the computer skills they learned during the summer."



Putnam County Data Busters learn new computer skills at a computer lab provided by the Putnam County School Board and Superintendent Tom Townsend.

Criteria for selection took into account each student's level of on-the-job responsibility and work ethic; classroom performance and interaction with others; and a PowerPoint presentation created during the program.

Top performers by county

BAKER COUNTY

Megan Donley
Imari Clark

NASSAU COUNTY

Devin Tookes
Symone Mitchell

PUTNAM COUNTY

Jarvis Wright
Akela Hendrieth

ST. JOHNS COUNTY

Pheaon Prince
Natia Johnson
Jasmine Walthour
Keshonda Alexander

DUVAL COUNTY

Ali Fields
Brittany Brightwell
Devron Chanelle
Keshonna Chambers
DeVonta Santiago
Marquez White
Camari Boyd
Nicole Green
Satin Anderson
Jordan Johnson

FLAGLER COUNTY

Paris Edwards



WorkSource provides \$262,000 to Data Busters

The company responsible for providing a trained workforce to employers in Baker, Clay, Duval, Nassau, Putnam and St. Johns counties provided \$262,000 to support Northeast Florida Community Action Agency's Data Busters program this year. Partly thanks to WorkSource, students had free transportation to and from their summer jobs and were able to receive monetary compensation for their work. Wages for instructors and program assistants were also compensated through their contribution.

In addition to WorkSource, Data Busters is made possible through valuable partnerships with educational institutions, government agencies and individuals throughout Northeast Florida. They include the Flagler County School Board, Putnam County School Board, Baker County School Board, First Coast Technical Institute and St. Johns Council on Aging.

Data Busters leads student to success

Amanda Morningstar participated in NFCAA's Duval County Data Busters program the summer preceding her sophomore year of high school. Two years later, she is now excelling as a freshman at the University of Florida. "I love it and am doing great," she said after mentioning that she came out of UF's summer program with a 4.0 grade point average.

"Data Busters' instruction in Microsoft Word and PowerPoint helps me now in college," she said. In addition to classroom readiness, Morningstar practices the healthy eating habits that she learned from the program's nutrition education classes during her time away from home.

She also benefited from the work experience she gained from Data Busters. Her job of assisting in FSCJ's President's office was an excellent resumé builder and helped her gain future employment.

"Although Amanda's actual experience with Data Busters only lasted a few weeks, the skills she gained from the program will last a lifetime," said John Edwards, executive director, NFCAA. "I'm proud this young woman has taken advantage of all the opportunities that have come her way and look forward to seeing the impact she will surely make in her future endeavors."

The mission of Northeast Florida Community Action Agency

is to defeat poverty and erase its devastating effects on Northeast Florida families by providing the education, empowerment and assistance that leads to self-sufficiency and a positive place within our community. Produced periodically, *The Advocate* highlights NFCAA's current efforts helping individuals and families living in Baker, Duval, Clay, Flagler, Nassau, Putnam and St. Johns counties.

For more information, call (904) 398-7472, (888) 498-7472 or visit www.nfcaa.org.

