

After-School Programs as Prevention

AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

IN A TIME when more parents work outside of the home and a growing number of children are left without supervision during the after school hours, the need for quality after school programs has become widely apparent. Studies have shown that children left unsupervised are more likely to spend their discretionary time participating in violence and crime, experimenting with drugs and alcohol, and engaging in sexual activity and other problem behaviors (Riley, 2000). According to national crime statistics, juveniles are also at greatest risk of becoming victims of a violent crime during the four hours after school each day (U.S. Department of Justice, 1999).

Parents and policymakers alike are recognizing that the period after school lets out is a crucial time for children and that more should be done to address emergent needs. A recent survey conducted by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and JC Penny, indicates that 9 out of 10 people believe that children should have access to programs that extend learning and development beyond the regular school day, but only 40 percent said that after school programs were available in their neighborhood or community (After School Alliance, 2000). Within the last several years, in response to the nationwide call for affordable childcare options and quality programs for young people, government and private funding for after school programming has dramatically increased (Gewertz, 2000). These programs have been shown



by **Victoria Stuart & Sarah Chandley**

Victoria Stuart is a Research Associate with EMT Associates, Inc. She has a nine-year history of working on national, state, and local evaluations of programs serving youth and families at-risk. Sarah Chandley is a Research Assistant with EMT Associates. She has contributed to the evaluations of after school program efforts and has conducted research on effective program practices.

to improve student academic performance, improve attendance and behavior patterns, increase safety, and decrease the likelihood of problem behavior, particularly among children from low-income families (Children Now, 2001).

City of San Diego's "6 to 6":

Putting Community Partnering into Practice

The City of San Diego's "6 to 6" Extended School Day initiative offers an innovative model for how schools and communities can effectively mobilize to meet after school needs. Sponsored by the San Diego Mayor's Office and San Diego City Schools, with funding from multiple private and public sources, the program mission is to "open community elementary and middle schools before and after school to provide a safe place where children can have fun, learn new skills and engaging academic enrichment, creative and performing arts, health, sports, and recreation activities during the hours that most parents work." The program features four major components, including academic support, extra-curricular enrichment, youth development, and community involvement. For more information about the "6 to 6" program, contact Steven Amick, "6 to 6" Program Administrator at (619) 236-6312, or s2a@sdcity.sannet.gov.

Benefits of After School Programming

Children who are left unsupervised during the after school hours are placed at greater risk for negative outcomes, including school failure, substance use, teen childbearing, youth violence and other forms of delinquency. Research has consistently demonstrated the potential of after school programs to reduce this exposure to risk and to promote positive youth development.

Recent studies have shown that participation in after school activities:

- Increases youth safety
- Promotes development of new skills and interests
- Increases school attachment
- Reduces drop-out rates
- Improves academic performance
- Strengthens social skills
- Reduces problem behaviors

(U.S. Department of Education, 2000)

Crucial Time

CRUCIAL TIME

IN RECENT DECADES, due to a shifting economy and changing family roles, most parents work outside the home, making childcare a prominent issue for American families. There are more single parent households now than in the past, and an increasing percentage of families with both parents in the workforce. More precisely, of the nation's 54 million school children, three-quarters have mothers who work outside the home (Gewertz, 2000). With recent changes in the welfare system, these numbers are likely to increase as more women move from welfare-to-work.

The limited availability of affordable childcare options results in an increasing number of school-age youth who are left to care for themselves in the after school hours. According to a U.S. Census Bureau report on childcare arrangements, almost seven million children ages 5 to 14 find

themselves in self-care on a regular basis (Smith, 2000). According to national survey data collected from students at the middle school level, 27 percent of 8th graders spend two or more hours home alone at the end of the school day. Low-income children tend to fare the worst with 17 percent spending three or more hours daily without an adult present (NCES, 1995).

Studies have indicated that a lack of adult supervision can increase exposure to negative influences present

for Children

in the after-school environment. Specifically, young people are much more likely to engage in or become the victim of a crime between the hours of 3:00 pm and 6:00 pm (U.S. Department of Justice, 1999). This peak time of youth crime and violence directly correlates with the period between the end of the school day and the time parents return home from work. The hours after-school are also the most common time for unsupervised adolescents to engage in unsafe sexual activity (Kahne et al., 2001) and other problem behaviors. For example, studies examining the relationship between self-care and substance use found that teens who were left unattended for eleven or more hours each week without opportunities for positive engagement were twice as likely to become involved with substance use as those benefiting from adult supervision (U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

In response to growing concern over the harms facing youth at the end of the school day, several funding initiatives at the Federal and state level have led to the development and expansion of school-based after school programming. The research on formal programs has identified several important functions of before and after school programs, which include providing supervision during the non-school hours, improving academic performance, and offering opportunities for enrichment, including participation in cultural, social, and recreational activities. While the research is still in its infancy, the evidence shows strong support for the promise of after school programs to minimize risk and harm, while promoting the healthy development of youth in need of support.

Funding Momentum for After School Programming

The U.S. Department of Education launched the 21st Century Community Learning Center (CLC) initiative in 1997 to provide \$1 million in competitive grants for the creation and expansion of school-based learning centers. Funded programs provide after school educational and enrichment opportunities to youth, families, and the broader community in safe, supervised, and drug-free environments. The program has since expanded with more than \$800 million awarded in funding nationally in 2001.

The State of California's Before and After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnership program, established in 1998, provides funding to school and community partnerships to support comprehensive after school services for elementary and middle school-age youth. A total of 155 grants have been awarded through FY 2000-01 and more than \$177 million is budgeted for the program annually.

Individual state spending is on the rise. A survey conducted by the National Governor's Association reported that in 1999, 26 of 43 states indicated current plans to expand funding resources for extended learning programs in their states (Gewertz, 2000).

Private organizations have continued to support after school and extended learning programs as a major funding priority. Notable contributors include the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the YMCA, the United Way, and the Ronald McDonald Foundation (Halpern, 2000).

Effective Programming

EFFECTIVE PROGRAMMING

EXPERTS IN THE after school program field have identified a broad scope in the design and implementation of after school services, ranging from school to community-based, from loosely to highly structured, and from those focused exclusively on academics to those emphasizing a broader range of youth development goals. The Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR) at John Hopkins University reviewed 34 after school and extended-day programs to explore this variation in program types and strategies and to assess their overall effectiveness. These findings have been adapted by the U.S. Department of Education to create a set of recommendations that serve as guidelines to facilitate program success. According to these guidelines, programs that meet the developmental needs of youth strive to incorporate a balance of academics, recreation, and culture while including specific qualities that enhance their effectiveness.

Components of Effective Programs

Research on the effectiveness of after school programs has identified eight major components of quality after school services:

- 1 Clear Goals, Strong Organization and Management, Sustainability
- 2 Qualified Staffing
- 3 Safe and Healthy Environments
- 4 Opportunities for Enhanced Learning
- 5 Effective Collaboration
- 6 Family Involvement
- 7 Linkages between the Regular School Day and After School Services
- 8 Strong Evaluation Component

(Adapted from *Safe and Smart: Making the After School Hours Work for Kids*, U.S. Department of Education, 1998)



Examples of Alternative Activities:

Programs can offer a wide range of fun and engaging alternative activities; balancing academics, enrichment, culture, and recreation. Examples include:

- Community Service
- Drug and Alcohol Free Celebrations
- Youth Leadership Retreats
- Life Skills
- Technology
- Adventure-Oriented Activities
- Team and Individual Sports
- Youth Entrepreneurial Ventures
- Performing and Visual Arts
- Cultural Activities

Conclusion

CONCLUSION

THE EVIDENCE FROM the field suggests that after school programming is moving in a positive direction. Federal and state government funding has dramatically increased in response to growing need, as have funding contributions from individuals, communities, and philanthropic organizations. As spending increases and new programs become established across the nation, the future of after-school programs looks bright. The key to program success will depend on the cultivation of effective service efforts that incorporate the components of quality programming while addressing identified needs. When programs succeed in this effort, the overwhelming evidence suggests that youth, families, and communities will benefit through increased safety, improved academic performance, decreased involvement in crime, and decreased drug and alcohol use.

California Focus

In February 2002, the California Department of Education released a statewide evaluation of the California After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnership program that supports after school academic and enrichment programming. The study conducted by the University of California, Irvine's School of Education (UCI) found positive correlations between after school program participation and academic achievement, school attendance, and positive behaviors. According to Delaine Eastin, the California State Superintendent of Public Instruction, "this report confirms what many of us working in education already know—after-school programs work for children, families, schools, and communities." For the full evaluation report, or to find out more about after school program opportunities in the State of California, please visit the California Department of Education website at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/afterschool>.

Self-Assessment Tool

Use the following tool to assess the overall quality of your after school program. Does your program:

- Promote caring relationships between youth and adults?
- Provide quality services that address identified needs?
- Operate in a safe and healthy physical environment?
- Offer opportunities for collaboration among partners, and input from participants?
- Provide high quality staffing and a supportive administration?

(Adapted from the National Institute on Out-of-School Time, Quality Standards for Out-of-School Time Programs, NIOST 2000)

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

Alternatives: Youth Recreation As Prevention is a **FREE** workshop for youth-serving professionals and volunteers that merges the fields of youth development and AOD prevention. The training will review the development of prevention strategies from prohibition to today's "risk and resiliency" approach, examine what youth need and identify critical components of effective alternative activities, including how to build a culture of community and ownership with your groups and suggest ways to create recreation programs.

For information about scheduling a **FREE** workshop in your area contact Heather Vasquez at **916-983-9506** or heather@emt.org

RESOURCES:

After School Alliance
P.O. Box 65166
Washington, D.C. 20035-5166
(202) 296-9378
<http://www.afterschoolalliance.org>

Federal Resources
<http://www.afterschool.gov>

National Institute on Out-of-School Time
Wellesley Centers for Women
106 Central Street
Wellesley, MA 02481
(781) 283-2547
<http://www.wellesley.edu/WCW/CRW/SAC>

REFERENCES:

- After School Alliance. After School Alert Poll Report, No. 3. 2000. Washington D.C.: After School Alliance.
- Children Now. After School Care for Children: Challenges for California. 2001. Los Angeles: Children Now.
- Gewertz, Catherine. "Research: After the Bell Rings." February 2000. Education Week.
- Kahne et al. 2001. "Assessing After-School Programs as Contexts for Youth Development." Youth and Society. 32 (4): 421-46.
- National Center for Education Statistics. Extra-Curricular Participation and Student Engagement. 1995. NCES. U.S. Department of Education.
- National Institute on Out-of-School Time. Understanding Basic Standards for a Quality Out-of-School Time Program. 2000. Wellesley College Center for Research on Women: NIOST.
- U.S. Department of Education. Safe and Smart: Making After School Hours Work for Kids. 1998. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- U.S. Department of Justice. Violence After School. 1999. National Report Series: Juvenile Justice Bulletin.

LET'S HEAR FROM YOU!

We welcome readers' comments on topics presented.



Call us at
916.983.9506



fax us at
916.983.5738



or send an email to
cmkord@emt.org

preventionTactics

is published periodically by The EMT Group, Inc., under its Community Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention contract with The California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs (DADP). The purpose of this publication is to help practitioners in the prevention field stay abreast of best practices emerging from current research and to provide practical tools and resources for implementing proven strategies.

The information or strategies highlighted in Prevention Tactics do not constitute an endorsement by DADP, nor are the ideas and opinions expressed herein those of DADP or its staff.

© 2002 by The EMT Group, Inc.

Permission to reproduce is granted, provided credit is given.

Authors: Victoria Stuart & Sarah Chandley

Editor: Chrissy Kord

Graphic Design: Art Farmer Design