



FOCUS

**On Promising Practices
2010**



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DIRECTOR’S MESSAGE

Promising: likely to succeed or to yield good results
Practice: actual performance or application, the usual way of doing something

Welcome to our second edition of *Focus on Promising Practices!*

This collection of stories embraces the simple act of sharing successes with others. We hope to help programs and communities find synergy by connecting through their children and youth. Sharing successful strategies from a broad range of out-of-school time programs is a great way to grow more opportunities for our kids.

The Oklahoma Afterschool Network (OKAN) remains committed to improving the lives and opportunities of *all* kids. In our state, 29% of our kids are completely on their own afterschool, while only 12% are in afterschool programs. We can do better!

Afterschool programs keep kids safe, healthy and inspire learning. Our goal is to make sure *all* kids have access to quality programs.

In OKAN’s second edition of Promising Practices, we highlight small strategies that can be replicated by almost any program, anywhere in Oklahoma regardless of resources. These strategies include engaging kids in service learning, involving volunteers as mentors and embracing the community as partners and stakeholders. By focusing on strengthening the community as a whole, we find practices and programs that provide a “win” for everyone.

We hope you find these practices helpful in your community, and we also encourage you to share your successes and ideas with us. Together, we are steadily building awareness among policymakers and local leaders about the importance of quality afterschool programs. Our website provides a quick and easy way to let others know about your promising practice in afterschool.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Sonia Johnson, Director
 Oklahoma Afterschool Network



www.okafterschool.org

Kenzie's Cause Union Public Schools Extended Day Program Tulsa, OK

Promising Practice

Through Kenzie's Cause, children are learning to be life-long "givers" as they design and create greeting cards to share with Meals on Wheels recipients in their community. Students develop literacy and art skills while giving back to the community as they write cards of encouragement.

who? The People and Program

The Union Public Schools Extended Day Program (EDP) was created to provide safe after-school care that extends a child's school day through enrichment activities. Recognizing the busy lifestyles of today's families, EDP works in coordination with school, home and parents. Serving 843 students, grades K-5 at 13 elementary school sites, EDP hosts activities such as homework help, gym games, outdoor play, art, dramatic play, science, math and board games. Union EDP identifies decision-making as a key component to a child's emotional, social and cognitive growth and independence. Therefore, one of the primary focuses of the program is to empower students by giving them the opportunity to self-select activities.

Kenzie explained the Meals on Wheels program and the loneliness and isolation that many of these individuals face. She began by asking the students if they like to receive cards on their birthdays, holidays and special occasions. The response was as expected. Kenzie then asked what it might be like to receive a plain card with no message. Of course, the students wanted pretty cards and ones that included encouraging messages. Kenzie then asked if they would write encouraging notes and draw pictures on cards to achieve a goal of reaching every Meals on Wheels recipient. The cards are a thoughtful gift of encouragement to remind seniors that someone is thinking of them. Kenzie also tells the students that her personal goal is to involve as many groups as possible with an ultimate goal of collecting one million cards for Meals on Wheels.

Extended Day Program students make cards from simple 4 x 6 index cards. Students choose their own medium such as markers, crayons, colored pencils, stamps, glitter and glue. Cards can be quite simple or extremely detailed. Each card includes an encouraging thought. Younger students often dictate their thoughts to be written by an older student, promoting mentoring and cooperation. This is a free choice activity, but several students routinely gather at the art table each day. Some even team up to complete different portions of the card before passing it to the next teammate in a collaborative fashion.

Unexpectedly, a friendly competition has developed between participating schools. Each school uses a bar chart to track progress on how many cards have been produced. By early May of 2010, students had made a total of 11,000 cards! Each school wants

what? The Promising Practice

Kenzie's Cause began as a pilot program in three elementary school Extended Day Programs. Initially, 242 students enrolled in the three programs, including Kenzie, a sixth grader at the Union 6th/7th Grade Center. An alumna of the Jarman Elementary School EDP, Kenzie felt it important to attempt to brighten the lives of those facing challenges. She visited each school individually to introduce the program and explain why it is important to reach out to those senior citizens involved in the Meals on Wheels program.



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to be recognized for making the most cards. EDP staff notice that math skills develop and concepts are reinforced as kids count cards, group them into bundles of 50 and learn to count by 50's. Students are even learning to create and read bar charts. This is a project that develops academic skills in language arts, math, social studies and art.

The Summer Camp, held at Union's Moore Elementary School will continue to offer card-making for Kenzie's Cause and Meals on Wheels during the summer months of 2010. Group progress will be tracked with a goal of producing 20,000 cards.

how? Strategies for Success

Modeling – Projects that are developed and presented by older youth often provide opportunities for them to model their enthusiasm for community service to younger children. Kenzie herself serves as a wonderful role-model to the younger students. She is well-spoken and passionate about this project.

Engaging Older Students – Older students can serve as great mentors to the younger students. In this practice, older students help the younger students with message writing and by sharing their artistic talents as they demonstrate various drawing techniques.

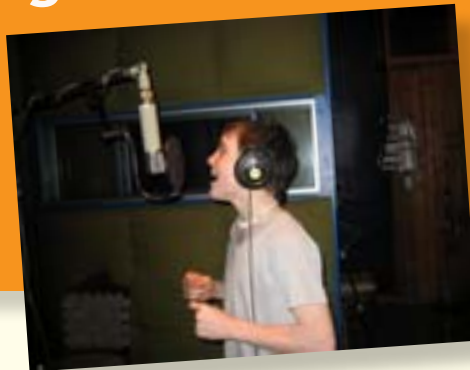
Marketing for Success – Consider how to help your participants grow their project. Kenzie has a four-minute DVD that can be shared with programs outside the Tulsa area. The DVD explains Kenzie's Cause and encourages other groups to join the project. Additionally, EDP has enlisted the help of the school district's photographer to share their work on Kenzie's Cause through the local media.

win! Impact on Kids and Community

Union Extended Day Program and Kenzie's Cause are a winning combination! This promising practice highlights the important role young children can play in making a difference in their community. Students engage in hands-on activities that extend their creativity, art and writing skills, while experiencing the enjoyment of making a difference and helping others. Meals on Wheels recipients are beneficiaries of kind and thoughtful messages because young people in their community care about them!

Engaging Kids Afterschool Through the Arts

Studio 222
St. Luke's United Methodist Church
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma



Promising Practice

Adventure and exploration are key elements of Studio 222, a small afterschool program in downtown Oklahoma City. Successfully reaching and engaging inner-city youth through arts education is a successful practice of this program.

who?

The People and Program

In the fall of 2004, Studio 222 began as a free visual and performing arts afterschool program designed specifically for inner-city middle school students. Facilitated by St. Luke's United Methodist Church, and through partnerships with Taft Middle School and local artists, Studio 222 provides a positive environment where children can develop their persistence, self-discipline and self-expression, while learning to avoid risky behaviors.

Programming is offered four days a week during the school year, with summer programming based on field trip and camp experiences. Studio 222 operates from a space specifically designed to replicate an art studio and gallery. Artwork created by the students is carefully displayed and shared with the community under gallery-like lighting, showing the children the respect the program has for their work.

Funding for Studio 222 is raised through individual contributions, corporate donations, fundraising projects and grants. Support through the use of buses, facilities, utility costs, janitorial and maintenance expenses are provided in-kind through the church and optional mission offerings.

Volunteers from the church and the community drive buses and assist in the classrooms. This transportation time has actually become a time to mentor students and offer them a listening ear and encouragement.

The long-term goal of Studio 222 is to replicate this program model of arts in afterschool throughout the Oklahoma City metro area and ultimately throughout the state, providing youth more opportunities to

express themselves creatively and realize their dreams. Studio 222 believes that all youth need a place where they feel safe and are shown how to become productive, contributing members of their community.

what?

The Promising Practice

At Studio 222, professional artists join the program as staff to instruct the students in photography, painting, sculpture, music, graphic arts, computer animation, culinary arts and many other arts-related areas. Students also engage in some type of daily physical activity to help them focus their attention on the art-based projects at hand. Time is also spent on field trips, community service, games and more.

Classes are divided into nine-week segments allowing the students to learn life skills such as setting goals, managing timelines for their projects, and working as a team. Although academic support may not appear to be the focus of the program, most art lessons incorporate math, science and language arts skills. An example of this is a lesson on creating a comic book. Students write the story, learn to illustrate, print, market and sell their book. During another lesson on producing a song, students write the lyrics, produce the recording using the computer, and market the product.

Working with professional artists inspires students to follow through the complete process of a project, continue their education, see how their work enhances a community and learn to set career



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goals. The promising practice found at Studio 222 is the simple act of utilizing the arts as a way to build children up and reinforce leadership and character.

how?

Strategies for Success

Passion! – Start with a passion! The success of incorporating art into an afterschool setting in this situation is because the program brings together a combination of volunteers and professionals that are passionate about art and children! The team strives to ensure that kids get outstanding art instruction and compassionate mentoring.

Employ Content Area Specialists – Employing program professionals from the field, in combination with staff trained in working with children, can have a significant impact on the success of any afterschool program. Investing in program specialists insures the highest quality experience for the participants.

Prove Your Commitment – Partnership opportunities with churches, schools and community and state agencies are available in the majority of communities. Working with like-minded organizations will help you find support, promotion, advisement, and growth for afterschool programming. Providing in-kind support for transportation, facilities and services can also demonstrate a strong commitment to a successful program.

Evaluation – Surveying participants, volunteers, and professionals regularly can help a program identify what is working and what can be improved. Survey tools can provide strong data for program planning.

win!

Impact on Kids and Community

Students enrolled in Studio 222 have consistently shown increases in academic performance and school attendance, but the best measure of the success of this practice comes from the program alumni. Many alumni are continuing their education through technical training and college enrollment. These former students are in regular contact with Studio 222 leaders, looking to them as mentors, but also to give back to the program by serving as volunteers. This continued connection is inspiring the younger children to explore the education and career options in the culinary arts, photography and arts education.

Through arts education, Studio 222 helps youth develop the skills and knowledge to dream great dreams and become productive, contributing members of the community.

A Real-Life Approach to Learning Job Responsibilities

Pay Day Tulsa Public Schools Before/After Care Program Tulsa, OK

Promising Practice

The Tulsa Public Schools Pay Day program, gives students the opportunity to learn job responsibilities while earning play money. This experience provides school-age children with the opportunity to explore jobs, work as a team, sharpen their money and math skills while learning to self-monitor their program, facilities and responsibilities.

who? The People and Program

The Tulsa Public Schools Before/After Care Program (TPSBA) provides much more than just a place for children to hang-out after school. The mission of the program is to provide high quality afterschool programs that offer safe, nurturing, educational and recreational experiences for children.

Opening its doors during the 2002 school year, the after care program started with 10 sites serving less than 300 children ages 4-12. Fast forward 8 years, and the program now operates at 28 sites and serves approximately 1,000 children. Each site is licensed by the Oklahoma Department of Human Services (DHS). A fee-based program, TPSBA also receives support from several Native American tribes. In addition to traditional before/afterschool programming, full day services are available when school is not in session. The program's efficiency is enhanced by utilizing shared spaces such as classrooms, cafeterias and gymnasiums.

The program offers a great environment for kids and also envelops their families by:

- providing quality care for children
- supporting the needs of the entire family
- assisting with academic achievement
- fostering fitness and physical skills
- offering activities that encourage confidence and feelings of self-worth
- promoting the life skills of caring, honesty, respect and responsibility

what? The Promising Practice

Sharing space with other programs can always be a challenging task. Flexibility and a little creative planning can make this easier. Each afternoon as you enter a TPSBA Program you will see the space transform from a plain cafeteria into a warm and inviting space for children to spend their afternoon. Instead of having the children wait and watch this transformation take place, TPSBA has engaged the children in the process. As you enter the a program you will see children completing tasks such as setting up "interest centers", organizing board games, replenishing art supplies, checking materials in the homework area, or preparing snacks. While the children are certainly contributing to efficient program operations and aiding the transition to enrichment activities, they are also performing the tasks required for a specific job they have chosen for the week as part of Pay Day.

Pay Day challenges each child to choose a job for the week. At week's end they receive compensation in the form of paper money for performing their job duties. The jobs change weekly, giving "employees" the opportunity to venture out and try new jobs. Money earned may be spent in the Buck Store.

Children who regularly attend the program can also earn extra money by being a substitute employee for friends who are absent. The money they earn is kept in individual folders and deposited in the "bank". Staff and children work together to serve as bankers.



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how? Strategies for Success

Life Skills – Children are provided with a safe environment that allows them to move within their comfort zone. They consider new ideas and develop life and work skills that will help them to be successful. Since some jobs require two people and many jobs need to be completed in a particular order, the program encourages teamwork. Teams come together to determine the best plan, and then work together to get tasks accomplished.

Participation – Many after school programs find it easy to involve younger students, but find it challenging to keep the interest of older students. The satisfaction of working and earning money help older Pay Day participants stay motivated and engaged. This model can therefore be implemented in afterschool programs of any size and for all ages.

Sustainability – Expenses beyond staffing include items that can be sold in the Buck Store. These items can be donated by parents or local businesses. Participants have also made items such as friendship bracelets and bookmarks for others to purchase in the store.

Adaptability – This promising practice can easily be adapted for any size program and a range of ages. While younger students perform small tasks, older students can complete more complex jobs or play a more significant role in making the afterschool program a success.

win! Impact on Kids and Community

Children in the TPSBA program are learning life-long lessons in the areas of decision-making, financial management, personal work ethic, and responsibility. The Pay Day program is student-centered learning as the participants choose their individual jobs.

Parents and teachers have noted positive changes in behavior and some teachers have adapted the program to be used in their classrooms. After eight years of implementation, this promising practice is a proven success for students, parents and the community.

Changing Habits to End Childhood Obesity

Label Reading, Store Tour Boys and Girls Club of Green Country Pryor, OK

Promising Practice

Seeking new strategies to impact the childhood obesity epidemic in Oklahoma, the Boys and Girls Club of Green Country has teamed up with health professionals at the Cherokee Nation to create real world health and nutrition learning opportunities. TRAIL (Together Raising Awareness for Indian Life) was designed to reduce the especially troubling high rates of obesity and diabetes in Native American populations. The store tours and label reading component of TRAIL gives children hands-on experience in food advertising and label reading for nutritional information and can be easily adapted to any afterschool setting.

who? The People and Program

Partnering with the Cherokee Nation, the Boys and Girls Club of Green Country serves children ages 8-18 at eleven sites in northeastern Oklahoma. Each Club hosts different activities, but all have programs that include homework help, leadership clubs, nature appreciation, fitness and diabetes prevention. A small annual membership fee is in place, but no child is refused services. To date more than 1,600 children have been Club members.

Several years ago, the Boys and Girls Club of Green Country took a closer look at their membership. Through this assessment they found that Native American children comprise 72% of their membership total. With Native American populations being 2 to 3 times more likely to develop diabetes than caucasians, the Club began revising the health education curriculum to meet the wellness needs of their service area.

Utilizing the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services "Steps to a Healthier United States: Putting Prevention First," the Boys and Girls Club of Green Country came to learn about TRAIL. Through a national pilot in several states, TRAIL received the support of the Indian Health Services and was expanded to 27 Boys and Girls Clubs in 17 states.

what? The Promising Practice

A promising practice of TRAIL that can be easily replicated in any out-of-school time setting is the Label Reading, Store Tour. Today, all food packaging contains important nutritional information for consumers. Learning how to read and understand this information is the primary objective for a fun excursion to a local grocer. Led by staff and volunteers, children participating in TRAIL have the opportunity to experience a real-life trip to the grocery store with the sole focus on learning how to read and understand food labels and then to make healthy decisions as they purchase food.

To prepare for the visit, students explore how advertising influences their food buying decisions. The children review sample food labels to understand the nutritional information and how to read a label. Before actually taking the field trip to a local grocer, the children select a simple menu and learn to create a shopping list. With clipboards, pencils and shopping lists in hand, children head to the local grocery store to compare product's nutritional value. Students also have the opportunity to record and share the results of their store visit by creating a log book.



"Label reading is a great way to teach kids about nutrition and a successful strategy we use in our programs."

- Debbie Sekel, Tulsa Public Schools Before/After Care Program



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how? Strategies for Success

Teamwork – Young students enjoy games and team competitions! This project encourages healthy competition and teamwork. Teams can be given a sample menu and then become responsible for selecting the healthiest items to complete their meal menu. To add another level of complexity to the tour, older students can be challenged to make the healthiest meal menu, using the least amount of money.

Coordinate with Other Curriculum – Label Reading, Store Tour can be expanded by incorporating other related programs or activities that support health and nutrition. For example, the CATCH (Coordinated Approach To Child Health) Kids Club program includes easy to implement games, such as Vegetable Tag, to support health and nutrition activities. Your local health department has a variety of resources designed to education on health, fitness and nutrition.

Building Community – The TRAIL program was designed to educate Native American students about nutrition and diabetes. Consider taking the Label Reading practice one step further! Make this a community-building promising practice by assisting the children as they use their ingredients to prepare a healthy meal and invite parents, patrons and students to enjoy a meal together.

win! Impact on Kids and Community

The Food Research and Action Center has identified afterschool programs as effective venues for improving nutrition, nutrition education and physical activities. Promising practices like those contained in TRAIL are often based on the principle that small changes over time can yield dramatic results. The more often children are exposed to activities, information and resources on topics such as diabetes, nutrition and wellness, the more likely we are to impact their choices.

The Oklahoma State Department of Health reports that 80% of obese children will continue to be obese adults. According to a 2009 study by America's Health Rankings, Oklahoma will spend more than any state on obesity-attributable health care by the year 2018.

Building healthy habits, such as label reading, at an early age will help children win the fight against childhood obesity and help the entire community win the fight against adult obesity.

Mentoring with a Commitment to the Whole Child

Youth at Heart Tulsa, OK

Promising Practice

One mentor, one child at a time. Youth at Heart has found this to be a successful approach to reaching at-risk children with nurturing relationships specifically aimed at encircling key parts of the child's life. By providing programs, education, recreation and social development in nine Tulsa Housing Authority Community Centers, this practice highlights the benefits of incorporating mentors into out-of-school time settings.

who?

The People and Program

Youth At Heart (YAH) serves youth in housing authority communities in the Tulsa area. The program was forged through a merger of two United Way agencies to provide better educational and social programs for youth living in low-income housing.

Youth At Heart provides a variety of afterschool and summer programs focused in socio-economically challenged neighborhoods. A faith-based agency, YAH offers a variety of programs including: tutoring, character training, youth mentoring, health and fitness training, sports leagues, career exploration, community service and summer camp. Each year, these programs reach over 3,000 children and teens, giving them an effective alternative to idleness, vandalism, drug use and gang activities that so often plague their communities.

Working with community partners such as United Way, area churches, Tulsa Community College, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Tulsa Public Schools, and 4H, each YAH site is designed to fit unique community needs. All programs focus on four core values: self-discipline, personal integrity, respect for diversity, and service to the community.

what?

The Promising Practice

Walk into any of Youth at Heart's nine sites located in Tulsa Housing Authority Community Centers and you will see students working one-on-one or in very small groups with an adult mentor. Often focusing on tutoring and homework help, the connection between the adult volunteer and the child is evident. What you may not easily observe is that this mentoring occurs at many different levels throughout the child's life. Trust and caring is the key to all YAH initiatives. At YAH mentoring is achieved through a focus on surrounding each child at multiple touch-points in their lives. This emphasis on the mentor/child relationship is strengthened and even expanded to include the child's family life and school.

Being a YAH volunteer mentor means having a solid commitment to the program's mission of developing a better child through all parties working together. Volunteers serve multiple roles of tutor, mentor and friend. "Over time we have developed a tutoring program that goes full-circle. We show kids, family and schools that we will make a difference. We select quality volunteers from churches or agencies that are committed to community success," reports Rodney Gray, YAH Director of Program Management.

YAH believes that there are several key strategies that have made this practice so successful in their program. They include:

- A curriculum that mentors share with students that stresses commitment, right choices and



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- encourages the student to be a world changer.
- A consistent schedule that children can come to rely on, where they see their mentor for an hour each week.
- The commitment that the mentor will visit and/or volunteer at the school the child attends.
- A home visit by the mentor accompanied by YAH staff.
- The mentor routinely attending bi-monthly field trips.

When students see their mentors at their school, the children know their mentors care about them. The home visit is also a key as it allows the mentor to:

- Earn the right to work with the child.
- Validate the parent as the authority and allow parents an opportunity to share issues.
- Have a greater understanding of the home situation.

how?

Strategies for Success

Volunteers – Select volunteers by identifying organizations that have similar goals and a comparable mission. This can include service agencies such as scouting, AmeriCorps, senior organizations such as Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) and faith-based organizations.

Sustainability – Volunteers need to be assured that they are making a difference. Beyond the motivation of seeing a child master a new concept, mentors should be kept informed about specific academic progress and the results of any evaluations conducted.

Publicize Success – Local media can be asked to showcase your program and recognize your volunteers. Newspaper articles, web posts and photos can help demonstrate success and encourage volunteers. Any recognition your students receive should be celebrated, from academic to sports to citizenship awards.

win!

Impact on Kids and Community

Through pre and post assessments, YAH has found the practice of including volunteer mentors in their program to be a win for the students as they continue to see increased academic performance. Volunteers report this practice as a win because it provides a well organized and successful mentoring structure. The big win is for the community, as this practice provides children a safe alternative to risky behaviors including drugs, gang activities and vandalism that impact the community.

More than 90% of students in the YAH tutoring program show above average academic performance, 84% improved personal character and 77% improved sportsmanship. These results are quantitative proof that this volunteer model works for YAH and their kids!

Improving Writing Skills Through Student Publishing

Write Now! Boys and Girls Clubs of Green Country Pryor, OK

Promising Practice

Developed by a teen staff member, Write Now helps students improve their writing skills, have fun and learn about community issues through publishing a mini-magazine. This easily adaptable practice has been so successful that it has been replicated across the United States, receiving national recognition from the Boys and Girls Clubs of America.

who?

The People and Program

Partnering with the Cherokee Nation, the Boys and Girls Clubs of Green Country serves children ages 8 – 18 at eleven sites in northeastern Oklahoma. Each Club hosts different activities, but all have programs that include homework help, leadership clubs, nature appreciation, fitness and diabetes prevention. A small annual membership fee is in place, but no child is refused service. To date more than 1,600 children have been Club members.

More than eight years ago, a teen employee at the Boys and Girls Clubs of Green Country in Pryor realized that serving on the high school newspaper staff had a significant impact on her skills as a writer. She decided that younger Club members could hone their communication skills through writing and having fun in the process.

The teen employee developed Write Now, a program initially focused on the development of a mini-magazine designed by students. After entering college, she realized that Write Now could be improved. The curriculum was redesigned to include components beyond the mini-magazine to include journal writing, poetry, photography and technology. She also included more emphasis on group discussion and feedback from other participating Club members.

what?

The Promising Practice

According to a recent survey conducted by the Afterschool Alliance, too few of Oklahoma's kids participate in summer learning programs.

When schools close for the summer, safe and enriching learning environments are out of reach and replaced by boredom, lost opportunities and risk for too many children. New analysis of data from the America After 3PM study measures the extent of this problem, concluding that just 20 percent of Oklahoma's schoolchildren (an estimated 124,954 kids) participate in summer learning programs – safe, structured programs that provide a variety of activities designed to encourage learning and development in the summer months.

Through Write Now, participants have the opportunity to practice news writing strategies and improving their existing writing skills, while learning about publishing a mini-magazine. This practice encourages students to access new technology in desktop publishing, increasing their computer and technology skills. Additionally, this project based approach encourages students to follow the publication process from start to finish, taking ownership of a mini-magazine and developing a true sense of accomplishment.

Throughout the 6-8 week summer program students meet for one hour, four days per week. Each session begins with journal writing, or selecting a topic from a magazine or newspaper clipping to serve as the writing prompt. Students learn how to conduct an interview, write a story, conduct research and publish articles.



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The Club has found that older students often serve as mentors and provide technology expertise. Each of these activities has direct correlation to initiatives that are central to Club programs. Other unanticipated outcomes have included relationships with local newspapers and printers, community service projects, mentorship opportunities, and entrepreneurial activities. The Club launched partnerships with several community agencies and local newspapers including The Cherokee Phoenix and Indian Advocate.

Write Now meets and holds student interest. In addition to the mini-magazine other projects have included poetry, graphic arts, and photography.

how? Strategies for Success

Mentoring – Older students can assist with the technology pieces such as digital photography, page layout, and proofreading. Leadership, education and career goals can also be key components for this success strategy through mentorship with older students or community members.

Program Customization – “Adapt-not Adopt”. Afterschool programs wishing to use a model like Write Now can adapt the basic framework in a way that best suits the situation at their site. The program can be implemented during the school year using one or two meetings weekly and student ages can be adjusted based on the complexity of the writing assignments. Continual refinement is encouraged and recommended.

Funding – Local community partners can provide services or professional expertise such as printing and layout. Volunteer experts also provide free staff to support other programs and students can sell advertising or subscriptions for any publications they prepare.

Local Schools – Partnering with schools to match Write Now projects with Oklahoma PASS objectives gives the opportunity to improve specific, age-appropriate writing skills. Schools can also partner by providing office supplies, printing or copying services.

win! Impact on Kids and Community

Write Now builds communications skills for students that will follow them throughout their lives and will help insure success in their careers. In addition to improving their writing, the practice encourages students to engage in community and social awareness by discussing and writing about current issues. This results in more informed students and ultimately, a more informed community!

Finding Partnerships that Promote Quality

Community After School Program Norman, OK

Promising Practice

Taking a collaborative approach and teaming together with other youth service agencies has been a successful strategy for recruiting quality employees, building capacity, increasing staffing levels and developing programming expertise at the Community After School Program (CASP).

who? The People and Program

In cooperation with the Norman and Robin Hill Public School Districts, Community After School Program (CASP) provides before and afterschool care for more than 700 children in kindergarten through fifth grade in sixteen programs. All sites are licensed as 2-Star facilities through the Oklahoma Department of Human Services. In a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere, CASP provides opportunities for children to expand their learning through arts, dramatic play, games, outdoor play, and informal science activities. The program puts a strong emphasis on opportunities for physical and social development activities.

One key collaborative partner for CASP has been Oklahoma Serves, an AmeriCorps program managed by the Oklahoma Community Service Commission. Oklahoma Serves Program Director Amy Roth believes that “it is critical for those in the field of youth development to collaborate in order to enrich the lives of Oklahoma’s children and youth.” AmeriCorps members working in the Oklahoma Serves program are dedicated to enhancing the lives of children and youth through various service activities including: mentoring, tutoring, educational enrichment, health, wellness, prevention, and food programs.

CASP has found that collaborations are absolutely critical to their growing success. They have found that partnering effectively is an important strategy for their private, non-profit agency.

what? The Promising Practice

Oklahoma Serves is a partner in coordinating CASP’s staffing of their health and wellness programs, tutoring and volunteer recruitment. Funding is often cited as the biggest challenge to providing quality afterschool programming and is often recognized as the largest line item in afterschool program budgets.

A standard tuition-based model, along with state subsidy reimbursement, is utilized by CASP to meet the personnel requirements as outlined by the Oklahoma State Department of Human Services. Partnerships like those between CASP and Oklahoma Serves, can allow programs to provide lower staff-child ratios, more specialized curriculum and opportunities for community members to be engaged in the program.

Seeing a specific need for a few specialized staff in key areas that would further enhance the quality of their program, CASP worked closely with Oklahoma Serves to develop a recruitment model. This collaboration between the organizations allowed CASP to support staff salaries through AmeriCorps and develop special new programs at school sites.

Working with AmeriCorps, CASP has enjoyed the addition of several key staff positions for their program including two tutoring coordinators to work with CASP staff to develop a tutoring and homework assistance program; a volunteer coordinator to recruit and organize volunteer activities and ensure that sites have consistent volunteer support; and five team members responsible for teaching the CATCH (Coordinated Approach to Child Health) Kids Club curriculum five days a week to school-age children.



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how? Strategies for Success

Do Your Homework – Agencies, foundations, faith-based organizations and consortiums that support youth programs abound in communities across the state. Find appropriate partners and develop alliances that leverage everyone’s resources.

Spell It Out – Well thought out job descriptions are important to every organization no matter the size. They become even more critical, as you develop community collaborations for staffing, to ensure both organizations have clear expectations. Keep an open mind on developing job descriptions. Individuals with unique skills and talents can bring added value to a program.

Don’t Take Things For GRANTed – Partners such as Oklahoma Serves may require a grant application. Though not a competitive grant, these applications serve to demonstrate a well thought out plan on how an organization expects to collaborate.

Recognition – Partnering agencies deserve to be recognized. Featuring their logo and story on a website, in news articles and during interviews or presentations makes it clear that their partnership is valued and appreciated. The same holds true for recognition of staff and volunteers.

win! Impact on Kids and Community

As a result of the Oklahoma Serves partnership, CASP is improving the quality and diversity of their personnel, developing program consistency from site to site and improving the quality of services.

“Volunteerism, such as that found through the AmeriCorps model, has been at the foundation of our nation since its inception,” said Amy Roth. “It not only enhances communities and the lives of those involved, but without volunteerism and community service, especially in these tough economic times, many critical social and civic services would simply not be available.”

Group Mentoring and Service Learning

Teens in Action Camp Fire USA Green Country Council Tulsa, Oklahoma

Promising Practice

Most people picture a mentoring relationship as one-on-one. They see an image of an adult providing guidance to a child, often with a view of a person of greater affluence reaching out to a disadvantaged child. Camp Fire USA challenges this image with Teens In Action – a service learning model that engages teen mentors in working with groups of school-age children. Camp Fire USA's Teens In Action changes the typical view of mentoring by providing a model for engaging older youth in service learning, while incorporating a group mentoring approach into school-age programming for younger children.

who? The People and Program

Through Teens In Action, Camp Fire USA Green Country Council actively engages Tulsa area teens in age-appropriate, meaningful service designed to make a concrete and visible difference in their community. Through partnerships with local school districts, neighborhoods, community-based organizations and out-of-school time programs these projects have become a source of pride and an accomplishment for many of the teens to share with friends, family and younger children.

During the middle and high school years, when young people face new challenges and risks, learning leadership skills and practicing resistance to negative peer pressure becomes increasingly important. Youth development researchers note that defining teenagers as “future leaders” actually acts as one of the greatest barriers to cultivating leadership among them. By treating young people solely as the “next” generation, we fail to help them see themselves as active members of the community now.

Teens In Action empowers older youth to take a leadership role with school-age children, modeling how to make a difference in their own schools, neighborhoods and communities while developing planning and decision-making skills.

what? The Promising Practice

In the Tulsa Public Schools, youth at two high schools receive training and guidance to work with students at nearby elementary schools who are identified as at-risk for suspension. Using the Camp Fire curriculum, Teens In Action mentors reach out to these at-risk children throughout the school year, engaging them in fun and creative activities related to specific learning experiences and by leading weekly Camp Fire Clubs.

In the Union Public School District, Teens In Action mentors have been used with older school-age children and younger youth to develop and conduct projects of shorter duration, including activities on emergency preparedness training and environmental improvement. Acting as group mentors, these teens serve as a valuable resource to out-of-school time programs and the young school-age children they serve throughout the greater Tulsa area.

Through these partnerships with school districts and other organizations serving low-income and disadvantaged children and youth, Camp Fire is able to ensure that higher-risk teens don't miss out on the leadership development opportunities often enjoyed by their more affluent peers. All Teens In Action groups are organized to provide intensive service learning experiences that feature the following five elements: Exploring the community and community needs, identifying and planning



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a project designed to address the need, carrying out the project, then reflecting on the experience and celebrating the results.

how? Strategies for Success

Reaching Out to Your Community – School-age programs wishing to implement a group mentoring project with older teens should look to groups in their community that have an expressed goal of developing youth leaders. Consider making a connection with groups already formed through your local school such as sports teams, honor societies, language clubs and Future Farmers of America. Also, look to community based partners such as Camp Fire Clubs, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and 4-H. These programs are designed specifically to promote student leadership skill building.

Supporting Group Mentoring – As young people master new skills, they often enjoy the opportunity to pass them on to peers or younger children through structured group mentoring experiences. When teens are entrusted and supported with the responsibility for leading an activity for younger children – or their own peers – Camp Fire has found that they take their leadership role very seriously. They learn to anticipate which materials and equipment they will need, how to prepare for the intended audience, how to work with group dynamics and how to evaluate the outcome of their work.

Empowerment – Teens in Action puts a spotlight on issues of concern to youth. This program is based on the concept that young people are the key to the future and we as adults trust that they have the ability to make a difference in the world. Working with adult partners in a mentoring relationship, teens experience and learn about leadership, communication and planning. They develop confidence in their ability to lead as they plan and implement community service projects, as well as challenge themselves to master new skills.

win! Impact on Kids and Community

The practice of engaging older teens as group mentors in afterschool programs is a winning combination for teen mentors, the younger children they reach and the community.

By serving in an afterschool setting, this model also benefits the younger at-risk children by exposing them to service learning, developing a caring relationship with a positive older peer role model, and engaging them in learning activities.

Communities benefit from completed service projects, such as the development of skilled leaders. Teens in Action is a promising practice that empowers teens, strengthens communities and impacts afterschool programs!

Building Skills One Block at a Time through Science, Technology, Engineering and Math

FIRST LEGO League Oklahoma Math and Science Foundation Owasso, Oklahoma

Promising Practice

Want to build a robot but don't have a rocket scientist handy? FIRST LEGO robotics enthusiasts in Oklahoma say "No problem"! Kids ages get engaged in hands-on learning about science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) while building robots from LEGOS. Along the way, they learn about team-building and scientific research while improving their communication skills and professional values.

who? The People and Program

The Oklahoma Science and Engineering Foundation (OKSEF), a statewide organization, utilizes FIRST LEGO League (FLL), a worldwide robotics competition, to promote science, technology, math and engineering for kids both in school and out-of-school time. An autonomous LEGO robot, a real-world research project, and a community service project requiring teamwork are all part of the program. Teams have the opportunity to attend state competitions and the best teams advance to the World Festival. FLL teams come from groups like scout troops, home-school teams, Boys and Girls Clubs, afterschool programs and neighborhood teams.

"Gracious Professionalism" and "Cooperitition" are trademarked terms central to the core values of FIRST LEGO League. Jack Lyons, OKSEF Chairman and consultant to NASA, explains that getting kids to cooperate, communicate and respect teammates and competitors is as important as the competition itself. The FLL Core Values are:

- Teamwork.
- Using the guidance of coaches to work for a solution.
- Honor the spirit of friendly competition.
- Discovery is more important than winning.
- Share experiences with others.
- Display "Gracious Professionalism" in everything.
- Have fun.

Worldwide, almost 15,000 teams and 150,000 students now participate in FLL. OKSEF expects to have more than 60 teams competing in the 2010 State Tournament.

what? The Promising Practice

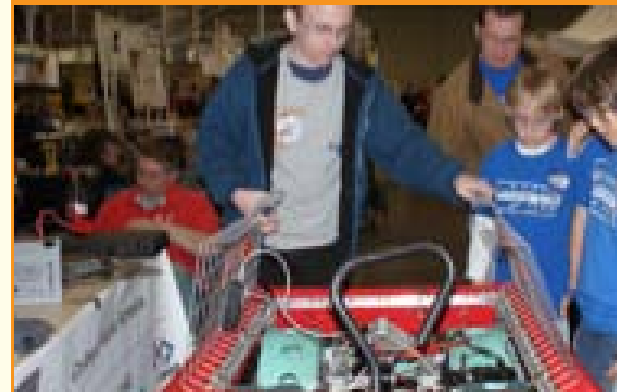
Each September, FIRST issues a Challenge to elementary and middle school teams around the world. The Challenge requires teams to develop a strategy to meet the missions and score points.

Competing teams must research and solve real world problems as they develop an autonomous robot using LEGO MINDSTORMS technology. The robot is built and programmed to demonstrate a variety of engineering concepts.

FIRST League Robotics (FLL) introduces students to hands-on learning and real-world engineering challenges. By building LEGO-based robots, kids learn to work in teams and compete with "gracious professionalism". By encouraging kids to use their imaginations and to have fun, FLL is an exciting activity and is rapidly gaining enthusiasts throughout the world.

Each year FLL teams of 3-10 students begin researching the annual "Challenge" using real-world math and science concepts just like today's scientists. In designing their robot, important talents are developed-critical thinking, time management, team-building and presentation skills.

A recent challenge required students to discover innovative ways to make travel in their community more economical, safe and energy efficient. While FLL coaches and mentors find the experience rewarding, students describe it as the "hardest fun you'll ever have."



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how? Strategies for Success

Recruitment – School enrichment programs, activity clubs, or a group of friends can form FLL teams. Home-school organizations, Boys and Girls Clubs, neighborhood teams, church youth groups, and scout troops are all examples of how FLL teams are put together.

Coaching – Each FLL team needs at least one coach. Coaches bring different areas of expertise and can be of any age. They can bring either technical or non-technical expertise to the team to provide students the opportunity for experiential learning. The ideal coach knows that mentoring is about inspiring and guiding students in order to provide them an environment for success.

Sponsorship – Sponsors can greatly impact the success of a team. Sponsors typically provide funding for equipment and facilities, serve as volunteers or mentors, and provide internships. Their benefits include developing deeper community relations, seeding a technology literate workforce, and providing team-building, volunteer and training opportunities for their employees.

Starting a Team – OKSEF Chair Jack Lyons stresses that expenses are not prohibitive and some of the most unlikely organizations often sponsor or host a team. "Students just need to know about the opportunity and find a coach," he said. Coaches can provide expertise in many ways. Research skill, time management, presentation talents, teamwork, and marketing are all critical to a team's success. "Kids will figure out the robotics and programming," he reassured. "So start a program with your students and remember, you really don't have to be a rocket scientist!"

win! Impact on Kids and Community

Data from a recent Brandeis University study indicates that FIRST LEGO League builds values that positively impact both the child and community. The study indicated that FLL participants are much more likely to:

- Attend college.
- Major and pursue a career in science or engineering.
- Volunteer in their communities.
- Be awarded an internship.
- Mentor other students.
- Become outstanding citizens.

"Gracious Professionalism" and "Cooperitition" are more than fun terminology to FLL team members. It is employing a philosophy that says even competitors can respect and help one another.

Leading to Bigger Things Braiding Funds for Afterschool

Union Public Schools Community Schools Program Tulsa, OK

Promising Practice

Sometimes promising practices lead to bigger things! Union Public Schools (UPS) demonstrates how a school district has taken several practices and maximized their funding sources to build expanded learning opportunities for their students. UPS puts the focus on activities that support the whole child and their educational outcomes. As a result, many promising practices emerge that can be easily replicated.

who? The People and Program

Located between Tulsa and Broken Arrow, Union Public Schools is not centered in a particular city. However, UPS views itself as a unifying organization within the community, connecting families. Their "Main Street" is the 14,000 students they serve!

Partnering with the Tulsa Area Community Schools Initiative (TACSI), UPS offers this extended learning day free of charge to students through a braided-funding strategy. This strategy incorporates funding streams that are wrapped together to support unified services. This is made possible through the commitment of the school administration and the support of community-based organizations.

Programs and activities include homework help, career exploration, environmental education, the arts along with health, fitness and nutrition.

- Global Gardens – providing staff and supplies to encourage hands-on informal science education with an emphasis on gardening.
- Girl Scouts and Camp Fire – club activities and group mentoring opportunities are scheduled at the school sites.
- Reading Tutoring and Adventure Club – supporting improved reading comprehension skills with adult mentors.
- Arts & Humanities Council - providing supplies and an artist in residence for Art Club students.

Two additional program practices that have recently received considerable attention include Bicycle Safety and Young Architects.

Bicycle Safety is a 6-week course where safety training is facilitated by volunteers from Tulsa Hub, a non-profit agency focusing on wellness, education and bicycle advocacy. Each student completing the course receives a new bicycle and appropriate safety gear!

Young Architects enlists local professionals to present activities related to a career in architecture. Students get involved in the design and drawing phase of a project and follow-up with a tour of a local architectural firm.

what? The Promising Practice

Union's Community Schools Program strives to offer youth development activities that appeal to students with diverse interests. Partnerships are developed with community based organizations that can utilize the school facilities to offer unique programming practices. A few of the more unique practices offered through this model include partnerships with:



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how? Strategies for Success

Open the Door – Schools may age, but they do not wear out. It is important for school administrators to offer the use of school facilities to youth and family agencies that have programs that can benefit both students and patrons.

Share! Share! Share! – "braiding" students as well as funding! UPS operates fee-based Extended Day Programs (EDP) in addition to those offered in Community Schools (CS). As an example, Kenzie's Cause (a program featured in this edition of Promising Practices) blends students from both EDP and CS who want to participate in reaching out to the Meals on Wheels community. The sharing system works for everyone. Middle school programs willing to share students with athletic programs and other extracurricular activities will show enrollment growth. Parents want a safe learning environment for their children, and kids want to have fun and spend time with their friends. School coaches and sponsors want their students to succeed academically and have a safe haven between activities or during the off-season. Sharing works for all.

Leverage Local Partners – In most communities, organizations such as 4-H, county health departments, scouts, arts councils, historical societies, garden clubs and universities are among entities that have traditionally worked in partnership with schools. Reach out to these service-driven organizations that can provide the individual strands in your "braided funding" approach to quality programs.

win! Impact on Kids and Community

Union Public Schools, working with the Tulsa Area Community Schools organization and local businesses, is able to offer programs and services that play an integral part in the well being of children and their families. Braided funding allows Union Public Schools to leverage corporate partners from the community. QuikTrip, whose headquarters are adjacent to the school property line, helped Union's Rosa Parks Elementary spruce up their Global Garden project during a "day of caring" in 2008. Approximately 70 QuikTrip employees worked to improve the garden site by building a pergola, installing raised beds, adding a fence, assembling picnic tables, painting hop scotch areas and even constructing bird feeders!

The afterschool programs that integrate community partners in this way develop outstanding enrichment programs, clubs and organizations. Community Schools gives these community partners access to students and space so they too can help meet the vision: a school community that provides each student with the necessary skills to confidently meet a diverse and ever-changing world.

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Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy
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Afterschool Alliance
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National Governor's Association
Center for Best Practices
nga.org

Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
mott.org

The Council of Chief State School Officers
ccsso.org

The Finance Project
financeproject.org

National Conference of State Legislatures
ncsl.org

National League of Cities
nlc.org

Oklahoma State Department of Education
sde.state.ok.us

Oklahoma State Department of Health
health.state.ok.us

Oklahoma Department of Human Services
okdhs.org

Academy of Educational Development
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The Forum for Youth Investment
forumforyouthinvestment.org

Wallace Foundation
wallacefoundation.org



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OKAN is a statewide initiative coordinated by the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy.