



Best Practices for Outreach and Retention of Middle School Youth in After-School Programs

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Introduction

About Us

The University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE), author of the research project that produced this document, is an arm of the University of California that provides educational and technical resources to communities. Its mission is research, extension of knowledge, and public service.

The Project and Purpose

The present project builds on a previous UCCE project called the *Cambodian Urban Youth Program* - funded by the California Communities Program (U.C. Davis) and the Alameda County Environmental Health Department in the first semester of 2001. This program was a community-based pilot project that created an after-school mentoring and tutoring program for Cambodian middle and elementary school youth in Oakland, California. During this pilot project, the organizers encountered difficulties in outreach to middle school families and retention of youth in the program. After two months of efforts, the middle school component was suspended.

UCCE carried out exploratory research to discover, through literature and interviews of individuals with experience in after-school programs, information on best practices for outreach and retention of middle school youth and families in after-school programs. We focused predominantly on programs for minority and immigrant youth by interviewing professionals and youth who belong to minority ethnic and cultural groups and who are involved in after-school programs that also serve predominantly minority populations.

This document, *Best Practices for Recruitment and Retention of Middle-School Youth in After-school Programs*, is the result of our work. We divided this document into a research finding section and a practical "how to" section. The research finding section is intended to present the results of current research around the issue of outreach and retention of middle school youth. In the process, we also discuss the qualities of successful programs. To compliment the research findings and apply the knowledge, we included a practical "how to" section that is the result of our interviews with professionals and youth who made the findings "real" by offering their practical experiences and innovations.

This research project produced another document - *Summary Transcripts of Interviews of Professionals and Youth*. It contains detailed summarized transcripts of interviews of ten professionals working with middle school youth and of eleven middle school youth in diverse types of after-school programs in San Francisco, Oakland, and Berkeley. These interviews were the basis for the "how to" section of this document.

Both documents are intended to be resources for the community, educational institutions, and other public, private, and non-profit organizations in developing their after-school programs, especially those for minority and immigrant youth.

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RESEARCH FINDINGS

There is little research and publications on recruitment and retention in after-school programs with middle-school youth. However, our review of the literature indicated several themes. They are: 1) why children come to after-school programs, 2) patterns of participation, 3) reasons for irregular attendance and dropping out, 4) characteristics of group processes and individual relationships that are important to youth, 5) obstacles to building group processes and individual relationships, and 6) youth participate in a democratic after-school community.

Outreach

- Why do children come to after-school programs:
 - Available activities
 - Mother wants or tells them to
 - Brother or sister goes
 - Mother works
 - Referred by a teacher or other agency (few teachers from neighborhood schools may be aware of the program)
 - Nowhere else to play
- Reasons for irregular attendance and dropping out:
 - Little effort to re-recruit children who disappear for a while
 - Greater emphasis is placed on recruitment of new members than on continuity of participation (within one year and from one year to the next),
- Group processes and individual relationships are important to retain youth:
 - Children seek out a peer group wherever they can and adapt their behavior to the norms of that group.

Retention

- Patterns of participation:
 - Younger children attend more regularly, as children get older, it becomes progressively harder to hold them in the program.
 - A core group will attend consistently every day. Others attend consistently one or two days a week.
 - Some youth participate sporadically, sometimes consistent, disappear for a few months, and then return.

- Reasons for irregular attendance and dropping out:
 - The weather and the season
 - Loss of interest in program activities
 - Unstable or chaotic family arrangements
 - Peer preferences
 - Reluctance to cross gang territory to reach program location
- Obstacles to building group processes and individual relationships:
 - Discontinuity of child's participation (so that it is difficult to know children's families, school situations, and their histories)
 - Staff's lack of training in group dynamics and group facilitation and inadequate support in carrying out their roles (no process review, and no opportunity to discuss children's problems with a social worker or psychologist)
 - Staff's inadequate time to plan activities and few curricular resources to develop interesting activities
 - Non-accepting and aggressive nature of relationships among children
- Group processes and individual relationships are important to retain youth:
 - Each child has his/her own story and special interests and talents to reveal and to be nurtured, and worries and fears to be disclosed and attended to.
 - Strong groups in after-school programs can provide support and structure for exploring identity, building self-esteem, discussing worries and fears, learning to work cooperatively, and learning to trust others.
 - Youth need nurturing and reliable adult relationships especially if they are lacking it elsewhere.
 - Groups can offer clear values and expectations which, if internalized, can be carried to other settings.
- Characteristics of a democratic community:
 - The core belief is that each person has something valuable to contribute and each person is considered equal, unique and worthy of respect.
 - Put-downs, insults, and devaluing actions are discouraged.
 - Members feel they are part of a healthy, respectful community and experience a sense of belonging.
 - Each person strives to develop personal skills, including responsibility for one's actions, perseverance, being fair, cooperating and helping others, and respecting others.
 - Democratic competencies such as active listening, empathy and respectful communications are cultivated through program activities.
 - Diversity is accepted and celebrated: participants value different perspectives and ideas and seek out new and diverse experiences.
 - There is a balance between group goals and group process.
 - There is a focus on the groups' central values, how they are created, maintained and modified, and all members agree to a social contract.
 - Those not belonging to the group are also respected.

Qualities of Successful Programs

Much of the literature on successful after-school programs has focused on the role of programs to “keep kids out of trouble”, i.e., give them a safe place to be and a positive environment that can offset the many negative characteristics youth encounter after school. This vision is being complemented by a new approach that focuses on promoting a more positive and developmental role in after-school programs where all children, including those who are not at risk are also targeted. This approach is outlined below.

- There is a need for a developmental approach using comprehensive strategies that give priority to:
 - *How youth are engaged* is more important than in what activity they are engaged.
 - *How adults interact* with them, i.e., processes, are more important what they do together.
 - The *kind of environment* they are in is safe and inspiring.

- What middle school youth want:
 - Exposure to career opportunities, strategies to go to college, real opportunities to gain job skills and earn money, and parent education for teen parents.
 - An environment where: they can be loud and active, and also can be quiet and have privacy; there were complex real life activities, but not too demanding either after a difficult day at school; and, they can just hang out without structure while they digested the day’s events.
 - Activities that: are safe, affordable, fun, culturally relevant, and teach them to think; build skills and competencies; and, provide opportunities to feel competent.
 - Relationships with adults where: adults spend time with them socializing; they can be trusted, heard and respected instead of blamed, feared and misunderstood; and, adult guidance is present to help them to contribute even though they’re not sure of how.
 - Activities that provide lasting relationships with caring adults and are done in hands-on experiences and through cooperative learning
 - An environment where there are adults who can relate to them in a special way
 - Integration and coordination between school, community-based programs, family and friends
 - To be perceived as: resources, contributors, and partners; voluntary participants; partners in the design, implementation and evaluation of their program.
 - Activities that are important and have value to society, and contribute to the community
 - An environment where they are a part of a healthy and respectful democratic community

- Characteristics of successful programs:
 - Be based on research on early adolescent development, and adapt to the changing needs of the young adolescent.
 - Provide food.
 - Offer a wide array of services.
 - Teach youth life skills such as responding to conflict, managing risk, goal setting, and making responsible decisions.
 - Have a solid structure, but less structure than a normal school day.
 - Assess and evaluate the program.
 - Define and enforce clear rules for membership.
 - Have well-trained and culturally competent staff and volunteers, an adequate number of staff, and a professional and leadership development plan.
 - Help children deal with racial, ethnic, and language differences among their peers.
 - Provide opportunities to work in groups that allow for socializing.
 - Have mentoring and coaching relationships with older youth and adults.
 - Make kids feel valued and recognized.
 - Maintain links among the community, families, religious organizations, and the school system.
 - Include families in program planning, have parental involvement, support competent parenting, and offer services to parents.
 - Be tailored to specific community and neighborhood needs.
 - Be part of a collaborative community effort, and uses community problems as opportunities for youth to design and implement solutions and to serve the community.

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PRACTICAL "HOW TO"

1. How do we spread the word about our program?

"Be out in the community. And, let the kids and the parents do the marketing."

"Word-of-mouth among children and parents can be more effective than a coordinator going all over the place making presentations. Children promoted 'fun' to their friends."



"Maintain a high profile in school. Talk to kids one-on-one or when they're in groups. Get a list of names of kids to target and go talk to all of them."

"I saw a flyer and I went to see for myself. It took me three days to get used to it and I decided I liked it. At first I thought I wouldn't like it. I thought I'd have to be working all the time."

"Flyers don't work. Hire staff to go to schools to hold activities there and talk to kids to find out what they need. You then direct them to go to your program for the activities they need. We hired a female All-American basketball player to run basketball leagues and competitions at the school."

Strategies To Try:

- ❑ Find a way to communicate regularly with the community. Go to meetings of community organizations to get feedback from families. Those most active in the community will come to these meetings and go back and talk to everyone. Also, give presentations to agencies that work with parents and/or kids.
- ❑ Use kids to attract other ones by showing off what they've learned through a demonstration or a performance at school and at community events.

- ❑ Use parents who are most involved to outreach to other parents.
- ❑ Formal meetings: Presentations to the PTA, in classrooms, and in special meetings for targeted populations during school hours.
- ❑ Informal meetings: Have a small parent group meet with kids' parents over coffee when they drop off their kids in the morning. A greeting by the principal will be appreciated.
- ❑ Teachers, counselors, and principals tell kids, parents and other school staff about the program. They also make referrals to the program.
- ❑ Offer home visits to harder-to-reach parents, those who have transportation problems, or have canceled a meeting with you.
- ❑ Send flyers and newsletters to parents, but talk to the kids first in their classrooms so they can tell their parents about what's written on the papers.
- ❑ Create a program t-shirt.
- ❑ Show kids something that interests them to get them in the door. Free field trips with their friends works.
- ❑ Starting in the late spring, do presentations in all the elementary school classrooms that feed into your middle schools. Recruit from elementary after-school programs too.
- ❑ Take the kids to see for themselves. At the beginning of the school year, have the school take kids on a field trip to visit all the resources available to them in their community, including your after-school program. Or, take pictures and make videos about the program so kids can get a real idea of what it is.
- ❑ Advertise on the internet, radio, and t.v. news.
- ❑ Create a staff and parent outreach committee to discuss what has worked before and to support program components that are needing help with outreach to both parents and youth.

Things To Remember:

- All presentations, all contacts with kids and parents should be in the language they understand best. In other words, staff must speak their language.
- Do outreach during school hours. Otherwise, the kids won't come.
- Once there's a regular attendance of 20-30 children per day and the program's perceived to be fun, word-of-mouth takes over, and the kids themselves will start to bring in their friends.

- The program has to build trust with the community. The community needs time to know that it isn't just for kids doing poorly in school or just the "nerds", but that everyone is welcome. This can take many months.
- Kids like to come in groups of friends so they should be told to invite their friends.

2. What makes a program fun?

"Children didn't know about it and didn't know it was fun."

"Fun meant learning new things like photography, theatre, creative art and construction projects, woodworking, choir... Immigrant youth can make paintings of what they remember of their past lives."



"You need attractions such as new computers with DSL connections or ping pong tables."

"Kids enjoy being with each other in small and big groups. They want a chance to share with other kids and make new friends. They want to work on projects together with other kids, not by themselves."

"When you get to college, the way you succeed in college is that you have these social groups that study together. You order pizza, hang out all night studying, go play basketball as a study break, then you come back and study some more. They think that studying has to be this measurable experience. We're trying to change that."

Strategies To Try:

- ❑ Limit tutoring time. Whether homework is completed or not in the allotted hour, kids move on to other activities.
- ❑ Give middle school youth the opportunity to read to elementary children. They love teaching a younger child to read and enjoy the respect they receive.
- ❑ Learning creative arts: Hands-on activities with a demonstrable result makes kids feel good about themselves.
- ❑ Have field trips once a month during the school year and more often during the summer. They are fun and help to build relationships. Favorites are ice-skating, bowling, movies, rock climbing, picnics and barbeques, and amusement parks.
- ❑ Get a budget for lots of games, better field trips, and to give assistance to kids whose families can't afford trips.

Things To Remember:

- Kids come for homework help, the program's good activities, and a chance to make friends.
- Kids want interactive learning, not lectures.
- Kids want some variety so they can choose.

3. What makes a good program?

"We see each kid as having an intrinsic and innate value and we're here to assist them to achieve his/her potential. It's difficult for some people to come into a program to do this. It isn't just making a program work."



"Kids should be helped but not have pressure put on them."

"Consistency is critical. Kids get used to coming, feel stable, and like consistency. It's important to be doing what is planned. Mentors can't come late or kids will feel lost and not know where to go. You can't cancel. Kids need to develop a routine to come."

"Tailor the program to fit the kids you're dealing with. You can offer them all kinds of things, but they may not be interested in it."

"Activities attract kids on the surface. But, the main attraction becomes the staff who are young, creative, can understand them and are bilingual."

"Kids come because other kids come. They want a structured place where they can talk to their friends."

"Whatever population you're working with, find out what they want and what you want to give them. They've got to want to learn it. So, disguise it so it



sounds like it is what they want. To teach public speaking skills, call it and teach it through "Rap" instead of "Public Speaking".

"A good program is organic, always changing. Be fluid and don't be afraid to implement changes. Seek new ideas."

"We told our program directors to come up with operations manuals to make their lives easier. Once they saw how useful it was for training new staff, they were really glad to have them. Now, it's just a matter of revising their manuals when there are changes. We all save time and made our program sustainable."

"We don't have to remind them what not to do. The kid thinks he's being rewarded for the good he's doing. It's a better feeling than getting punished. 'If I act good, I get a 'strawberry buck'. If I do my home work on time and if I'm actively engaged with my mentor, I get rewards.' We do have to get on folks, but we want to reinforce the good behavior."

Strategies To Try:

- ❑ "Consistency" means keeping a new program open even when few kids are coming. Kids and parents need to know where to find you. Develop and maintain a routine so that kids and parents need to know where to find you.
- ❑ Find out what is "needed" in the community through needs surveys to families, talking to teachers, going to meetings of community organizations. To connect with the community, offer what's not available elsewhere in the community.

- ❑ Programs should have a specific focus, and not try to do too many things.
- ❑ Have special activities in the summer such as conflict resolution and leadership. Also, give separate spaces for young men to communicate with adult men, and girls with women.
- ❑ Offer kids nutritious snacks because some haven't had enough to eat yet during the day. Make sure they like what you're offering.
- ❑ Offer more field trips.
- ❑ Make operations manuals so that whatever is developed in a program doesn't depend on one person. The program should be sustainable.
- ❑ Incorporate an evaluation component. Programs get lost by poor process. This means not setting goals and objectives. We want to know what effect we're having on each kid's life.
- ❑ House rules are made clear to everyone. These include rules of respect such as "Respect Yourself, Respect Others, Respect the Environment", and consequences of improper behavior. Avoid negative rules such as "Don't do this. Don't do that."

Things To Remember:

- Keep activities interesting all the time so they don't get bored in the middle of the program.
- When programs have homework tutoring, kids say that getting "help on homework" is a main reason for coming to the program. Along with homework, they also say that they like the "fun activities."
- Evaluations are hard to accept because people think they're being criticized. The approach has to be 'how we can do it better.'
- A good program offers opportunities that are "needed" and that are not offered elsewhere in the community.

4. How do you know what kids want?



"Let the kids make the decisions. They should be allowed to be 'equal partners' by helping in program design and evaluation. Let them be as important as the adults in order to make it meaningful for them."

"After three months, kids were asked to rate planned activities by 'so so,' 'best,' and 'not at all.' There was the problem that they didn't know what some of the activities were, so we organized them into groups and rotated them to each activity just to learn what they were. The assessment was repeated and the results changed.

"We hired someone just to talk to youth to find out what they wanted in their new teen center. This new coordinator did a survey with the kids when they came to a job program orientation. The survey had a large list of activities including the ones we wanted to offer, those the new coordinator knew how to run, and many more. We offered the activities with the highest interest—video production, DJ training and working in the community"

Strategies To Try:

- ❑ Encourage them to do different activities so they can learn what they are. Especially for immigrants new to U.S. culture, they don't understand what's available (e.g. support groups, sexual health and drug prevention workshops).
- ❑ Organize a student leadership team to meet with you once a week so they can ask for what they want. They can be responsible for getting suggestions from all the kids about field trips, advertising in school, coming up with a name for the program, and writing a column in the school newspaper.

Things To Remember:

- Don't always let all activities be completely elective. Kids need to learn firsthand what they are.
- In the first month of a new program, the dropout rate will tell you whether it's what kids expected.
- Kids don't want just special events like an "open mic" day, but projects where they can do something they enjoy (such as basketball) or learn to do something (DJ-ing and video making).
- Staff have to have the initiative to talk to kids to ask them what they want and not just run their programs.

5. What kind of space do middle school kids need?

"All purpose rooms are detrimental. There need to be individual spaces for reading and that provide privacy so kids aren't interrupted by other kids and activities."



"The environment must be safe for them to want to come back. They need a place where they can relax and be themselves."



"The younger kids' programs end at 6pm and the older kids who come to the teen center feel like they have their own place since it's in the early evenings."

"Having a middle school program in a space for elementary kids isn't good. They need their own space, time, activities, field trips, tutors, etc. to make a community feeling."

Strategies To Try:

- ❑ Provide lockers so kids can put down their belongs and run off.
- ❑ Have spaces where kids can be loud and active, but also have privacy when they want it.
- ❑ Give them their own space where neither younger nor older kids are around at all.

Things To Remember:

- A child's feeling of safety comes from the staff who they like and trust.
- Kids don't want to have to wait too long to get on a computer or use games.
- Resources need to be specific to the community of kids being served. They know when the resources are specifically directed toward them.

6. How do we get kids to keep coming?

"Get involved in their lives. Get involved in their events at school. They want to know they're cared about as people."

"Kids will come if they like the tutor. You don't know there's a match until it happens. So, switch 'em around until there's a match!"



"With transport between the school and the center, kids avoid distractions."

"Have an achievement plan with small ongoing incentives and a large year-end one too."

"Keep the excitement going. Have weekly lunchtime shows for the performing arts groups just like sports teams have a game each week."

Strategies To Try:

- ❑ Kids stay when they know their parents are going to pick them up.
- ❑ Consistent monitoring: Talk with child and staff working with child right away before issues get bigger and the child drops out.
- ❑ Keep close contact with parents. Most kids go to their after-school programs because their parents want them to. Talk to them about what their kids are

doing builds respect. Call them weekly to update them on their child's participation.

- ❑ Let them feel a part of what's going on. Let them be creative by putting up the bulletin boards, answering the phone, etc.
- ❑ Select the kids who are a good match for the program through calling, interviewing, and testing them about their commitment level. Screen for kids who'll stay. Kids with stronger relationships with their parents are good candidates.
- ❑ Set up an ongoing reward system where kids get gift certificates to local restaurants (e.g. Mrs. Field's) for attendance and schoolwork, and a big field trip at the end of the year. Tie incentives to attendance or behavior, depending on your goals.
- ❑ Take their opinions into consideration and be flexible. For example, if a child doesn't want to do his/her required hour of homework in the tutoring center, talk to him/her to do it in another setting or work something else out.
- ❑ Kids are lost over breaks and the summer, so have staff send postcards to them and hold activities over breaks.
- ❑ A logo encourages kids' identification with the program.

Things To Remember:

- If kids can come right from school, then there's no problem. Program or parent transportation or money for public transport must be worked out.
- Some kids don't always adapt to the group norms and stay with their outside peer group.
- For special meetings and events, kids need reminders ahead of time and the same day or they'll forget to go.
- Don't say 'no' to them when they need your help with homework, just talking, or anything else. They won't say 'no' to you when you need their cooperation.

7. How do you deal with absences?

"Aside from the core group, other kids come once or twice a week. As a response, *the program allowed for drop-ins. Most activities started from scratch the same day.* Even a theatre production would let new kids join."

"Give kids opportunities and something to work toward. Our high school basketball team has done work to raise funds and have traveled to places where they otherwise wouldn't have an opportunity to go. Give them role models such as this basketball team, so they know that if they're good, stay in the program, they can join this team, and travel and maybe even get a college scholarship eventually ..."

"We don't hire people who are there just to get paid. We don't have open gym. We have structure, objectives and goals for each program. Also, we systematically track and assess how kids are doing."

Strategies To Try:

- ❑ Ask the kids why they're not coming. They're very honest.
- ❑ Hold a mandatory parent orientation once a year.
- ❑ Contact parents by phone when child is absent.
- ❑ Send a form home telling parents their child was absent.

Things To Remember:

- Irregularity of attendance is to be expected. Some kids have many after-school activities. They have obligations at home and elsewhere. Also, parents have difficulty coordinating and transporting kids especially when they have more than one child.
- Some kids just don't want to come regularly.

8. How about the kids who are the most difficult to retain?

"Those who were difficult to retain were usually academically weak, latch-key kids who hung out at school for lack of other activities. The program was the only place for them to come to. So, we let them waltz in and out, even for only fifteen minutes."

"What didn't work was trying to save every kid in the program."

"The more you get to know them, the more they tend to stay. Spend time with them."

"Tell them they can't get kicked out of the program and you're always welcomed back."

"Difficult kids may not be attracted to academic programs. Truant kids won't be on the school site. Find out what appeals to them. Maybe a big brother or big sister relationship."

"Provide an activity for where kid is at. If kid has a problem reading, then we give him one-on-one help in the reading lab. Also, work with parents to tell kids to not drop an activity the child needs. The parent can be your ally if the kid wants to drop. Convince the parents."

"Be fair with the kids. We have a strict disciplinarian, but if you do something wrong, he'll be fair. You have to give positive reinforcement for good behavior. We have a 'strawberry bucks' reward system with a store where they can go redeem their bucks. They get rewards, not punishments."

"Track and assess all kids. Create a system to do this."

"Make kids feel important. 'Do you know what you did wrong? Do you know why you did that wrong? How long have you been coming here? You've been here for a long time now. If I can't count on you, who else can I count on? We're looking to you as a leader. If you run in the hallway, other kids are going to do that too.' Before you know it, that kid's going to be letting other kids know they're not supposed to be running in the hallway. I told his parents that he has an understanding that I look to him to be a leader here. I haven't had any trouble with that kid. Turn it around into a positive experience rather than 'I got yelled at today' that only makes the kid feel worthless."

Strategies To Try:

- ❑ Give them a place to be important. Invite them to the program and give them real responsibilities and a chance to be respected. Build a relationship with them and always welcome them when they do come.
- ❑ Try to give attention to all kids and to reach out to all children, and not just those with the most difficulties. Give special one-on-one attention to kids who tend to stay alone so they don't feel left out.

- ❑ Create a tracking and assessment system. Program directors evaluate kids when they enter the program and every three months on academics, future focus (e.g. do they talk about college and about what they want to do in the future), teenage pregnancy, violence (e.g. have they said they wanted to hurt someone), etc. Assessment is based on observations and talking with parents. If a kid hasn't moved from lowest level to stable in 3-6 months, then the kid and his/her family are referred to counseling.

Things To Remember:

- Communication with parents and school staff is especially important with high risk kids.
- Kids need activities with structures and goals that value youth development. If this is met, there won't be a problem with dropout. Remember that you must have staff who value structure and youth development.
- Kids are looking for love. They may not be having a great experience with the school, but when they come to your program, they need to know they're going to get love. They want someone to tell them, "These are the limits. If you cross them, This is what will happen."

9. How important is staffing?

"Kids come because they like the staff who's working with them. A diverse staff is important. Our staff is far more diverse than the teaching staff at their school."



"Have younger staff in their 20s and have male staff to make it successful for the male kids. However, kids also need mothering and older staff can recognize dangers that younger staff may not."

"Be careful of allowing staff to free flow. Have the curriculum developed so that time is not wasted. Their job description has to be clear."

"Make sure that your staff understands the mission of your agency. Improve their skills to manage people, do outreach, and work with people effectively."

"The mentoring relationship is important, but takes a long time to develop. *Mentors change and kids stay for several years. Curriculum development is more important.*"



"Our older staff who've been with us for over 12 years know the ups and downs. They've helped children in really difficult situations to make progress one step at a time and know they won't save all the kids. *New, young staff are idealistic. They don't know to meet the families and kids where they are, case by case, and see what we have to offer them*

to get where they want to go. *Instead, they want to make every kid and family fit into their program.* Our mission is to assist each child to achieve his or her potential."

"*Train staff to meet kids where they are.* For a child who's reading isn't at grade level, we need to ask the child if anyone has ever read to him. 'How do you feel when you have to read in class? What are you interested in? Let's read up on something you're interested in.' Go and find a book appropriate for that kid's level and read with him. The ultimate objective is getting that kid at grade level, not having him read poetry because the program is poetry."

"*It's challenging to educate staff.* We have great programs, but it's the other things we do in between the programs, like developing relationships with kids that's the most important. Lots of them haven't seen their father in a long time, so having adult males there is a program in itself. All you have to do is say hello to them and ask them how things are going at home. Has an adult male ever hugged that kid? We also need to convince male staff that they have a role in nurturing kids."

Strategies To Try:

- ❑ Let staff be creative, but manage how they're using their time to best care for the children. Staff has to have the same goals as the program goals.
- ❑ Give a core group of paid college students resources, including a budget, to be a team and social group with the mission of recruiting and training volunteer staff on an ongoing basis. Even if there is high turnover among the volunteers, the core group keeps bringing in more.

- ❑ To provide informal education, a staff with organizational skills and background working with children is central. Otherwise, it's just a drop-in center.
- ❑ Staff-child ratio should be limited. Some say eight to ten kids to one staff member works for activities. One tutor for every two or three kids is ideal. A volunteer college student for each tutoring table would be ideal.
- ❑ Staff should live in the community and have a stake in it. Most programs have paid staff with some volunteers who receive at least a symbolic remuneration.
- ❑ Involve parents as staff: Give parents and community members stipends to teach special classes and activities. Let parents manage the program and make their relationship to that or the coordinator's equal by letting them budget and manage the funds through a bank account in their name.
- ❑ Training that addresses staff's needs is important. Offer basic training on child development, discipline, speaking with children, then ask them what they want to learn and bring in experts to talk with them. Also, administration, leadership, and business management skills would help a community organization to expand.

Things To Remember:

- Some staff rotation with some regular staff could work. Not all staff has to be permanent and regular. Some should be paid and others volunteers who receive a symbolic remuneration.
- All staff need to have the same mission and "be on the same page."
- Kids come to get help with their homework. Get enough tutors so they really are getting help. ESL youth especially may not be able to get the help they need at home.
- Staff retention issues are ongoing and need to be managed.
- A good program has staff who want to be there, and are enthusiastic and consistent.
- Have staff model appropriate behavior. Teachers are rude to kids so kids are rude back to them.

10. How can we get parents involved?



"Outreach to parents, including through adults who are active in the community. Parents need to know who you are and where their kids can be found."

"Let the parents manage the program money completely and not just do the budgeting."

"Offer parents leadership opportunities. Their degree of management will depend on their skills, but move toward a real 'stake' rather than a symbolic one."

"The karate teacher greets parents every single time that parents come to pick up their kids to report on how kid is doing, ask parents how they're doing, and what they want us to work on with their kids. We have to build a rapport with both kids and parents."

"We maintain regular contact with parents, but we have one staff member who worked with the younger kids who just wasn't comfortable building up the relationship with their parents, so these parents didn't get prepared early on to work with us like we'd like them to."

"Have your staff go to schools to offer counseling for parents after school when they come to pick up their kids. This way, they don't have to come to your center."

"Offer parent groups for parents to share their issues: discipline, work and childraising, how to advocate for your kids at school (how to get appropriate classes for your kids, etc.), but call it 'how to bust the system', 'how to set limits', and 'child rearing', but don't call it hands-on training."

"Parents develop a relationship with you. Sometimes we try to get them to go see a counselor when they come in with a problem and starting talking with you. Parents will come to the one they trust the most. If counselors have changed too quickly and parents don't know them, they won't go there. Staff should be prepared to talk with parents."

Strategies To Try:

- ❑ Put the money in a bank account in their name.
- ❑ Use parents who are most involved, usually of the higher performing kids, to outreach to other parents.
- ❑ Parents interested in participating put down a small monetary deposit when they sign up as a symbol of their commitment. They get it back when they complete the program.
- ❑ Offer fun incentives for parents too. This can be field trips with or without their children.
- ❑ For events, call parents and get their RSVP. Mail and messages via children don't work well.
- ❑ Hold four to five events each year for parents. Offer them food and entertainment (raffles).
- ❑ Have counselors do home visits for parents who don't respond to phone calls.

Things To Remember:

- Give parents as much information as they can handle. For example, Asian parents who are strongly education oriented want all the information they can get about getting their kids into college.
- Working in the community means dealing with parents' schedules. Working around their schedules must be done given their time constraints. In low income communities, people move around a lot and parents may only be available in the summer.
- Don't be too aggressive. It's important to get to know parents on their level.
- Keep parents informed through introduction and other meetings. It's important to promote working together.
- Family stress and dropout are inevitable.
- A favorite parenting workshop is discipline. Teaching parenting skills helps parents learn to talk to kids instead of yelling at them.

11. How do you work with different cultures and less represented groups?

"All outreach was done in three languages—Spanish, Chinese, English. All written materials were in three languages, and three parents—Latino, Chinese, and African American—were hired to do outreach."



"We have to remember our mission to reach as many children as we can. You have to have a staff that reflects the population that you hope to serve."

"The environment should provide solutions and not be a part of the problem. *Give Laotians and Latinos a place to learn to be together.*"

"I want to know the experiences of other kids who have had to overcome difficulties in adapting to life in the U.S. and how they did so. I want more projects together with other kids."

"Only the right point person will know how to build up trust with a certain ethnic community. When a parent comes in to complain, you need someone to talk to them to find out what they're saying, what they need. It's hard to have someone available for each community due to lack of staffing. Regular staff don't have time to assume this responsibility and may have the attitude that it isn't their job to do outreach. *A person just for outreach to each population is ideal.*

Strategies To Try:

- ❑ Cultural representation and flexibility should be emphasized. People should be made to feel comfortable. Do whatever the community responds to, be it food, 'kickoff' events, etc.
- ❑ Get young staff of the same cultural background as those you're working with. Kids need to see staff they can identify with. If this isn't possible, at least get their input on what is appropriate behavior for working with a community you don't know.
- ❑ Teach kids awareness and appreciation about the other cultures in their group in a way that counters what their outside environments may be like. Encourage being together.

- ❑ Cater to each group. If an environment is set up for boys, more boys will come. If there are no language skills to handle Laotian kids, fewer will come.
- ❑ Staff who speak the child's language makes him/her feel understood and comfortable.
- ❑ Offer special activities and have some staff of the minority group you want to bring to your program. Kids of the minority group(s) may not come because they think the program is just for those of the majority group(s).

Things To Remember:

- Outreach should focus on the underrepresented groups. They are hard to reach due to alienation and not feeling safe in an environment where no one else is like them. Hire the right person who knows how to build up trust with the parents of the community you want to reach. You'll need a different person for each group.
- Increasing diversity has many obstacles. More thought needs to be focused here.
- Kids feel safe and comfortable when there are staff and other kids who are like them. Many kids don't come when there aren't staff and other kids of their own ethnic or cultural group.

12. How do we work with the schools?



"It's all about relationships. The coordinator should be an ally of the school on many fronts. Instead of just making presentations, the coordinator could attend all the activities the principal invites her to."

"The key way to succeed is to become a part of the school culture. The school needs to be supportive. It's a huge resource or a huge barrier."

"Push the program up one level by integrating with the school. Have teachers be more active in your program.

Encourage them to come by to the after-school program. If possible, get them to communicate in advance what homework needs to be done and what their lesson plan is a month in advance."

Strategies To Try:

- ❑ When schools need your expertise or help, be available to them in order to build a good relationship. Trust has to be built with teachers so they let you talk to the kids. To have this trust, the program has to be good.
- ❑ Let the teachers know regularly when their kids aren't coming. Use teacher support to prevent dropouts.

Things To Remember:

- All presentations, all contacts with kids and parents should be in the language they understand best. In other words, staff must speak their language.
- Accountability to the school is important.

13. How do we link the kids and the community?

"Expose kids to their community. Take them out to enjoy it. They can see and meet people who live and work there."

"It's not by staying within the school or the after-school center that they'll learn to understand community."

Strategies To Try:

- ❑ Do community service projects using the service learning model. Kids conduct assessments of community needs, interview people, and look for collaborators (under the leadership of eighth graders and adults).
- ❑ Collaborate with other community organizations so they know what total services kids are getting and there's no overlap.

Things To Remember:

- Middle school kids may not have learned the concept of community yet. Expose them to student government and community activities and give them the support to do what they want.

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