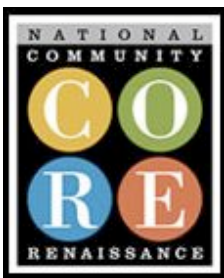


After School and Beyond: A Profile of Hope Through Housing Foundation's Youth Development Program

By Sam Piha, *Temescal Associates*

About Hope Through Housing Foundation



Hope Through Housing Foundation ("Hope") was established in 1998 to further the mission of community revitalization envisioned by its partner organization, National Community Renaissance ("National CORE"), a national nonprofit developer of affordable housing.

Hope was founded on the premise that quality affordable housing is only the first step in transforming the lives of residents living in blighted neighborhoods. The second step is the creation of an organization which can provide much needed social service programs to assist economically disadvantaged families with children and seniors in the communities where they live.

Together, Hope and National CORE provide housing and supportive services to more than 30,000 families and seniors in 73 communities in California, Texas, and Arkansas. National CORE and Hope have created a service model that seeks to change the lives of their residents and offer opportunities for a better future.



About Hope's Afterschool and Beyond Program

Hope's Afterschool and Beyond program was developed to address the academic and social needs of children living in poverty. The goal of the program is to remove obstacles that prevent economically disadvantaged children from being socially and academically successful.

This program offers a safe, stable environment with positive role models during the critical afterschool hours, capturing a demographic group that traditionally is not enrolled in afterschool programs at the school or in the community.

Hope's afterschool program focuses on academic achievement and the development of life skills. This promotes positive feelings about learning and puts in place the components necessary to achieve academic success, such as engagement, motivation, behavior and attendance.

Number of Programs, Number Served and Demographics

As of the 2009-10 school year, the After School and Beyond program served 1,681 youth at 34 sites. The high school program, conducted at Eisenhower Senior High School, served 2,403 older youth. Participants are x% male and x% female. X% of participants are African American, Latino, Caucasian, Asian, and Other.

Program Structure

All of Hope's After School and Beyond Programs are provided at no cost. Many are offered Monday through Friday from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. with extended hours for children in Kindergarten.

A typical day at Hope's afterschool program includes: a healthy snack; activities that support academic success, including homework help, internet access, and academic support; enrichment activities; small group discussions led by mentors to promote life skills, such as dealing with bullies and drug and alcohol awareness; physical activity; and recreation.

Enrichment activities are the cornerstone of Hope's afterschool program. Through evidence-based curriculum and project-based activities, children are exposed to life lessons that empower them to see themselves and others in a more positive light, build and strengthen relevant skills, and expose them to a world outside their community.

Promoting Program Quality

Research has shown that program quality is essential to improving youth outcomes. Hope works to promote program quality by investing in staff development, the use of a common program format, the trained use of research-based program curriculum,



and data-driven improvement using information gleaned from program evaluation.

Staff Development: Hope invests significant resources in professional development for its onsite staff. This is done in two ways: The offering of monthly training sessions and staff retreats, and the provision of onsite coaching. Hope believes this is essential to maximizing the impact of the After School and Beyond Program.

The relationship between Hope's afterschool staff and children enrolled in the program is a crucial element in creating an environment where children can grow and thrive. Through training, staff learn how to effectively support and interact with economically disadvantaged children and families and to make afterschool a time for high quality learning.

Training topics include peer conflict resolution, relationships with youth, and time management & transitions. Many of the training sessions are offered by outside consultants and are attended by up to 60 program staff members.



Staff are also trained on leadership and team dynamics to ensure that staff are connected to Hope's mission, find support in their peers, and take personal responsibility for the success of the program. Training also supports the quality implementation of their common program format, and all curriculum utilized by the program, which is described below.

In addition to training, Hope invests heavily in coaching. Hope employs a full time Program Coach who observes sites weekly and offers onsite coaching to staff with a focus on supporting the leadership of the Site Coordinator.

Common Program Format

Designed to establish consistency and predictability of the program, all After School and Beyond Programs share a common

sequence of daily activity blocks and a common monthly activity calendar.

The sequence of the activity blocks serve to move children from group activities to ones that are focused on the individual, and from activities that are physically active and stimulating, to ones that are calm and focused. Hope staff also pay particular attention to guiding children through different transitions: entering and leaving the program, and moving from the ending of one activity to the beginning of another in an orderly fashion.

Using a monthly activity calendar serves to provide staff with a long-term view of when and how often activities take place. The shared calendar also helps staff look forward to needed preparation and the purchasing of supplies.

Curriculum

The senior staff of Hope believe that having a skilled afterschool staff is not enough to ensure quality. That is why they employ evidence-based curricula, which is described below.

KidzLit: Hope implements KidzLit, a reading enrichment program designed specifically for out-of-school settings by the Developmental Studies Center. This program was developed to increase children’s enjoyment of reading while building literacy skills and promoting core values.

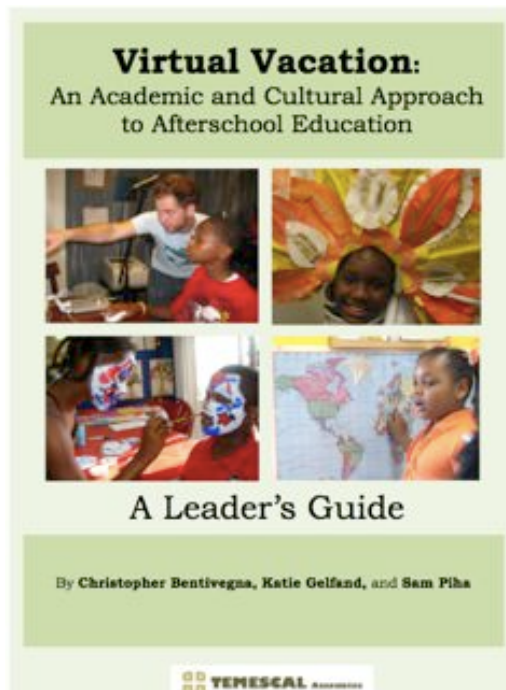


Literacy skills include learning new words, identifying and discussing big ideas related to a story narrative, journal writing, organizing their ideas using role play, drawing, puppetry, drama, music, and pantomiming. Core values include helpfulness, fairness, personal responsibility, perseverance, self-respect, and respect for others. Cognitive thinking skills include brainstorming, visualization, group charts, mind maps, partner readings, and buddy chats.

PeaceBuilders: PeaceBuilders is a nationally acclaimed violence prevention and character building program that creates a peaceful, productive and safe environment for children and staff. This research-based program has been found to reduce aggression, promote language development, and teach pro-social skills.



Virtual Vacation: Virtual Vacation, an unpublished curriculum, is utilized to encourage children to explore and celebrate countries and cultures from around the world. In Virtual Vacations, children “travel” to different locations. Once a country destination is determined, older children and staff research the destination online and begin a sequence of activities that brings the country alive through its history, arts, and tradition.



As an example, Hope had a group of children visit Japan. In one of the activities, they each made kimonos out of paper for their trip and in the process they learned the history of kimonos. As a project-based curriculum, Virtual Vacation incorporates history, math, reading, research, art and culture, and reinforces values and lessons learned in PeaceBuilders and KidzLit.

Evaluation Measures

Hope evaluates the After School and Beyond Program yearly and publishes a Program Evaluation Report annually. The evaluation focuses on program fidelity and quality and youth outcomes.

In the area of program fidelity, Hope examines the implementation of KidzLit and PeaceBuilders. They do this through focus groups with program staff, program observation, and youth surveys.

Program quality is measured through program observations in the fall and spring by trained evaluation staff. They use a number of measurement tools. One tool is SACERS (School Aged Care Environmental Rating Scale) which rates the program quality based on 43 items focused in six areas: space and furnishing; health and safety; activities; interactions; program structure; and staff development. Program quality is also measured using surveys of youth participants and their parents/guardians.

Hope evaluators measure youth outcomes using a variety of tools. They Feelings About School Scale (FAS) to determine academic self-efficacy. On the FAS, children are asked questions that measure how they view themselves in the areas of math, reading, and writing, and their feelings about school, their teachers, and classmates.

With the introduction of the KidzLit curriculum, Hope now utilizes the Motivation to Read Profile.

Program participation data measuring the frequency and duration of attendance to the program is also collected.



Using Evaluation Data for Program Improvement

Hope leaders strongly believe that program evaluation data should influence program training, coaching, and drive program improvement. For example, Hope's evaluation of program fidelity to KidzLit revealed poor implementation. Further examination revealed that the staff did not understand the importance of young people's positive exposure to books and literature.

"Our staff saw the curriculum as too much like a school day activity, and this negative attitude was being transferred to the youth," explained Joelle Greene, Director of Research and Evaluation at Hope. This information resulted in senior staff offering a training on the prevalence of the lack of literacy in low-income households and the effect this has on developing readers. They also discussed the importance of developing a love of reading in young people. This resulted in a greater appreciation of the KidzLit approach and improved the implementation of the curriculum.

To improve program quality, staff are given evaluation reports based on the fall observation using the SACERS tool. This allows the staff from each site to select areas for improvement. Using this information, they develop site-based plans on how to improve in their selected area. They can then utilize the spring observation to seek if their strategies achieved the intended results.

To improve program attendance, staff receive monthly attendance reports on the degree to which they are meeting their program goals. They are asked to create and implement strategies to increase participation. This has resulted in an overall increase in attendance across the sites.

Another example is the use of survey data. Youth and parent surveys revealed that less than half of the families had access to a computer and working internet connection. They also learned that families increasingly had difficulty putting enough food on the table. This led to sites rethinking the availability of technology within their programs and their referral of families to local food banks.



Evaluation Findings

Hope's evaluation reports from 2008-09 and 2009-10 offer a wealth of data on program participants and program outcomes. For example, in 2008-09, the Hope evaluation revealed the following information about those they serve: Fifty-seven percent of parents do not have enough time to help their child with homework and 50% of parents do not know how to help with homework. Eighty-one percent of parents enrolled their children in the Hope After School & Beyond Programs because the programs were located close to home. The remaining parents cited better hours (19%) and no cost (10%).¹

Hope After School & Beyond experienced tremendous growth in the 2009-10 school year.¹ The number of youth served increased by 70% and the number of programs by 21%. The percentage of children attending 100 days or more nearly doubled to 19%. Twenty-five percent of children attended 91% of available program days and an additional 25% attended 69% of available program days.

In regards to program quality, there was a significant overall improvement from fall to spring of school year 2008-09. The average SACERS score increased from 3.32 to 3.76 across all sites. Hope's outcomes evaluation revealed that youth in grades K-6 experienced significant improvement in academic self-efficacy. From fall to spring of 2008-09, academic self-efficacy scores increased an average of .3, indicating that over the course of the year, children became more confident in their knowledge of and ability to learn math, reading, and writing.

The 2009-10 Hope evaluation revealed that 48% of youth participants were at risk or at some risk of reading below the benchmark of proficiency per grade on the Dynamic



Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS).

Of those with consistent attendance and participation in KidzLit activities, motivation to read scores increased significantly for participants who were initially classified as at-risk and not at risk for the DIBELS. (However, there was no change in motivation to read for youth classified as at some risk.)

It should be noted that between 2008 and 2010, Hope experienced tremendous growth, both in terms of numbers of programs they managed, and the number of youth served. They fully expect that these programs will show improvement in quality and outcomes, as they continue to mature and benefit from ongoing staff development and coaching.

About the Author

Since 2007, Sam Piha has served as founder and principal of *Temescal Associates*. Sam began his career in 1974 as an afterschool worker, an experience that led to 13 years of classroom teaching and work as a child and family counselor and school social worker. Between 1989 and 2006, Sam managed school-based youth programs at the regional and national levels. He served as editor and contributing author of several important practice guides and journal articles on afterschool programming. Sam holds a Masters Degree in Social Welfare and is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker.

About Temescal Associates

Temescal Associates is dedicated to building the capacity of leaders and organizations in education and youth development who are serious about improving the lives of young people. Temescal Associates' clients include leaders of youth serving institutions and organizations, school and youth program practitioners, public and private funders, intermediary organizations, and policy makers. For more information, go to: www.temescalassociates.com

About the Funder: Hope Through Housing Foundation

This paper was made possible by funding from the Hope Through Housing Foundation. Hope Through Housing provides services to affordable housing residents that are focused on improving the social and economic climate of neighborhoods vulnerable to the effects of crime, blight, poor school performance and the effects of generations of poverty. Hope contributes to community vitality through three major initiatives: Early Childhood Education, Youth Development (Afterschool Programs), and Senior Wellness. Hope provides services to more than 30,000 families and seniors in 73 communities in California, Texas and Arkansas. For more information, go to: www.hthf.org.

Citations

¹ Greene, J.K. & Yoon, E.U. (2009). Program Evaluation Report: K-12 Grade Programs 2008-09 Program Year. *Hope Through Housing Foundation's After School & Beyond: Growing Strong*. <http://www.hthf.org/pdf/AS&B-ProgramEvaluationReport-Apr2010.pdf>

² Hope Evaluation 2009-10.

Photos

Thanks to the following organizations that provided photos for this article: Hope Through Housing Foundation and National Community Renaissance. Images for PeaceBuilders and KidzLit were taken from their websites.