



SPOTLIGHT FOR JULY 2005:

Promising Practices in After-School Programming for Refugee Youth and Children

"I wasn't sure about it at first, but then I got to meet new kids and make new friends," Matthew said. "My grades weren't so good before, but they are a lot better now...."

".... He's a totally different person," said Cha Toua, Matthew's dad. "Before it was very difficult to discipline him. Now he listens to us. Even at bedtime, there are no arguments."

Matthew has his own perspective on things now: "My parents and I talk more now, about school, about everything, about whether they love me or not. I know they do now." [1]

The above statements are by members of a Hmong refugee family whose son attended the Wilder Foundation's "Hmoob Koom Siab/Hmong Working Together" after-school program in St. Paul, Minnesota. The positive changes expressed by this family demonstrate some of the benefits that high quality after-school programming can have for refugee youth and their families.

This month's Spotlight provides a brief overview of after-school and other Out-of-School Time (OST) programs and examines these in light of the special strengths and needs of refugee families. We identify challenges and recommendations for establishing and running a successful OST program and list resources for further reading. This month's Special Feature column provides examples of promising practices. It highlights two after-school programs serving refugee families: the Wilder Foundation's "[Hmoob Koom Siab/Hmong Working Together](#)" program and the International Rescue Committee's "[Students Plus](#)" program in San Diego, California.

Out-of-School Time (OST) Programs

The OST field - including after-school, summer, and other youth programs - has grown tremendously over the past decade. Such programs are not new; as early as the 1800s, after-school services were provided for immigrant children in settlement houses to assist with assimilation and provide care and supervision while their parents were at work. [2] With the desire for after-school care increasing in recent years due to a number of social and economic changes, a recent review of these services noted that:

Afterschool programs are increasingly viewed as one viable way of bridging the gap between the end of the school day and the time parents get home from work. They have the potential to provide a safe, supervised place for children and youth to participate in constructive activities and form positive relationships with peers and adults. Such programs may also supplement what children and youth learn during the regular school day and expose students to a wide array of enrichment opportunities that promote cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and moral growth and development. [3]

The types of activities offered by Out-of-School Time programs vary considerably as, not surprisingly, do the quality of these services. As the OST field grows, there is increasing emphasis on developing evidence-based practice models and standards of practice. The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation commissioned a committee to identify "...operational conditions that research and practice have found to be essential to sustain high-quality after-school programs."

These essential conditions include:

- Effective partnerships to promote learning and community engagement
- Strong program management including adequate compensation of qualified staff
- Qualified after-school staff and volunteers with regular opportunities for professional development and career advancement
- Enriching learning opportunities that complement school-day learning, utilize project-based learning, and explore new skills and knowledge
- Intentional linkages between school-day and after-school staff including coordinating and maximizing use of resources and facilities
- Appropriate attention to safety, health, and nutrition issues
- Strong family involvement in participants' learning and development
- Adequate and sustainable funding
- Evaluation for continuous improvement and assessing program effectiveness [4]

The [National Afterschool Association \(NAA\)](#) has published organizational and program standards and developed an accreditation system for after-school programs. Other initiatives, like [The After-School Institute](#) in Baltimore, MD, have further developed these standards for their own use into a [manual](#).

Refugee Youth, Children, and Families

Refugee families can benefit from OST programs in the same ways as US-born families, but they also have unique strengths and needs that must be addressed for these programs to be effective. After-school programs can assist refugee families in the following ways:

- **Child Care:** Both parents in refugee families are encouraged to seek employment soon after arrival, and parents often work long hours to make ends meet to provide for their family and reestablish themselves in this new country. In addition, some refugee groups have higher numbers of single parents for whom child care remains a pressing concern (for example, see [BRYCS' report on Liberian refugees](#)). After-school programs can provide at least some supervised child care.
- **Academic Assistance:** Formal education may have been interrupted or not widely available for refugee children due to the effects of war and living in refugee camps. Most refugees attend English as a Second Language (ESL) classes after arrival, and some recent groups of refugees have had relatively low rates of literacy. Extra assistance with school work can tap into the high value most refugees place on education and their strong drive to succeed, and increase their chances of success in school.
- **Positive Youth Development:**
 - Importance of strong relationships with family and community - One of the most critical issues for refugee families is the "acculturation gap" that inevitably develops when children adapt more quickly than their parents to this new culture. This gap can be exacerbated when parents work long hours in order to provide their children with opportunities, and when the usual parent-child role is reversed by, for example, children acting as interpreters for their parents. Children who maintain strong connections to their family and original culture, but also become competent in U.S. culture, [tend to be most successful](#). Programs that encourage and support children's relationships with their parents, and their parents' relationship with the schools, can make a positive difference.
 - Opportunities for connecting with U.S.-born youth and adults in a supportive atmosphere – It can take time for refugee children to feel at ease with other youth at school and, unfortunately, refugee children are sometimes teased or bullied for being different. Programs that foster relationships with other youth and adults can provide refugee children and youth with experiences that support their positive development.

Programs can also provide an opportunity for an important information exchange to occur. They can provide information to the refugee youth on learning and navigating U.S. culture - from accessing school resources to applying to college. Refugee youth can also provide U.S. born participants first-hand information on countries, cultures and international events that they may only read about.

Challenges to Program Implementation and Longevity

There are very real and practical logistical challenges to running a successful out-of-school time program, including the following.

Planning: Many agencies do not plan sufficiently before starting a program. It is important to conduct a needs assessment, build support within the community, and use a [logic model](#) to think through the different program components and strategies.

Staff: Programs may have high staff turnover rates due to dissatisfaction with job status and low potential for career advancement.

Funding: Sources of funding for after-school programs often do not provide sufficient support for staff or for stability over the long term.

Participation: Programs must engage participants, meet their needs and be fun. Older youth, especially, are less likely to continue to attend programs that do not engage them.

Access: Difficulty accessing program services due to location, lack of transportation, or cost also affect participation. Basing programs at schools can increase access and decrease cost, encourage refugee engagement with schools, and strengthen communication between day school personnel and after-school staff. However, refugees may feel more comfortable at a local ethnic community based organization (ECBO). Some programs have resolved this by the ECBO providing the services at the school.

Evaluation: Programs often do not have the in-house expertise to implement an outcome evaluation or the funding to pay for an external evaluation. Evaluation is important for continuous program improvement, measuring success, and securing funding.

Recommendations

Program Planning:

- Conduct a needs and resources assessment. Involve potential participants, their families, and the community in the project from the very beginning as well as throughout all project phases.
- Build partnerships with other groups doing similar work in order to increase resources and coordination and decrease competition and duplication.

Resources:

- [What Is the Need for School-Age Care? Lessons from Two Communities](#)
- [Community Youth Mapping](#)
- [Moving Towards Success: Framework for After-School Programs](#)
- [Making an Impact on Out-of-School Time](#)
- [Learning From Logic Models in Out-of-School Time](#)

Programming:

- Use an evidence-based curriculum that allows for sufficient adaptation to participants' culture:
 - An intervention with a proven track record may be more likely to lead to positive outcomes.
 - Adaptation of parts of the intervention to the participants' culture can lead to more knowledge about what works and with whom.
 - Using documented practices on which there are already data, and continuing to evaluate the practices, continues to advance the field of OST, particularly as it relates to the special needs of refugee youth and their families.
- Focus on family- and community-strengthening approaches, which tend to be especially appropriate for refugee populations.
- Include strategies for strengthening involvement of refugee parents with the schools, and increasing understanding and support of school personnel concerning refugees.
- Review the National Afterschool Association's (NAA) Organizational and Program Standards.

Resources:

- [Finding Fortune in Thirteen Out-of-School Time Programs: A Compendium of Education Programs and Practices](#)

Staffing:

- Hire refugee community members and support their professional development and licensure in the social service, mental health, or legal professions. This practice:
 - Increases agency eligibility for additional funding sources (such as Medicaid and private health insurance plans).
 - Provides the agency with true "culture brokers" better equipped to mediate between the two cultures.
 - Demonstrates the agency's commitment to supporting community members in their professional development, and consequently, the development of the community as a whole.
- Ensure staff are adequately trained and sufficiently compensated.

Resources:

- [Establishing BEST Youth Development Practitioner Apprenticeship Programs for Youth Workers](#)

Funding:

There are a number of potential funding sources available for OST programs. As with all programs, it is important to diversify funding to ensure long-term financial stability.

- Government sources:
 - [Dept of Health & Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement](#)
 - [Department of Education's 21st Century Community Learning Centers](#)
 - [Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention](#)
 - State and local governments
- Private foundations:
 - [Charles Stewart Mott Foundation](#)
 - [George Soros' Open Society Institute](#) established The After-School Corporation which supports programs in New York City and throughout the state
 - Other national and local foundations
- Corporations
- Individual donors

Resources:

- [Afterschool.gov](#) - connects you to federal resources that support children and youth during out-of-school hours, including a database of over 100 federal grant and loan programs.
- [The Finance Project](#) - provides technical assistance resources on financing and sustaining Out-of-School Time and community school initiatives.
- [TASC After-School Tool Box: After-School Funding Sources](#) - provides the youth services community with public and private funding information, including ongoing funding sources, as well as time sensitive RFPs.

Evaluation:

- To minimize cost and maximize expertise, engage researchers or graduate students at a local university to conduct the evaluation as part of their own research.
- Conduct regular process evaluations (progress according to your program plan) and outcome evaluations (changes in participants that result from your intervention). Evaluations are expected by funders, provide information for continuous program improvement, and provide accountability to participants, their families, and the community.
- Use evaluation to identify “promising practices”, or strategies that can be demonstrated to be effective in your after-school program, especially practices that work with refugee youth and families and that can be replicated by others.

Resources:

- [The Out-of-School Time Learning and Development Project, Harvard Family Research Project \(HFRP\)](#) - Works in “partnership with other organizations to add value to the out-of-school time (OST) field by promoting strategic use of information to improve quality, accessibility, and sustainability of OST programs across the nation. Our strategy is tailored to support knowledge development, evaluation, and learning in out-of-school time.”
- [Afterschool.org/Promising Practices in the Afterschool System](#) - “The Promising Practices in Afterschool (or “PPAS”) System is an effort to find and share things that are working in afterschool programs. The PPAS website is for afterschool program directors who want to improve the quality of their programs. All sorts of other people will find it useful, too--people like program staff, volunteers, parents, community members, policymakers, funders, researchers, and anyone else who cares about children and youth.” This is a comprehensive Web site listing resources, activities, research and publications, and legislation updates.

See BRYCS’ [Special Feature column](#) for descriptions of two after-school programs that demonstrate many of these recommendations.

Additional Resources to Learn More

[The National Institute on Out-of-School Time \(NIOST\)](#) - “The National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) believes that out-of-school experiences are essential to the healthy development of children and youth, who then can become effective and capable members of society. Our work bridges the worlds of research and practice. NIOST has compiled a list of state and regional organizations and resources, which can be found on their LINKS page.”

[A Resource Guide to Planning and Operating After-School Programs](#) – “Now in its second edition, this resource guide [by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory] describes readily available and inexpensive resources that support after-school programs. Topics include management, communication, programming, community building and collaboration, and developing connections between K-12 educational and after-school programs.”

[Our Roots, Our Future: Affirming Culture and Language in After School and Youth Programs](#) –

Contains “promising practices along with an exclusive set of practical tools and activities to support program reflection and development. Included are the moving voices of youth and an informative framework speaking to the importance of culture and language in the lives of young people. Find out about diversity trends in the field by reading the results of California Tomorrow’s national survey of after school programs. Learn effective strategies for working with English Language Learners, and expand your capacity to support youth of color and young people of all cultures.”

This month's [featured search](#) in the BRYCS clearinghouse will lead you to the above resources and more related to the topic of out-of-school programs for refugee children and youth.

- 1 Wilder Foundation (2004). “Matthew Her - Bridging Cultures, Bridging Generations.” Annual Report 2004, p. 5. Downloaded on June 28, 2005 from http://www.wilder.org/annual_reports/WilderAnnualReport2004.pdf.
- 2 Hart, K. (2000). “Questions and Answers: An Interview with Michelle Seligson.” The Evaluation Exchange Out-of-School Time issue, Volume 6, #1, Harvard Family Research Project. Downloaded on June 27, 2005, from <http://www.hfrp.org/evaluation/the-evaluation-exchange/issue-archive/out-of-school-time-issue-1/interview-with-michelle-seligson>.
- 3 Lumsden, L. (September 2003). “Afterschool Programs. ERIC Digest.” Eugene, OR: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, p. 2.
- 4 C.S. Mott Foundation Committee on After-School Research and Practice. (2005). Moving Towards Success: Framework for After-School Programs. Washington, DC: Collaborative Communications Group. Downloaded on June 27, 2005 from http://www.publicengagement.com/Framework/images/framework_61505.pdf.