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BRYCS BRIEF

Summer 2011

New insights...from a body of groundbreaking research on seasonal learning...underscores the tremendous untapped potential of the summer months to level the playing field for all of our children.¹

Leveling the Playing Field through Summer Learning Programs

Most refugee-serving agencies recognize the critical importance of summer programming for refugee children and youth. In fact, a quick search of the BRYCS Promising Practices database resulted in over 30 programs with some type of summer programming.² Whether newly-arrived or in this country for several years, most refugee youth will benefit from the additional academic support, orientation to U.S. culture, and the healthy recreation and social opportunities that these programs offer. In addition, many refugee youth are in need of a safe and structured environment in the summer while their parents work, and these programs can provide refugee parents with the peace of mind that their children are well-cared for during the day.

Recent research has shown that high-quality academically-focused summer programs not only help prevent the inevitable loss of school-year learning over the summer months but, most importantly, these programs can improve the chances for long-term academic success, particularly for low-income youth.³ This additional “boost” may be even more relevant for refugee youth, who often arrive in this country with little knowledge of English and with interrupted or limited formal schooling due to their experiences as refugees.

Although there are many types of summer recreational and school programs, “summer learning programs” in this BRIEF refer to programs that are voluntary, are often held at religious or community-based organizations, and combine enrichment, academic, and recreation activities.

Ideal Characteristics of Summer Learning Programs

A recent literature review by Child Trends showed that summer learning programs differed from other out-of-school time programs during the school year mainly due to the more intensive and limited schedule of summer programs (typically 6-8 hours/day, 5 days/week, and 6-8 weeks in duration).⁴ This seemingly minor difference has important implications for program goals, design, and expectations for learning. While the overall goal of summer learning programs is academic improvement, activities include physical exercise, expressive arts, meals, and field trips in

¹ Miller, B. (2007). [The Learning Season: The Untapped Power of Summer to Advance Student Achievement](#), Nellie Mae Educational Foundation.

² Since the [BRYCS Promising Practices database](#) currently contains over 100 program descriptions, this number represents one-third of all programs in a database that includes parenting/family strengthening, child welfare, and school-based programs, in addition to out-of-school youth programming.

³ Terzian, M., Moore, K.A., & Hamilton, K. (2009). [Effective and Promising Summer Learning Programs and Approaches for Economically-Disadvantaged Children and Youth: A White Paper for The Wallace Foundation](#). *Child Trends*.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 26-28.

addition to learning new information and skills. The academic learning that takes place is typically complementary to school curricula rather than repeating information.

Harvard Family Research Program identified the three key elements of successful summer learning programs as (1) *intentionality*—including thoughtful planning, using theories of change and logic models, and process evaluation for continuous feedback and improvement; (2) *linkages and partnerships*—with families, communities, and schools; and (3) *youth engagement*—by emphasizing fun, experiential learning, and varied learning goals.⁵

Child Trends recently built on these elements to develop the following list of principles of effectiveness for out-of-school time programming:⁶

- *Form collaborative partnerships with key stakeholders;*
- *Involve families and communities;*
- *Utilize well-trained, experienced staff;*
- *Offer ongoing staff development;*
- *Plan programs deliberately;*
- *Make programs affordable and accessible;*
- *Promote positive relationships with caring adults;*
- *Provide positive role models;*
- *Reward good behavior;*
- *Teach social cognitive skills, life skills, and character development;*
- *Make learning fun and hands on;*
- *Intervene more intensively with at-risk students; and*
- *Evaluate programs continually to inform design and implementation*

Promising Practices in Summer Programming for Refugee Youth

The following “Promising Practices” principles were drawn from content analysis of the 30 summer program descriptions for refugee youth in the BRYCS database:

1. **Partner with families, resettlement agencies, refugee communities, and schools.** *BRYCS promotes engaging refugee communities and organizations from the beginning when developing programs as a means of empowering communities, ensuring youth and family engagement and increasing program effectiveness. For more information, see BRYCS’ resources on the [refugee resettlement](#) system, [Building Bridges: A Cross-Service Training Guide](#) and [How to Start or Strengthen Collaboration with Schools](#).*
2. **Focus on learning English, cultural orientation, and catching up on U.S. school subjects.** *Contact the new [Promising Practices](#) highlighted on the next page to find out more about the curricula they use.*
3. **Provide diverse opportunities for learning.** *Include expressive arts, sports, and field trips, in addition to academic learning. For more information and resources on refugee youth expression through the arts, visit [BRYCS Youth Arts and Voices](#).*
4. **Ensure access.** *Locate the program in a familiar, safe, and easily accessed venue (such as an ethnic community based agency, resettlement agency, or school) and provide transportation when needed.*
5. **Hire bilingual/bicultural staff.** *These staff can help refugee youth feel at home, increase communication and understanding with refugee youth and families, and provide positive role models for youth.*
6. **Celebrate ethnic heritage.** *Promote youth connection and positive identification with their ethnic background as well as their new U.S. identity.*
7. **Diversify Funding.** *Program financing can be a challenge, especially in today’s economic climate. Current funding sources include local city or county governments, [Refugee School Impact Grant](#) funds, and private foundations. Most programs solicit private donations, donated goods, and volunteers. Be sure to sign up for the [BRYCS monthly newsletter](#) and discussion list to learn about new funding opportunities.*

For more resources on developing programs for refugee youth, see the BRYCS publication, [Growing Up in a New Country: A Toolkit for Positive Youth Development with Refugees and Immigrants](#).

⁵ Wimer, C & Gunther, R (2006). [Summer Success: Challenges and Strategies in Creating Quality, Academically Focused Summer Programs, Issues and Opportunities in Out-of-School Time Evaluation Brief No. 9](#). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.

⁶ Terzian, M., Moore, K.A., & Hamilton, K. (2009). [Effective and Promising Summer Learning Programs and Approaches for Economically-Disadvantaged Children and Youth: A White Paper for The Wallace Foundation](#). *Child Trends*, p. 27.



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Highlighted Summer Programs for Refugee Youth

Listed below are several different approaches to summer programming for refugee youth:

GLOBE Summer Camp, Refugee Development Center (RDC); Lansing, MI

This *educational and social support center* for refugees organizes four weeks of summer school programming for English language learners (ELL), combining intensive English study, social integration and an overnight experience. Three weeks of instruction take place on site at the RDC, and the fourth week is held at an environmental learning center. Students learn to use public transportation and are provided with bus passes for camp. GLOBE is funded jointly by the Lansing School district, RSIG funds from ORR, and the RDC. Read more about the GLOBE program in our [Promising Practice](#) description!

Youth Summer Program, African Community Center; Denver, CO

This *refugee resettlement / ethnic community based organization* provides a blend of summer activities, including a youth soccer league, summer field trips for refugee youth, and a summer reading program in collaboration with the Bennie Goodwin Community Center. Read more about this affiliate of the Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC) in our [Promising Practice](#) description!

Summer Academic Clubs, World Relief—Aurora; Aurora, IL

This *refugee resettlement agency* provides “Academic Clubs” for refugee youth from different age groups (elementary, middle and high school). Each club meets one afternoon a week for six weeks during the summer and engages in English language acquisition along with enrichment activities. The high school age group includes a large group of Bhutanese students and meets weekly for an “All Stars Club” focused on college preparation and campus visits. In addition to private donations, funding for the Academic Clubs is provided by RSIG funds; and funding for the All Stars Club is provided by Federal Office of Refugee Resettlement [Preferred Communities](#) funds.

Youth Summer Day Camp, Wellspring Interfaith Social Services; Fort Wayne, IN

This *community social service agency* runs a large summer camp and over the last three years has been intentionally reaching out to a growing community of refugees from Burma. This year the program will be adding an additional hour of academic instruction, running daily for seven weeks from 8:30 AM – 1:30 PM. The program employs bilingual/bicultural staff; school bus transportation and lunches are provided. Outreach to refugees from Burma is funded by the [St. Joseph Community Health Foundation](#).

See BRYCS [Highlighted Resources: Summer Learning Programs for Refugee Youth](#) for up-to-date resources and research related to this topic.

Additional BRYCS publications on youth development can be found on the [BRYCS Publications page](#), including [Growing Up in a New Country: A Toolkit for Positive Youth Development with Refugees and Immigrants](#).

For technical assistance on developing summer learning programs for refugee youth, [contact BRYCS](#).