# Afterschool Matters

Special **40th** Anniversary Summer Issue

*National Institute on Out-of-School Time*

**AT THE WELLESLEY CENTERS FOR WOMEN**

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Special *40*th Anniversary Summer Issue
*Papers by National Afterschool Matters Fellows*

## WELCOME

We are so excited to present to you our special summer issue recognizing 40 years (1979–2019) of consultation, training, research, and technical assistance as the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) at Wellesley College.

After founding NIOST, Micki Seligson (see page 1) published *School-Age Child Care: An Action Manual* in 1982. Ten more editions of this book were produced through 1993. The book, informed by NIOST's research, lays the groundwork for better understanding nationwide of how vulnerable children are if they are not supervised and how much they need quality school-age care.

NIOST's work has had a monumental influence on OST programs and the field. Our staff have worked with afterschool program providers to help them:
- Measure quality outcomes for all
- Assess the effectiveness of policies and practices
- Benchmark against best practices
- Develop in-house evaluation and measurement skills
- Establish standards for program quality and create staffing credentials
- Share their knowledge and exemplary practices with our increasingly professionalized field

We have empowered our partners—from individual programs to system-wide networks—to provide quality OST experiences for all. We are immensely proud to be a leader in shaping and promoting OST as a distinct professional field with evidence-based quality standards.

This issue of *Afterschool Matters* is particularly special! All of the papers were written by OST professionals who participated in our Afterschool Matters Fellowship over the last five years. We were humbled to work with and guide such thoughtful, committed, and dynamic professionals. We are inspired by their commitment to improving the quality of programs and experiences for all children and youth. We are grateful for the legacy gift the Robert Bowne Foundation provided to support the fellowship and the journal.

The first half of 2020 has seen more change than any six-month period I can remember. This time has re-exposed the inequities of our nation's systems and structures. The relationships we have forged and work we have done over 40 years will help show the way toward our part in building a just and equitable world.

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Director & Senior Research Scientist, NIOST
Managing Editor, *Afterschool Matters*

*Personal essays on pages 18-30 are not included in the peer review process.*

# The Birth of a Field

## An Interview with Michelle Seligson, Founder of NIOST

Michelle (Micki) Seligson has been nationally recognized as a leader in afterschool and in childcare policy and practice. In 1978, she founded the School-Age Childcare Project, which became the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) at Wellesley College.

To commemorate NIOST's 40th anniversary, she sat down with Georgia Hall, director and senior research scientist at NIOST, to talk about how observation of exemplary practices became guidance for an emerging field.

*Georgia:* Tell us about your journey 41 years ago to start the School-Age Childcare Project, now known as NIOST.

*Micki:* My whole involvement in childcare was about my feminism as a mother. I was back at school, and I had children. I knew I needed to get my education finished. Five of us started a children's center in Brookline, Massa-

chusetts, for our little kids. Then we needed afterschool, so I went to the school department to figure that out.

It was perfectly serendipitous that I met Jim Levine, who was writing a book called *Day Care and the Public Schools.* At that point, he was working as a foundation officer. He found me through my work for the 4-C Committee [Community Coordinated Child Care] in Brookline. Some cities had set up these committees in anticipation of federal childcare legislation that Nixon vetoed. Brookline and some other cities used federal money to fund childcare resources and referral for parents for a while.

The 4-C Committee was crucial in developing childcare programs, including extended day programs in the schools. It was real systemic change in attitude, driven by feminism and the needs of working moms. My seven years with the 4-C Committee saw the development of parent-run afterschool programs in every school in Brookline, along with the beginnings of middle school initiatives.

*Georgia:* How did you get from the Brookline position to Wellesley College?

*Micki:* What happened was, *Ladies Home Journal* and *McCall's* published pieces on school-age childcare, with

tips and ideas for parents. In response, there were 2,000 letters from parents. We used those 2,000 letters as the first data to show the deep need. We convinced the Ford Foundation to give us a $10,000 grant, which enabled the start of the School-Age Childcare Project at Wellesley. We became the place to come for information, resources, and technical assistance. Later, we got funding from the Reader's Digest-DeWitt Wallace Foundation for an early version of the MOST (Making the Most of Out-of-School Time) initiative in three cities.

I remember, when I left Brookline, somebody said, "Oh, you won't get anyone's interest in afterschool. Nobody's interested in that." I'm glad I didn't listen to the naysayers.

*Georgia:* NIOST has celebrated its 40th year in service. Your landmark book *School-Age Child Care: An Action Manual* was published in 1982, so it will soon be 40 years old. At the time, you wrote, "This book will help you design, develop, implement, and operate a program for the school-age child." I'm just wondering about the role that you think this action manual has played in the expansion and development of the afterschool program field.

*Micki:* I think it was very innovative, because what we did was, we interviewed leaders of what we called "exemplary programs." Based on our research in the interviews, we developed the book. What was different about this process was that these were grassroots efforts at organizing and providing afterschool programming; these were parents, community groups, women's groups, citizen groups who knew that there had to be something in the afternoons for kids. We deconstructed what they did. We outlined and documented everything told to us, from needs assessment to implementation and everything in between. Nobody had ever written anything like that before about afterschool programs. We quickly sold 10,000 copies.

*Georgia:* That early work in what later became NIOST had policy implications, too.

*Micki::* Yes, we helped to bring about several federal policy initiatives. There was dependent care childcare legislation that included afterschool. The IRS changed its definition of "education" to include childcare. We partnered with Mathematica on a national study funded by the US Department of Education on before- and afterschool programs. This was a huge sea change in the field's development. We published *School-Age Childcare: A Policy Report* as a companion to the practitioner action manual.

*Georgia:* The Afterschool Alliance estimates that 10.2 million children are enrolled in afterschool programs, and that for every child in a program there are two who are waiting to get in. Are you surprised, 40 years later, at the size of both the professional field and the utilization of afterschool programs?

*Micki:* I'm not surprised, and it's thrilling. It's thrilling to know that we helped start something.

*Georgia:* Where did the work in the afterschool program field take you? And what was your sense of the value of the field?

*Micki:* I'm now a Jungian analyst. I did that training because I felt compelled to understand at a deeper level what kids were really experiencing in their lives, and why we are who we are, including adults. It really came out of my work in the afterschool field. I saw the programs as the *only* place some kids had in their lives for connection, for the feeling of being respected. Afterschool program time is this in-between place where all the big stuff happens, where your feelings are coming up, where somebody there takes the time to say, "So what's happening?"

*Georgia:* So, when you think about the early work that you accomplished, in calling attention to the issue of afterschool programming and care, what are the accomplishments that you're most proud of?

*Micki::* I'm proudest of the initiative we took. Our policy report articulated something that hadn't been articulated yet. Everything came out of our own personal experience organizing and managing afterschool programming. We said, "What is it like to have these programs? What are the best ones?" I remember one of our exemplary programs in El Paso, Texas. The afterschool director was so wonderful with the kids. And that was it. Other than that, the program was a closet full of balls—it was in a recreation center; there wasn't a real space. But it was the relationship this leader had with these kids that made us realize what the potential was for quality afterschool programs.

So we took that position going forward: that relationship building is key to healthy and positive development for kids. The afterschool program worker may be the only person in a child's life who sees them, who relates to them and connects to them.

> I remember, when I left Brookline, somebody said, "Oh, you won't get anyone's interest in afterschool. Nobody's interested in that." I'm glad I didn't listen to the naysayers.

# Flexibility and Fidelity in a Drop-in, Open-Door Art Studio Program

**Emily Ustach**

*"Hello, and welcome to New Urban Arts! Let me tell you a little bit about this place. We are an afterschool art studio for high school students. We don't have any attendance requirements, so you can come when you want, stay as long as you want, and return as often as you want. Would you like a tour?"*

That is how each young person is greeted on their first visit to the afterschool arts program where I work. Knowing there are competing demands on young people's time, we immediately remove one barrier to their participation. Open-door, drop-in programming, along with other practices, has allowed us to enroll and retain a large number of high-school-aged youth.

The impact of attending out-of-school time (OST) activities for youth of all ages is widely known and

documented (Afterschool Alliance, 2009). The effects of afterschool programs specifically on high-school-aged youth include improved school attendance and graduation rates (Afterschool Alliance, 2009; O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2016). However, these older participants are harder to attract and keep engaged than younger children, who are a captive audience (Afterschool Alliance, 2009; Deschenes, Little, et al., 2010). High school youth can deal with the competing and compelling demands on their time by voting with their feet.

For over 20 years, New Urban Arts has successfully attracted and retained high school participants in our community-based arts studio in Providence, Rhode Island. Over the course of my two-

**EMILY USTACH** is deputy director at New Urban Arts in Providence, Rhode Island. Having spent the past 19 years exploring the intersection of formal and informal education, she keeps coming back to afterschool spaces. She participated in the National Afterschool Matters Fellowship, sponsored by the National Institute on Out-of-School Time and the National Writing Project, in 2017–2019.

year National Afterschool Matters Fellowship, I dove in to better understand how the open-door nature of New Urban Arts supported young people's participation and how that participation, in turn, supported their development and postsecondary paths. A key finding was that, for an open-door program to feel safe and supportive for young people, the providers and other staff need to be particularly attentive to their own consistency in implementing programming. Fidelity of program offerings, social interactions, and access allows young people to be flexible in how, when, and in what ways they engage, allowing them to practice and stretch their own personal agency. Although my research is situated in the context of an arts studio, I believe some of our practices can be applied to other open-door and drop-in spaces that may have high numbers but struggle with deeper engagement.

## About New Urban Arts

Founded in 1997 by a small group of high school and college students, New Urban Arts is now the largest high school afterschool arts program in Rhode Island. New Urban Arts is an independent nonprofit, not affiliated with any larger institution. Our mission is to build a vital community that empowers young people as artists and leaders to develop a creative practice they can sustain throughout their lives. Programs are free to participants, sustained by a mix of individual, state, federal, and foundation funding. Since 2007, support from the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program has allowed us to significantly invest in our program staff and increase our capacity to meet the demand for afterschool programming.

The long-term goal of our school-year program is that our participants make a permanent place for creativity and imagination in their lives. Our interim goals are that they:
• Develop close, positive relationships with nonparental adult mentors and peers
• Acquire skills and knowledge in the arts
• Begin to develop their unique artistic voice
• Graduate from high school on a path toward postsecondary success

> A key finding was that, for an open-door program to feel safe and supportive for young people, the providers and other staff need to be particularly attentive to their own consistency in implementing programming.

Our participants complete an end-of-year survey each spring. Over the past four years, on average:
• 93 percent of participants reported having built strong and trusting relationships with peers and adults.
• 91.5 percent said they had improved as artists.
• 96 percent said they had developed a way of creating that expresses who they are.
• 84 percent had developed a better idea of what they want to do in the future.
• 98 percent said they are open to trying new things.
• 94.5 percent said they had developed more confidence.
• 94.5 percent said they feel safe and supported. (New Urban Arts, 2018)

During the school year, instruction is offered by part-time staff (resident artist mentors) and volunteers (volunteer artist mentors). All are artists, both emerging and established, who apply for mentoring positions and are chosen by current program participants through a competitive process. Montgomery et al. (2013) found that young people want to learn from experts. That is why we choose artists who are experts in their craft. Once artist mentors are chosen, full-time staff provide yearlong training and support that cover youth development, community building, reflective practice, and conversations to help artist mentors process their experience and prepare for their mentoring sessions. In 2019, we had four full-time program staff, five part-time resident artist mentors, and 12 volunteer artist mentors. Volunteers serve four hours a week from October to May and receive a stipend.

On any given day during program hours (3:00 to 7:00 pm), someone walking into New Urban Arts might see between 20 and 50 participants in the studio. Average attendance for the past three years has hovered around 70 participants per day, but they are not all in the studio at the same time. The open-door nature of the program means that young people come and go depending on when they get out of school and when they need to be home or elsewhere.

On that average day, there might be a group of young people sitting around a table up front working

on a mix of projects such as paintings, illustrations, or sketchbooks, while mentors sit with them or move between them and other participants. There is almost always a group of teens at another table starting up a game of Uno, while two kids sit at the upright piano in the front window pecking out the melody to whatever pop hit is on their minds these days. In the back of the studio, our screen printing mentor is setting up projects in various stages of development with three or four young artists at a time. In the lower level, there is usually a large group playing music together in the recording studio; some are jamming with a mentor, while others are editing recorded music with another mentor. Some participants are at sewing machines or working on hand-sewing projects. In other corners, participants are meeting with our A Life After School coordinator or working on homework, either alone or with a studio study buddy. We have a set of computers with design and music software, so teens are often gathered around the computers working on design projects, listening to music together, or writing papers.

Over the past four years, New Urban Arts has enrolled, on average, 620 young people each year. An average of 20 percent of those young people attended programming for 30 or more days that year (New Urban Arts, 2018). Among our participants, 81 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunch; the percentage is higher for teens who attend at least once a week, at 88 percent (New Urban Arts, 2018).

The biggest impact of having a free open-door, drop-in program is that we are able to reach young people who otherwise would not participate in afterschool programs or arts programs, especially low-income youth of color. Research shows that these young people do not have as many opportunities as more affluent youth to engage in the arts (Montgomery et al., 2013; Rabkin & Hedberg, 2011) and have less access to safe, neutral spaces (Bryant et al., 2013). Initial findings from my action research at New Urban Arts support the idea that programming that is flexible in its attendance and participation requirements, is

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focused in its offerings, and provides a high level of choice in how young people engage can increase the participation of high-school-aged youth in OST programming.

## What Makes High School Programming Successful

High school programs face challenges that elementary and middle school programs don't. Most importantly, high school participants have more agency than younger children in how and when they participate. Furthermore, the roles and responsibilities they assume compete with OST opportunities.

A number of studies have found key attributes of programs that successfully attract and retain older youth. The particular success of New Urban Arts lies in how we combine these characteristics of successful afterschool programming for older youth.

**Programming is based in the community and not in a high school building** (Deschenes, Arbreton, et al., 2010). Programming based in the community rather than in the school has been shown to better attract and retain older youth for a number of reasons. One is that it gives participants opportunities to socialize with community members and peers who don't attend the same school. For young people who feel disconnected from their school, community-based programming allows them to engage in learning on their own terms. As an independent nonprofit organization, New Urban Arts is not housed in a school; we are located within close proximity of three high schools on a major public bus route. Location has been critical for us. We are separate from school but are close enough that young people can easily walk or take public transit.

**Professional experts offer instruction using professional materials and equipment** (Deschenes, Little, et al. 2010; Montgomery et al., 2013). Older youth want to learn from experts who have real-world experience. At New Urban Arts, our core teaching staff are practicing artists. As part of the hiring process, applicants submit samples of their work. During their

interviews, participants ask them questions about their creative practice. Furthermore, participants have access to professional materials and equipment, such as a screen print studio, a black-and-white darkroom, a music recording studio, computers with digital design software, and professional-grade sewing and serger machines.

**The program offers leadership opportunities** (Deschenes, Arbreton, et al. 2010; Holstead et al., 2015; O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2016). Research finds that, for both middle- and high-school-aged youth, opportunities for leadership and voice are key for long-term retention. At New Urban Arts, youth leadership takes many forms. At the most basic level, youth take the lead on their creative projects; mentors don't set projects for all participants to complete. If a young person wants to make something, they take the lead, and the mentors are there to provide guidance and technical support as participants make their vision a reality. Participants who want to take on more leadership can join the Studio Team Advisory Board (STAB, a name created by participants). This youth advisory board, which meets twice a month, is the central group that helps with mentor hiring. STAB members provide guidance to the organization and program staff, help to host events and activities, and play a key role in orienting new participants to the studio.

**Participants have access to postsecondary support** (Deschenes, Arbreton, et al., 2010; Holstead et al., 2015; O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2016). High school students are thinking about their futures. They are drawn to programs that provide resources to support them in gaining skills and knowledge to help them after high school. New Urban Arts employs a full-time postsecondary advisor to support participants with applying to college, putting together a résumé, finding summer experiences and employment opportunities, and assembling an art portfolio.

**The program fosters community** (Deschenes, Arbreton, et al. 2010; O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2016). Developmentally, older youth are looking for spaces with strong feelings of community and belonging. As they learn to navigate new spaces and find themselves with new levels of responsibility, they are looking for places and groups that provide a sense of community

that is different from family and school. They are eager for spaces that are made for them and that are physically and emotionally safe. New Urban Arts focuses on building community among our staff, volunteer artist mentors, and participants. We accomplish this goal through mentor and student orientations, introductory events to help staff and participants get to know each other, and celebratory events such as gallery openings.

## Flexibility and Fidelity

In a 2008 study, Lynda Okeke asked why middle school children dropped out of afterschool programs. She found that adolescents have different needs from elementary-aged children. They need programming that is focused or narrow in its offerings, that is faithful and consistent, and that is flexible in how participants engage (Okeke, 2008).

> Location has been critical for us. We are separate from school but are close enough that young people can easily walk or take public transit.

Over the summer of 2018, I conducted research to understand the impact of New Urban Arts programming and how its structure prepared participants for life after high school. I developed an online survey and sent it to 426 alumni who had graduated from high school in 2015, 2016, and 2017. Of those 426 alums, 25 fully completed the survey. The low response rate limits the ability to generalize the findings. In addition, the alumni who completed the survey self-selected to participate; thus, their outcomes may be different from the outcomes of alumni who choose not to complete the survey.

When asked how New Urban Arts is different from other afterschool programs or activities, one survey respondent said:

> New Urban Arts is different … because it's structured in a way that allows for choice. The loose structure really allows for an environment that adapts to the needs of youth, rather than make them adapt to the space. And having artist mentors serve as beacons of activities that students can choose to interact with is also core. In all, New Urban Arts is an ideal example of how to structure fluidity.

Arguably, there is tension between structure and fluidity, between fidelity and flexibility, but New Urban Arts embraces the challenge of building consistency into program design while maximizing flexibility for

participants. Staff and volunteers are held to high standards related to program structure so that we can give participants an experience that feels relatively unstructured, offering freedom so they can choose how and when to participate. Through monthly trainings for volunteer mentors and weekly staff meetings, our staff and mentors support each other in being as consistent as possible in their interactions with participants. For example, we address participants by name, greeting them individually when they come in and saying goodbye when they leave, each and every day.

To take another example, mentors have to be responsible for setting limits in a drop-in art studio where participants direct their projects. The same participant or group can't be the only ones using a specific material or equipment when other people also want to use it. However, mentors are flexible so that, if no one else is signed up, one young artist can spend the whole day using that material. This rule sounds very simple, but it requires a lot of discipline in an environment that, at first glance, appears amorphous.

Community and relationship building are also critical to maintaining physical and emotional safety in a drop-in studio. Where young people come and go throughout the program day, it is up to the mentors to get to know participants, starting with going out of their way to introduce themselves. As the year progresses and regular participants become familiar with mentors and the studio, they naturally form strong relationships with specific mentors. At this point, the mentors must stay open and accessible to new participants who want to work with them, while at the same time maintaining the relationships they have already built. Mentors and program staff reflect throughout the year on how to balance this dynamic, which can be a new experience for mentors whose background is in the arts and not in youth development or education.

My survey asked alumni how the structure of New Urban Arts had affected their participation. It also asked hypothetical questions about how changing aspects of the drop-in nature of New Urban Arts programming would have affected their participation. Table 1 summarizes the findings.

Respondents had the option to leave comments beside their answers to these questions. More comments were left beside the "less likely to participate" responses than beside the "more likely to participate" responses. Generally, these responses emphasized the point or went into specific detail about the respondent's thinking. For example, respondents left these comments on the question that asked about homework:

> If I were required to do homework before working on an art project I would feel discouraged. Part of what makes New Urban Arts great is the power of choice. I would usually go to New Urban Arts after practice or a club and the last thing I wanted to do was think about stressful commitments weighing down on me. What I felt I needed after a long day of school and practice (and especially before going home), was connecting with my mentors or writing poetry. New Urban Arts really encourages getting what you NEED. Having the choice to do so made all the difference for me.

> No. Just no. I can do homework at home.

Similarly, alumni explained their responses to the proposed requirement to attend for two hours each day for two days a week:

> It's such a hard concept but I was definitely staying there for more than two hours at a time. However, as a high school student I would say being told something is mandated might make me feel an-

## Table 1. Survey Results: How Programming Changes Would Affect Participation

| HYPOTHETICAL PROGRAM CHANGE | More likely to participate | Less likely to participate |
|---|---|---|
| If required to attend 2 hours per day, 2 days per week | 36% | 68% |
| If required to complete an hour of homework | 24% | 76% |
| If required to arrive either at 3 pm or at 5 pm | 16% | 84% |
| If required to stay for a full 2 hours | 8% | 92% |

chored down and not want to attend. Personally, it was such a place that embodied freedom compared to everything else that was rigid in my afterschool life. I knew I could come back to New Urban Arts and just delve right in.

With the many commitments that I had at the time, it would have been difficult to also add fixed blocks of time into my schedule. All of the other programs/activities I participated in took a fixed portion of my time that sometimes contributed to my stress. With New Urban Arts it was the opposite.

Fully 80 percent of survey respondents were involved in other activities after school in addition to New Urban Arts, including sports, school-based clubs (debate team, theater, and so on), religious activities, jobs, and other youth organizations.

An open-ended question asked what made New Urban Arts different from other afterschool activities. Respondents' answers fell into the following categories: community, choice, freedom, acceptance, safety, free (that is, no cost), arts, and leadership. Below are some of the open-ended responses:

> New Urban Arts is different because of its unique environment. The structure is flexible in a way that allows you to drop in and head out at your convenience. New Urban Arts also has tons of workshops and activities to choose from.

> [T]he staff encourage growth and development as an individual. It was not just task based, but rather the environment itself served as an expression of freedom—which was among the most liberating after school activity that I could possibly imagine.

> You are free to enter and leave as you please, the staff actively works to make students feel appreciated and welcomed, and students are able to engage in activities that they are genuinely interested in without feeling forced to do anything they don't want to do.

First, our policy on attendance is that we don't have one. Ironically, this means participants attend at high levels; some attend every day, and some drop by a couple of times per week or per month.

## Implications for the Field

These responses say a lot about how New Urban Arts attracts older youth. First, our policy on attendance is that we don't have one. Ironically, this means participants attend at high levels; some attend every day, and some drop by a couple of times per week or per month. Adopting an open-door, drop-in model like ours may scare program providers and funders who are looking to engage a specific number of young people for a specific number of days. Many afterschool funders want to see attendance metrics; they often tie attendance requirements to funding. Of the programs Deschenes and colleagues studied for their report on engaging older youth, 92 percent had attendance requirements, "many of which are tied to a funding source, although only 22 percent [of programs] indicated that they enforce these requirements" (Deschenes, Arbreton, et al., 2010, p. 18).

However, in that same report, Deschenes and colleagues note that "commitment may matter more than hours," especially for high school youth. "Many providers reported that daily attendance at a youth program is often not realistic for teenagers—that high school students would never come to a program four days a week and that it is developmentally 'off' to expect older youth to attend a program every day" (Deschenes, Arbreton, et al., 2010, p. 18).

Early on in New Urban Arts' development as an organization, we created our own attendance tracking system. Participants sign in on a sheet of paper when they first arrive, and staff input the sign-in sheets into a custom module, built into our Salesforce database. This process gives us an accurate account not only of how many young people are attending on any given day, but also the frequency with which they are returning; it also allows us to cross-reference attendance data with demographics. "Off-the-shelf" participant databases and tracking software for afterschool programs are not set up for drop-in programming: They require participants to be "enrolled" in a "class," and they process absentee rates rather than frequency of return. New Urban Arts made a large investment to build our own database system so we could track and analyze participation and attendance. Other programs may

need to make similar choices in order to implement drop-in programming.

Once participants show up, we retain them by using documented best practices for working with youth of all ages, but especially older youth. We have a safe, consistent community of professional artists, offer professional-level materials for young artists to work with, make leadership opportunities available for those who so choose, and provide postsecondary support if they want it. All of these practices give participants flexibility in how they engage in our program and maintain implementation fidelity through the efforts of well-trained artists and staff.

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# Bringing Afterschool Home
## OST Programming in Affordable Housing Communities

**Marisela A. Montoya**

When the bell rings at the end of the school day, many afterschool participants head to the cafeteria, gym, or portable building where their programs take place. Some hop on buses to attend programs at a local community or recreation center a few blocks away. However, thousands of students across the country go home to their afterschool program.

That's because their program is located in the apartment complex or housing community where they live. Afterschool programs in housing communities are much like school- or community-based programs. They offer academic assistance such as homework help and reading intervention, along with free healthy snacks or meals, enrichment programs, and fitness activities—just as any other afterschool program might. The main difference is that these programs are offered to participants where they live by the affordable housing organizations that manage their housing complexes.

The primary work of affordable housing organizations is to develop and manage housing for economically disadvantaged people who are underserved by the private market. In addition to housing, many offer other on-site services to enrich the lives of their residents. This model, termed "housing plus services," may include asset-building programs such as financial literacy classes, homebuyer education programs, income tax preparation assistance, and personal financial coaching. Health and wellness programming ranges from exercise groups to cooking classes to food pantries. The organizations work to build community by developing resident leaders and

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resident-led committees. Additionally, many provide educational opportunities: early childhood programs; college preparation for nontraditional students; and adult education programs such as English as a second language, digital literacy, and high school equivalency preparation. Out-of-school time (OST) programs are often part of this mix of support. Offering afterschool programming in the communities where families live helps to overcome some of the barriers that can keep low-income children from participating, such as transportation and scheduling issues.

I am the director of education for the nonprofit affordable housing organization Foundation Communities in Austin, Texas. As part of my National Afterschool Matters Fellowship, I conducted research on affordable housing organizations, including my own, that provide OST programs. I aimed to identify similarities and differences between these programs and other OST programs, the benefits they offer residents, and the challenges they encounter.

## Methods

To learn what housing organizations are doing in OST education, in May 2018 I surveyed youth program providers from NeighborWorks America, a national network of 245 nonprofit affordable housing organizations. To help me determine whether the programs were run by the housing organizations themselves or by a partner, the survey asked about how the OST programs are managed. It included questions about the programs' size, focus (such as academic, recreational, or other), staffing, and funding; it also asked whether the programs were collecting student or other outcomes data. Program directors from 19 nonprofit housing organizations completed the survey.

Of those 19, I selected three organizations that managed their OST programs themselves, rather than relying on an outside partner: Blackstone River Valley in Woonsocket, Rhode Island; People's Self-Help Housing along the central coast of California; and my organization, Foundation Communities in Austin, Texas. I chose these organizations for their varied locations and for the similarities that emerged in their survey responses. All three emphasize academics as the focus of their afterschool and summer programs. All three have paid staff dedicated to their youth programs, a factor that enabled each organization to have a staff-to-student ratio of 1:15 or better. All three have varied funding streams, though their funding

structures are different. All three also collect data on their students such as grades, program and school attendance, reading scores, and reading levels; each had worked with the local school to secure data-sharing agreements. Furthermore, all three are long-standing affordable housing organizations with 20-plus years of experience. All not only offer OST programs for children in grades K through 5 but also provide other services to residents, both youth and adult.

In addition to tapping my own experience as director of education of Foundation Communities, I interviewed Margaux Morisseau, director of community building and engagement at Blackstone, and Alejandra Mahoney, director of education for People's Self-Help, in June 2018. All three of us had, at the time of the interview, at least 12 years of experience as OST directors for our affordable housing organizations.

## Context

Like affordable housing organizations across the country, the three I studied strive to meet needs of working families in their regions. Most of their housing communities are multifamily apartment complexes that offer affordable units for families with children as well as for senior adults, veterans, and single adults transitioning out of homelessness. All three serve diverse communities; large proportions of their OST program participants are English language learners. The services these organizations provide, including OST programs, help their residents deal with the many barriers to their success.

Blackstone provides both rental housing and opportunities for home ownership in three locations. Its 432 rental units house approximately 1,000 people. According to Morisseau, most residents are immigrants from West Africa, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, or Southeast Asia.

People's Self-Help provides 52 affordable housing communities for almost 5,500 individuals. Mahoney told me that the population is predominantly Latinx, including working poor families, single parents, elderly people on a fixed income, veterans, and persons with disabilities, including mental illness. Many formerly experienced homelessness.

Foundation Communities has 23 communities, housing over 7,000 families. Our population is a mix of Latinx, African American, and white people, with an increasing number of people from the Middle East. We provide special programming for families who are transitioning from homelessness.

## Affordable Housing and Education

One thing I wanted to learn from this research is the impact of affordable housing on education and student achievement in general. Housing is a basic human need. The research shows that access to affordable, quality housing improves families' economic stability, employment, health, and educational achievement (Cunningham & McDonald, 2012). Affordable housing provides stability that can help prevent frequent moves and therefore lessen disruption in school attendance and learning (Brennan, 2011). Hypermobility, or frequent moves, leads to a decrease in student achievement, particularly when children have to change schools because of a residential move (Brennan, 2011). Lessening frequent moves for families—in other words, providing stable housing—seems likely to help students with challenges at school.

The affordable housing providers I studied pair this housing stability with the support of a quality OST program to add to student success. Blackstone, People's Self-Help, and Foundation Communities all started afterschool programs when residents expressed a need for a safe place for their children while parents were working. Originally, these organizations provided drop-in programs that offered constructive activities. The goal was to keep children engaged after school in a supervised environment, deterring them from unsafe activities. Later, all three organizations provided more intentional OST programming to support young residents academically. All three have dedicated learning spaces, which are either stand-alone learning centers or converted apartments.

Morisseau said that Blackstone "saw the youth programs as a way to build relationships between the families and property management and staff, help working parents, and keep maintenance costs down by keeping youth busy and supervised." Fifteen years ago, Blackstone decided to formalize the program by offering academic-based OST programming. Morisseau described Blackstone's OST site as a "walk-to center" in the middle of the organization's housing communities.

People's Self-Help began its afterschool programs 16 years ago after parents in the community expressed a need for help with their children's homework. In her interview, Mahoney said that the founding executive director "saw the importance of academic achievement as part of an effort to stop generational poverty." Today, People's Self-Help has 11 designated learning centers serving 170 children.

Similarly, Foundation Communities began its afterschool program at one location over 20 years ago as a drop-in program that provided a safe space with some basic homework help and arts and crafts activities. The program has evolved to provide more academic support and structured activities. As the organization continues to build new housing, it has committed to including a learning center and afterschool programming in each community. Its 14 learning centers serve 600 elementary-aged participants, with another 300 children in pre-K and in middle and high school programs.

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## OST Program Offerings

Studies have demonstrated that afterschool programs require a number of components in order to have an impact. These include "a safe environment, academically enriching activities, mentors who care about [participants] and who they can look up to, healthy snacks and meals, and opportunities for physical activity" (Afterschool Alliance, 2016, p. 4). To meet these needs, the three housing organizations' programs have evolved to offer academic assistance for young people and support for families. All three offer homework assistance, skill-building academic activities during the summer, a reading support program, health and fitness programming, and a varied menu of enrichment activities including arts, music, cooking, technology, and other interests. These programs have emerged from the commitment of the housing organization leaders to prioritize the academic achievement of youth residents. Success factors include support from varied funding sources, the dedication of program directors and staff, and partnerships with local agencies and school districts. As Morisseau said of Blackstone, "We have evolved over time, strengthening our programs and diversifying our funding."

Blackstone's OST programming annually serves

100 young people, kindergarten through college age, in its three housing communities. A variety of classes are offered by paid program staff, some of whom are certified teachers, as well as by instructors such as a chef, musicians, a philosopher, and artists. The program focuses on academic support and enrichment to create "college-ready communities," according to Morisseau. "Blackstone River is dedicated to supporting youth as they work towards higher education and supporting parents to ensure their children are in high-quality programs while they are at work, sometimes working two or three jobs." Blackstone partners with Head Start to offer programming for early learners. Children in grades K through 5 attend the Art Center, "a highly rated certified childcare center," according to Morisseau. Older students have the C3 Center, "a specially designed community learning center that has served as a national model for sustainable youth programming." Both centers stay open year-round, offering full-day programming during summer and other vacation times. Blackstone also offers a college club for young adults.

People's Self-Help OST programs for elementary-aged children focus on literacy and math, Mahoney said, using web-based curricula to support learning. The programs, which are open five days a week, also provide homework help, outdoor recreational activities, and enrichment. "Our programs develop differentiated curriculum," Mahoney said, "including social-emotional learning." A key component of the programs is support to parents "as a liaison between home and school." For example, OST educators attend parent-teacher conferences to help with translations and with any requests parents have for the school. For older students, grades 7 through 12 and beyond, People's Self-Help offers a college club that provides college counseling, assistance with financial aid and admissions, test preparation, and other supports. Mahoney emphasized that the OST program continues to work with participants who move out of the housing community, if they want the assistance.

OST programs for children in grades K through 5 at Foundation Communities include academic assistance,

> Success factors include support from varied funding sources, the dedication of program directors and staff, and partnerships with local agencies and school districts.

enrichment activities, reading support, and physical fitness programming. We also created curricula for our elementary-aged children that focus on the environment, sustainability, and healthy choices. For pre-K children, we partner with the local school district to provide programs at two of our communities. Our programming for young people in middle and high school provides academic support and college and career exploration. Free Minds, a humanities course provided in partnership with local colleges, gives older students the opportunity to earn college credit.

All three organizations have been involved in efforts to standardize the quality of youth programs in affordable housing communities. Partnership for Children and Youth has led one effort, called HousED, to establish standards for quality expanded learning programs for youth in public and affordable housing communities. The initiative includes assessing quality and providing professional development on quality standards for program staff (Partnership for Children and Youth, n.d.). HousED is supporting the work of OST programs in the NeighborWorks network by providing site observations, feedback, assessment tools, and training.

In addition, all three organizations I studied are part of a cohort of housing providers called H-PASS (Housing as a Platform for Academic Success) who are using a common online reading platform, supported by the NeighborWorks network. The goal is to ensure that all participants are reading on grade level by third grade. The broader idea is to see how housing-based afterschool activities can be a platform for academic success. These efforts around standardization and reading support show how affordable housing organizations are working to provide quality OST programs that have positive effects on young residents' academic performance.

## Benefits of OST Programming in Affordable Housing Communities

Bringing afterschool home to the affordable housing communities where low-income families live has some clear advantages for participants, families, the programs, and the housing communities.

### Accessibility

All OST programs and other services in the affordable housing communities are conveniently located. Accessibility is often a barrier to OST participation, particularly for young people in low-income areas. The Afterschool Alliance (2016) found that "More than 2 out of 3 parents living in communities of concentrated poverty (67 percent) report that finding an enriching environment for their child in the after school hours was a challenge, compared to 46 percent of parents living outside of these areas" (p. 7). OST programs in affordable housing communities help to fulfill this need.

School-based afterschool programs are convenient, as students can simply stay to participate after school dismisses. However, the schedules of school-based programs do not always align with families' work schedules, and some do not provide transportation home. The programs in housing communities easily resolve the transportation problem: Participants either ride the school bus home, where they are delivered to their OST programs, or they walk home from school. Foundation Communities, for example, provides a supervised walk from school to the OST program. When programs dismiss at 6 p.m., youth can walk back to their apartments, or family members can easily pick them up.

### Affordability

OST programs and childcare often are not affordable for low-income families. According to the Afterschool Alliance (2016), "More than 6 in 10 parents living in communities of concentrated poverty (61 percent) agree that economic conditions have made it difficult for them to afford placing their child in an afterschool program" (p. 8).

The three housing organizations in my study address this issue by offering their OST programs free of charge to their families. A unique source of funding for these organizations is rental revenue. All three of the affordable housing organizations I studied use rental income to partially support their programs. Including

> A unique source of funding for these organizations is rental revenue. All three of the affordable housing organizations I studied use rental income to partially support their programs. Including this income in their diversified funding structures enhances the sustainability of these organizations' OST and other programs.

this income in their diversified funding structures enhances the sustainability of these organizations' OST and other programs.

The OST programs at Blackstone are fee-based. However, all parents qualify for state childcare vouchers that cover the program fees. Morisseau told me that 75 percent of the funding for Blackstone's OST programs comes from the state. Another 20 percent is provided by private foundations; the final 5 percent is rental income. Morisseau said that this funding structure "ensures that we can sustain our youth programs over time."

People's Self-Help also uses a combination of funding sources to provide OST programming at no charge to residents, according to Mahoney: half from grants, about 20 percent from rental revenue, 20 percent from other revenue, and 10 percent from private donations.

At Foundation Communities, our free OST programming is supported by a diverse funding base. Approximately 8 percent of our funding comes from the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers program. About 15 percent is city and county funding, 25 percent from private foundations, and 15 percent from other grants. The rest comes from individual donations and rental revenue.

### Consistent Attendance

Regular participation in afterschool programs "has been shown to help students improve their work habits and demonstrate higher levels of persistence" (Afterschool Alliance, 2016, p. 4). Consistent attendance thus "helps to close the achievement gap that exists between children from low-income families and their more affluent peers" (Afterschool Alliance, 2016, p. 4). A study published by the Center for Housing Policy notes that "Residential-based afterschool programs have a number of potential advantages over school-based programs" (Brennan, 2011, p. 4), including eliminating the need for transportation, providing a safe space in high-crime neighborhoods, and giving families a convenient OST option in their own home communities (Brennan, 2011).

During my 18 years at Foundation Communities, I have observed that young people's attendance in our OST programs seems to be more regular than at the school-based programs where I have worked. In school-based afterschool programs, I often struggled to enroll enough students. At Foundation, many parents are eager to enroll their children. In fact, the property management staff told me that our free afterschool program was definitely a "selling point" when leasing to new residents. Last year, about 60 percent of our 600 elementary-aged participants attended the programs consistently, at least three days a week. One reason is trust: Participants live in the community where their afterschool program is located, often for several years. Accessibility is another reason that participants show consistent attendance.

### Retention

Participant retention may also be of less concern for housing-based OST programs than for many others. How long young people participate may correlate with how long their families live in the community— and many families live in affordable housing communities for several years. I observe that Foundation Communities OST participants tend to stick around longer than students in the school-based programs where I used to work. Because we provide a pipeline of educational services for young people from early childhood through college, we often see children grow up in the program.

Similarly, Morisseau told me that most participants in Blackstone's OST programs "stay all of the way through." She said that, according to census data, residents stay in Blackstone communities twice as long as in other rental communities in the area. Blackstone staff believe that on-site services, including OST programs, are part of the reason for this success.

When I talked with her, Alejandra Mahoney of People's Self Help was tracking a group of students who began in the organization's youth programs in kindergarten. The participants in this "cohort," as she proudly calls them, have now graduated from high school; a large majority are currently enrolled in or

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have completed college. Some have returned to work in the youth programs back home, where younger participants value them as role models. Mahoney says, "Because of the stability of our residents, we can assist and track them until they graduate from college." The success of these young people in graduating from high school and then from college stems in part from the support offered to both parents and children by their housing communities. The OST programs have provided a foundation for academic success and have developed a culture of educational attainment. Mahoney said, "The expectation is set, and the supports in these communities are there for them to achieve it."

### Family and Community Engagement

Family engagement is a crucial component of student success. All three of the youth program providers in my study emphasized that program staff have regular contact with parents because the programs are in the communities where the parents live. All believe that their programs help bridge the gap between school and home by supporting parents to become more involved in their children's education.

Alejandra Mahoney told me that parents are very involved in the OST program at People's Self-Help. She said that the staff are invested in the families and therefore have an edge over school staff in communicating with parents. "We know [the families'] traditions; we know their community." By contrast, she said, her friends who are teachers say that they are "lucky if they know the parents."

At Foundation Communities, a staff family engagement specialist provides resources and tools for parents, serves as liaison between families and the school, and sponsors monthly family nights in which parents and children can learn together. The goal is to make our learning centers feel family-friendly and inviting to parents.

### Community Benefits

The programming these affordable housing organizations provide is beneficial to more than just the residents. One example is the fact that some

housing organizations offer OST programming to youth outside the housing community, when space and staffing allow. In Foundation Communities programs, about 70 percent of participants are residents, and about 30 percent live in surrounding neighborhoods. Most attend the same schools as our residents and, like them, need academic support and a safe place to go after school. Extending the program to children outside the housing community serves families in nearby neighborhoods and enables us to strengthen relationships with the local schools.

## Overcoming Challenges

Affordable housing organizations have an edge over other OST providers in addressing some of the barriers to participation that low-income families face. Still, they face common challenges, including funding, attendance, staffing, and family engagement. In response, they have found ways to combat these challenges, many of which are unique to housing-based providers.

As their OST programs grow and expand, housing organizations, like OST providers everywhere, need to fund their programs in sustainable ways. Funding for quality programs for middle and high school participants is a particular challenge. The OST providers I interviewed have found strategic ways to ensure sustainability by diversifying funding sources, including, in the case of Blackstone, use of state childcare vouchers. Housing organizations also have a source of funding that is not available to other OST providers: rental revenue from the housing itself.

Though housing-based programs have clear advantages in connecting with youth and families, enrollment and attendance can still be issues. Some parents simply may not be interested, particularly if an adult is home after school and someone can help the child with homework. Another factor is the emergence of charter schools, which often have a longer school day than neighborhood schools. At Foundation Communities, our afterschool programs are almost over by the time some charter school students return home. Though we would like to enroll every young

> Affordable housing organizations have an edge over other OST providers in addressing some of the barriers to participation that low-income families face. Still, they face common challenges, including funding, attendance, staffing, and family engagement.

resident, we have set a goal to enroll 75 percent of resident youth in OST programs.

The three program directors in my study agreed that competitive pay for frontline staff and staff retention are common issues, as they are for many youth program providers across the country. To attract and retain staff, the program directors look for opportunities to promote part-time frontline staff to full-time positions in order to provide consistency for participants and to retain quality staff. Another staff retention strategy, one that is unique to housing organizations, is the ability to provide staff with housing. Blackstone River Valley, according to Margaux Morisseau, has set aside six apartments for OST educators. In exchange for at least 16 hours per week at the afterschool center, instructional staff can live on-site at an affordable rate. At Foundation Communities, staff can live in the affordable housing community with a rent discount after six months of employment. Such housing opportunities are helpful for nonprofit staff, many of whom are attending college.

Despite the advantages of being physically close to the families, parent engagement is still challenging for housing-based OST programs. Most Foundation Communities learning centers have a core group of parents who participate consistently, but we would like to get more participation from more families. One strategy we use is offering varied opportunities for parents to get involved. In addition to attending our family events, they can help at one of our learning centers or take part in fitness or adult education programs for themselves. We highlight these opportunities so that parents feel welcomed and excited to participate with their children.

## Stability, Relationships, and a Holistic Approach

The benefits of providing OST programs in affordable housing communities are clear. The housing itself provides much-needed stability for families. Reducing the number of moves a family must make prevents students from losing valuable time in school.

Furthermore, being located right in the families' home communities makes the OST programs accessible to resident youth. That accessibility, paired with housing stability and the organizations' ability to offer free programs, means that young people often participate for many years in the OST programs. Long-standing relationships with caring adults have an impact on participants' academic success and life choices. At all three organizations in my study, some long-term participants who went on to college have returned to work in the program, serving as role models for younger children. Another factor in the programs' success is that the housing organizations take a holistic approach by offering programs and services for the entire family, from early childhood programs to classes for adult learners and health and wellness programs for whole families.

All three of the program directors in my study have had long careers with our affordable housing organizations. We all are still passionate about this work. We find it rewarding because we feel we are making an impact on the young people we serve, their families, and the housing communities. Alejandra Mahoney of People's Self-Help summed it up when she said that bringing afterschool home "is the most effective way to support students and families with flexibility, intention, and integrity. I feel that we have been able to make a change using direction from our communities. And that is why I love my work."

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# Reinventing ADHD in Out-of-School Time

**Devan Blackwell**

Attention issues made it difficult for Matthew, a fifth grader, to sit down and focus for long periods of time. He was easily distracted and often got into trouble during the school day for being disruptive.

I nicknamed him Matty Go-Go when he was in my school classroom because he was always on the go. If you spent any time observing Matthew, you would likely find yourself exhausted. His internal motor kept him in a constant state of motion. His chair was often empty because he was busy making frequent trips to the pencil sharpener (because somehow the point just kept breaking), to the hook on the wall where his backpack hung (because something he desperately needed was in there amidst the clutter), and to my desk to share the rapid flow of thoughts, ideas, and questions that came into his mind (because he just *had* to). If you are an out-of-school time (OST) practitioner, I'm sure you know a kid, or possibly many kids, like Matty Go-Go.

Well, I was that kid.

Unlike Matthew, I was not diagnosed with attention-deficit / hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) until I was an adult. But as far back as my memories go, I always felt that there was something *different* about the way my brain worked. I felt driven by an internal motor that sometimes accelerated beyond my control. Though I did not receive a formal diagnosis until I was in my 40s, I could present a list of struggles that began in elementary school and persisted through my adult life and career. These struggles, I would learn, were connected to my brain's ADHD wiring.

ADHD is typically diagnosed among children in grade school. Children like Matthew who have ADHD typically present with restlessness and with difficulty

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in paying attention and controlling their impulses. Because I had been that kid, I knew why Matthew struggled during the school day. I also knew that children like him need an environment that is designed to accommodate all that go-go energy.

When I introduced an urban landscape photography project to students during afterschool time, I encouraged Matthew to participate. This project offered opportunities for physical movement through outdoor discovery walks. While working with him and other students who I suspected had similar wiring, I emphasized the importance of looking and observing as we travelled an urban landscape capturing photographs of all that we saw. "Don't move so fast that you miss something amazing," I would remind the student photographers.

Over time, I added mindfulness components to this learning experience. Through activities that encouraged participants to slow down and stop for breath work, I demonstrated how they could learn to manage their internal motors. In the end, Matty Go-Go slowed down enough to skillfully observe his surroundings. He mastered the art of photography, capturing still images that were good enough to become part of an installation at a local museum.

Outdoor photography and the freedom to meander provided a space that fit. Finding such a space was essential for Matthew.

## Journey into Technicolor

In those days, when I was a novice teacher, I found myself in a space that did not fit.

I taught fifth grade in an inner-city school. Even though I enjoyed working with the kids, I struggled every day to keep up with the ever-growing administrative demands of the classroom. Who knew there would be so many? Long after the school day ended—and often into the weekend—I was buried under piles of student IEPs, SGOs, and other mentally exhausting acronyms that were supposed to guide every single aspect of what I did in the classroom.

Adding to that struggle, the curricula I was trained to deliver felt like clothing I could never tailor

to comfort. The English language arts curriculum, for example, came not only with required readings and writing assignments, but even with prescribed questions for class discussion. It all felt very scripted. How well I followed that script was part of the measure of how tenure-worthy I was, a supervisor told me.

Further, the intense focus on teaching to a state test left me full of angst. I felt pressured to see my students mostly as data points on the growth charts district overseers used to assess both them and me. That perspective was so one-dimensional, I thought, in comparison to the multidimensional students I was working with every day. They were more than data points to me. I thought there had to be other ways— more meaningful ways—to assess their strengths and aptitudes.

One afternoon, after we had finished reading *The Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum, I introduced my fifth graders to the 1939 film version. I had seen this movie dozens of times, starting when I was around the age of my students. As an adult, I understood that the movie was an example of "the hero's journey," a concept popularized by Joseph Campbell. The hero's journey is the common template of a broad category of tales and lore that includes, for example, the *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter* series. A hero goes on an adventure and suffers setbacks. In a decisive crisis, the hero wins a victory and then returns home changed or transformed in some way.

I remember that, on this day in particular, *The Wizard of Oz* resonated with me in a deep, personal way. Though I was not stuck on a dusty farm in Kansas, I was living an existence similar to that of the story's protagonist. As a classroom teacher, I felt trapped in an uninspiring black-and-white setting, confined by dusty chalkboards and classroom walls. I longed to escape. At that time, one of my students was known as a "runner": She attempted to break free from the school a few times a week. One day I found myself wanting to run out of the building ahead of her and not come back. That's how badly I wanted out. I felt stifled, teaching from a script that I did not create, speaking words that were not my own. I was chronically disengaged, miserable, and on the verge of leaving the profession.

> In the end, Matty Go-Go slowed down enough to skillfully observe his surroundings. He mastered the art of photography, capturing still images that were good enough to become part of an installation at a local museum.

I turned to an artist friend and mentor named Shozo. He was Mr. Miyagi to my Karate Kid, Yoda the Jedi master to my Luke Skywalker. When I vented about how stuck and uninspired I felt, he told me to find a way to bring my authentic self to the work. Shozo encouraged me to create, to make art of the situation. *Easier said than done,* I thought.

Little did I know that signing up to be an instructor in the district's newly implemented OST program would be a transformative experience.

There had to have been a plan on paper for this district-wide afterschool initiative. But when I walked into the cafeteria on the first day, that plan, whatever it was, was not translating into engagement, as far as I could see. I saw only disengaged students and bored adults. There were baskets of books on the windowsills. There were science kits and art supplies stacked on the lunch tables. But there was no engagement.

That is when I saw opportunity for myself: the freedom to create, to experiment with ideas. I would use this space as a blank canvas. My hero's journey took me from black-and-white Kansas—the school classroom—to a place far beyond the imagination where everything changes. My Oz was the vast landscape of OST. There, I was able to create and teach in technicolor. Student engagement came to life. The most incredible projects came to life. I came to life!

Bringing my authentic self to the work allowed me to make art of it, as my friend Shozo had encouraged me to do. By making art of the OST programming, I created the afterschool enrichment that had been promised to participants. Being in a space that *fit* was as transformative for me as it was for Matty Go-Go. For the first time in my career as an educator, I saw myself from a positive perspective.

## Finding Jamie Everywhere

Inflexible classroom structures and rigid environments can induce or exacerbate symptoms of ADHD as students struggle to sit still for long periods and to follow auditory-sequential instruction. The analogy of square pegs trying to fit into round holes comes to mind. Understanding myself as one of those square pegs, I know the importance of finding—or carving out—a space that fits.

> My hero's journey took me from black-and-white Kansas—the school classroom—to a place far beyond the imagination where everything changes. My Oz was the vast landscape of OST.

As a student, I had Matty Go-Go's hyperactive energy. I was also inattentive, with a mind that constantly wandered. Surely you've worked with a student whose mind seemed to travel here, there, and everywhere when you wanted it to pay attention to you and the lesson you put so much time and energy into planning?

That is, maybe you know a student like Jamie Everywhere?

This middle schooler was often overlooked among her peers because she did not stand out as a top scholar. Mostly, Jamie seemed to want to be invisible in class. She never raised her hand, and she rarely spoke. She was so anxious that she would tremble when called on to answer questions.

Jamie also was a daydreamer—something she and I had in common. Her trademark was a steady intent gaze that would fixate on the lights above her desk or the clouds moving through the sky outside the window. Whenever I noticed Jamie staring off during class, or *wandering* as her mother described it during a parent conference, I simply moved toward her desk and restated the instructions for everyone. My proximity would usually bring her back from her travels and get her on task.

I once observed an interaction between her and an increasingly frustrated instructional coach. "Jamie, where do you go?" the instructor scoffed.

*Everywhere*, I thought. *Jamie goes everywhere.* I knew. I remembered how I had struggled to follow auditory-sequential instruction as a student. Like Jamie, I had a mind that took me here, there, and everywhere. My wandering was a regular escape from my own classroom anxiety.

Many inattentive students long for some connection, a way to anchor their minds to activities that engage them in the here and now. Partly because I had been one of those students, I wanted to make a connection with Jamie. One day, I asked about her inner world. I discovered that she had a profound depth of emotion, something most teachers had not been able to unearth. I told Jamie that I had always been a daydreamer just like her. I shared that I had found ways to use daydreaming to enhance the fiction manuscripts and mixed-media art projects I created in my spare time.

Jamie had not considered herself to be a creative or artistic person. I encouraged her to channel the imagination and curiosity that fueled her daydream wanderings into some form of creative expression. Jamie decided to give writing a try. We made a deal. She could daydream in my class, but, whenever her mind wandered back to her desk, Jamie was to jot down some vivid description of where she had gone. These writings were intended to be just for her. Eventually, the shy student began to share some of her daydream travels with me. On the pages of Jamie's notebook, I saw her talent as a writer.

At the time, I was overseeing the afterschool production of a student-made film that told the stories of fictional teens who struggled with feelings of isolation because they believed that they did not have a voice. Knowing Jamie's emotional depth as a writer, I believed that connecting her with this project could be transformative. I was right. Jamie connected to the creative writing and even to the performative aspects of the project in ways that surprised everyone. No one was more surprised than Jamie herself.

Although she had steadily grown in confidence as a writer, Jamie's anxiety almost prevented her from sharing her voice by performing a monologue in the film. I had an idea. I told Jamie to take the words that she had written and create a character to give them to. The film's audience would see and hear not Jamie, but someone different: the character Jamie created. I told her many creative people used this tactic, especially those who were naturally introverted like her. This approach worked for Jamie. The character she created, described as an *emo daydreamer*, become the emotional center of the production.

With her *everywhere* mind focused on the artistic process, Jamie demonstrated a newfound confidence when operating in her "zone" as an artist. The OST space gave her the technicolor world she needed.

## A Space of Possibilities

As an adult practitioner with ADHD, I experienced the OST environment as a space where I could thrive. I finally actualized possibilities for myself that felt like a lifeline to unlimited potential.

> Jamie decided to give writing a try. We made a deal. She could daydream in my class, but, whenever her mind wandered back to her desk, Jamie was to jot down some vivid description of where she had gone.

I wanted to share that feeling with others, especially students like Matthew and Jamie who struggled as I had. I wanted to create a space for them to thrive and offer them "possibility projects" to keep them inspired. Introducing the idea of *possibility* to the youth I worked with felt imperative. These young people had been labeled "at risk," based on their socioeconomic status and other statistics, but I saw them as being "at potential." I would use OST—and particularly project-based learning—as a vehicle to introduce participants to possibilities for what they could be, do, and achieve in their lives.

Whether I was leading a visual and performing arts or STEM-based activity, facilitating a service-learning project or a civic engagement initiative, or guiding a lesson in career exploration, I understood that my most important role always was that of a constant enthusiast for the possibilities of the youth in my program.

I had always struggled with paperwork, as a student and as a teacher. However, I had a natural affinity for what I call *people work*. Becoming an OST practitioner gave me opportunities to demonstrate and cultivate those skills on a daily basis. I measured the success of my people work in the number of youth who were so engaged in our activities that they stayed late at school and even met up on weekends at the library to work on our projects. I also saw the results of this people work when the students I worked with grew in self-confidence and took creative and artistic risks. More evidence came when students spoke in terms of possibilities, including their aspirations to attend college, create inventions, or become entrepreneurs.

After being seen as a source of weakness in countless areas of my life, ADHD revealed itself to be a strength and distinguishing factor. In my OST work, my ADHD wiring showed up as boundless energy and enthusiasm. It also brought a sense of play to the learning environment. These attributes set me apart from teachers who taught with tightly structured lesson plans and followed routines to the letter.

My style of teaching connected with participants in a way that kept them engaged and invested during OST hours. All of us were thriving together in a less structured environment where we rarely sat down,

used outside voices indoors when excitedly brainstorming ideas for our projects, listened to music while we worked, and felt safe and supported enough to be expressive and performative when demonstrating the outcomes of our learning.

This is how I wanted learning to look and feel everywhere. Although I could not create such a space during the school day, afterschool programming was where I could experience and facilitate learning the way I felt it ought to be. Both I and the students I worked with needed to experience learning this way.

## Abdal the Impossible / the Influencer

While students like Matty Go-Go and Jamie Everywhere can frustrate teachers with their disruptive behavior and inattentiveness, some students with ADHD can create more serious disciplinary problems. Often these challenging students are the ones who require the most empathy.

Perhaps you've encountered a student like Abdal the Impossible?

Abdal, a high school student, came with labels like "oppositional," "defiant," and "combative" and with a paper trail of documented incidents in his file. Abdal had issues with most adult authority figures. His name was well known in the school—and not because of his good behavior or outstanding achievements.

When a teacher at the high school suggested that I include Adbal in a service-learning initiative I was starting, another pulled me aside later to say that it wasn't a good idea. "You don't want anything to do with him," the teacher told me. "He's not worth the trouble."

I took a chance on Abdal. At the outset, I found that he lived up to his reputation. He challenged me in lots of ways. But mostly, I felt challenged to find a way to reach him.

Over time, I would learn that Abdal had built a wall around himself as a survival tool. It took a lot of effort for me to reach him. But I didn't give up. When Adbal finally felt safe enough to lower that wall for me, I discovered that his outward behavior masked concerns and fears about what was happening in his

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neighborhood, including gang-related violence and pressure to participate in illegal activities. Students like Abdal can struggle to pay attention to schoolwork because of the toxic stress with which they live every day.

While working on that initial service project, Abdal and I had many discussions. Mostly, we talked about ways that he could have an impact in his community, feel significant without gang affiliation, and rewrite the narrative created by his past behavior. These conversations had such an impact on me that I was inspired to establish strategic partnerships with community organizations in order to design meaningful service learning projects for the youth with whom I worked. Our projects included collecting canned goods to address food insecurity in the community, taking to the streets to raise awareness and collect coins in support of a homeless youth shelter in the city, and creating the content for a public service announcement that promoted alternatives to violence.

Through his participation in structured OST service learning initiatives, Abdal cultivated his dominant personality traits into leadership skills. He was always an influencer among his peers, but he was known for the negative aspects of that influence. However, as he grew into a more positive leadership role, Abdal the Impossible became Abdal the Influencer. Teachers soon noticed the change. Abdal's mother told me that she had started to receive compliments, for the first time, about the young man her son was showing himself to be.

One example of the change was Abdal's participation in a literacy initiative in which older students read to kindergarteners. The towering young man with whom few teachers had wanted to work was reading a picture book to a five-year-old. Later, he tied that child's shoe and protectively took him by the hand to walk him to the dismissal area.

Other boys who joined the OST service projects also came, like Abdal, with warnings. Despite those warnings, I welcomed these young men, connected them with other youth development professionals for additional mentoring and support, and watched with great pride as they worked to make a positive impact

on the world around them. Lives can be turned around by meaningful connections created during purposeful service-oriented learning experiences. These OST experiences were a lifeline for Abdal and young people like him. The young people on the roster with whom teachers want to work the least are often the ones who need us the most.

## Reinventing ADHD

For young people who exhibit ADHD traits, OST programming can provide the atmosphere and learning experiences that, by design, sustain attention, engagement, and focus.

After guiding multiple possibility projects over the years with students like Matty Go-Go, Jamie Everywhere, and Abdal the Influencer, I reinvented the meaning of ADHD, changing it from a deficit label to an instructional technique. Rather than attention-deficit / hyperactivity disorder, this use of ADHD means *attention-driven / hyperfocus-designed.* This construction of ADHD is the approach I applied to the planning and delivery of possibility projects that engaged participants across all learning levels and abilities.

Some of the most successful attention-driven, hyperfocus-designed projects I led were either inquiry-based or project-based. To design projects that appeal to young people with ADHD (the diagnosis, not the instructional technique), you don't need to recreate my urban landscape photography project or exact service-learning initiatives. However, there are critical elements you should apply to design of your own attention-driven hyperfocus-designed activities:

- Opportunities for movement and spatial exploration
- Outlets for artistic expression and creativity
- A strong adult-youth mentoring component
- Meaningful real-life connections through purposeful learning experiences
- Opportunities for youth voice

With this focus, you can find out and then deliver what your students need most. Matty Go-Go needed

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activities that offered movement and exploration. Jamie Everywhere needed artistic expression and creativity. Abdal the Influencer and his compatriots needed mentoring, meaningful real-life connections, and purposeful learning experiences that enabled them to be of service.

Students with ADHD often are enormously talented and incredibly gifted. They are full of creativity, curiosity, and spontaneity. ADHD-wired brains offer a "special something" that can enhance any setting. Anchor yourself to the belief that you will be the educator who guides ADHD-wired program participants to discover that "special something" in themselves. In doing so, you will create opportunities for them to actualize their potential. This work will be challenging and at times frustrating. But the future of a young person's self-image and life trajectory may depend on it.

# Healing on His Own Terms

## Using Diverse Genres of Expression to Support Boys and Young Men of Color

### Keith F. Miller, Jr.

"Keith, he just shut down on me," the teaching artist said, shaking his head, defeated. "I don't know what to do. He said he won't do anything."

His voice was calm but disappointed; his eyes said he was trying to solve a problem that felt unsolvable.

At the Deep Center, we support young people in Savannah, Georgia, to thrive as learners, community leaders, and agents of change. Through creative writing, cultural production, and art, we create platforms for the city's youth and the village of support around them, including their families and adult allies, to share stories, engage in debates, and make Savannah a more just and equitable place. As both a teaching artist and director of youth programs, I work with Deep Center teaching artists and staff to find unique, innovative ways to support all of our youth, especially boys and young men of color, in using their stories and art to heal, grow, and thrive through trauma.

When this staff member came to me, I was taking dictation from one of our other young artists. The young man next to me was describing his experiences of being racially profiled and criminalized due to his record. He was now attending a new school, but the same problem popped up. Teachers saw what was on his record, not the real person in front of them asking for help, asking to be heard, seen, or, at the very least, given a chance to learn. We had been putting together quotes for a poem he wanted to write when the teaching artist walked in from another room.

"Oh, okay, what's going on?" I asked the other teaching artist. "Who are you talking about?"

He said a name I never expected to hear. Max (a pseudonym), an Afro-Haitian young man, was often

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the quietest voice in the room, with one earbud in as he listened to scenes from his favorite anime. Max was the one who was refusing to write.

No explanation was given. He simply said he wouldn't do it.

I traded spots with the teaching artist. As I headed into the other workshop space, the familiar Max I'm used to seeing as the embodiment of sun-kissed joy sat staring off into the distance. His square-rimmed glasses pointed away from the group; his jaws were clenched.

I gestured for him to join me outside. He got up and followed me out the door.

We sat on a curb in silence, listening to the faint whoosh of passing cars before I spoke. At the Carnegie Branch Library, a historic safe haven and site of history for Black residents, the weight of the need to get this right weighed on both of us.

"What's going on?" I started, gently. "I hear you refuse to write or revise any of your pieces. That's never happened in the past two years I've known you."

No words. He just shook his head, staring down at his feet and then at the brick wall in front of us. The blanket of silence began to fall, slowly.

I continued to wait.

If I'd learned anything over the years, especially when it came to supporting my fellow boys and young men of color, it was that anything

> 66 [I didn't write in the nonfiction form like everyone else because] I didn't want to be stuck. I didn't want [the personal things that were happening to me] to be something that people would feel comfortable to bring up. Sometimes I like to let stuff go. But when someone brings it up, it's like, 'Oh….' I don't think writing about that in that way would have helped me. It would have just made me mad. I don't want to bring that up and write angrily. I want to keep my writing chill. I don't want that out there. 99
>
> — *Max*

> 66 That year, with the specific nonfiction and ethnography focus, to me, I felt like, 'No. I can't do that. Don't expect this.' I have my own way of writing and that's how the program is supposed to be. [That's how you said it would be.] It's supposed to be a place where you express your own mind, instead of just expecting only one thing. 99
>
> — *Max*

could happen, but it must happen on their terms and in their time. The world yells its demands, saying what they should do, who they should be, and why they should be that. But at times like this, I've learned that it's best to stand still and wait.

"They won't let me write what I want to write," he said, just above a whisper.

"What do you mean?"

"They said I have to try writing something else, but I don't want to. I want to write what I want to write. I don't want to write like that."

I understood. Max was our resident science fiction and fantasy writer. But our high school program, Block by Block, had a community research (ethnography) focus. Our program goal was not only to help some of Savannah's most fearless young artists discover their own voices, but also to uplift the voices of people in their community who are often silenced, ignored, or erased altogether. Because of this focus, the most common forms of expression in our program were passionate poems about social injustice, essays about institutional racism, and short stories about the harsh reality of our participants' lives and their hopes and dreams of changing that reality.

The year before, Max had written a beautiful sci-fi piece about gentrification in the form of a nightmare in which the houses talked to each other and a little boy was chased from his old neighborhood. Knowing he had done

that, I was sure he could do it again. But I quickly realized it wasn't a matter of *could*, it was a matter of *want*.

In talking with Max now, I used that story as an example of how he could do both: write the way he wanted but also critique the real world around him. But there was a problem: I had it all wrong. From his perspective, he didn't write a story about gentrification. It was just a story about a boy having a nightmare where the houses talked. He didn't create it for us based on the themes we were covering; he created it for him simply because he wanted to. He told me so point blank.

"Okay," I said. "I see what you mean, so how about this: Tell me what you want to write about and we can figure out how to meet somewhere in the middle."

He nodded, slightly, and then explained the fantastical story he wanted to explore. His face lit up, his jaw relaxed, and he leaned in as he spoke. Although I was listening to everything he said, it wasn't his words that caught my attention; it was his eyes. They were on fire, dreaming in real time. They were desperate to tell a story that only he could tell and in the only way he could tell it.

"I like that. I think you're onto something. But can I ask you a question?"

The light in his eyes dimmed a little. He'd worked with me long enough to know that Mr. Keith, as he affectionately called me, had a habit of asking the hard questions. He knew he didn't always have to answer them, but they would require deep thinking, regardless.

"Yes?"

"Why don't you want to write about what's going on—"

"I just don't want to write about that kind of stuff. I don't enjoy it. I want to write about what I want to write

> " It's not necessarily if you can't write nonfiction, you should write science fiction. It should be a choice. In writing sci-fi, [youth] are trying to write what they want to say and what's going on with them in their way, so they can get it off their chest. But in reality, they can't really say it how they want to say it [because it may be too difficult]. But when they are forced [to write nonfiction], they are being forced to say it how the other person wants them to. Say for instance a person is having trouble in school. It's like saying, 'Tell me what's going on but don't tell me the reason for the problem.' And it doesn't have to be a teacher, that goes for anyone. "
>
> — *Max*

about. I don't want to be made to do something I don't want to do."

He sat there shaking his head softly. He wasn't yelling. He wasn't arguing. He was simply stating how he felt.

And I had two choices: hear him or hear him.

"I get it. And I think that's fair," I replied, softly. "I don't want you to write about anything that you don't want to write about. But can you make me a promise?"

A smirk appeared. He looked at me, wondering. "Maybe."

"I'll let you write about whatever you want to. And if I have any say in what you choose, I think you should definitely write about the story you just shared with me. If you want me to, I'll become your personal editor and make sure we get it over the finish line to get published."

"Okay," he replied, waiting for the "but." This was a negotiation and he knew it.

"But," I laughed, confirming his suspicions, "I still want you to push yourself. You have a gift with words, and I honestly believe if you experiment with other genres, it'll only strengthen your sci-fi and fantasy work. But you don't have to do it alone. I'll be there to help you, if you want me to."

He stared back, deliberating. There was enough trust and curiosity for him to nod. "Okay."

I quickly pulled out a pen and asked him to tell me the names of the books he'd been reading recently and the anime he was currently watching. I promised I would watch at least one of the shows that weekend.

When we returned to the workshop, I instructed him to write as hard and fast as he could, bringing to life the story he had just shared. As I debriefed with my fellow teaching artist about our conversation, we both watched as Max's fingers sped across the keyboard,

every keystroke bringing something new into being: a world of his own making.

In the following weeks, Max would write a beautiful science fiction piece about the glorious battle of an underdog triumphing against nearly impossible odds. Max invented a character who had to engage with forces perceived to be more powerful than himself—as Max himself did. Through willpower, this character would always find a way to win, or at least keep standing.

During this time, Max also produced a poem—proof that he was willing to challenge himself and step out of his comfort zone. This development reminded me that, when we challenge our young people to produce across diverse genres, they not only find their collective and individual voices but also discover the unique ways they can tell stories and explore topics of significant value to them. For example, the poem Max ended up writing was about greed and how it changes us—how it forces us to value self over others, warping and distorting us from the inside out, until we no longer recognize ourselves. This was the first time Max vocalized to others his personal values and how he believed we should move through the world. But it was also an opportunity for Max to realize that he could experiment, flexing his creative muscles while stepping out of his comfort zone.

In the youth artist showcase that year, Max performed his poem on a stage in front of nearly 400 of his peers and members of the community. That year's program publication featured both his science fiction piece and his poem.

As a result of what I learned from Max, and in partnership with an innovative graduate student at the University of Georgia, Stephanie R. Toliver, who was studying sci-fi and Afrofuturism as tools for promoting

> " At first, the experience of being expected to write nonfiction was agitating. It felt like they wanted me to change this and that because of what we were supposed to do for the program. But when the director sat me down and said, 'Write what you want,' I felt free. And even when I did write poetry, because I don't like poems and I feel I suck at them, being able to write what I want to allowed me to make it more sinister, something different. I ended up liking that and expanding what I thought poetry was in my own way, which was inspired by an anime I'd seen mixed with some other things of my personality. "
>
> — *Max*

critical literacy in youth of color, my program created an Afrofuturism unit. This unit enabled our youth to strengthen their creative muscles and envision the worlds they wanted to exist, addressing social ills and injustices in all kinds of technological, psychological, physical, and even spiritual innovations and settings. We were opening our eyes to the many ways our youth could tell stories.

On top of that, when the movie *Black Panther* was released the following year, we were able to take all of our youth and their families to see the movie and enjoy popcorn, candy, and a beverage at no cost to them. For the first time, we were able to touch the lives of our entire community through one of the most important pride- and culture-building points of the year. People could participate no matter where they lived or how much money they had. All of our youth and their families experienced the hope that sci-fi, fantasy, and Afrofuturism can bring: the ability to envision a new reality, no matter how harsh the present might be, and do so joyfully, together.

This experience taught me a valuable lesson that continually shapes the way the Deep Center supports our young artists across our programs. We had always encouraged young people—especially those in the Young Authors Project, one of our introductory programs primarily serving middle school students— to write in diverse genres. However, by the time participants got to our intermediate high school program, we had started, unintentionally, to privilege nonfiction and poetry as the most legitimate forms of expression. One reason was that those genres mirrored the expertise of our teaching artists. Another was the ethnographic lens and social justice focus at the heart of our programming.

Even though I was myself a lover of sci-fi and

fantasy short stories since middle school, I had never thought to champion this form of writing as a possible manifestation of our social justice and ethnographic focus. Admittedly, I never felt confident enough to teach the form, which is why it had always simply remained a hobby. I didn't realize that sci-fi and fantasy were by their very nature and creation acts of resistance. I didn't yet see the significance of the way Afrofuturism dared to envision a future free from the oppression many people of color have experienced over hundreds of years and continue to experience today. Learning the fundamentals of teaching sci-fi, fantasy, and Afrofuturism with Stephanie's guidance opened up a new world for me and our staff. Then we opened this new world to our youth and, by extension, to our entire community.

> " It makes me feel proud to know I was able to change something in our program. [Writing our stories the way we want to] helps us. It helps us let stuff go ... write down our problems and get it off our chest. When we do that—when I do that—you actually feel happy and excitement. It lets you let the weight go. That's how it is for me…. When I finish a piece and put down my pen and paper [after writing] the way I want, I don't just stop there. I'm thinking of part two. In my head, I'm thinking, 'Wow … I'm proud of what I did, and I'm going to do it again and again and again. "
>
> — *Max*

Whether educators realize it or not, not all students want to write about the very real things around them that hurt them. In fact, to force them to do so is an act of violence. We risk retraumatizing our youth if we don't equip ourselves with the tools to facilitate expression in diverse genres so they can explore their healing journey in their own way and on their terms.

In Max's case, the truth was quite painful: A teacher bullied him for an entire semester. Even as his single mother tirelessly advocated on his behalf, he progressively shut down. He didn't want to write about the pain, anxiety, and stress he experienced every day as a result of this experience. Specifically, he didn't want to be forced to write about such traumatic events in his safe and brave space, Block by Block. However, through the power of his preferred genre, he could rewrite the battle into one where he won, where justice was served, and where he didn't have to feel like a victim but was instead the victor.

Afterschool educators sometimes encourage program participants to write heartfelt stories that make us feel better about the work we're doing. We want to feel we're making a difference, that we're empowering our young people to speak truth to power and win. In some cases, we might be. But we must respect each young person's journey and intentionally create space for cathartic storytelling without retraumatizing them.

Max taught me the power of listening. When we dare to push beyond our own limited perspective of what we think should be and the stories we think need to be told, we instead find ourselves on the cusp of transformative healing, radical hope, and limitless possibilities. The possibilities inspire us as practitioners and the young people and communities we serve to live, love, think, create, and feel differently—together.

# Integrity Is a Core Value in the OST Experience for Youth

### Marie Benson

The importance attached to the development of strong character is evident in schools, out-of-school time (OST) programs, and the workplace. As providers of OST programs, we must infuse our programs with activities that build positive social and emotional skills in order to help mold future human capital. Educators, employers, and society as a whole agree on the need for honesty and for social and emotional skills. These skills are valuable across a person's lifetime, regardless of where they are learned and practiced. Employers are looking for employees who possess competency in social and emotional skills; these skills may even be in more in demand than technical skills

(Afterschool Alliance, 2018). OST programs can prepare participants for their futures by promoting social and emotional learning.

One vital character trait, which encompasses many aspects, is integrity. According to Dictionary.com (2020), integrity is the practice of being honest and showing consistent adherence to strong "moral and ethical principles" and values. The word *integrity* derives from the same root as *integer*, which means *whole* or *complete*. According to the International Center for Academic Integrity (Fishman, 2013), the five fundamental values of academic integrity are

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responsibility, respect, fairness, trustworthiness, and honesty. Integrity is an important social and emotional skill to promote and role model to youth.

When we have integrity, people tend to trust us, even if they disagree with us. Integrity means standing up for what we believe in and choosing to do the right thing. Discovering who we are is a process for us all; it involves the complex notion of accountability to self. Integrity is a framework that does not change with context. As many professionals in the OST world agree, our programs are a great place to help to understand and practice integrity.

OST programs may be challenged to work on building social and emotional skills every day in every activity. There are limitations due to the wide variety of kinds of OST programs and their timing, funding, and attendance patterns. However, most program activities naturally will allow staff and participants to practice their social and emotional skills, including integrity. There are countless opportunities each day to provide a learning experience when issues arise with youth and staff.

High-quality trainings are necessary to prepare staff to recognize and take advantage of these teachable moments. We need to support staff in engaging, assessing, reflecting upon, and improving opportunities to build social and emotional skills in an ongoing cycle of program improvement.

Here are some activities program staff can facilitate to help participants think about and practice their integrity skills:

- Build with blocks on different types of foundations. What happens if the foundation is not solid? Why did it happen? What can we change to make it work? The lesson here is that, when you stay the course and do things the right way, what you build is stronger and lasts longer.
- Make puppets and put on a show focused on a value such as honesty. Help the children decide how to show honest and dishonest actions and the consequences of each.
- Create a match game with integrity-related pictures and words. Make cards that list words related to integrity, such as honest, reliable, stand up for what you believe in, doing the right thing when no one is looking, accountability, and so on. Then make another set of cards that have action phrases or pictures to match.

- Cook together and demonstrate the importance of following directions consistently. If you change the recipe and leave out an ingredient, you alter the whole project! Do the same recipe twice, and see what happens when you use salt instead of sugar.

Sailing provides a good metaphor for the demonstration of integrity. Your sail must be intact for the boat to sail upwind. Furthermore, if the boat heels over more than it should, it becomes difficult to control. Balance is lost. Similarly, if you stretch your values to make exceptions to your rules for integrity, then you compromise your wholeness. Integrity helps you to stay the course with each shift in the direction of the wind. Let's help our youth set their sails and begin life's journey with integrity.

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