Philadelphia's At-Risk Youth: Addressing Risk Factors through After-School Programming

Mayor's Internship Program
Public Safety Group
Summer 2008

Adam Bartolanzo

Anodja Creighton

Jeanell Evans

Yvonne Farrell

Fatima Flynn

Jennifer Frechie

Ashley Hairston

Kristen Harchut

Jeffrey Lebron-Melendez

Eileen McKeown

Francis Nelson

Julie Brinn Siegel

Philadelphia's At-Risk Youth:
Addressing Risk Factors through After-School Programming

INTRODUCTION

One of the six major objectives of the City of Philadelphia's Strategic Plan is to ensure that Philadelphia becomes the safest large city in the country. To achieve this, the City of Philadelphia is committed to increasing the feeling of safety at home, at school, in the neighborhoods, and to reducing the homicide rate by 25% in 2008.[1]

The City of Philadelphia must address the after-school needs of at-risk youth in order to reduce crime. As an operational definition, at-risk youth encompass adolescents and children under 18 years of age who habitually encounter severe risk factors in their community. Such factors include high rates of school dropout, high levels of poverty, susceptibility to alcohol and drug use, susceptibility to engaging in and becoming a victim of criminal activity, and exposure to abusive and negligent family life. In order to illustrate the severity of the problem, consider the following statistics:

- In 2006, the public high school dropout rate in Philadelphia was 5.4%, a population of 5,369 youth. This was the highest dropout rate in Pennsylvania, and it was more than two times that of any other dropout rate in the state.[2]
- In 2006, 35% of Philadelphia's children were living in poverty. Between 2002 and 2006, the City's childhood poverty rate has increased by 10.2%. [3]
- Recent surveys have shown that one out of every ten students between 6th and 12th grades in Pennsylvania reported having sold or used drugs on school property in the past year.[4] Almost one-third of Philadelphia's teens had their first drink (more than a few sips) of alcohol before age 13, and more than one-fifth of the City's high school students reported using marijuana at least once in the last 30 days.[5]
- In 2005, over 1,100 reports of child abuse and neglect were reported to the Philadelphia Department of Human Services, and 17 children were killed as the result of child abuse.[6]

The problems facing Philadelphia's at-risk youth require immediate attention. In an effort to address the needs of this targeted population, the Mayor's Internship Program Public Safety Group led an investigation into after-school programming throughout the City. An after-school program is defined as a program that provides any social or human services—whether it be educational training, mentoring, counseling, etc.—to youth under

---

[1] City of Philadelphia. "Strategic Plan Summary." Available from <http://www.phila.gov/pdfs/philaStrategicPlan.pdf>. Accessed 30 July 2008.
[2] PA Department of Education. "Public Secondary School Dropouts in Pennsylvania: 2005-2006." Available from <http://www.pde.state.pa.us/k12statistics/cwp/view.asp?a=3&q=129265>. Accessed 30 July 2008.
[3] Public Citizens for Children and Youth. *The Bottom Line is Children: 2008 Report*. Available from <http://www.pccy.org/PDF/2008%20PCCY%20Bottom%20Line%20Report.pdf>. Accessed 30 July 2008.
[4] The Gallup Organization. *Pennsylvania Adolescent Health Study*. Available from <http://www.dsf.health.state.pa.us/health/lib/health/familyhealth/PAAdolescentHealthStudy2006.pdf>. Accessed 30 July 2008.
[5] Public Citizens for Children and Youth. *A Report on Philadelphia's Drug and Alcohol Treatment System for Adolescents*. Available from <http://www.pccy.org/PDF/D&AReport.pdf>. Access 30 July 2008.
[6] *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. "Child-abuse cases in Philadelphia." Available from <http://www.philly.com/inquirer/special/child_welfare/Child-abuse_cases_in_Philadelphia.html?imageId=2770267>. Accessed 30 July 2008.

18 years of age during out-of-school hours, which are typically after 3:00 pm Monday through Friday during the school year, and anytime during the weekends and summer break. As college students residing in the Philadelphia area, the Public Safety Group selected several organizations which we have heard of or worked with which offer services to the area's at-risk populations. After weeks of research and interviewing, we have developed a synopsis of what programs are available, which ones work, and the challenges they face. The following report presents key findings of this investigation and recommendations on how the City of Philadelphia can improve its' efforts to encourage after-school programs that target at-risk youth, and therefore, improve public safety throughout the City.

IDENTIFYING PROGRAMS THAT WORK

Government Organizations

After-school programming is often provided by many organizations that are directly funded and administered by the government. The Public Safety Group identifies two government organizations that have stood out in offering valuable services to at-risk youth: the Free Library of Philadelphia and City Recreation Centers.

In addition to providing an extensive collection of books and other resources that are available to the public, the Free Library of Philadelphia provides numerous after-school services for community youth. Although the libraries offer many after-school activities, these programs are generally geared towards younger children and have not been successful in reaching the at-risk youth. The Haddington Library Branch located at 446 North 65th Street, for example, offers arts and crafts classes, bug shows, animal awareness classes, and Native American dance performances. While these programs may not attract the at-risk population, the recent purchase of a Playstation video game system has increased the number of adolescents visiting this branch.

In addition to the Free Library of Philadelphia, Philadelphia Recreation Centers have been critical in providing after-school programming to at-risk youth. The Recreation Department, which started running these programs in 1996 at only 12 sites, now operates youth programs at over 100 sites throughout Philadelphia. Each center is open five days a week, conducting after-school programs between 3:00 pm and 6:00 pm. Activities such as martial arts classes, swimming, and reading and writing programs are available at these centers. The recreation centers also run a number of sports leagues, such as basketball and baseball, which reach close to three thousand youth per week. Overall, 90 after-school programs, including 10 teen centers, operate in playgrounds and recreation centers throughout the City, and over 2,800 youth receive services from them each week.[7]

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southeastern Pennsylvania

[7] Any statistics and numeric findings that are not specifically cited were obtained through interviews with program directors and staff.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southeastern Pennsylvania (BBBS SEPA) has operated in the Philadelphia area for over 90 years. The organization runs a school-based mentoring program that matches children with volunteer mentors who serve as both positive role models and friends. Each year, BBBS SEPA serves over 4,000 children in the four counties in which they operate, including 2,500 youth who reside in the City.

BBBS SEPA also operates the Beyond School Walls Program, a program that combines mentoring with exposure to a corporate environment. In this program, elementary and middle school students travel by bus to meet with their mentors in their places of business. This opportunity gives children the chance to experience and understand their mentor's career, while also developing an understanding of the connection between their academic performance and future career pursuits.

BBBS SEPA has proven to be successful in its use of funds, breadth of programming, and impact on at-risk youth. The organization spends between $1,000 and $1,200 on average to make and support a match each year, and they are able to support the thousands of matches they create with fundraising campaigns, public and foundational grants, and individual donations. Through an extensive network of community and corporate partners, including area schools, local congregations, and businesses such as Comcast and Urban Outfitters, BBBS SEPA conducts effective outreach throughout the City. Finally, BBBS SEPA has shown proven results in addressing the risk factors that Philadelphia's at-risk youth face. Impact studies show that children who have a Big Brother or Big Sister are 46% less likely to begin using illegal drugs, 27% less likely to begin using alcohol, 52% less likely to skip school, 37% less likely to skip a class, and 33% less likely to hit someone.[8]

The Police Athletic League of Philadelphia

The Police Athletic League of Philadelphia (PAL) is a non-profit organization run by city policemen and women. PAL operates several athletic league programs, including basketball, baseball, softball, golf, bowling, soccer, and tennis. In addition to sports, the organization also provides academic activities such as math challenges, spelling bees, and chess tournaments. The purpose of these programs is to promote athleticism and education while providing activities to keep at-risk youth off of the streets.

PAL has been very successful in engaging at-risk youth for several reasons. First, the organization specifically targets at-risk neighborhoods in which there are few alternative after-school programs, such as YMCAs or Boys and Girls Clubs. Second, PAL uses effective marketing techniques to reach out to community youth. Most participants enroll at the beginning of the year during school assemblies that are organized by PAL. The organization's services are also advertised through neighborhood newspapers, their website, the Police Public Affairs Office, and events held by their corporate sponsors. Finally, many officers were once at-risk youth who participated in the very same PAL activities that they now supervise. Hoping to give back to the program that supported

[8] Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Southeastern Pennsylvania. "Mentoring: Fun and Impact." Available from <http://www.bbbs.org/site/c.gkIULaMUJxE/b.1658855/k.332D/Our_Impact.htm>. Accessed 30 July 2008.

them during their own childhood and adolescence, PAL officers represent positive role models for today's youth.

Faith-Based Organizations

According to one estimate, faith-based organizations within the City provide about a quarter of a billion dollars worth of social services to residents each year.[9] Faith-based organizations play an especially important role by providing services for inner-city youth. Over 70% of Philadelphia's congregations provide programs directed at youth and children in the community, many of which are after-school programs that are housed and operated within local churches, temples, and mosques.[10]

The Women's Christian Alliance and Episcopal Community Services have been particularly successful in providing invaluable after-school programs for hard-to-reach, at-risk youth. In addition to two after-school programs, the Women's Christian Alliance operates a Head Start Center, the Summer Freedom School, and the Alliance for Progress Charter School. Over 200 children in K-8th grade receive services through the organization's after-school programming. Episcopal Community Services' Urban Bridges Program is designed to meet the needs of residents in Franklinville, Frankford, and Fox Chase. Operated and housed at numerous locations, including schools, recreation centers, and churches, Urban Bridges offers after-school programs, summer art classes, one-on-one mentoring and tutoring, educational assistance, life skills training, and job readiness preparation to many of North and Northeast Philadelphia's most disadvantaged African-American, Latino, and Asian-American youth.

In addition to their individual efforts, faith-based organizations contribute significantly to citywide initiatives such as the Amachi Program. Amachi is a mentoring program run through a partnership between Public/Private Ventures, BBBS SEPA, and local faith-based and community-based organizations. Relying heavily on congregations for volunteers and site space, the program provides one-on-one mentoring services to children of incarcerated parents. In the first two years of operation, the Amachi Program provided mentors for 517 at-risk children, and 62% of these matches lasted over 12 months. Begun in Philadelphia in 2001, there are now 117 Amachi sites in over 100 cities and 43 states.[11]

Latino Community-Based Organizations

Many organizations provide services targeted towards Philadelphia's Latino communities, specifically the City's Puerto Rican community, which comprises the third largest Puerto Rican population outside of Puerto Rico.[12] Two organizations in particular

---

[9] Cnaan, Ram et al. *The Other Philadelphia Story: How Local Congregations Support Quality of Life in Urban America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.
[10] *Ibid.*
[11] Public/Private Ventures. "Major Projects: Amachi." Available from <http://www.ppv.org/ppv/youth/youth_major_projects.asp?section_id=7&initiative_id=51>. Accessed 30 July 2008.
[12] The Historical Society of Philadelphia. "Latino Philadelphia at a Glance." Available from <http://www.hsp.org/files/latinophiladelphiaataglance.pdf>. Accessed 30 July 2008.

provide important after-school programs for at-risk youth within the Latino and Puerto Rican communities: ASPIRA Inc. and Taller Puertorriqueño.

ASPIRA Inc. uses community service to encourage Latino youth to become aware of the challenges facing their culture and to take action within their community. ASPIRA Leadership Clubs enable students to lead after-school programming that engages youth in activities designed to foster community awareness. In addition, ASPIRA Inc. provides an intensive college prep program that serves 800 middle and high school students during the school year and 200 students during the summer.

Taller Puertorriqueño matches Latino artists with youth who share an interest in arts and culture. By linking at-risk youth with artists of similar ethnic background, the organization's Youth Artists Program (YAP) helps students develop their skills in the visual arts through instruction with qualified teachers. YAP participants also visit galleries and exhibits, receive tutoring support, and have their own art exhibitions. YAP is bilingual, which allows both primary English and primary Spanish speaking youth to receive the program's services, and it provides art instruction classes yearlong to between 15 and 18 students at a time.

THE CHALLENGES THAT AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS FACE

Providing after-school programming for at-risk youth is a daunting task that requires organizations to tackle major challenges and problems. Though many obstacles must be overcome, all of these programs face two critical challenges: attracting and retaining the targeted at-risk youth population.

Attracting Youth

One of the main problems cited across all the programs surveyed was the considerable difficulty in attracting at-risk youth. Most at-risk youth do not actively seek programming during out-of-school hours, and are hard to reach with information and advertising because they do not gather in conventional public spaces. For these reasons, many after-school programs struggle with recruitment and enrollment.

Many of the organizations investigated by the Public Safety Group employ innovative techniques to deal with the issue of attracting at-risk youth. As mentioned earlier, PAL enrolls most of their participants at school assemblies. Another program that effectively partners with public schools to advertise their services is Taller Puertorriqueño's Youth Artists Program. YAP's coordinator visits the schools and delivers interactive presentations about the program. The coordinator also distributes flyers and program brochures during school open-houses and other events in which students participate.

Retaining Youth

Even after effectively attracting youth, many after-school programs struggle to establish the incentives necessary to retain participation. At-risk youth habitually face social

pressures to engage in delinquency and substance abuse. As a result, many organizations that provide after-school programming must compete with these activities in order to get youth off of the streets.

The success of after-school programs is contingent upon the development of strong connections with participants. One way to facilitate this is to introduce a competitive aspect. The Police Athletic League of Philadelphia and many recreation centers, for example, host sporting events that promote friendly competition and allow camaraderie to develop between teammates. The bonds between team members tend to be far-reaching and help youth acquire constructive skills, self-esteem, and leadership capacity. Friendships also encourage at-risk youth to return to the after-school program day after day.

Maintaining membership in a program can also be achieved by involving at-risk youth with community service. Community service instills a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment in young people. When youth see that they are able to make a positive difference, they begin to develop a lasting relationship with the community they are helping. ASPIRA Leadership Clubs provide Latino youth the opportunity to lead community service activities. Participants are encouraged to remain in these groups because they are able to recognize the importance of their hard work.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CITY

After-school programs provide invaluable services that help Philadelphia's at-risk youth address the risk factors they face everyday. Yet many of the organizations that provide these services need additional support, especially when dealing with the major challenges of attracting and retaining at-risk youth.

The City of Philadelphia can play an important role in assisting the ongoing efforts of after-school programs. Because these programs engage at-risk youth in healthy and enriching behavior, the City can expect in return effective services that promote the public safety. The Public Safety Group therefore submits four recommendations to the City for the purposes of meeting this end:

1.) **Provide Community Space** – Many after-school programs depend on the public schools as forums for advertising their services. In addition, many programs are housed in and coordinated by the public school system. To facilitate these operations, the City could pursue a direction similar to that of Los Angeles, where the Mayor's Office and the School District jointly administer funds and conduct evaluations for after-school programming through the LA's Best Program. Many of Philadelphia's after-school programs also take place in municipally owned property, such as branches of the Free Library of Philadelphia and City Recreation Centers. The City should encourage the continued provision of after-school programs at these locations and seek to provide these spaces for other community-based programs as well.

2.) **Encourage Collaboration with Extra-Governmental Providers** – Many nongovernmental organizations provide important after-school programs for at-risk youth. The City of Philadelphia should encourage the efforts of these organizations by providing funding, training, and technical assistance opportunities. One example of how the City has already done a good job in promoting these collaborations is the Mayor's Office of Faith-Based Initiatives. This office effectively engages the social capital of faith leaders by providing capacity-building workshops. For example, an upcoming conference will introduce faith leaders to Peaceful Surrender, a new citywide initiative designed to enable local congregations to assist and encourage individuals with outstanding criminal warrants for non-violent offenses to surrender to the authorities. The City of Philadelphia should promote more of these efforts in order to encourage collaboration with extra-governmental after-school program providers. This can be done by actively spreading the word about these programs to the City's neighborhoods and involving these programs in the City's policy discussions concerning at-risk youth.

3.) **Ensure Accountable, Provider-Friendly Partnerships With Intermediary Organizations** – By administering public funds and providing technical assistance and training, intermediary organizations supply infrastructural support to many of the City's after-school programs. For example, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southeastern Pennsylvania serves as an intermediary organization for Amachi sites by providing training for mentors, intake assistance, and participant recruitment. Supporting the work of intermediaries can be conducive to building the capacity of programs that provide services to youth. However, it is important that government partnerships with these organizations are accountable and provider-friendly. According to a recent report issued by the Fels Institute of Government, the City of Philadelphia has relied too heavily on intermediaries in the past to set policy and monitor outcomes. As a result, a system was created that lacked accountability and caused organizations to stray from their original mission.[13] In order to work effectively with intermediary organizations, the City must take a strong leadership position in delineating outcomes and monitoring quality. Chicago, New York, and Baltimore all work with intermediaries to provide youth services, but there is a strong role for City government in each of these systems.[14] The City of Philadelphia should follow the example of these municipalities and ensure that accountable and provider-friendly partnerships with intermediary organizations are established.

4.) **Encourage Competitive and Team-Building Activities in After-School Programs** – After-school programs that are successful at retaining at-risk youth often provide competitive and team-building activities such as athletics. As a means to encourage more after-school programs to provide these types of activities, the City could begin a citywide initiative to train organizations on how to integrate competition and team-building into their after-school programming.

[13] Fels Institute of Government. "Delivering Services in Philadelphia: The Integrated Youth Services Project."
[14] *Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

Everyday, thousands of children living in Philadelphia are at-risk of school dropout, poverty, alcohol and drug use, criminal activity, and familial abuse and negligence. But each day heroic individuals devote their time, energy, and passion to operating after-school programs that seek to remove children from these conditions. Organizations such as BBBS SEPA and ASPIRA Inc. and programs such as Urban Bridges and Amachi have proven to be successful at providing quality services to at-risk youth.

The City of Philadelphia has a responsibility to encourage this type of programming. By providing community space, encouraging collaboration, seeking program improvement, and recognizing what works, the City can help after-school programs meet the needs of the region's at-risk youth. Together, the City and after-school program providers can make Philadelphia the safest large city in the country.

Mayor's Internship Program
Public Safety Group
Summer 2008

Philadelphia's At-Risk Youth
Addressing Risk Factors through After-School Programming

Philadelphia's Strategic Plan: One of the six objectives within the City's mission statement is to improve public health and safety.

- Public Safety: Philadelphia becomes the safest large city in the country
- Increase feeling of safety at home, SCHOOL, the neighborhood, work and play

Our Group's Focus: Make Philadelphia safer by targeting at-risk youth

- In order to increase public safety, our group decided to research and analyze programs that target at-risk youth and make recommendations regarding the best practices for after-school programs in the City of Philadelphia.

Benefits of Participating in an After-school Program

- Increased academic performance
- Lower juvenile crime rate
- Improved social skills

Programs that Work: Public, Private and Non-profit

- Government Organizations: Free Library of Philadelphia and City Recreation Centers; Big Brothers Big Sisters of SEPA; The Police Athletic League; Faith-based Organizations: Women's Christian Alliance and Episcopal Community Services; Latino Community-Based Organizations: ASPIRA and Taller Puertorriqueño

Challenges Faced by After-School Programs

- Attracting Youth
    - Solution: recruit during school assemblies, advertise through community outlets, provide interactive presentations at neighborhood schools
- Retaining At-Risk Youth
    - Solution: develop and maintain positive youth-adult relationships, involvement in community service, allow youth to lead selected programs, promote friendly competition

Recommendations for the City

- Provide community space
- Encourage collaboration with extra-governmental providers
- Support and evaluate the ongoing work of intermediary organizations
- Encourage competitive and team-building activities in after-school programs

Public Safety
Philadelphia's At-Risk Youth

Addressing Risk Factors through After-School Programming

Philadelphia's Strategic Plan

- One of the six objectives within the City's mission statement is to improve public health and safety
- Public Safety: Philadelphia becomes the safest large city in the country
  - Increase feeling of safety at home, school, the neighborhood, work and play
  - Reduce the City's homicide rate by 25% in 2008

Our Group's Focus: Make Philadelphia safer by targeting at-risk youth

- Philadelphia's dropout rate was 5.4% in 2006
- In 2006, 35% of Philadelphia's children were living in poverty
- 1/3 of teens in Philadelphia have their first alcoholic drink before age 13
- In 2005, there were 1,100 cases of child abuse reported to the Philadelphia Department of Health Services

Benefits of Participating in an After-school Program

- Increased academic performance
- Lower juvenile crime rate
- Improved social skills

Identifying Programs that Work

- Government Organizations: Free Library of Philadelphia and City Recreation Centers
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of SEPA
- The Police Athletic League
- Faith-based Organizations: Women's Christian Alliance and Episcopal Community Services
- Latino Community-Based Organizations: ASPIRA and Taller Puertorriqueño

Challenges Faced by After-School Programs

- Attracting Youth
  - Solution:
    - Recruit during school assemblies
    - Advertise through community outlets
    - Provide interactive presentations at neighborhood schools
- Retaining At-Risk Youth
  - Solution:
    - Develop and maintain positive youth-adult relationships
    - Involvement in community service
    - Allow youth to lead selected programs
    - Promote friendly competition

Recommendations for the City

- Provide community space
- Encourage collaboration with extra-governmental providers
- Support and evaluate the ongoing work of intermediary organizations
- Encourage competitive and team-building activities in after-school programs

Thank you and we hope you enjoyed our presentation!

Public Safety Group: Adam Bartolanzo, Anojda Creighton, Jeanell Evans, Fatima Flynn, Jennifer Frechie, Ashley Hairston, Kristen Harchut, Jeffrey Lebron-Melendez, Eileen McKeown, Francis Nelson, Julie Brinn Siegel