Support Services for Middle School Youth: A Survey of Spokane Area Organizations

Findings from a survey of community organizations providing support services for middle school youth in the Spokane Public School (SPS) district underscore the wide range of support services available, including academic support, support for basic needs, health and mental health services, and risk prevention services. Most programs in the Spokane area remain relatively small and stable, providing services multiple times per week across the year, often relying on a sizeable group of volunteers to carry out their missions.

Most programs in the area serve a relatively high proportion of minority youth and youth from low-income households, who also often lack the involvement of a responsible family member. Programs appear somewhat more successful in recruiting and retaining youth whose basic needs are not being met (e.g., homeless youth) and youth with health issues than those associated in any way with the criminal justice system.

As a whole, programs serving youth in Spokane incorporate a youth development perspective, working to develop skills and characteristics that help youth succeed in their journey to adulthood. Most programs use published curriculum and structured mentoring; far fewer incorporate alignment with the schools or middle- to high school transition activities.

Most programs incorporate evaluation, systematically collecting a variety of program data. About a third of the programs responding to this study employ formal assessment. Programs report the greatest improvement in pro-social behaviors and are least likely to report reducing risk behaviors.

Findings from this study, especially a comparison of 15 programs that demonstrate improvement among participants in academic performance with the sample as a whole, suggest that the community may want to focus on the following strategies to further improve the academic performance of middle school youth and their positive transition into high school:

- Celebrate the strength of youth development in the community
- Support evaluation efforts
- Strengthen alignment with schools
- Increase middle- to high school transition programs

In addition, programs serving middle school-aged youth may want to focus on the following strategies:

- Incorporate formal assessment
- Strengthen retention of more vulnerable children
- Increase parent involvement
- Address key risk factors
Dear Stan,

An article called “A college degree, but not a college Job” stated that in 2009 about 55% of students didn’t find jobs once they graduated. The odds are even worse for students majoring in the humanities fields (see chart for details). It’s a sobering fact that sends chills down my spine after considering the hours of studying, tuition costs, living expenses, and the years spent obtaining a college degree. So, why don’t students get the jobs they want? What does it take to succeed in the desired field of study? – Worried About the future

Dear Worried,

In the last two years as a research assistant and an advisor/recruiter for the Children’s Studies Program, I have had the opportunity to speak with numerous students. It turns out that many students entered the university with the assumption that all they really needed to succeed was to cultivate good grades and complete their program. There is nothing wrong with that perspective, except that it confines the students to stay within their comfort zones. Here, the students don’t feel the need to push themselves into extracurricular activities like volunteering, internships, research teams, and clubs. As a result, students miss the tremendous opportunities our university provides to build their vita or academic resume and establish the network needed to succeed in the work field.

Where do we start? Since Winter quarter of 2012 has already begun; the assignments are assigned, the quizzes/tests are scheduled, and we’re busy reading through the required texts. It is up to the students to figure out what occupational opportunities they have after they graduate and even during their studies. Despite demands on their time, students would benefit from extensive research about their future jobs. They should explore the qualifications, attitudes, and knowledge needed to be a good applicant. All the while, keeping in mind that in our present economy there are people with higher degrees and more experience, who are far more desperate then you, applying for the same jobs. Once the student discovers what they need, whether it is experience, specific skills, diversity, conference presentations, recommendations, or awards; they should begin looking for opportunities to obtain them. I would recommend using the university as the primary source and then your community. Begin with your advisor, then your favorite professors, check out the cool student service agencies all around campus, attend events, and anything else you find interesting relating to your studies.

Students must understand that anyone they meet is a connection in their developing network that may at one point help them to succeed. It sounds selfish, but really it is common courtesy when the student’s motivation is, “How can I contribute to you?” and not, “How can you help me?” It is the people that we meet...

Sincerely,

Stan

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**ASK STAN: DEGREE CHART**

...who really shape us as individuals and guide us on our journey. No one can be sure what will help. It could be that letter of recommendation that gets you a job, someone putting in a good word for you, the tutor who edited and critiqued your personal statement that got you the scholarship, or a complaint that lost you your job and forced you to search elsewhere. In the end, opportunities open up for those who seek to find them.

Sincerely,

Stan

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**CHILDREN’S STUDIES STAFF**

- Stan Pichinevsky - Research Assistant for the Online Program
- Annie Tirado - Peer Mentor
- Rosie Tirado - Community Relations Assistant, Event Planning
- Amanda Dunn - Newsletter Editor
- Tegan Baldwin - Technical Writing Assistant

The Children’s Studies staff is located in 007A Hargreaves Hall on the Cheney campus and can be reached by calling 509.359.6813.

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**CHECK IT OUT!!**

**Ask Stan, Supporting Articles:**
PARTNER HIGHLIGHTS: COMMUNITY IN SCHOOLS

Community in Schools (CIS) works to improve the lives of middle school students. Support includes basic services, counseling, family referral and support, and after-school programs. Afterschool programs include the mentoring program on Mondays. Typically, youth selected for this opportunity are currently failing at least half of their core subjects; many are also impacted by poverty. These young people have an urgent need to connect with a caring adult to transform their motivation to be more successful in school and other dimensions of their lives.

CIS mentors commit 2 hours of their time each week until the middle of May. All mentors must complete a Washington State Patrol background check and attend a mentor training session. Training prepares mentors in a way that gives structure and security to the site-based match with students, plus the opportunity for mentors to weave their gifts into this important relationship.

If you are interested in mentoring contact Vanessa Goss, Mentor Facilitator with Communities In School of Spokane County at vanessargoss@gmail.com or Sheri Frantilla, the Cheney Middle School Site Coordinator at sfrantilla@cheneysd.org.

2011/12 OFFICERS FOR THE CHILDREN’S STUDIES CLUB

President - Jana Bowman
Vice President - Anna LeCount
Treasurer - Stan Pichinevskiy
Public Relations - Anne Long
Membership Chair - Jessica Gaulke

Come join us! Our meetings are generally held on the first and third Monday of each month at 1:00pm in 05 Hargreaves Hall. Please feel free to contact the Children’s Studies office (359.6813) for more information. Check us out on Facebook!

CHILDREN’S STUDIES PROGRAM

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OH, THE PLACES YOU WILL GO:
ALUMNI UPDATE

Kelly Jo Keggereis

Despite the challenges of raising her family, working part-time, attending school full-time, and commuting 45 minutes each day, Kelly Jo Keggereis graduated in spring of 2011. She left Eastern Washington University with a double major in Children’s Studies and History, also with a minor in English. Kelly’s dedication and diligence has helped her achieve a four-year degree (bachelorette) at EWU and will continue to drive her ambition in completing a Clinical Mental Health Counseling Program at Whitworth University Graduate Studies in Education. Keggereis is really excited to begin her graduate studies on September 12. Looking at what she will gain in the end, she brushed off the disadvantage that her commute will now be two hours long... Kelly continues to prove her faithfulness to her motto “we are never too old, nor too far away, to continue our education.” After the completion of her master’s degree, Kelly wishes to open a counseling service agency for children and their families.

Lauren Goldbloom

Since graduating from the Children’s Studies Program in 2006, Lauren Goldbloom has well established her career as a licensed foster parent. Partnering up with her husband, together they have fostered over 50 kids, ages birth to 12 in the last 5 years! Lauren shares her gratitude for the educational background and practicum she did at Sally’s House, which helped find her calling as a foster mom. She’s now a mother of two wonderful boys and feels blessed to be raising and teaching them at home. She admits that the Children’s Studies philosophy has been an incredible influence not just on herself, but on all the kiddos that have come through her doors. Lauren Golden enjoys sharing her personal story and expertise about foster care in different classes at Eastern Washington University. Her dedication to foster care continues to show through her desire and willingness to speak about it when opportunities present themselves.

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