

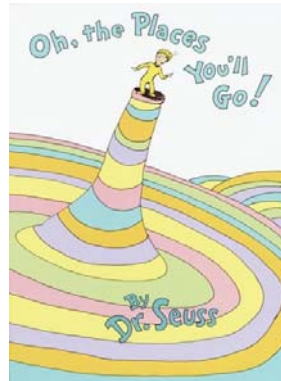
*Anyone Can Start an  
After-School Children's Program*



"If you are a dreamer, come in.  
If you are a dreamer, a wisher, a liar,  
A hope-er, a pray-er, a magic bean buyer . . .  
If you're a pretender, come sit by my fire,  
For we have some flax golden tales to spin.  
Come in!  
Come in!"

~Shel Silverstein

## So you want to start an After-School Children's Program?



*"Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not..."*

*...You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes.*

*You can steer yourself any direction you choose.*

*You're on your own, and you know what you know.*

*And you will be the guy who'll decide where you'll go."*

*-Dr. Seuss*

**S**o, you've decided you want to start an after-school children's program. But how do you begin? We've all known of successful programs but also of programs that haven't been so successful. But what are some of these programs doing that are making them such a success? The goal of this story is help you learn about how to put together an effective program by seeing what others have done in the city of Lowell. My aim is also to encourage you to do your best by providing you with real-life examples from an experienced program coordinator, Manisha Sharma. Manisha is employed at *Girls Incorporated* of Lowell, Massachusetts and she has helped to get many programs off the ground and running. Throughout this article, she shares her opinions and advice on starting a program.

This archive item will describe:

- ✓ *Characteristics of effective programs*
- ✓ *Steps to creating your own program*
- ✓ *Recommended resources*
- ✓ *Best practices: setting goals and evaluations*
- ✓ *Innovation and problem solving*
- ✓ *Research*
- ✓ *Partnerships: with community, parents, the public, and others*
- ✓ *References*

**Note:** Children's books are one source of creativity that can be used when creating a program. Many books have life lessons and themes that can be easily incorporated into a program. Interspersed within this article are several quotations from popular children's books, I hope they help get your creative juices flowing!

### *Characteristics of Effective After-School Programs*

**W**e all want to design effective programs, but it can be difficult to make sure that we have included everything that is important. Where do we look for information that will be useful for program? I suggest you look at the web site

<http://www.drugs.indiana.edu/publications/beyond/3.html>. Below I have listed some factors that most studies indicate are a part of successful programs. This web site will give you additional information.

- ✓ **Respond** to the needs and interests of youth.
- ✓ **Include** a mix of youth and not just youth who are at-risk.
- ✓ **Integrate** into a comprehensive prevention program that reinforces its lessons and addresses specific factors that influence drug use.
- ✓ **Promote** positive development and resilience of youth by enhancing their competence and sense of autonomy and purpose.
- ✓ **Extend** the reach of prevention efforts to youth who are at high risk for, or have already tried using, alcohol or drugs, as well as families and communities.
- ✓ **Design** challenging activities and promote the development of social and personal skills, maintain high expectations, and teach the skills needed for success.
- ✓ **Maintain** an encouraging, cooperative, supportive, but structured environment that emphasizes participation and collaboration rather than competition.
- ✓ **Involve** youth in planning and running the program, and serve as a resource to their peers and their community.

*What Steps does Manisha take when starting her After School Programs?*

“First I conduct a needs assessment. I look at what research has been done in the past and I do a pre-test and find out where the participants are and what knowledge they already have. I use other curriculum and books to help guide me when writing lesson plans and then I conduct a post-test to evaluate the success of the program.”

## ***Recommended Resources:***

*What Resources does Manisha use?*

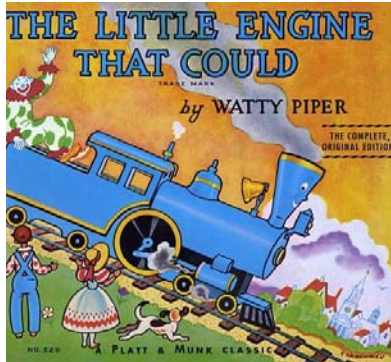
“When looking for programs about girls, Girls Incorporated has a great website ([www.girls-inc.org](http://www.girls-inc.org)). I've also used curriculum from [gurze.com](http://gurze.com) and [edap.org](http://edap.org). People that I have spoken with include the program director and executive director at Girls Inc. I've also spoken with people from other youth agencies such as Girl Scouts, YMCA, YWCA, The Boys and Girls Club, The United Teen Equality Center, etc.”

*What will you find on the Girls Inc. website??*

- Program Descriptions
- The Girls Inc. History
- Employment Opportunities
- Research about Girls
- Inspiring stories
- Fun activities
- Message boards

*Visit [www.girls-inc.org](http://www.girls-inc.org) for more information*

## Best Practices in Starting Successful Programs



*"Slowly the cars began to move. Slowly they climbed the steep hill. As they climbed, each little steam engine began to sing:*

*"I-think-I-can! I-think-I-can! I-think-I-can! I-think-I-can! I-think-I-can! I-think-I-can! I think I can - I think I can - I think I can I think I can--"*

*And they did! Very soon they were over the hill and going down the other side."*

*The Little Engine that Could, By: Watty Piper*

### Setting Goals

Manisha Sharma believes that setting goals is very important when starting an after school program.

*"The first thing that I do when setting goals for a program in Lowell is look at what the needs of the population are. I like to find out what areas need to be developed and expanded upon, what are topics that the girls in our programs are looking to learn about. It is useless to put your effort into a program if no one is going to attend. If you are going to put your time and energy into something it is important to find out if this is something that the girls, teacher, counselors, nurses, etc are asking for. I also look at what has been done in the past or by other organizations in Lowell. This is a great way of finding out what programs have been useful and successful and often provide a guide when coming up with goals and direction for a program. I will also brainstorm with my colleagues so that I can utilize their input when trying to come up with goals. After conducting a needs assessment, I usually write down all of my goals and meet with my colleagues to determine what goals we as an organization want to pursue. I might also run in past the potential participants to see what they think and if they have any feedback about the program goals."*

The organizers of successful after-school programs try to be clear from the outset about their goals, and their programs are designed to address those goals. For example, some programs are designed primarily to provide a safe after-school environment. Some focus on recreation. Some have a strong academic focus. Many are designed to provide a combination of the above.

Regardless of their focus, the programs should be fun. Experienced planners are agreed that students should be provided with opportunities to explore interests, learn about other cultures, and develop hobbies. Academic components should be challenging but not overwhelming. In short, after-school programs should reflect the needs, interests, and abilities of the students they serve.

Goals serve as a foundation for a strong program. We all have experience setting goals. By building on your individual experience and considering the following principles, you will be well equipped to design and implement your programs. In general:

- ✓ Goals should be broad and realistic. They should include specific references to your program and be able to be evaluated over the course of six-months or a year.
- ✓ Take time and care when developing your goals. Evaluate your past goals: Were they realistic? Did you make substantial progress toward reaching them? Were they program specific? What can you do to create better goals? By taking time to think about your past successes, you can prepare more successfully for the future.
- ✓ Spend time conducting research. Many successful programs study the results of their past activities and conduct research on trends in their community. By spending time understanding the demographics of your community, and making your campaigns as audience specific as possible, you are more likely to create realistic goals.
- ✓ Consider the major components of your program. Create specific goals for each important element of your program. Are there components that are: being ignored? need funding in future years? are unrealistic? Seeing these goals, side-by-side will allow you to prioritize the major components of your program and their associated goals.

## *Evaluation: How to Assess the Program's Success*



*"I don't see much sense in that," said Rabbit.  
"No," said Pooh humbly, "there isn't. But there was going to be when I began it. It's just  
that something happened to it along the way."  
~Winnie The Pooh*

**M**anisha has found that evaluation is another essential component of the after-school programs. Here are some questions that may help you assess the success of your program:

- *Is the program achieving its goals?*
- *What areas should be strengthened?*
- *Are there unexpected benefits?*
- *Is the program more effective for one group of students than for another?*
- *Does your program meet children's needs?*
- *Is your program intellectually challenging?*
- *Does it include everyone?*
- *Is your program sensitive to parent needs and ethnic and gender diversity?*
- *Is your program fun as well as educational*

## ***Innovation & Problem Solving: How is Your Program Doing?***



*"One evening Harold decided to go for a walk in the moonlight. But there wasn't any moon, and Harold needed a moon for a walk in the moonlight. Fortunately, he had bought his purple crayon. So he drew a moon. He also needed something to walk on, so he drew a path..."*

*~Harold and the Purple Crayon, by Crockett Johnson*

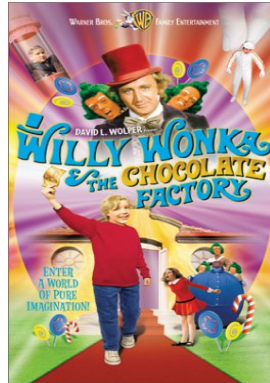
### ***What challenges or obstacles might I face in setting up a quality after-school program?***

**T**he challenges that after-school programs face are in some ways the same challenges faced by the school themselves. How do we find, train, and then keep good staff? How do we help parents, and involve parents, with the difficult work schedules parents often have? Where do we find money for materials, computers, and field trips? How can we create an environment in which children can learn, play, and be safe? For after-school programs, there are added questions: How can we market our services to the community, and keep them informed about and involved with our program? How do we sustain the program in the long term, after the initial funding runs out?

Taken from:

[http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/concept2class/month11/exploration\\_sub5.html](http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/concept2class/month11/exploration_sub5.html)

*Don't try to reinvent the wheel!*



*"Invention, my dear friends,  
is 93% perspiration, 6% electricity,  
4% evaporation, and 2% butterscotch ripple."*

*~Willie Wonka, from Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*

**M**anisha recommends looking to other successful programs for advice before beginning your own. Challenges in your program may range from time constraints to transportation issues to monetary challenges. These challenges can't be ignored and they require time and resources to be resolved. But it is important to remember that successful programs throughout Lowell and in other communities have struggled with exactly these same issues. Many schools communicate about their concerns with each other to come up with solutions. You can use the internet or the telephone book to get in touch with schools in your area to see what solutions they have found. You can also directly contact program administrators or program coordinators at local centers such as *Girls Incorporated* or the *Boys and Girls Club* to ask for their advice.

## ***Research: Will your program help the kids who need you?***



*"Now stop!" Max said and sent the wild things off to bed without their supper. And Max the king of all wild things was lonely and wanted to be where someone loved him best of all."  
~Where the Wild Things Are, By: Maurice Sendak*

What does Manisha say about Research?

"I research other programs before I begin. Usually I start with an internet search to see if there are any other similar programs and organizations conducting the same types of programs that we are. I speak with my colleagues and other community members/youth workers and find out what they have done in the past and what has or hasn't worked."

**Not sure if your program will help kids? Check out these compelling studies:**

- Children and youth who regularly attend high-quality after school programs have better grades and conduct in school; more academic and enrichment opportunities; better peer relations and emotional adjustment and lower incidences of drug-use, violence and pregnancy. (*U.S. Department of Education. 21st Century Community Learning Centers: Providing Quality After school Learning Opportunities for America's Families, September 2000*)
- Nearly eight in 10 teens (79 percent) who participate in after school programs are "A" or "B" students. Teens who do not engage in after school activities are five times more likely to be "D" students than teens who do. (*YMCA of the USA. After School for America's Teens, March 2001*)
- Participants in the Boys and Girls' Clubs of America's national educational enhancement program Project Learn increased their grade average and

showed improved school attendance and study skills. (*S. Schinke. Evaluation of Boys and Girls' Clubs of America's Educational Enhancement Program, 1999*)

- High school youth in after school programs are at least 5 to 10 percent more likely to earn "A"s and "B"s; have attended a cultural event or visited a museum in the past month; say they love school or like school a lot; believe being a good student is important; say their schools are preparing them very well for college and plan on continuing their education after graduation. (*Peter D. Hart, Research Associates. The Shell Education Survey Poll, 1999*)
- Fourth-graders in the Ohio Hunger Task Force's urban after school initiative exceeded the statewide percentage of students meeting proficiency standards in math, writing, reading, citizenship and science. (*Partners Investing in Our Community of Kids and Ohio Hunger Task Force. Urban School Initiative School-Age Care Project: 1989-99 School Year Evaluation Report, 1999*)
- Students who participate in extracurricular activities achieve better grades, have lower rates of truancy, attain higher levels of achievement in college and feel more attached to their schools, as documented by a 17-year study that followed 1,800 sixth-graders in 10 Michigan school districts through high school and college. (*Michelle Galley. "Extra Benefits Tied to Extracurriculars" Education Week, October 18, 2000*)
- Teens who do not participate in after school programs are nearly three times more likely to skip classes at school than teens who do participate. They are also three times more likely to use marijuana or other drugs, and they are more likely to drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes and engage in sexual activity. (*YMCA of the USA. After School for America's Teens, March 2001*)

The website <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org> offers a lot of research located on line for you to peruse. Some of the research topics include:

- Help Working Families
- After school and the Building of Character
- After school: The Natural Platform for Youth Development
- Literacy & Reading in After school Programs
- Generating Excitement about Math and Science
- After school and Technology
- After school and Students with Special Needs
- After school Keeps Kids Safe (crime and drug prevention)
- After school and Healthy Lifestyles
- After school and Service-Learning
- After school, Community Service and Volunteerism
- After school Partnerships with Higher Education
- After school Programs Meeting Youth Needs in Rural America
- After school and Pregnancy Prevention
- After school and Summer Programs

- A study of a 32-month after school and summer skill-development program in a Canadian public housing project showed that the number of juvenile arrests declined by 75 percent from two years previous. (*Fight Crime: Invest in Kids. America's After-School Choice: The Prime Time for Juvenile Crime Or Youth Enrichment and Achievement, October 2000*)
- Students who spend no time in extracurricular activities are 49 percent more likely to have used drugs and 37 percent more likely to have become teen parents than those who spend one to four hours per week in extracurricular activities. (*U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services. Adolescent Time Use, Risky Behavior and Outcomes: An Analysis of National Data, 1995*)
- A study of five housing projects with new Boys & Girls clubs and five without clubs showed that the housing projects without after school programs had 50 percent more vandalism and had 30 percent more drug activity than those with after school programs. (*Fight Crime: Invest in Kids. America's After-School Choice: The Prime Time for Juvenile Crime Or Youth Enrichment and Achievement, October 2000*)

## *Forming Partnerships Between Your Program and Others*



*"Differences of habit and language are nothing at all if our aims are identical and our hearts are open."*

*~Albus Dumbledore, from Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*

Partnerships can be very beneficial to a new after-school program in that they can provide the expertise, time, and supplies of various people in the community. Partnerships can be formed at any level, with each party participating a little or a lot. Manisha recommends forming partnerships between local colleges and your program. She suggests contacting several departments in each local college such as the psychology and education departments. Manisha often acquires volunteers to teach her programs by going through the local colleges. She has had students volunteer because they are getting class credit for the experience and also because they are gaining valuable experience that will help them in their future careers.


### *Involving The Larger Community as a Partner*

Taken from:

[http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/concept2class/month11/exploration\\_sub3.html](http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/concept2class/month11/exploration_sub3.html)

Garnering support from parents and building strong community partnerships is key to setting up a program that will be sustainable in the long run, for several reasons. First, after-school programs exist in response to the changing needs of American families, and therefore must remain continuously in-tune with family concerns. Programs are more likely to find parents involved, as volunteers when possible, as planners, as sources of funding (for example, through their employers), when the parents know that program administrators are paying attention to their needs.

Second, the community as a whole also has a serious stake in successful after-school programs, to reduce crime and other problems that arise when youth are unsupervised, and to help ensure that young people become responsible, contributing members of society. Business leaders will be responsive and helpful when they are made aware of the overall impact good after-school programs can have. They can provide resources that would otherwise be too expensive, such as extra space, old or new computers, and other materials, including arts supplies or equipment for science projects.

 In addition, business leaders may be willing to act as mentors, and some employers might offer job-shadowing programs for neighborhood youth. Law enforcement officials also know that their role in the community is multi-fold; they can act not just as enforcers but as mentors and role models. Around the country, law enforcement officials have sponsored after-school programs, collaborating with schools and community groups to provide resources and time to help improve the lives of young people.

***Here are some more important tips when involving others in your program:***

- Ensure that parent involvement is meaningful, from initial planning through continued leadership.
- Find strategies for open communication with family and school-day teachers to ensure an effective flow of information.
- Give parents and other members of community opportunities to volunteer and lead.
- Make use of existing networks of youth-serving organizations.
- Be sure to include the children and youth themselves in planning, communication, and leadership.

All of the above information has been taken from a very useful website. Check out [http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/concept2class/month11/exploration\\_sub3.html](http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/concept2class/month11/exploration_sub3.html) for more information.

**Some ideas for Program/Community Partnerships:**

- Local law enforcement officers teach a class for students interested in pursuing careers in law enforcement.
- Workers from a chemical plant demonstrate simple science experiments for students.
- Members of a local civic group hold a "book drive" to support the program's emphasis on literacy. The drive collects books from a list of recommended readings put together by school personnel.
- The program coordinator asks a building supply store to donate all of the supplies for summer projects and asks the town newspaper to donate daily publications for use in the literacy program.
- A ballet company offers 25 paid scholarships for students, and the after-school program pays for transportation to the ballet school.
- Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts offer "after-hour" sessions at the conclusion of the regular summer-school day to extend the hours of service.
- A local industry sponsors a "career shadowing" day to give students an opportunity to visit a work site. Workers at the industry train to provide information to students on employability skills and the importance of math, science, and social skills in the workplace.

**Some Ideas for Program/Parent Partnerships:**

- Parents and students request specific activities that reflect their interests.
- The program staff sends progress reports to parents along with regular classroom report cards.
- The program coordinator and staff recruit parents as volunteers for special events.
- Parents contribute to the program through a reasonable participation fee (\$5 per month) and donations of basic program supplies. Parents review homework with students every evening.
- The program coordinator sets up a weekly "telephone hour" when parents can call for program information or with questions or suggestions. A person answers the phone, not an answering machine.

- The program staff plans activities that encourage parent involvement through attendance at student performances, including concerts, art shows, and theater productions.

**Some Ideas for Program/Public Partnerships:**

- The school newspaper includes a column, created by students participating in the program, that describes program activities.
- Local churches carry an announcement section in their weekly church bulletin describing upcoming program activities and registration information.
- The program staff produces a newsletter that is circulated to parents, school staff, community partners, and the business community.

Resources: Websites about Forming

Partnerships

- <http://www.ncrel.org>
- [www.thirteen.org](http://www.thirteen.org)

And will you succeed?  
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KID, YOU'LL MOVE MOUNTAINS!

So...  
be your name Buxbaum or Bixby or Bray  
or Mordecai Ali Van Allen O'Shea,  
you're off to Great Places!  
Today is your day!  
Your mountain is waiting.  
So... get on your way!

---Dr. Seuss

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