




## Youth Safe Haven/Police Ministation: Providing After-School Havens for Middle School Youths

Programs such as Youth Safe Haven/Police Ministation are effective because they are close to youths and the communities they serve, and because they seek to stimulate active engagement of different stakeholders in the community.

 **Middle Matters** » February 2008, Vol. 16, No. 3

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For many middle school youths in disadvantaged communities (whether inner-city, suburban, or rural), the absence of appropriate support systems and supervision at home, school, and in their neighborhoods often reduces their readiness to succeed academically. As a consequence, some begin skipping school, doing poorly in classes, and practicing problem behaviors. By the time these struggling middle school students reach high school, most of them are ill-prepared (academically, emotionally, and socially) to successfully adjust to the norms, values, and expectations of their new setting.

It comes as no surprise, then, that a significant number of them drop out of high school within the first two years of enrollment. The fit between high school expectations and their academic readiness is so off balance that they simply stand no chance of succeeding unless institutional (*e.g.*, school) or communal (*e.g.*, neighborhood) resources exist to provide them with one-on-one mentoring and tutoring.

### **A Model for Community-based After-school Programs**

For almost three decades, the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation has been replicating and scientifically evaluating successful community-based after-school program models for elementary, middle school, and high school youths living in disadvantaged communities. Youth Safe Haven/Police Ministation (YSH/PM) is one such program model that is rich in structured adult mentoring, academic tutoring, and scheduled, developmentally appropriate skill-building opportunities.

Its goal is to provide youths with a safe space during after-school hours in which positive development, academic achievement, and connection to family, school, and community can be cultivated. The Eisenhower Foundation has successfully replicated the YSH/PM model across the United States and variations of the model have been successfully replicated by other agencies in other communities as well.

The YSH/PM model merges the American concept of an after-school youth safe haven with the Japanese concept of a neighborhood-based police ministation. The program is operated by civilians and is usually located in local public schools, public housing, or some other low-income setting. Paid YSH/PM staff and trained volunteers give priority to mentoring, tutoring, coaching, and near peering (*i.e.*, mentoring by peers who are close in age).

Local police who are assigned to the program work closely with program staff and share the same space within the community. Using the ministation as their home base, the police officers spend about half their time mentoring youths and the other half undertaking problem-oriented community policing. Some YSH/PM sites also provide dinner for youths, thereby enriching the program's academic and development agenda. The program operates from 3-10 p.m. weekdays, during the time of the day when youths are most likely to be unsupervised, need assistance with homework, and get into trouble.

### **Research-based Program Assessment**

The Eisenhower Foundation assesses the impact of its YSH/PM replications by carrying out evaluations of student and community outcomes. The assessments are guided by theory-driven research, treatment and comparison groups, and quantitative and qualitative measures. These assessments have shown that the YSH/PM can have a considerable positive effect on the communities in which they operate.

Daily interactions between youths, program staff, local police officers, and family members have led to improved relations and trust. In turn, this has made local citizens more forthcoming in reporting instances of crime, especially those committed by youths. Over time, these changes have contributed to statistically significant reductions in crime in many communities served by the YSH/PM program.

Assessments of YSH/PM participants' progress focus on several different aspects of youth development:

1. Academic performance in four core subjects (English, math, science, and social studies);
2. School attendance rates;
3. Attitudes toward school;
4. Level of problem behaviors; and
5. School completion.

Outcome data from the YSH/PM programs have proved to be exceptionally valuable in capturing academic and behavior patterns among middle school students living in disadvantaged communities. For instance, 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 assessments of middle school YSH/PM participant progress reveals that youths whose grade in English decreased between the first and second semesters also were likely to earn a lower grade in at least one of the other three core subjects during the same period. At the same time, an improvement in the English grade was accompanied by an improvement in math, science, and social studies.

Staff at YSH/PM sites have been advised to provide middle school youths with more targeted (child-focused) one-on-one tutoring in English and stricter oversight of homework in other classes and similarly, YSH/PM sites are being encouraged to seek out volunteers experienced in tutoring youths in different aspects of the English language, primarily reading, writing, and comprehension.

The need in disadvantaged communities for trained and committed tutors and mentors for youths of middle school age is urgent. While some sites are trying to address this issue by forming partnerships with other institutions or citizen groups, intentional collaboration between middle schools and the local YSH/PM programs is perhaps the most essential factor for the long-term success of youths and the schools they attend.

The lack of connection between middle schools and community-based after-school organizations limits the schools' success. Collaborative efforts between schools and after-school programs such as YSH/PM are essential in communities that are otherwise depleted of assets, or where local institutions lack the means to reach youths and motivate them to stay in school and do well.

#### **Lessons to Consider**

We encourage middle school principals to give careful consideration to the Eisenhower Foundation's lessons and to design their own approaches to linking local after-school resources, such as the YSH/PM program, to students in need. Here are some examples of what administrators can do to make this possible:

- Talk to your teachers and counselors about the role of the school and after-school programs in serving youths and how after-school programs can help increase the success of your school.
- Identify and then build, restore, or strengthen partnerships with local community-based programs that offer academic enrichment or tutoring to youths attending your school.
- Discuss with directors of local after-school programs the main set of academic skills and knowledge your students are expected to develop. Be involved in the lesson plans of programs such as YSH/PM so as to better align your school's expectations with youths' needs and to capitalize on the program's services.
- Offer your school as a resource. At the very least, school facilities can be used after hours for community program activities.
- Seek the support of local after-school programs in increasing engagement of other stakeholders, such as parents, relatives, friends, neighbors, and local police officers

patrolling the community or working at the school.

We have a joint responsibility to provide youths with opportunities to learn and, equally important, with opportunities to receive help with learning. All youths—including those living in struggling communities—have a right to access viable options for achieving self-sufficiency and control over their futures. Programs such as YSH/PM are effective because they are close to youths and the communities they serve, and because they seek to stimulate active engagement of different stakeholders in the community. Middle schools have an important role to play in nurturing these collaborations.

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