Afterschool Spotlight

Harlan County Boys and Girls Club

PROTECTIVE FACTORS



Harlan County Boys and Girls Club

Harlan, KY

81

Average number of students served during the school year

100%

Students from low-income families

Main funding sources:

- State and federal funding (including 21st Century Community Learning Centers)
- ► Foundation grants
- Local donations
- Fundraisers

Being a resource for students and their families to help them connect to appropriate systems of support

New research tells us that the adolescent years are a highly important developmental period for brain growth and "the second most critical period of development." However, there are factors at both the individual and community levels that impact the development process. This includes risk factors that increase the likelihood that one will take part in unhealthy behaviors, as well as protective factors that spur healthy behaviors and development. Young people need a continuous system of support from birth through adolescence into young adulthood, creating the conditions that help them thrive and build the skills and attributes that will have a positive influence on their lives as they face thousands of decisions each day. Afterschool and summer learning programs are a part of this continuous system of support, providing services during a critical time of development for young people that will help children grow their strengths, cope with the complications of life, and lead healthful lives to become healthy adults.

Overview

Harlan County Boys and Girls Club (the Club) is part of the national Boys and Girls Clubs of America, a youth development organization dedicated to helping all young people reach their full potential. The Club in Harlan County provides southeastern Kentucky youth ages 6-18 with many aspects of high-quality afterschool programming typically offered at other clubs, such as leadership development and improving healthy habits. Moreover, the Club has tailored many of its services to address the needs of youth living in a community where substance misuse is prevalent.

A typical day for students

Every day after school, youth from three schools within walking distance begin to arrive at 3 p.m., while county buses transport students from farther away to the Club. Students start their afternoon with Power Hour, an educational program that provides academic support, such as homework help, as well as fun educational activities, like math bingo. Afterwards, youth have the option of participating in a myriad of enrichment programs that focus on leadership and character development, health and life skills, the arts, or physical fitness. During

the summer, students can participate in a full day of programming, with weekly themes such as "the great outdoors," science, and world culture.

Outcomes

Program Director Kateena Hayes says that over the years she has seen a reduction in the misuse of prescription drugs among high school students, however, there is still a strong need to support children growing up within a family and community impacted by the opioid epidemic. Based on program participant surveys that gauge feelings of general safety and knowledge of opioid addiction, 82 percent of youth reported having a trusted adult at the Club whom they could confide in and rely on, while all surveyed youth reported abstaining from vapor products, tobacco products, and marijuana in the last 30 days. Teachers and school administrators alike also report seeing a decrease in negative behavior during school hours in youth who attend the Harlan County Boys and Girls Club.

Program characteristics

Since the outset, Harlan County Boys and Girls Club has been motivated to break the cycle of addiction looming over the community. In creating a safe and supportive environment for youth that includes trauma-informed practices, the Club not only works to prevent a new generation of youth from engaging in risky behaviors, but also works to meet the needs of youth and families currently struggling with the devastating effects of the opioid epidemic. Initially, Club programs incorporated practices that focused on education and prevention efforts, such as helping youth understand the impact of addiction on friends and family. To expand their reach, the Club partnered with local schools to provide their drug prevention education program, Smart Moves, during the school day. Smart Moves spreads the message about the dangers of substance abuse and offers guidance on how to strengthen decision-making skills and exercise responsible behavior.

However, after a wave of Club members (13) lost parents to overdose deaths over the course of one winter, the Club adapted its programming to include additional support services to help youth identify healthy ways to cope with the disruptive and often traumatic effects of the opioid crisis. In the case of a passing, the Club has a protocol to provide immediate assistance to youth and their families, where staff members care for affected youth while their families make funeral arrangements. Staff also offer to accompany youth to the funeral proceedings. The Club continues to provide long-term supports to build the social and emotional resiliency of youth in the aftermath of a loss by connecting them with weekly one-on-one mentoring opportunities and grief counseling. Club staff members who have participated in the national Boys and Girls Club "Be There" grief and bereavement initiative are able to use their training to identify the appropriate needs of youth experiencing loss. In addition, the Club partners with a local counseling practice to bring in a licensed counselor to help youth work through the grieving process.



Challenges

The importance of the adolescent years: Science shows that, from birth through young adulthood, our brains are continuously developing: brain pathways grow stronger, information is processed more rapidly, and we build more complex connections that enable more complex thinking. A child's adolescent years hold enormous potential to grow and develop the skills—from building relationships to learning self-control—that they will need in adulthood. It is also a time when adolescents are in a more vulnerable state and their surrounding environments and supports—particularly non-familial supports—play a significant role in their development.

The effect of our surroundings: Research has found that our surroundings at the community, family, and individual levels can have a positive or a harmful effect on our development. Poverty, community violence, conflict within the family, and parent or family members that struggle with alcohol or drug misuse are just a few of the risk factors that exist at the community and family levels.

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs): Close to half of children in the U.S. from zero through age 17 have experienced at least one ACE, an experience, such as being a victim of violence or having a parent or guardian who has passed away, that could have a negative and lasting effect on one's health and well-being.

Individual risk factors: Depression, cigarette use, and substance use and misuse are also risk factors young people grapple with today. In 2017, 32 percent of high school students reported feeling sad or hopeless for persistent periods of time, 17 percent seriously considered attempting suicide, 14 percent reported misusing opioids, and e-cigarette use increased by 78 percent among high schoolers and 48 percent among middle schoolers from 2017 to 2018.

Read Afterschool: Fostering Protective Factors that Can Last a Lifetime to learn more.

Risk Factors and Protective Factors

Risk factors and protective factors are present at the individual, family, and community levels. Below are examples of risk and protective factors for adolescents at the various levels.







Individual

Family

Community



Risk Factors

- Low self-esteem
- ► Inability to communicate
- Substance use and misuse
- ► Family conflict
- Parent substance use
- ▶ Unemployment
- ► Lack of adult supervision
- Poverty
- Exposure to a community or school related traumatic event or violence
- Favorable community or peer group attitude toward alcohol and drug use



Protective Factors

- ► High self-esteem
- Positive self-image
- Positive peer relationships
- Engagement in school
- Supportive relationships
- Clear expectations for behavior
- Stability and consistency
- Positive adult mentor
- Engagement in school or community activities
- ► Healthy peer groups

Adapted from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's "Risk and Protective Factors for Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Disorders Across the Life Cycle."

Program history

As the opioid epidemic swept over eastern Kentucky, Harlan County was no exception. In 2001, as the community began dealing with the ramifications of rising rates of prescription drug misuse and abuse, a group of parents interested in creating a safe environment for youth after school came together to form the Harlan County Youth Sports League. As one of the only afterschool programs available to youth in the area, Harlan County Youth Sports League quickly realized the need to expand its services, and decided to charter as a Boys and Girls Club in 2003. At the time, it was the only Boys and Girls Club in southeastern Kentucky.

Recommendations

for being a resource for students and their families to help them connect to appropriate systems of support:

- ▶ Give youth a voice. As adults, we may know what the best practices are, but to get youth to "buy in" they need to be involved in the process. Instead of dictating their needs to them, genuinely listen to what youth are expressing.
- Provide holistic support to youth by looking at each child's needs specifically and filling in the gaps that exist between school and home.

