

**The Academic Cultural Enrichment Mentorship Program: An Innovative Approach
To Serving African American Youth**

Kimberly J. Shinew
Dan K. Hibbler
Denise M. Anderson
Department of Leisure Studies
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
104 Huff Hall
1206 South Fourth Street
Champaign, IL 61820

Acknowledgements: This study was made possible through the cooperation of the National Consortium on Recreation and Youth Development that was funded partially by the National Recreation and Park Association. Funding for this study was also received from the Illinois Association of Park Districts' Research Board. The authors would like to thank the Champaign Park District for its cooperation, and would particularly like to acknowledge the efforts of Robert Toalson, Mathew Humphries, Brenda James, and Rasul Mowatt for their involvement in the project.

Executive Summary

The purpose of this study was to evaluate an after school program that is designed to meet the specific needs of African American youth. The program is called the Academic Cultural Enrichment (ACE) Mentorship Program and is sponsored, in part, by the Campaign Park District. The purpose of the program is to provide students with the competencies and skills needed to be involved, resilient, and successful. The program seeks to foster positive Black identities in the participants, and to develop strong math, reading, oratorical, and analytical thinking skills. The program has a strong African cultural component, as well as academic and recreation components. Three research questions guided the evaluation project: 1) are the program's goals being achieved; 2) do the parents and leaders perceive a positive change in the participant's behaviors and attitudes as a result of their participation in the program; and 3) what are the salient program aspects of the ACE Mentorship Program. The evaluation took place over a two-year period. Pretest and posttest survey data were collected from the participants for two consecutive years. Additionally, at the end of the second year interviews were conducted with leaders, parents, and participants. The participant's academic grades were also examined. The information collected from the surveys indicated that the pretest and posttest scores on the Protective Factors Scale and Harter's Self-Perception Scale were not significantly different. The academic grades did indicate positive changes for most of the participants. Further, the information received from the interviews with the parents, leaders, and participants consistently indicated that the program is meeting its goals and is having a positive impact on the children. The salient program elements that seemingly contribute to the positive outcomes include effective and consistent leadership, parental involvement, and innovative programming.

Introduction

Despite fears about violence in schools, the number of kids committing and falling victim to crime has been dropping since 1994 (Witkin, 1998). A recent government report ("Kids crime declines," 1999) on the state of American children painted "an improving and mostly hopeful" picture of children and teens. For example, this report found that the number of high school students smoking cigarettes dropped in 1998 after gradually increasing since 1992. Additionally, the birth rate for girls ages 15 to 17 fell from its peak of 38.7 live births per 1,000 teens in 1991 to 32.1 in 1997. Despite these improvements, child advocates respond by indicating that more needs to be done and that "we're not where we should be". For example, there has been little or no progress in many areas, such as child and teen alcohol consumption ("Kids crime declines," 1999).

Innovative programs have been developed for children as society continues to struggle with the issues facing today's youth. After-school recreation programs are believed to help address some of society's problems, such as lack of home supervision during after-school hours, lack of positive adult role models and mentors, and lack of community opportunities (Colston, 1994; Posner & Vandell, 1994; Witt & Crompton, 1996). Recreation, in particular, is viewed by many as an important component of these

intervention programs (Grossman & Shigaki, 1994; Kunstler, 1993; McCall, 1994). According to Witt and Crompton (1996), recreation is used to attract youth to the program, which subsequently provides them with a safe environment to participate in structured activities during their free time.

In her book *Adolescents at Risk* (1990), Joy Dryfoos spoke of the serious nature of the problems facing today's youth. Dryfoos wrote:

Many children are growing up in the United States today without a hope of enjoying the benefits that come with adulthood. They are not learning the skills necessary to participate in the educational system or to make the transition into the labor force. They cannot become responsible parents because they have limited experience in family life and lack the resources to raise their own children. The gap between achievers and non-achievers is expanding. A new class of "untouchables" is emerging in our inner cities, on the social fringe of suburbia, and in some rural areas: young people who are functionally illiterate, disconnected from school, depressed, prone to drug abuse and early criminal activity, and, eventually, parents of unplanned and unwanted babies. These are the children who are at high risk of never becoming responsible adults. (p.3)

Today's youth need to be taught the necessary skills to deal with the pressures and temptations of everyday life. Jessor (1992) stated that, "Behaviors such as illicit drug use, school dropout, unprotected sexual intercourse, encounters with the criminal justice system, or others, can compromise successful adolescent development and jeopardize the life-chances of youth." (p.25). However, not all youth succumb to the pressures they face on a regular basis. It is believed that some youth have benefited from the development of protective factors. Jessor (1992) concluded that protective factors moderate, buffer, and insulate against and thereby, mitigate the impact of risk on adolescent behavior and development. Protective factors assist youth in the development of resiliency, which refers to those skills and behaviors that help youth cope and adjust to the pressures and circumstances of their every day environment (McMillian & Reed, 1994). Allen, Stevens, and Harwell (1996) stated that resiliency should be one of the outcomes of successful recreation programs for this target population.

The interest in assessing the outcomes of youth programs has increased in recent years. Many studies have been conducted to evaluate program effectiveness (e.g., Allen et al., 1996; Baker & Witt, 1996; Scott, Witt, & Garteiser Foss, 1996). However, as stated by Scott et al. (1996), in order to facilitate service delivery and to ensure the future funding of programs that are targeted to meet the needs of youth, additional program evaluation research is needed. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study was to evaluate an after school program that is designed to meet the specific needs of African American youth. The purpose of the program is to provide children with the competencies and skills needed to be involved, resilient, and successful. The program seeks to instill a positive Black identity in the participants, and to develop strong math, reading, oratorical, and analytical thinking skills. Thus, the program has a strong African cultural component, as well as academic and recreation components. The program, the Academic Cultural

Enrichment (ACE) Mentorship Program, is sponsored, in part, by the Champaign Park District and has been in existence for three years.

Methods

Community Setting

Champaign is a city of 65,000 residents with a neighboring city to the East, Urbana, having a population of 35,000 residents. The two cities are also the home of the University of Illinois with an enrollment of approximately 35,000 students. The two cities are typical of a middle class American university community and have a mean family income level of \$36,950 (“Destination Champaign,” 1993). Currently, the African American population is approximately 14.2%, the Asian population is approximately 4.1%, and the Hispanic and Native American population is less than 1%. The remainder of the population is European Americans (80.7%).

The ACE Mentorship Program operates from the Douglass Community Center located in the Northeast section of Champaign, Illinois. Historically, this section of the community and its residents have been considered “at-risk” due to the high concentration of minority residents combined with the lower economic status of the area compared to the remainder of Champaign. This perception is supported by Champaign Police Department’s crime density reports that indicate that the majority of Champaign’s violent and drug-related crimes take place in this area of town. This is further confounded by the high African American poverty rate. According to the City of Champaign’s city report, more than 30% of Champaign’s African American families are living below the national poverty level as opposed to 4.8% of Champaign’s European American families. In fact, the City of Champaign reports that numerically, African American families living below the poverty level exceeds all other racial groups combined. Many of these families live within walking distance of the Douglass Center. Also, according to the ACE Mentorship Program Coordinator, over 50% of the children participating in the program reside in an African American female-headed household. This is opposed to 17.7% of all female-headed households reported by the City of Champaign.

Program Information

The ACE Mentorship Program is designed to provide African American youth between the ages 6 to 14 with an opportunity to spend their after-school free time in a structured setting while learning a variety of new skills. The hours of operation are from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on Saturday. The Champaign Park District (CPD) and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) jointly operate the program. The AFSC provides the mentors for the program. Currently, there are approximately 50 students enrolled in the program and the program is offered free of charge. Depending on the day’s scheduled activities, there are approximately 5-10 mentors each day to oversee the program. The mentors voluntarily give their time to the program.

The overall purpose of the ACE Mentorship Program is to strengthen and develop

the youths' analytical thinking skills, oratorical skills, and their basic reading and math skills. Through developing these skills the staff's goal is not only to improve participant's academic performance, but also to improve their overall ability to excel in the educational system and in society in general. Three methods are utilized to meet the program's goals. First, traditional classroom style instruction is applied to allow youth to work on targeted academic skills in a small group setting. To complement the classroom instruction, the youth are given one-on-one sessions with mentors who provide personalized instruction. Finally, there is a Black cultural component that is used to help provide the youth with a positive Black identity. The program leaders select a theme each week and then all scheduled activities revolve around this theme. Some of the themes that have been used in the past are family trees, personal safety, community responsibility, and effective communication skills.

The program structure follows a regular schedule. Two days a week the focus is on academics, which includes both the group instruction and one-on-one sessions. Within the group instruction, the youth work on science projects, participate in word finds, solve puzzles and riddles, and analyze movies and videos. These different activities are used to get the youth accustomed to using analytical thinking skills. The one-on-one session is used to give the youth more personalized attention. Participants are also given time to work on homework and to get assistance when needed.

Some days have more of a recreational focus, but continue to stress the development of analytical and oratorical skills, as well as math and reading skills. One day a week the activities focus around cooking, which is taught by one of the parents and another day the focus is on arts and crafts. Recreational games include the traditional games like softball and tag, but also strategy-focused games such as chess and checkers. They also learn new skills, like how to play golf or ski.

The African cultural component serves as a tool to increase the youths' self-esteem. They learn the history of their culture, including such things as historical figures and traditional clothing and customs. Field trips are used to expose the children to different aspects of their culture. For example, the program participants recently went to St. Louis to see an African drum and dance show.

The Douglass Community Center and Park

The ACE Mentorship Program takes place at the Douglass Community Center that is located in Douglass Park. The park contains a playground area, a picnic area, one lighted ball field, and two lighted basketball courts. The Douglass Center is a multi-purpose facility and is equipped with a full-size gymnasium that includes six basketball goals, a stage, a weight training room, locker rooms and showers, and a learning area. The Douglass Annex is located next to the Douglass Center and is equipped with a large activity room, kitchen, lounge and craft room, television, and piano. Also located in the park is the Douglass Library, equipped with computers for the children to use.

Data Collection Procedures

The data was collected in two phases, with both phases involving pretest and posttest data collection. The first year the pretest data was collected during

September/October of 1997 by utilizing on-site questionnaires. The program staff indicated that typically enrollment is not stable until the second week of the program, and therefore, data collection did not occur until after this period. The subjects were given a paper and pencil survey instrument in four 15-minute increments over a 2-day period. Half of the surveys were completed each day in an effort to maintain the children's attention. The program leaders, who work with the participants on a daily basis and who administered the surveys to the children, received verbal and written instructions concerning survey administration prior to data collection. Posttest data was then collected in May/June of 1998.

The same data collection procedure was followed the second year. Pretest data was collected in September/October of 1998 and posttest data was collected during May/June of 1999. In addition, at the end of phase two, personal interviews were conducted with children, parents, and leaders. These semi-structured interviews were conducted in an effort to gain greater insight into the effectiveness of the ACE Mentorship Program.

Sample

The participants of the program are African American children between the ages of 6 to 14 years old. The current enrollment is approximately 50. All children were eligible to participate in the study. Consent forms were distributed to all parents and guardians. The first year of the evaluation, 24 children completed pretest surveys, and only one child dropped out of the program. Thus, 23 children completed both pretest and posttest surveys. The average age was 7.69 years ($SD=1.6$) and 60.9% were girls. Of those who participated in the study, 52.2% had been involved in the ACE Mentorship Program the previous year. Nine different schools were represented among the study's participants. The second year of the evaluation, 50 students completed pretest surveys, but only 39 students completed both pretest and posttest surveys. The average age was 7.72 years ($SD=1.8$) and 50% were girls. Twelve different schools were represented. Once again, almost half (46.7%) of the study's participants were involved in the program the previous year. Eight children participated in the evaluation both years.

Measures

The survey that was given to the children included four sections: satisfaction with program; motivations for participation; Harter's Self-Perception Profile of Children (1982); and the Protective Factor Scale (Witt, Baker, Scott, 1996). The decision to utilize Harter's Self Perception Scale was derived from its ability to tap children's domain-specific judgments of their competence, as well as a global perception of their worth or esteem as a person (Harter, 1982). The scale was designed as a measure of children's perceptions of themselves across the various domains of his/her life. The five specific domains in addition to Global Self-Worth that were included were scholastic competence, social competence, athletic competence, personal appearance, and behavioral conduct (Harter, 1982). All of these domains seemed relevant to the program's overall goals. Each of the six subscales contains six items, constituting a total of 36 items. A four-point scale was used with the anchors of "doesn't sound at all like me" to "sounds a lot like me."

The Protective Factors Scale (Witt, Baker & Scott, 1996) was utilized to measure

the program's ability to develop protective factors in youth. The Protective Factors Scale is based on the earlier research of Jessor (1992) and was developed to measure program outcomes in various areas. These areas included such factors as knowledge of neighborhood resources, access to interested and caring adults, having a sense of acceptance and belonging, having a positive attitude toward the future, ability to work out conflicts, and ability to work with others. In short, protective factors counter or balance the risk factors faced by youth (Jessor, 1992). Again, given the program's overall goals, this was an appropriate measure to include in the study. The scale included 36-items, and the participants were asked to judge how much they either agreed or disagreed with each statement by circling strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, or strongly agree on a five-point Likert Scale.

Academic grades were collected for the study's participants. Grades were obtained from the Champaign and Urbana School Districts. Grades were collected for the year prior to participation in the program as well as the year of participation. Permission to access the grades was obtained from parents and guardians, as well as from school officials.

Findings

Program Motivation and Satisfaction

The participants of the program were asked, "If you were involved in the program last year, what did you like about it?" For the first year of the study, the most popular choices were "the leaders", "learning new things", "it was a safe place to be", and "it keeps me out of trouble". The least popular choice was "the activities". The findings for the second year were different. The most common choices were "the activities" and "learning new things". Other common responses were "the leaders", "being with friends", and "it was a safe place to be". The least popular choice was, "it kept me out of trouble".

The participants were also asked, "Why did you decide to participate in the ACE Mentorship Program this year?" For the first year respondents the most common choices were "I had a good time last year", "I didn't have anything else to do", "I wanted to learn to do different things", "it was a safe place to be", and "to meet new people". The least common responses were "my friends were doing it" and "my parents made me". The second year, the most popular response was "to meet new people". This was followed closely by "my friends were doing it", "I wanted to learn to do different things", and "it was a safe place to be". The least popular choice was "to get away from home".

Protective Factors

Overall scale and subscale scores for the Protective Factors Scale were computed and analyzed for each participant (Table 1). The analysis examined whether the pretest scores and posttest scores were significantly different. No significant differences were found either year for the overall protective factor scale or for the scale's subscales. Careful examination of the data revealed that some "improvement" had occurred, but given the small sample sizes, the differences were not statistically significant.

Self-Perception Profile

Scores on Harter's Self-Perception Scale and subscales were computed and

analyzed for each participant for both years of evaluation (Table 2). No significant differences were found between the pretest scores and the posttest scores. However, again, the mean scores revealed that some positive change had occurred, but not to the level of statistical significance. For example, there was a notable difference the second year of evaluation for three of the six competency areas including scholastic competence, behavioral conduct, and global self-worth. In all three areas, the level of significance was just over .10.

The Interviews

As mentioned, interviews were conducted with parents, participants, and leaders. The interviews were conducted after the second year of evaluation. The purpose of these interviews was to ascertain how those involved in the program perceived its overall impact on the children. Analysis of the transcribed interviews revealed several themes, with the overall theme being that all those involved were very satisfied with the program. In fact, one of the leaders stated that the program, “has gone beyond what I ever imagined.” The three primary themes that emerged were 1) the program’s positive impact on academic performance; 2) the effectiveness of the program’s leadership; and 3) the importance of the African cultural component of the program.

The parents felt that the program was having a positive effect on their children’s academic grades. A statement made by a mother with three children in the program can summarize the impact:

I think it has because they have the tutoring, they help them with their homework, and if they have problems....um...James was having problems with math, I believe, and I mentioned it to one of the leaders or mentors, and I told him...ya know...when James has math homework could somebody help him with it cause he got him some problems with it, and they were fine with it.

A father with two children in the program also indicated that he thinks the program has had a positive effect on his son’s grades. He stated that:

I think the mentor will correct you if you can’t pronounce a word straight like my youngest son, Jarvis. He’ll say certain words and they’ll correct him, then he’ll take information and apply it to school once he gets back.

The leaders also felt that improved academic performance was an important component of the program. One of the leaders concluded:

We work on them developing confidence in themselves...through critical thinking...a major focus of the program....that helps them translate what goes on in ACE to what goes on at school and at home...developing consistent behavior across all environments... that’s what’s important...because that translates into

confidence, which translates into better behavior and better grades

A second theme that emerged from the interviews was the effectiveness of the program's leaders. The parents felt that the mentors provide their children with a quality learning environment. They feel that the mentors truly care about their children, and are willing to do whatever it takes to meet their needs. A mother with one daughter in the program was asked if the program has good leaders. Her response was:

Definitely...definitely...I see um sometimes and I wonder whether they sleep...um I see Colee and the others putting in a lot of hours, a lot of time...um, not only trying to create programs of interest and stuff, but going beyond that...um, and I really doubt that the Park District is paying them for that extra time...um...the cheer/pom program is a ...to me is an excellent example. It doesn't cost that much to sign your child up for, but I look at the hours of practice that they work with the girls, I look at them going out and trying to make arrangements for them to go different places and see things, and it's the same thing... I mean they could very easily just do... this is a class...meet here once a week...boom and that's it. No, they go beyond that... so even this cheer/pom program that's supposed to jump up and down and do cheers, but if you go to practice, you will hear Colee saying things to the girls about the way they talk, the way they carry themselves, the way they should behave. So, it's a constant, there's a constant teaching that's going on there and if that's leadership...yes.

Another parent commented on the individualized attention that the leaders give her child. The example that she gave involved her daughter's dietary needs. Her daughter is diabetic and the leaders make certain that her needs are met, including, "if she forgets her snack, he'll give her 50 cents to get her a snack out of the machine or something." The parents recognize the constant teaching that takes place in the program. The importance of names, and how they are used is just one example. For example, one parent gave the following response when asked if the leaders are really impacting the children's lives:

I think so, my kids look up to em, a lot of em, and they respect em and um... a couple of em have Muslim names and they tell the kids what their names mean and what certain things mean...I think they're role models for, for the children.

The importance of having African American leaders was also clear. For example, one parent commented:

I think the best thing is...ya know...they talk a lot about role models, and when my son and daughter can see young Black men coming back and forth and ya know, not cursing, ya know, carrying books constantly. It's rare that I see anyone go in the center that's involved that doesn't have a book, doesn't have some kind of brief case or knapsack...they're constantly getting a positive image

A third theme that emerged was the importance of the African cultural component of the program. This was mentioned by several individuals, including leaders, children, and parents. One parent mentioned that this is what impressed him most about the program. He stated, "...they are learning more about their culture and themselves." Another parent mentioned that, "...if you don't know your past, you don't know your future." Further, one of the participants indicated that "Black history" was the thing that he had learned most from the program. A leader stated that: "learning different parts of African American history helps them build a better self-image." This point of view was also voiced by one of the parents:

We live in a neighborhood that's not ethnically balanced, and I really wanted her to be more exposed to the African American culture. Period. You know, and I don't care how that sounds, because out in Southwest Champaign she wasn't necessarily getting it, and it goes beyond what you teach at home. The exposure has to come from elsewhere, so I came over to Douglass and I watched a little bit and I talked to people.... and I liked what I was hearing, what I was seeing.

Finally, a consistent theme from the leaders of the program was the importance of parental involvement. A leader mentioned that one of the parents had taken over most of the cooking instruction. The leader stated, "She's a school teacher, so after school she comes to ACE and essentially leads the cooking class for that day". Another leader stressed the importance of the parent support group:

We started having monthly meeting with the parents to keep them informed...you know... on....um....the activities and stuff...and then they took it on themselves to organize the meetings...and now...it's like...I go to their meetings...they have really taken the initiative.

The parents have also taken over the snacks that the participants receive each day. In the beginning, the program was providing the snack, but because of limited resources, they asked the parent support group to take this over. Now, parents bring snacks everyday for all the program participants. One of the leaders revealed:

"...they take turns, so no one has to do it all the time...my guess is that each parent does it once every two months or something...it has helped us a lot and since it's spread around, it's not that big of a burden to them either. It works great."

Academic Grades

Academic grades for 15 participants from 1996-1997 and 1997-1998 were analyzed. Thirteen of the students showed improvement in at least one subject from one year to the next. Nine participants had improved grades in language arts, six had

improved grades in math, four had improved grades in physical education, two had improved grades in science, and two had improved grades in social studies. The second year of evaluation, grades for 13 participants were collected (1997-1998 and 1998-1999) and eleven of the students showed improvement in at least one subject. Seven participants had improved grades in language arts, five had improved grades in both math and science, and three had improved grades in physical education and social studies.

Conclusions and Implications

Conclusions

This study of the ACE Mentorship Program examined the following: 1) are the program's goals being achieved; 2) do the parents and leaders perceive a positive change in the participants' behaviors and attitudes as a result of their participation; and 3) what are the salient program elements that appear to be related to positive outcomes. The evaluation took place over a two-year period. Participants were asked to complete surveys that measured motivations for participation, satisfaction with the program, protective factors, and self-concept. Information was also collected through personal interviews with parents, leaders, and participants. Academic grades were obtained from the local school districts to verify perceptions of academic improvement. The information received from the interviews with the parents, leaders, and participants consistently indicated that the program was meeting its goals and was having a positive impact on the children. The parents and leaders felt that the program was having a positive affect on the children's academic grades, and this was supported by the information obtained from the school districts. Moreover, the parents and leaders felt that the program was helping the children build positive Black identities due to the strong African cultural component of the program. The salient program elements that seemingly contributed to the positive outcomes include effective and consistent leadership, parental involvement, and innovative programming.

The information collected from the surveys indicated that the pretest and posttest scores were not significantly different for the protective factors or self-concept. There are several potential explanations for this lack of significance. First, the sample size was fairly small; a larger sample size might have produced different results. Second, the instruments might not have been appropriate given the age of the sample. The age range for the program is 6-14 years, and that is within the appropriate age parameters of the instruments. However, the average age of the respondent was just over 7 years, and that is quite young for this type of assessment. The leaders helped the participants complete the surveys and they indicated that often times that had to interpret the questions for the children.

The directors of the ACE Mentorship Program were able to provide some insight into outcomes fostered by the program that were not identified through the survey data. One of the most significant outcomes of the program is that the program has positively affected the recreation opportunities of the children in this area of Champaign. Crediting the consistency and quality of the ACE Mentorship Program, the directors reported that both parents and children now have a positive view of Douglass Park and its programs.

The park and facilities have become safe havens. In recent history, the park and the programs associated with it were viewed negatively. Crime is high in the area and programming was sporadic due to a lack of consistency in staffing. Today, the parents and children view the program as a safe place where there are adults who care about the children.

As a result, many parents are enrolling their children in the other programs that are offered at Douglass Park. Instead of going elsewhere for their recreational needs, the families are now investigating the programs that are offered at the Douglass Center, and that has led to a growth in programming for the area. The directors pointed out that programs such as a youth basketball league, a pom-pom program, and day camps have grown in size and increased in quality as a direct result of the success of the ACE Mentorship Program. Many of the parents are so pleased with the programs that they have started volunteering their time to teach different classes during the ACE Mentorship Program, as well as during the summer day camps. Moreover, the directors suggested that the families have started to feel like they are more a part of the entire Champaign-Urbana community, a feeling that is new and appears to be a result of their increased involvement in the park district and community.

Although survey results did not indicate statistically significant changes in self-concept, the program directors believe that the participants are becoming more self-assured and are developing leadership abilities as a result of their involvement in the program. Many of the older children have taken on the role of mentor to the younger youth through engaging in program development and assisting with homework and games. Interestingly, one of the directors pointed out that many of the older youth are developing an interest in exploring different types of careers, particularly within parks and recreation. One of the leaders commented that he is now hearing fewer participants say "I'm going to be a pro basketball player" as their career aspiration. Rather, they are asking questions about what his job entails as well as other jobs in the park district, and how one would go about getting that type of job.

Implications

The ACE Mentorship Program appears to have several key components that make it a successful program. First, the program offers consistency to the youth that it is trying to reach. The consistency has not only helped build a quality program, but it has helped both parents and children feel more secure in their involvement in this program as well as other programs being offered at Douglass Park. Parental involvement has also been an important element of the ACE Mentorship Program. By involving the parents in feedback sessions, regular meetings, teaching, and programming, the program has been able to better meet the needs of both the children as well as the families. Not only has the parental involvement helped with retention rates, but it also helped in recruiting new children. Supportive parents are effective in relaying the benefits of the program to other interested parents.

The importance of partnerships and collaborations with other organizations was emphasized by Mentiel et al., (1996) and Hultsman and Little (1995). The ACE Mentorship Program is an excellent example of a partnership between the Champaign Park District and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). The AFSC is an

international peace and justice human rights organization. The AFSC has offices in every major city in the United States, and in 120 different countries throughout the world. One of the programs within the AFSC is the African American Community Empowerment Program. It is through this particular program that the ACE Mentorship Program receives its mentors. This program trains mentors in conflict resolution, program structure, and discussion techniques. Without the assistance of this program, the ACE Mentorship Program would not exist. The volunteer efforts of the mentors are crucial to the success of the program. The commitment of the mentors is clearly evident by the time and effort that they devote to the children and the program. They are completely responsible for the program content and structure, and work collectively to assure its quality. The mentors have extensive experience in other youth programs, and bring that expertise to the ACE Mentorship Program. Further, having African American role models is crucial to the success of the program. For many parents, this is an attractive and fundamental component of the program.

Innovative programming is another important aspect of the program. A result of the growing sophistication of our society is the increased expectations young people have for programs and service providers. There is a general feeling among many children that youth programs and centers are too structured, and thus unappealing. Studies in this area (e.g., Kleiber, Larson, & Csikszentmihalyi, 1986; Larson, 1994) conclude that activities that are challenging, meaningful, and intrinsically motivating assist children in their developmental processes. However, programmers must remember that the activities must also be fun for children, otherwise they will lose interest in the program. The ACE Mentorship Program has been successful in weaving structure and fun into its program content. Although the program has a strong focus on African culture and academics, the leaders have been able to stress these components in an enjoyable, entertaining format that is pleasurable for the children.

The ACE Mentorship Program is an example of an innovating program that has been developed for African American youth. Careful attention has been given to leadership, programming, structure, and parental involvement. As a result, the program is successfully meeting its goals and is providing children with a positive after school experience. The program is also helping to develop a strong, positive Black identity in the program participants by providing the children with effective African American mentors and by emphasizing an African cultural component in the program structure.

References

- Allen, L. R., Stevens, B., & Harwell, R. (1996). Benefits-Based Management Activity Planning Model for Youth in At-Risk Environments. *Journal of Parks and Recreation Administration, 14* (3), 10-19.
- Baker, D., & Witt, P. A. (1996). Evaluation of the impact of two after-school programs. *Journal of Parks and Recreation Administration, 14*(3), 60-81.
- Colston, L. G. (1994). *The critical impact of urban recreation on the African American community: A summary of public opinion survey*. Arlington, VA: National Park and Recreation Association.
- Destination Champaign: 21st Century. (1993). Comprehensive Plan Update, City Inventory, August, 1993.
- Dryfoos, J. G. (1990). *Adolescents at-risk: Prevalence and prevention*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Grossman, J., & Shigaki, I. (1994). Investigation of familial and school-based risk factors for Hispanic Head Start children. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 64*, 456-467.
- Harter, S. (1982). The perceived competence scale for children. *Child Development, 53*, 87-97.
- Jessor, R. (1992). Risk behavior in adolescence: A psychological framework for understanding and action. In D. E. Rogers & Ginzberg (Eds.), *Adolescents at risk: Medical and social perspectives*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Kids crime declines for 6th year in row. (1999, July 9). *The Chicago Tribune*.
- Kunstler, R. (1993). Research Update. Serving the homeless through recreation programs. *Parks and Recreation, 28*(8), 18-22.
- McCall, R. B. (1994). Academic underachievers. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 3*(1), 15-19.
- McMillan, J., & Reed, D. (1994). *Defying the odds: A study of resilient at-risk students*. Richmond, VA: Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium.
- Posner, J. K., & Vandell, D. L. (1994). Low-income children's after-school care: Are there beneficial effects of after-school programs. *Child Development, 65*, 440-456.
- Scott, D., Witt, P.A., & Garteiser Foss, M. (1996). Evaluation of the impact of the Dougherty Arts Center's Creativity Club on children at-risk. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration, 14*(3), 41-59.
- Witkin, G. (1998, May). The crime bust. *U.S. News & World Report*, pp. 28-37.
- Witt, P. A., Baker, D., & Scott, D. (1996). *Protective factors scale*. Texas A&M University: unpublished instrument. College Station, TX: Department of Recreation, Park, and Tourism Sciences, Texas A&M University
- Witt, P. A., & Crompton, J. L. (1996). *Programs that work: Public recreation in high-risk environments*. Arlington, VA: National Recreation and Park Association.

Table 1: Results between Pretest and Posttest Scores on the Protective Factors Scales

Protective Factors	Year 1 (n=22)			Pre	Year 2 (n=39)		
	Pre	Post	<i>f</i> value		Pre	Post	<i>f</i> value
1. I know lots of safe places to play	4.33	4.29	.11	4.00	3.87	.44	
2. There are adults who are interested in me	4.00	3.86	.35	3.86	4.17	1.14	
3. I am able to get along with friends	4.38	4.56	.49	3.89	4.20	.92	
4. I must stay out of trouble	4.29	4.33	.14	4.49	4.73	1.30	
5. I respect authority figures	4.00	4.35	.84	4.43	4.65	1.49	
6. I am creative	4.53	4.53	.00	4.34	4.23	.59	
7. I can succeed in life	4.85	4.65	1.28	4.30	4.64	1.05	
8. I try to treat other kids with respect	4.18	4.18	.00	4.49	4.65	1.11	
9. I try to solve problems in a positive manner	4.29	4.05	.71	4.25	3.94	1.48	
10. I know of lots of activities in my community	4.24	4.38	.40	4.00	4.11	.43	
11. I can turn to adults for help	4.41	4.65	.61	4.45	4.42	.13	
12. There are other kids who like me	4.32	4.27	.15	4.11	4.37	1.24	
13. I must obey the rules	4.50	4.36	.37	4.44	4.69	1.35	
14. I respect adults	4.10	4.24	.50	4.40	4.38	.08	
15. I can set goals	4.35	4.65	1.18	4.58	4.36	1.18	
16. It is important for me to always do my best	4.57	4.81	.96	4.54	4.54	.00	
17. Teamwork is important	4.76	4.71	.25	4.46	3.37	.55	
18. I try to control my anger	4.35	4.50	.65	4.15	4.36	.82	
19. I am interested in participating in programs in my community	4.52	3.90	1.98	4.46	4.78	.90	
20. There are adults who will look out for me	4.86	4.81	.37	4.48	4.45	.12	
21. I am an o.k. person	4.85	4.65	.85	4.47	4.59	.61	
22. I respect people in charge	5.00	4.53	2.42	4.38	3.94	1.60	
23. I can deal with problems that might come up in the future	4.30	4.65	1.09	4.32	4.24	.10	
24. It is important for me to do well in school	4.71	4.81	.63	4.54	4.60	.29	
25. Adults are willing to help me with my problems	4.81	4.91	.81	4.21	4.47	1.14	
26. I must follow the rules if I want to participate	4.91	4.86	.44	4.33	4.58	1.05	
27. I can settle arguments without fighting	4.55	4.45	.34	4.32	3.97	1.16	
28. I will be punished if I break the rules	4.76	4.81	.25	4.22	3.83	.57	
29. I respect kids who stay out of trouble	4.57	4.71	.57	4.16	4.27	.39	
30. I like to try new things	4.50	4.77	1.00	4.35	4.41	.31	
31. It is important for me to stay in school	4.76	4.90	1.00	4.68	4.70	.17	
32. Cooperation is important	4.73	4.73	.00	4.31	4.557	1.39	
33. All players need a chance to play	4.81	4.77	.33	4.22	4.92	.49	
34. I listen to other people	4.50	4.56	.29	4.26	4.56	1.43	
35. I am interested in programs that take place after school	4.59	4.68	.53	4.40	4.40	.00	
36. I am wanted by the people around me	4.40	4.40	.00	4.28	4.17	.37	

Means based on response options ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree.

Table 2: Results between Pretest and Posttest Scores on Harter's Self-Perception Scale

Scale Items	Year 1 (n=22)			Year 2 (n=39)		
	Pre	Post	<i>f</i> value	Pre	Post	<i>f</i> value
Some kids						
1. feel that they are very good at their school work	3.62	3.62	.00	3.40	3.43	.14
2. find it hard to make friends	2.35	2.45	.24	2.62	2.70	.27
3. do very well at all kinds of sports	3.50	3.44	.19	3.45	3.54	.40
4. are happy with the way they look	3.57	3.71	.64	3.42	3.42	.00
5. often do not like the way they behave	2.63	2.74	.25	2.53	2.63	.43
6. often get mad at themselves	2.85	2.75	.23	2.47	2.50	.10
7. feel like they are just as smart as other kids their age	3.05	3.37	1.06	3.19	3.37	.75
8. have a lot of friends	3.75	3.60	.76	3.59	3.62	.16
9. wish they could be a lot better at sports	3.50	2.70	2.88	3.35	3.15	.94
10. are happy with their height and weight	3.50	3.30	.57	3.66	3.59	.81
11. usually do the right thing	3.09	3.29	.64	3.65	3.32	1.82
12. don't like the way they are leading their lives	2.16	2.21	.10	2.08	2.54	1.74
13. are pretty slow in finishing their school work	2.05	2.37	.84	2.20	2.28	2.70
14. think they could do well at just about any new outdoor activity they haven't' tried before	3.19	3.38	.72	3.47	3.25	1.11
15. are kind of hard to like	2.40	2.75	.75	2.45	2.74	1.24
16. wish their body was different	1.90	1.90	.00	1.97	1.73	.84
17. usually act the way they know they are suppose to	3.33	3.17	.53	3.44	3.13	1.43
18. are happy with themselves most of the time	3.68	3.53	.82	3.56	3.52	.16
19. often forget what they learn	2.55	2.65	.24	2.45	3.27	2.88
20. are always doing things with a lot of kids	3.33	3.21	1.08	3.16	3.24	.40
21. feel that they are better than others their age at sports	2.74	2.89	.43	2.85	2.62	.94
22. wish their physical appearance was different	2.00	1.94	.15	2.69	2.44	.88
23. usually get into trouble because of things they do	2.22	2.72	1.48	2.53	3.21	2.57
24. like the kind of person they are	3.31	3.47	.50	3.36	3.39	.12
25. do very well at their class work	3.75	3.65	.57	3.51	3.39	1.21
26. wish that more kids like them	3.05	2.68	1.13	3.00	2.94	.21
27. in games and sports, usually watch instead of play	2.10	2.30	.44	2.94	3.23	1.24

28. wish something about their face or hair looked different	2.68	2.53	.33	2.26	2.39	.56
29. do things they know they shouldn't do	2.40	2.85	1.08	2.39	2.66	1.46
30. are very happy being the way they are	3.57	3.26	1.19	3.58	3.58	.00
31. have trouble figuring out the answers in school	2.20	2.25	.12	2.91	3.00	.38
32. are popular with others their age	3.42	3.31	.31	3.39	3.00	1.57
33. don't do well at new outdoor games	2.20	2.70	1.36	2.56	2.73	.61
34. think that they are attractive or good looking	3.52	3.57	.18	3.48	3.27	1.03
35. are usually very kind to others	3.52	3.43	.49	3.48	3.54	.32
36. aren't very happy with the way they do a lot of things	2.14	2.52	.90	2.67	2.51	.63

— Means based on response options ranging from 1 = "doesn't sound at all like me" to 4 = "sounds a lot like me"