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## How to Start a Neighborhood After-School Program

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*Yes we can!*

**After-school programs are a great way to help young people succeed in school and grow to become successful adults.**

*A **How-to Guide** for neighborhood leaders working to make life better for people in Battle Creek*



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After-school programs are a great way to help kids succeed in school and grow to become successful adults. Many after-school programs have been started by neighbors working together. They began as volunteer projects, sometimes growing into larger, staffed programs. With some time and effort, you can be a part of creating a very important way to support youth in your community, get parents more involved with their kids, and bring the neighborhood together around one of our greatest treasures — our youth.



### What Are the Advantages of After-School Programs?

- They provide an excellent opportunity to increase learning, improve grades and attendance, and reduce dropout rates.
- They help minimize threats of violence by providing responsible adult supervision during non-school hours in a safe setting.
- They provide young people with positive alternatives to drug, alcohol, and tobacco use, and other high-risk behaviors.
- Young people who participate in after-school programs have the opportunity to master new skills, get excited about learning, and develop a sense of belonging. Research shows that youth behave better, handle conflict more easily, improve their social skills, and benefit from positive adult attention when they get involved with after-school programs.

### Gathering a Team of Helpers

#### Brainstorm hopes and ideas

Start by bringing together a group of parents, teachers, and anyone else who cares about young people.

- Check with local schools to find out about existing after-school programs. If there is no after-school program available in your neighborhood, you and your neighbors can start one yourselves.
- Talk to parents, guardians, and grandparents about what their children do after school or how they get help with school subjects when they need it.
- Place a notice in your school's parent bulletin or ask teachers to place flyers in each child's backpack. The notice can ask parents if they are interested in after-school programs for their children and whether they are willing to help organize something for their kids. This will help you explore all the possibilities.

- Ask each person who expresses interest in helping to talk with a few more people. Remember, the larger your group the greater your influence will be when you are ready to take the next step.

When your group gets together for a first meeting, talk about what you and your children or teenagers value in an after-school program. These values could include fun, new experiences, homework help, computer access, or making decisions about which activities to be involved in. When you're planning your program, think about the kind of human and material resources you have and what resources you need to make the program succeed. How many volunteers do you have or how many volunteers can you recruit?

You can either invite the local principal and teachers to your first meeting or, if you want, talk with just parents and neighbors in the first meeting and plan to have a smaller group meet with the educators from the school. In any case, you want to learn about the hopes and ideas of everyone who plays a major role.

#### Consider community resources

When you're planning your program, think about the kind of human and material resources you have and what you need to make it succeed. How many volunteers do you have or can you recruit? What kind of space is available in your community? Who can donate equipment, expertise, or time? All of these things are critical for building a successful program. But remember, a small program that has parents helping kids with homework after school can make an amazing difference in a young person's life and his or her ability to succeed in school. It doesn't take bells and whistles. It just takes caring adults who are there for kids.

Once your group of neighbors and parents feels clear on what it would like to see, call a group meeting that

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involves interested partners to talk about how you might proceed together.

Every community has groups and nonprofit organizations interested in supporting positive youth development. Talk to people at city hall, the Battle Creek Parks and Recreation Department, churches, youth organizations, etc., to find out if they are interested in working with your group to develop a program. Call the After-school Alliance (612-802-9270) for training and assistance.

Ask your employer to donate a product or service to the program, or to allow employees to volunteer at the after-school program once a week. See if an employer will get his or her business and/or civic associations involved in supporting after-school programs. Ask him or her to experience the after-school program and see what goes on. Perhaps the employer would like to talk to a group of young people about what your company does. See if employers would like to give a group of young people who participate in the after-school program a tour of their business. Some employers may even be interested in beginning a program for creating jobs for youth.

### **Recruit new people**

Remember that, while you might have an idea of what you want to do, adding new people and organizations to the mix means adding their new ideas. People from the organizations that join your meeting may also give you important information and advice about what has been tried before (both successes and failures!) and what resources are available. They also may have their own ideas about what's realistic. Try to work at striking a balance between what your group wants to do and what is realistic according to partner organizations and people from the school. Don't give up your vision, but don't start building a program that isn't likely to succeed.

### **Running Meetings**

Simple rules to remember to have a good first planning meeting:

- All ideas should be given fair consideration.
- People need to be treated with respect or they won't come back.
- No one should leave the meeting without a task.
- Everyone should sign in.

Tasks to assign during the meeting:

- Put together a simple survey to take around the neighborhood that asks about needs and lists types of activities that could be offered. This is a great way to spark interest and hear from the wider community about what they want.
- Look at the community's after-school needs and resources currently available to help meet those needs.
- Find out how other neighborhoods established after-school programs.
- Talk with teachers about activities that might be offered and how they could participate.
- Create exciting roles for parents and other volunteers.
- Plan your overall program (see below for details).
- Develop a fundraising plan.

### **Creating the Program**

Below are some things your group will want to consider as you work together to develop your after-school program.

#### **What age group will our program serve?**

A program for children five to eight years old will be very different from one that serves teens. You will probably want to focus on an age group, so that you don't spread your resources too thinly.

***“Youth improve grades, behave better, and benefit from adult attention with after-school programs.”***

#### **What type of program will it be?**

Your program could take many shapes, depending on the needs you and your group find in your community, as well as the available resources. Some examples of different types of programs are:

- *Homework and academic skill-building time* – Homework support, learning games for those not doing homework, tutoring, reading time
- *Reading time* – Young people choose a book or bring a book; everyone participates in quiet reading for a certain period of time
- *Story time* – Young people can listen to adults read or tell stories, or have help in creating their own stories to share
- *Station rotation* – Choice between different stations, for example: reading, board games, craft activities, computer use
- *Clubs* – Young people can choose to be a member of a certain club that meets weekly for a set number of weeks; clubs could include art, music, dance, drama, sports, reading, or languages
- *Outdoor recreation* – Organized games and free play
- *Field trips* – Young people plan and participate in simple neighborhood field trips, as well as more elaborate field trips requiring special transportation, planning, and chaperones. Examples of field trip destinations include children's museums, art museums, parks, zoos, food pantries, nursing homes, hospitals, government buildings, historical sites
- *Service-learning projects* – Young people plan and participate in service projects on a regular basis

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### How will we schedule and plan our activities?

Involve young people in program planning! The more involved they are in creating the program, the more interested they will be in participating and getting their friends to participate, too! Create a rotating “advisory group” of youth who will represent the whole group. Adults should present ideas to this group and get input from the young people.

Decide on the regular daily, weekly, or monthly parts of your program. Within each part, include many opportunities for young people to make choices about their activities. Post this activities schedule, making sure that it is easy for parents and youth to understand what is in store — people will appreciate a sense of structure. Be flexible to accommodate special events and projects that take longer than expected.

Have activities focus on a theme each week or month. Brainstorm ideas with volunteers, parents, and young people and go through activity books for ideas. Tie themes to community events and holidays or build on the same themes that young people are exploring at school. As much as possible, let themes emerge from ideas that come from the youth.

Design appropriate routines and environments. Work with kids to decide when and where different activities will take place, what kinds of transition time will be necessary, what materials and furnishings are needed to accommodate different activities,

how the environment will look and feel, etc. Involve them in decorating the environment to create ownership.

Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of your program through focus groups and surveys. Make changes according to suggestions of volunteers, parents, and young people.

### An After-School Program in Battle Creek

For some time, Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church had a small computer lab and some informal computer training for church members. Deacon Kenneth White heard from some adults using the lab that they needed help supporting their students with homework, especially computer work. Thanks to a mini-grant from *Yes we can!*, the church was able to greatly expand the computer lab and add eight volunteer tutors to work with neighborhood youth several days each week after school. The church provided snacks and coordination for the tutors in computers, math, languages, business, history and geography to roughly 40 students each week. One student, Daniel, said that thanks to the program, his grades improved from C's and D's to A's and B's and, even better, he now looks forward to school each day rather than dreading it. He says his new tutors are definitely friends worth having!

*Starting an after-school program can make life better for your family, your neighbors, and your community.*

### Local Resources

Battle Creek Parks and Recreation Department — coordinates after-school programs in the Battle Creek Public Schools. They can provide you with ideas and resources for possible activities that are already in place that your group could use to coordinate with others or to build your program around.  
*Pete Baum 966-3431*

Shiloh Mission Baptist Church — has an active after-school program and is happy to help with advice and support.  
*Kenneth White 965-1590*

Girl Scouts — provides after-school scouting program in Battle Creek.  
*Matt Bates 965-5519*

First Presbyterian Church — has an active after-school program and is happy to help with advice and support.  
*Rick McKire 964-3700, ext. 104*

Guidance offices of local schools

### National Resources

The After-school Alliance — is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to raising awareness of the importance of after-school programs and advocating for quality, affordable programs for all young people. They provide training and direct assistance for developing after-school programs regionally through the National Center for Community Education.  
*Bridget Gothberg — 612-802-9270*  
[www.afterschoolalliance.org](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org)

**Feel free to share this guide with friends and neighbors. Call 269-969-2228 for additional copies and for other guides on a variety of how-to topics.**

Source: After-school Alliance *How to Start — A Program Guide*

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*Yes we can!* is a collaboration among Battle Creek residents and organizations working to help kids achieve in school and build a solid economic future for the people of our community. *Yes we can!* is funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

For general questions about *Yes we can!*, call 269-969-2228 or visit [www.wkkf.org/yeswecan](http://www.wkkf.org/yeswecan). To apply for a mini-grant to support your neighborhood or community project in Battle Creek, call the Battle Creek Community Foundation at 269-962-2181.

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