AFTER-SCHOOL AND PARENT EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR AT-RISK YOUTH AND THEIR FAMILIES

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Tommie Morton-Young is a native of Nashville, Tennessee where she presently resides. She received her early education in the public schools of the city and graduated cum laude from Tennessee State University. She holds the M.A. degree from Peabody/Vanderbilt University and the Ph.D. degree from Duke University.

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A Guide to Organizing and Operating a Community-Based Center for Basic Educational Skills Reinforcement, Homework Assistance, Cultural Enrichment, and a Parent Involvement Focus

By

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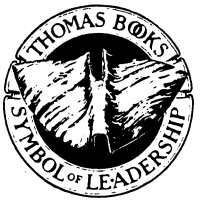

CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER
Springfield • Illinois • U.S.A.

Published and Distributed Throughout the World by

CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER
2600 South First Street
Springfield, Illinois 62794-9265

ISBN 0-398-05961-6 (cloth)
ISBN 0-398-05962-4 (paper)

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 94-38716

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Printed in the United States of America
SC-R-3

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Morton-Young, Tommie.
After-school and parent education programs for at-risk youth and their families : a guide to organizing and operating a community-based center for basic educational skills reinforcement, homework assistance, cultural enrichment, and a parent involvement focus / by Tommie Morton-Young.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-398-05961-6 (cloth). – ISBN 0-398-05962-4 (paper)
1. Basic education—United States. 2. Education—Parent participation—United States. 3. School-age child care—United States. I. Title.
LC1035.6.M67 1995
370.11—dc20 94-38716
CIP

It takes a whole village to raise a child.
African Proverb

PREFACE

This work is about *after-school* programs that are designed to assist students in completing homework, aid youth in acquiring basic educational and social skills, and their parents in becoming more effective agents in their children's schooling experiences.

The book is intended for use by community organizers, parent/child advocates, parents, teacher education programs and field experience classes, and as a supplementary resource for schools.

The work is divided into four (IV) parts: Part I—Getting Started; Part II—Planning and Implementing the Program; Part III—Parent Programs; and Part IV—Resources Directory.

The premise of this work is that in a changing society, the schools, a place where most children are required to go, are the more likely agencies to close the gaps in the development of youth left by upheavals in the home and fluctuating social experiences. Since schools are increasingly overextended and are limited in what they may do, this need can more readily be met after school by partnerships formed of community groups which develop programs designed to serve children and families in a variety of ways. After-school programs can offer such services as adult mentoring and nurturing, assistance in academic skills efforts, and provision of leadership for parents.

This work is a response to a number of concerns that impact the lives of children, families, and the schools. It is based on program ideas and procedures implemented in university learning laboratories and community-based projects directed by university staffs, local community leaders and the author of this work for more than twenty years.

T.M.Y.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author of this work acknowledges with appreciation the cooperation of parents, teachers, students, volunteers, faculty and staffs of agencies and institutions that have aided and assisted the various projects and developmental centers and their programs with which the author has been affiliated. Many ideas, activities, and theories discussed in this book evolved from practical experiences in various after-school and learning center projects. The author also acknowledges the financial assistance that various funding agencies have given over the years in support of some of the after-school and parent education programs with which she has been associated.

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AFTER-SCHOOL AND PARENT EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR AT-RISK YOUTH AND THEIR FAMILIES

Introduction

CHANGING TIMES

American society has experienced dramatic changes in the past forty years. No place are changes more evident than in the family. America has expanded its definition of the family, and the traditional model of nuclear family—father, mother and child or children—has given way to more than one configuration. Families now include relationships of gay and lesbian couples, many of whom have children, unmarried heterosexual couples, step families, and the so-called *skip-generation families* (Seligmann, 1990) in which grandparents raise the children of their children. The phrase *head of family* has been replaced by the term *householder.* Current statistics reveal that more householders are females without a spouse.

Two parents working outside the home is said to be the most dramatic change in the family's changing patterns. As a result, children are often left unsupervised for many hours, particularly during after-school hours. As mothers go to work, young children, often beginning in infancy, are attended by a variety of caretakers. These children are with caretakers during most of their waking hours and may be exposed to differing values transmitted by the caretakers. Some authorities attribute children's attitudes toward authority in the home and the school to be the result of having a variety of authority figure in their lives and upbringing. This raises an alarming question: *Who's taking care of the children?*

Another impact on the time parents have to spend with their children is travel. Many must travel miles to and from work. Transportation time whittles away at the time the parent can spend with the child and adds stress to the lives of both parent and child.

While both the single- and the two-parent family must cope with the challenges of time and distance separating them from their children, the single-parent family often finds family life as being near havoc. Thus, children of single-parent families where the mother is the sole wage earner tend to experience more social and school problems.

Picture the schoolchild of the past. The school day ends, the child

goes home where an adult awaits to greet him: mother, grandmother, aunt, uncle, an older sibling. Or, perhaps the child goes next door to the home of a neighbor or relative. The child changes from school clothes to play clothes, has a snack, then sets about doing chores. Where the child lives determines the type of chores. Children in rural areas more often have very specific duties critical to the survival of the family. Upon completing the chores, the child plays until supper time when the family gathers around a table more likely of simple, but nutritious food. The family talks—shares the day's events. After supper, older siblings help the child with schoolwork, or parents are nearby, ready to help or ensure homework is done.

Thus passed the day in the life of the child of the past, who lived in a safe, secure environment surrounded by people who loved and cared for him. In this environment there were regularity, expectations and responsibility, stability, support, and a sense of well-being.

Today, *latchkey* has come to identify those children who come home from school five afternoons a week to find a house void of human presence. The child lets himself into the house to find silence. For him, television is the most available source of images and sound, and the television becomes the companion and sitter. Alone and desirous of quelling the sound of silence, the child is likely to choose the most exciting and provocative program that can be found.

The child of today is less likely to go to a neighbor's house. America's sense of community has changed. Families are far more mobile. Children are less likely to be born in and grow up in the same community. Many do not know their neighbors—neighbors come and go. By the time the child is ten he is likely to have lived in at least two different communities. New communities crop up every day, and housing developments and planned communities often include neighbors who meet only during association meetings or in passing. The absence of the sense of community affects children and families who may drift toward feelings of isolation and alienation. The declining sense of safety causes parents to teach children to avoid strangers, and people are becoming increasingly suspicious and fearful of each other. Assuring that the child is in a safe place while parents are at work is a priority for most working parents. Finding that place is often a challenge.

Technology has altered America's way of life. It has reduced the number of hours and routines required to sustain daily life. Youth have fewer responsibilities and chores to perform in the home. This creates

more free time. These hours are often filled with mindless watching of television, playing electronic games, or just *hanging out.* Some parents buy expensive gadgets and devices as a compensation for the time not shared with their children. Many of these devices and toys encourage violence and aggressive behavior.

There is need for parents to find ways to keep their children involved with things that have purpose and meaning and desirable outcomes. There is a need for agencies in the community to help parents in perceiving the kinds of needs that children have.

The layout of America's communities requires automobiles in order to get around. Suburbia is home for millions of families. Parents work and are not available to transport youth to the many sites that their lives demand. Public transportation in middle and smaller-sized communities is often inefficient or lacking. Parents fear for their children walking to places and being on the streets. Therefore, automobiles for youth are more often necessities than luxuries. Yet, automobiles pose problems for youth. Youth can go to places today that would have not been readily accessible in the past. Automobiles can provide a place and an opportunity for a number of behaviors that are negative. Deaths of youths by and in automobiles are seen in painful annual statistics. Speeding, driving under the influence, and careless driving habits are often cited as the causes of youth fatalities.

Many high school youth work after school and require automobiles. Many youth work to pay for their automobiles. As a result, their schoolwork and health often suffer. Automobiles are a mixed blessing for the young.

Experimentations and abuse of illegal substances, access to firearms and weapons, and unsupervised free time take their toll on youth. Children who are inadequately supervised and/or live in critical neighborhoods have been known to be recruited as *drug runners.* Children who have no safe place to go after school may hang out on street corners, porches and yards of neighbors and may be identified as candidates for drug involvement.

CHILDREN AT RISK

The term *at risk* cannot be precisely defined. For some it has come to mean *disadvantaged* and *culturally deprived.* Both of the latter terms tend to be even more imprecise. While many after-school, cultural and educa-