Kiwanis®

International

Serving the Children of the World®

Early childhood development

SERVICE BULLETIN

Young Children: Priority One: Aiding early education

Giving kids a chance

THE MISSION

With a focus on early childhood development, Kiwanis clubs should sponsor/partner with programs, agencies and projects involving children ages 3–5. The programs supported should successfully meet this goal: to help break the cycle of poverty by addressing the developmental needs, health needs and early education/learning of children from low-income or no-income families.

Studies have shown that youth favorably exposed to early education are more likely to seek out education/training, attend school, complete training programs, receive diplomas, find employment, seek higher education and express job satisfaction than their peers. They are less likely to be held back in school, drop-out of school, become a teen parent, be arrested or exploited.

THE ROLE OF KIWANIS

Support of programs designed to meet the emotional, social, health, nutritional and psychological needs of disadvantaged children and their families provide an important start in a child's future. Support of programs and agencies that focus on teaching basic reading, writing and mathematics skills, self-confidence and basic health habits are suggested.

Education and development programs and agencies should address each child's individual needs and respect cultural characteristics.

Examples of potential programs and agencies are:

- **Health programs** that emphasize early identification of health problems. Medical, dental, vision and mental health services.
- **Parent-involvement programs** that help educate parents about their children's needs and about good parenting skills, as well as involve them in everything from playtime to policy making.
- **Parent training** in the recognition of the signs and symptoms of child abuse, neglect, exploitation, shaken baby syndrome and failure to thrive.
- **Awareness of and assistance in obtaining social services** from local agencies is crucial because the more support these parents receive, the more time and attention they can devote to the needs of their children at this critical stage.
- **Awareness of services for special needs children** that meet the needs of children with mental retardation, health, hearing, speech or language impairments, visual handicaps, emotional disturbances, learning disabilities and orthopedic handicaps.

The poverty cycle

In 1964, Robert Cooke, then chief pediatrician of Johns Hopkins Hospital, wrote a report to the United States government that read in part: "There is considerable evidence that the early years of childhood are the most critical point in the poverty cycle. During those years, the creation of learning patterns, emotional development, and the formation of individual expectations and aspirations take place at a very rapid pace. For the child of poverty, there are clearly observable deficiencies in these processes, which lay the foundation for a pattern of failure, and thus a pattern of poverty throughout the child's entire life."

THE OPPORTUNITY

Kiwanis clubs can support early childhood development and education in many ways, and the most popular project ideas are outlined in this bulletin. Several of the greatest needs among many programs are transportation for the children, funding and larger facilities to serve more children. Kiwanis clubs can help not only by donating or raising money, but also by contributing service hours.

Provide transportation. Many programs have vans or buses, but those that don't would welcome help transporting children. Provided, of course, that your club works with them in order to establish a program that includes background checks, ensuring appropriate levels of insurance, and obtaining parental authorization. Clubs also should stick to the two-adult rule so that no adult is alone with a child.

Once established, the transportation opportunities include:

- Forming a driving pool so that drivers are available each day to take children where they need to be. (Doctor, dentist or a Head Start facility, since children in outlying areas often can't attend because their parents can't arrange or afford transportation.)
- Paying the regular maintenance costs (oil changes, tune-ups, new tires) for vehicles the centers already own.
- Purchasing a van or bus or persuading a local dealer to donate one.

Keep them healthy. Many centers arrange with local professionals/clinics for the children to receive medical and dental examinations each year, immunizations and follow-up care if necessary. Many children throughout the world may not be getting the basic health care they need to help identify early problems.

Your club could help by covering the costs of examinations and recommended treatment for children whose families aren't eligible for assistance, or for all children in areas where health care clinics are absent or not easily accessible.

Help teachers and staff. The membership of every Kiwanis club is a valuable source of knowledge and experience, and early learning programs would be glad for you to share your expertise with staff, parents and children.

- Members can provide enrichment activities in areas where teachers and staff don't normally receive training. For example, a medical professional might teach first aid for young children, a psychologist or social worker might teach how to recognize child abuse, someone who works with the media could teach effective public relations.
- Since many Kiwanians are professionals with excellent business skills and ties within the community, members might be asked to serve on the program's board of directors, policy council or advisory committee. Some professional members also can help by providing services to the center or to the children at no cost or reduced rates.
- There are many ways to assist that don't require any planning, just being willing and available. Classroom volunteers might be asked to assist in a wide range of activities, such as reading to the children, giving attention to a child with special needs, preparing bulletin board materials, checking children's height and weight or record-keeping.

Assist parents. Members also could be valuable participants in training and information workshops that programs/agencies provide for parents.

- Organize and conduct a series of workshops for parents on job readiness skills, such as resume preparation and appropriate dress and conduct during an interview.
- Conduct a career exploration program that shares experience and information on several kinds of employment.
- In order to attend such workshops, parents might need transportation and babysitting, which your club could provide.

Work with the children. Members also can share their experience with the children.

- Visit the center and tell students about particular careers or hobbies. Explain what it's like to be a dentist, firefighter, soldier or secretary, or a stamp collector, gardener or service-club volunteer. Sharing hobbies is another good way to involve Service Leadership club members. Keep your presentation simple and brief, and try to make it interesting for very young children.
- Centers may conduct regular field trips that make the children aware of their community and introduce them to different types of activities they might pursue later in life. Kiwanians can help in several ways:
    - Volunteer as chaperones to help supervise the children.
    - Offer tours of businesses or places of employment.
    - Cover the costs for a special field trip outside the immediate area, including meals, admission fees and gasoline or a chartered bus.
    - Form a "Kiwanis Caravan," offering your own vehicles and driving services for a field trip (after appropriate permissions are made).

- Organize special activities for the children that supplement the daily routine and combine learning with fun.
  - Conduct a puppet show.
  - Put on a short skit.
  - Plan a picnic.

Improve facilities. Service also can be donated for the general maintenance of or improvement to facilities.

- This might include simple tasks, such as hanging posters, painting a room or mowing the lawn.
- More complex projects might require more planning, special skills and team work.
  - Electrical or plumbing repairs.
  - Minor construction.
  - Installing or servicing office equipment.
  - Building or sprucing up playground equipment.
  - Adding fencing or landscaping.
- In inner-city programs, provide complete landscaping materials and services to turn a concrete playground into a place of beauty and relaxation. Some sand and dirt, a little grass seed, a few flowers and a bird house can turn a dull, rock-hard playground into a nature study.

Purchase materials. Another way your club can support programs is to purchase materials that will improve the staff's professional skills or give the children and their parents new opportunities for development.

- Special educational materials for the children might include developmental toys and books for learn-while-you-laugh games and programs.
- For the teachers and staff, funds can be spent on valuable resource materials or training seminars. Each center has information on recommended materials and probably has a "wish list" of particular items that would be most useful.
- Resource materials can be valuable for parents too. Parents may never have had the courage or desire to frequent the public or school library. At the Head Start center, your club could establish a lending library of materials that parents can borrow and return on a sign-out basis.
  - Lending materials should cover basic, relevant topics like parenting skills, building healthy families, substance abuse prevention and intervention, job skills and family nutrition.
  - You also could make information from local social services available in your library.
  - Be sure to include easy-to-read materials as some parents may not have good reading skills.
- The program may need equipment for the office, classroom, and playground—items like a computer, copier, child-size tables and chairs, or special equipment for children with special needs.
  - Solicit businesses to donate the necessary equipment whenever possible, or consider purchasing it as a club project.

Dual-purpose camp

The Knoxville, Tennessee, Kiwanis Club and the local Head Start program have collaborated since 1985 to solve a cramped-quarters problem.

They share a lovely, 25-acre camp facility that is owned by the club.

During the summer, the club operates a camp for disadvantaged children. But during the school year, the camp is a Head Start center for 150 children.

This relationship assures the Kiwanis club that the camp does not sit empty most of the year, and provides Head Start with a complete, ready-to-use facility for its programs.

- You also could consider covering costs for routine maintenance that may be required or recommended for some equipment.

Expand or create facilities. Many children 3–5 years old are not being served. This is mainly because of insufficient space.

- Clubs could remodel an existing facility or build a new one. Whether you decide to refurbish or expand, it will take a good deal of capital. Conduct a fundraising event or establish an ongoing campaign that involves not only local residents, but also the business community.

"Adopt" a child or family. Other ways to help children and families understand developmental milestones and begin early education is to "adopt" a child or family. This means providing whatever assistance the family needs:

- A good coat or shoes for the children in the family.
- Seasonal food baskets.
- Home repairs.
- Weather-proofing.
- Assisting the parents with job training and placement. It may include teaching parents how to:
  - Read to children.
  - Prepare nutritional foods.
  - Develop the child's motor skills, balance and cross-over motion.

The program director will be instrumental in helping you decide which child or family to "adopt." Once the relationship is formed, agree on specific goals and be prepared to make a long-term commitment to reach them.

Focus on literacy. Illiteracy and functional illiteracy are great problems in our society. Illiteracy to any degree often leads to a poor self-image, lack of education, poverty and crime. Many of the parents have poor reading skills, and your club can help.

Become a personal tutor. Not everyone wants to be a tutor, but many opportunities exist. Consult with your local literacy program to see what would be most helpful when working with parents.

- Participate in or contribute toward local family literacy programs, if available. Family literacy has three goals:
  - Improve parents' reading skills.
  - Encourage an early interest in reading among young children.
  - Strengthen the family unit through reading together.

"Adopt" a center. The ultimate project your club might consider is to "adopt" a center or program, which entails providing a range of funds, advice and service at frequent opportunities on an as-needed basis. The kinds of help provided might include many of the suggestions listed in this bulletin, as well as special needs discovered in a community needs assessment.

Relate to the public. Most agency staff have their hands full attending to the needs of the children and their families. They have little time to worry about public relations, nor do they usually have the required skills or experience. You can help both the program and your club by keeping the media—and therefore, the community—aware of what is happening in the program, and how it benefits the children and the community.

- Publicize club projects, joint ventures, new purchases, volunteer services, fundraising drives and special events.
- Ask television, radio and newspapers for coverage.
- In your photographs, include "action shots" of children's activities—with parental permission.

Collaborate with the community. You can understand that supporting early learning centers provides a wide range of possibilities for club projects, at several different levels of support. Because these centers work closely with other local agencies, your club also could become involved in those programs as well. Helping children and families is truly a community-collaboration effort.

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www.kiwanis.org

3636 Woodview Trace Indianapolis, IN 46268 USA • service@kiwanis.org
317-875-8755, ext. 211 US and Canada: 800-KIWANIS