

THE AFTER
SCHOOL PROJECT

*A Program of the
Robert Wood Johnson
Foundation*

Precious Time



Susan Meiselas/Magnum Photos

If we start with the belief, as more and more people do, that constructive after-school activity is crucial to the development of healthy children and adolescents, then two questions naturally follow:

① How can American cities and states provide that opportunity to all or most of the children who now lack it, especially in low-income communities? and

② What would happen if they did?

For brevity's sake, we can reduce these questions to two shorthand terms popular in the social sciences: *scale* and *outcomes*. Yet behind those simple terms lurks a morass of administrative, financial, and technical obstacles, with little guidance from practical experience or successful precedent. Most

places have only the most fragmented sources of authority, skill, and money to pursue such a far-reaching idea, much less any single institution or body charged with carrying it out. Only in a handful of cities are the questions even close to being answered. Nor is it yet clear how readily the early, promising experiences can translate to other places. All of this early work faces a steep climb before anyone will be able to say with confidence that the main obstacles have been removed.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's After School Project was organized to spark such experiments; to help them plan, coalesce, and grow; and to see what can be learned from their results. Specifically, the Foundation is seeking to learn whether cities can establish lasting capacity to increase the number of young people involved



Photo courtesy of After School Matters/Gallery 37

with adults in high-quality activities after school. The building blocks in this capacity presumably include planning, data collection, funding, training and technical assistance to service providers, and policy advocacy.

This approach raises several questions on which we hope to shed light and encourage wider discussion. For example: What institutional structure is most effective for organizing the building blocks into a coherent after-school expansion strategy? What sources of money, authority, and expertise need to be incorporated into that structure? What is the right balance of advance planning and hands-on experimentation for reaching the twin goals of scale and quality?

After roughly two and a half years of work, the Project has focused special attention so far on two cities among half a dozen with intriguing ideas and visions. In these two places, Chicago and the San Francisco Bay Area, momentum is clearly building around new and far-reaching after-school initiatives. The After School Project has supported each of these efforts with a \$100,000 planning grant and a \$5 million, five-year operating grant.

The Project has also helped two other metropolitan areas, Boston and Jacksonville, organize broad coalitions to plan and promote universal after-school programs. In Boston, we made a

\$100,000 grant to the After School for All Partnership to plan its program priorities and build a working coalition of the region's major private after-school funders, including a relatively new team member, Harvard University. Together, the members represent \$24.5 million in new private-sector pledges for after-school activity. We also made a \$10,000 grant to Parents United for Child Care, a 15-year-old organization of low- and moderate-income parents, child care providers, and other residents, to conduct a study of the real net cost of after school programs — one of the most comprehensive cost studies of its kind ever attempted.

In Florida, the Project made a \$30,000 planning grant to the Jacksonville Children's Commission for work that led to the creation of the Jacksonville Kids Coalition, a broad-based partnership of organizations pressing state leaders for better children's services, including after-school programs. The Coalition initially took shape as part of a planning process to compete for Robert Wood Johnson Foundation after-school support. More recent funding comes from the Jesse Ball duPont Fund and the Jacksonville Children's Commission. Among the Coalition's list of proposals is to expand on the 4,500-student effort called TEAM UP, an after-school program of Duval County, which includes Jacksonville.

Amid all this activity, there are still only two things we can say for certain about these efforts. The first is that each is strikingly different from — and in some cases riskier than — most of the previous efforts in other communities. The second is that they are already proving how much work, persistence, and imagination are required to create a citywide after-school system worthy of the name.

Chicago

Planning While Doing

If teenagers are lost, it's because *we're losing them*, by not giving them opportunities to show what they can do, to be their best, and to have a little fun in the process.

—Maggie Daley, Chair, After School Matters, Chicago, Illinois

Consider a school district like Chicago's, with 300,000 children in public elementary and middle school and 100,000 in high school, of whom at least 50 percent (no one knows for sure) have no organized activity once school lets out for the day. More than 85 percent of public school students live in low-income families. With nearly 500 elementary and middle schools and 100 high schools spread across the city's 228 square miles, it will take a breathtaking feat of civic mobilization and management to reach every student who is alone and idle in the after-school hours — not to mention a revolution in public and private funding.

To take on a challenge of those proportions, two general approaches suggest themselves: Either (a) start with activity and resources that are already

working at a reliable level of quality, and try to build and replicate those, incrementally, into a citywide system; or (b) organize a task force of key players to coordinate and plan a new system from whole cloth. The approaches aren't mutually exclusive, but they rely on different starting points: One starts with activity and follows with planning for enlargement, the other starts by planning a large system.

To take on its massive after-school challenge, Chicago is drawing from both methods, but with a decided emphasis on the first. The city has never been known for a theoretical approach to governance, and Chicagoans tend to be skeptical of remote planning exercises untethered to visible activity. Meanwhile, the end of the 1990s economic boom has left just about every city in a budget bind, Chicago included. So the Daley administration has chosen to start by addressing part of the problem with resources already at hand, and if that is successful, then expand to more

and more of the K-12 population. To compensate for not tackling the whole problem at once, the city began where the need is most severe and seemingly hardest to address: with high-school-age adolescents in a selection of the lowest-income neighborhoods.

Overall, Mayor Daley announced in his 2002 State of the City address, the city's goal is "every year to provide more high-quality after-school and summer programs so that more of our children can participate in a meaningful alternative that engages them and keeps them away from gangs, guns, and drugs." In short, the gradual expansion of after-school programs is not just a vision, but an official priority of the mayor, on a par with limiting taxes and controlling crime. The mayor's office announced in a press release that by 2006 the new effort, called After School Matters, "intends to be in every public high school in Chicago, serving at least 50 percent of the city's high school students." Meanwhile, a broader-based coalition of city initiatives called KidStart will gradually expand current programs for children of all ages after school, reaching a projected 45,000 young people.

'Starting with the most neglected'

LIKE THE WIDER-RANGING KIDSTART PROGRAM, After School Matters started with existing efforts of demonstrated quality, and sought to build variety, scale, and leadership around that kernel of activity. But unlike most other after-school efforts, including KidStart, the particular aim of After School Matters is highly specific and hugely ambitious: to organize a program of consistently high

quality, with a mix of activities and adult mentors that would appeal to almost any young person, all of it aimed at a population specifically chosen for its profound risks and lack of alternatives — teenagers in poor neighborhoods.

To many people, offering programs for younger children in these neighborhoods would be more than daunting enough, without the added problems of dealing with adolescents. Maggie Daley, the city's first lady and chair of After School Matters, says that's precisely why Chicago chose to start with high schools:

As a society, we have tended to isolate teens — we've walled them off as a problem, a big mystery that we never hear about except when there's trouble. And no surprise, our high schools are in trouble, too. We tell ourselves, sometimes, that by the time kids are in high school it's too late to affect them, that we might as well focus on younger kids. And sure, we need to pay attention to younger students. But that attitude assumes that teen-agers are somehow already 'lost' — that it's too late to interest them in things, to get them involved in the community. Anybody who has raised teenagers, as I have, knows better than that. Which is why parents get so frustrated with the system. If teenagers are lost, it's because *we're losing them*, by not giving them opportunities to show what they can do, to be their best, and to have a little fun in the process. So After School Matters is about teenagers. We're starting with the group that has been the most neglected, and we're turning this whole pattern on its head.

By the time After School Matters was organized in 2001, Chicago already had ten years' experience at enlisting

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teenagers in summer, after-school, and daytime activities centered around the arts. The prototype effort was called Gallery 37, named for a vacant downtown parcel of land designated in the zoning books as Block 37. The program got its start on that empty block in 1991 under a makeshift tent. By 2000, the program had expanded to 40 high schools, plus a new year-round arts education center near Block 37, where students from all over the city take daytime art classes for credit and participate in after-school workshops in 50 disciplines, led by professional artists.

The process of organizing, expanding, and enriching Gallery 37 provided, in Mrs. Daley's view, a road map for setting up after-school programs in other fields, like sports and technology, that could appeal to a wider variety of teenagers. At the end of its second full academic year, After School Matters is now organized around four program areas: Gallery 37 and its three newer spinoffs, Sports 37, Tech 37, and Words 37 (which starts with performance storytelling and will gradually absorb other verbal arts programs like writing and theater that are now part of Gallery). In the first year the four-program model operated in six high schools, with at least a basic enrollment of 20 students in each of the four areas in every school. In the 2002 academic year, it is in 18 schools, with six more to be added next year.

Because of its ten-year head start, Gallery 37 is operating without the other three programs in another 22 schools as well. Before the start of After School Matters, Gallery 37 had grown on its own from a total fall enrollment of around 300 to more than 1,000. With the addition of 4,860 fall-semester participants in the sports,

tech, and words programs under the banner of After School Matters, total fall enrollment is now roughly 5,700. Within 12 months, that number is expected to rise to 7,300. Although the program doesn't yet have an unduplicated count of youngsters served over the course of the year, that number seems likely to be well above 10,000 by the end of 2003.

The Troika

TO CRACK THE FIRST OBSTACLE to a city-wide after-school program — the lack of adequate space, facilities, and staff for a population this size — After School Matters has been set up as a three-way partnership among the city agencies with the biggest inventory of suitable real estate and trained personnel: schools, parks, and libraries. They are also the three largest systems whose mission includes serving young people. Chicago's Park District, for example, is among the nation's largest, with the most extensive network of "clubhouses" — community recreation centers in the parks — of any municipal park system. Chicago, alone among the nation's largest cities, has expanded its 75-branch library system every year for the past decade, with rising capital and operating budgets, at a time when most other cities were cutting or freezing their library spending.

Schools are perhaps the richest and most obvious source of after-school space. But until very recently, that was practically the last thing on their agenda. Just five years ago, says Arne Duncan, named CEO of the Chicago Public Schools in 2001, "security guards used to sweep the halls at 2:30. I mean, they'd literally do a sweep — everybody out. These buildings com-

pletely shut down. And the kids got swept right out the door."

It took an aggressive use of mayoral authority to create a different idea of these three bureaucracies' mission, and to knit their formerly unconnected staffs into a coherent team. ("*Unconnected* is putting it mildly," said one city official, preferring to comment off-the-record. "*Hostile* would be closer to the mark.") The park and school systems are governed by separate boards with separate budgets, though both are, in effect, answerable to the mayor. Only the library system is a line agency of city government. Employees of the three systems all have different credentials and belong to distinct professional groups and unions.

Yet to build the kind of program that Mayor and Mrs. Daley envisioned, students would have to be able to go from a school to a sports program in the park clubhouse or to swimming classes in either a public or high-school pool; they should be able to tell stories to younger children at the local library or else, in the same time slot, be able to choose an art or computer workshop using school facilities. Park superintendents, school principals, librarians, school custodians, security personnel, instructors, coaches, and artists would all need to be available to one another, and to the students, on a uniform schedule and calendar that governs everyone.

The bureaucracies' marriage broker

VETERANS OF INTERAGENCY COORDINATION, at any level of government, will recognize this challenge as a long-shot. It is the kind of complex bureaucratic interweaving that most often dies of

inertia or outright sabotage. Sooner or later, each agency comes up with non-negotiable procedures or requirements that the others can't tolerate, and the people with authority to break the logjams either don't attend meetings or feel reluctant to press their lieutenants.

"We had some of that," says B.J. Walker, Mayor Daley's Director of Human Infrastructure¹, part of an inner circle of top mayoral aides. "But we had much less than you'd imagine." Pockets of resistance, she says, tended to dissolve or to be dislodged by top-level management without significantly delaying the early stages of program development.

One reason for that — several people say the main reason — is Ms. Walker herself, a formidable city operative whose influence is based on years of accumulated experience, goodwill, and respect throughout the bureaucracy. "People may not realize," she says, "how important it is to work with the lower ranks [on reform efforts], to win them over and show that you can deliver for them. It's not good enough to just say, 'the mayor's office wants this.' Because sure, they have to take your calls, but sooner or later they can figure out a way to hurt you, mayor or no mayor. The key is to give them buy-in so it's *their* program, and if the program succeeds, *they* succeed."

That took an extraordinary commitment of time and energy on Ms. Walker's part — extraordinary because, on the roster of her official duties, after-school issues would seem to command no more than 5 to 10 percent, maybe less. Yet in the first year of operation for After School Matters, Ms. Walker spent "easily one-third of my time" cutting through the bureaucratic thicket, regularly meeting face-to-face with individual

¹ The unusual title encompasses oversight of a broad mix of city agencies and functions "that have to do with people," including public housing, homelessness, children's services, education, and a host of special initiatives. Many heads of city departments in these areas deal with the mayor primarily through Ms. Walker.

principals and park superintendents as well as the CEOs of the three participating agencies. "Now," she says, "I have relationships. I can call or e-mail people and we know each other. It's not just somebody from the mayor's office."

Mutual benefit

PART OF WHAT THE VARIOUS OFFICIALS NOW KNOW about each other is that their agencies actually derive a benefit from participating in After School Matters. In Mrs. Daley's and Ms. Walker's plan, the three bureaucracies are learning to like their collaboration mainly because it is getting them something they needed. The most obvious example is the high school principals who, according to schools CEO Arne Duncan,

are all running these schools that, before Gallery 37 and After School Matters, had little or nothing for their students [in the after-school hours]. They'd look across town at the better-off neighborhoods, and there'd be all kinds of things going on in the schools or in the community after school, and these principals would be sending their students home, in many cases, to nothing. And it's safe to assume those same students would be coming back the next day worse off than the kids across town. Now, that's something that *matters* to a principal, not just out of compassion, but also because nobody likes to see what they work hard to accomplish all day long just get un-done in the next few hours.

Now, Mr. Duncan points out, besides having a source of activity for students after school, principals get direct use of park clubhouses and city pools for their students, access to library computers, and an influx of practicing

artists, business people, professional and volunteer coaches, and (thanks to Tech 37) additional computers, broadband hookups, and other tech support for their schools. Before After School Matters, most of those resources would have been scarcely worth dreaming about.

Less obvious but just as powerful, the Park District gets a benefit from After School Matters that is literally helping to relieve a crisis. Like many cities with a big inventory of public swimming pools and beaches, Chicago faced an annual shortage of life guards. It had become so acute that the city was forced to shorten pool hours and even to contemplate closing some pools. (New York City, in much the same boat, has actually sent life-guard recruiters to Eastern Europe, according to a recent *New York Times* story.) Now, Sports 37 trains life guards for the Park District's pools and beaches, thus easing a labor shortage and providing students an all-but-guaranteed summer job in the process. The program also trains high schoolers to be coaches and officials for younger children in the parks' summertime sports programs and day camps.

The library system looks to graduates of Words 37 and Tech 37 programs as aides in the branches. In one Tech 37 program, students master the intricacies of the Chicago Public Library's powerful online database and research system, and then work in branch libraries helping other users find what they need and learn the system. Words 37 students tell stories or read aloud to younger children, many of whom might otherwise be hanging out aimlessly at the library, or might not come in at all. Because Words 37 teaches storytelling as a performance art, teenagers come

to the libraries particularly well prepared to make books and stories come alive for children, holding their attention with movement, varied voices, and audience participation.

Capturing outcomes

THE DESCRIPTION THUS FAR has mostly been about *scale* — that is, launching the program and building a critical (if still preliminary) mass of activity in 18 formerly unserved communities. Further work on scale in the coming year will include the addition of more schools, the expansion of less-structured “Club 37” sports and fitness programs in schools and parks, and the incorporation of community-based organizations and their programs into the mix of service providers and organizers.

The second question with which we began — what will all this activity accomplish? — has called forth a parallel body of work aimed at capturing not only what happens to teenagers who participate in after school programs, but also what draws them there in the first place, what they think of their experience, and what they are likely to tell their friends. For that, the Daley administration and After School Matters have turned to the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago. Beginning in the spring of 2002, every year of After School Matters programs will be bracketed by a pre- and post-program survey of students to capture their desires for after-school activity, their expectations about program results, and their actual assessment of those results when the program is over. Chapin Hall is meanwhile looking for funding to survey all ninth graders citywide, and to

interview a subsample of them in more depth, to learn about how they spend their out-of-school time and what they think of various kinds of after-school activity.

Alongside these surveys and interviews, Chapin Hall has broader ambitions to pursue information from other state and local databases whose data could paint, over time, an increasingly detailed picture of whether and how students’ lives are affected by the way they spend their time after school — and whether their neighborhoods change in any way when after-school programs are available. Chapin Hall and After School Matters are pursuing grants to assemble information from these sources into a long-term gauge of outcomes, tracking graduates of After School Matters’ programs for some years and comparing their experiences to those of students who didn’t participate.

Chicago’s program, the most ambitious effort in the country for teenagers, is one way to approach the two questions we raised earlier: What would it take to make after-school programs available to every student, and what would happen if you did? Chicago’s approach, in a nutshell, is to start with what’s working, enlarge and diversify it, and then compile as much data as possible on what happens to participants and their communities over time.

Another approach — more deliberate, but potentially just as ambitious — is to start with what’s *not* working, or in many cases not even available, and assemble a coalition to fix or improve it. That has been the approach in San Francisco, starting with the under-appreciated field of youth sports.

San Francisco Bay Area

Rethinking the Game Plan

“More and more, people in both health and youth development are looking to sports to help them reach the people they are most concerned about. But it hasn’t always been easy to get them to see it that way.”

—Rachel Baker, Co-Director, Team-Up for Youth, San Francisco, California

Just over a decade ago, San Francisco voters approved a tax set-aside for young people’s programs over ten years. In 2000, they extended it for another 20. Partly as a result of that dedicated fund, and partly thanks to leadership from city government, from the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr., Fund, and from San Francisco’s army of nonprofit and community-based organizations, the ensuing years have seen an explosion of after-school programs, including a growing network of Beacon schools modeled on those of New York City. Two years ago, the state added an after-school initiative of its own to supplement local efforts.

Yet across the San Francisco Bay Area, too many children still have little or no access to such programs. Mean-

while, one critical field of youth activity has often been all but omitted from the discussion. Sports, which are far and away the most popular out-of-school activity for the greatest number of young people, have generally taken a back seat to other activities like academics, the arts, or community service. One result has been that, even amid a pronounced increase in after-school activity around San Francisco Bay, relatively little has been done in the one area with the power to engage the greatest number of young people.

To fill this gap, a two-year-old intermediary, Team-Up for Youth, is building coalitions of local organizations in San Francisco and Alameda Counties committed to after-school sports. The coalitions are organized around shared standards of quality, attention to leadership development, and producing a significant increase in the number of young people participating. By seeding new programs, providing planning

grants and technical assistance to those operating current programs, and highlighting best practices, Team-Up for Youth aims to raise the number of children in such programs by at least 20,000 in the next three years, from roughly 30,000 in 2000 to 50,000 in 2005, and to provide them a better experience, with better outcomes, over time. (There are around 65,000 children in San Francisco public schools, and 54,000 in Oakland, the largest city in Alameda County.)

To meet these goals, Team-Up offers grants, help with planning, and other kinds of technical assistance to address shortcomings in the area's parks and recreational facilities, the limited size and uneven quality of current programs, and the need for a systematic, broad-based recruitment and training program for coaches and other adults. Developing high-profile leadership around these issues, especially in local government, will require persistent advocacy across several

municipal governments in the area.

In 2002, Team-Up launched the Community Sports Organizing Project in three neighborhoods, helping community organizations in each area join forces to improve and expand the sports opportunities available to local children. In each neighborhood, a lead agency convenes a group of interested community organizations. The group then compiles an inventory of the youth sports available there, compares that to the interests and needs of young people, and formulates a plan for matching the supply of available activities more closely with the demand.

For example, in San Francisco's Tenderloin neighborhood — a densely populated community where the median family income is \$16,000 — local organizations are training adolescents to coach younger children, developing new sports facilities, and organizing activities specially aimed at the interests of the neighborhood's largest immigrant groups. New martial



Photo courtesy of Team-Up for Youth

Sports are more than fun — they teach teamwork, poise, resilience, fairness

arts and theatrical martial arts programs, for instance, respond to the interest of Southeast Asian residents; rhythm gymnastics appeal to many Russian families. To create space for sports programs in such a dense neighborhood, the groups are making creative use of the area's existing physical features: a bare exterior wall is now a climbing surface for urban mountaineers; a parking lot will become a pool and gym.

What constitutes 'quality'

THE DECISION TO START WITH SPORTS is based not just on their popularity, but also on their potential for promoting young people's healthy development. Team-Up for Youth begins with the premise that sports are not merely fun, but can actually be good for kids — bringing caring adults into their lives, fostering a sense of belonging and group membership, teaching teamwork, poise under pressure, equanimity and resilience in defeat, and fairness in competition. The developmental benefits are often overlooked: Even many advocates of after-school sports tend to emphasize that they lure young people away from harmful activity and expose them to adult influence, but not that the activity is valuable in itself.

A brief but heated congressional debate over "Midnight Basketball" in the mid-1990s illustrates this problem of perception in promoting after-school sports. Many in Congress balked at a proposed 1995 addition to the federal Crime Bill to support basketball and other sports leagues, not by arguing that the program was unaffordable, but that it was frivolous. Even among proponents of youth development programs after school, the debate over the

merits of sports still simmers, though at lower temperatures. Is a "quality" after-school program measured primarily by its intellectual content, or by social factors like bonding with adults and peers, developing interpersonal skills and healthy physical habits, and building attachments to constructive activity of whatever kind? And even if we concede that the latter goals are worthwhile, can sports really achieve them?

Rachel Baker, who became co-director of Team-Up for Youth in February 2001, answers the questions this way:

Often, people in youth development tend to look primarily at cognitive development, and then at social and emotional development, and they focus on activity that specifically addresses those things. They oftentimes leave physical development to the health people. Meanwhile the public health sector is increasingly concerned about physical activity — you've had major recent pronouncements on obesity and sedentary lifestyles from the Surgeon General, the World Health Organization, and the Secretary of Health and Human Services. But they're not focusing as much on other aspects of young people's lives. Sports is where the two groups can really come together. Sports integrates all these things — cognitive, social, emotional and physical development — and most important, young people actually want to participate. More and more, people in both health and youth development are looking to sports to help them reach the people they are most concerned about. But it hasn't always been easy to get them to see it that way.

Overhauling the playing field

TEAM-UP FOR YOUTH AIMS TO IMPROVE the Bay Area's network of after-school sports programs in three ways:

Leveling the field. Even if sports were merely fun, and not an important socializing and development mechanism, it would still be disturbing that sports programs are far more common in middle- and upper-income communities than in poor neighborhoods, and just as disturbing that they overwhelmingly reach boys, not girls. Team-Up for Youth is addressing both disparities.

On the first issue, the Community Sports Organizing Project has started its work in three very low-income neighborhoods and will add three to five more next year, all the while keeping its public message focused on the lack of opportunities in poorer areas. On the second front, Team-Up has awarded grants to three local organizations specifically to expand their girls' sports programming. The "Gear Up for Girls" program aims at recruiting women as coaches and program leaders, recruiting girls into sports activities, and helping community-based programs reach out to girls and serve them more effectively.

In promoting sports as a prime youth development vehicle, Team-Up regularly points out that pursuing class and gender balance is a way of both reaching more young people and eliminating a longstanding inequity.

Improving the field. Raising the quality of programs, measuring their performance, and tracking the outcomes is not just a way of ensuring

quality for today's participants, but also a way of establishing the credibility of youth sports and building a national constituency for them. Through an expanding coalition of practitioners in the Bay Area, Team-Up for Youth plans to promote standards of excellence by consensus and measure the results.

The organization is also intent on improving the playing field in a more literal way. At the request of the San Francisco Parks and Recreation Department, Team-Up has organized a group of six high school students to assess the sports programs at ten city recreation centers in low-income neighborhoods and to consult focus groups of other young people on ways to improve the quality and mix of the Department's recreation programs.

Expanding the field. Bringing more opportunities for after-school sports to more young people is in some ways the most obvious, and the most measurable, goal of Team-Up for Youth. But it will succeed only in proportion to the success of the other goals — equal access for lower-income communities and for girls, improving the availability and condition of fields and facilities, and setting and raising standards of quality.

Taken together, all these goals point a way toward a truly universal system of after-school recreation and development opportunities for young people. That goal is mostly still a dream, but the dream is now materializing, as coalitions begin to form, grants flow, and new programs begin enlisting more youngsters.

The National Picture

And a Look Ahead

Gathering the Minds

BESIDES PROVIDING GRANT SUPPORT TO PROMISING WORK in individual places, the After School Project has started to form a cadre of metropolitan areas across the country where interest and leadership in after-school programs are solidifying. In October 2001, we invited representatives of all the communities where we've been working, including Chicago, the San Francisco Bay Area, Boston, Denver, and Jacksonville, to our first national meeting. The group included practitioners, policymakers, funders, and researchers from each place, along with a handful of national experts and advocates. We gathered in Chicago, which gave the participants a chance to see an unfolding citywide system in action. Chicago city officials and After School Matters staff escorted participants to local schools, libraries, and parks to see the system's moving parts up close, in operation. And for two days, people from around the country talked over the opportunities and roadblocks they've encountered as they go about creating their own variations on Chicago's experience.

The national meeting not only surveyed the work under way in each of the participating cities, but gave participants a chance to discuss national pol-

icy, exchange ideas on how to assemble and administer citywide programs, compare strategies for building local coalitions around after-school activities, and map sources and trends in after-school funding. Representatives of Chapin Hall presented ideas about measuring outcomes and using applied research, and evaluators from Conwal, Inc., described the approach they will take in evaluating the After School Project for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The past few years have seen a gathering national consensus around the appeal of after-school programs, their value as a youth-development tool, and the scarcity of good programs for families that want them. Increasingly, the issue before researchers, policymakers, and practitioners is not whether after-school programs are desirable, but how to offer them in a way that consistently appeals to young people, reaches all the students who want to participate, forges meaningful relationships between young people and adults, and demonstrates an acceptable level of quality and accountability for results. Behind those questions lies an even broader, largely uncharted expanse of problems involving funding, administration, leadership, staffing, and political will. Can these issues be tackled, for example, without an institution

that is accountable for planning, supporting, and coordinating the work of after-school programs? Or if such a body is needed, what should it look like — with what membership, budget, and formal authority?

By gathering the people who are working on these problems, and expanding the discussion as new players join the effort, the After School Project plans to help build agreement and understanding around what has been learned so far, and focus attention on the questions still to be answered. The national gathering was our first formal step in that process, with more to follow.

Juvenile Justice Meets After-School: A Profile of a Rare Alliance

IN OUR TRAVELS AND CONVERSATIONS with state and local leaders last year, we came across an extraordinary case of juvenile justice reformers making use of after-school programs to prevent delinquency. As part of a top-to-bottom overhaul of the Wayne County, Michigan, juvenile justice system, the county now offers a small reimbursement to after-school programs that accept young people referred by the system. In some cases, nonprofit organizations that care for juvenile offenders are also allowed, with county funds, to support after-school programs in their communities, even if those programs are not serving any adjudicated offenders.

We think Wayne County, which includes Detroit, is trying something that deserves close attention from the rest of the country. So in mid-2002, we released "Before It's Too Late," by Tony Proscio, a profile of the Wayne County reform, how it came about, and what it

has achieved so far. It's too soon to declare the effort a success, although preliminary results are encouraging, both in fiscal and human terms. But whether it succeeds or fails, Wayne County is attempting something that thoughtful people have been urging for years but almost no actual court system has attempted: saving money and reducing crime by treating delinquency at its source.

The idea of after-school youth development as an answer to crime is decades old. In practice, though, juvenile-justice funding hardly ever makes its way into the after-school arena, and most juvenile justice programs seem to believe they need to defend their budgets from incursions by other youth programs. (For a fuller discussion of this odd dynamic, we offer "Financing After School Programs: Prospects for Juvenile Justice Funding" by Carol Glazer of the After School Project.) If Wayne County finds that its new system is more effective in treating current offenders — including not only rehabilitation, but more effective restitution for their crimes — and still has enough money to support after-school programs, it could have a profound effect on the way the two systems debate funding and strategy. A national breakthrough in this debate may still take years, but in at least one place, there will now be hard evidence to cite and analyze.

A Final Word

THE PAST FEW YEARS have seen a burst of national enthusiasm for after-school programs, from parents and police thinking locally to lawmakers and public policy buffs surveying the big picture. Yet the popularity of the concept has been something of a mixed blessing.

*Growing
attention to
after-school
programs
has raised
awareness,
but also
expectations*

On one hand, the sheer proliferation of after-school programs and the seemingly bottomless demand for them has been remarkable, particularly since much of the support for them seems to cross political and ideological camps. On the other hand, enthusiasm about after-school activity has tended to range so broadly, supported by so many different theories and goals, that the field has had relatively little glue to hold it together — other than the obvious coincidence that all its activities occur in the out-of-school hours. Which ambitions are realistic? What can and should a good program be expected to accomplish? What would it take to satisfy most of the demand? Who should govern and pay for all of it? All these questions remain almost as unclear today as when the field was first entering the public debate a few decades ago.

We hold no illusions that this Project, or the handful of other major after-school initiatives now under way across the country, will provide definitive answers to these questions any time soon. Our aim is to support some responsible experiments and plans backed by strong local coalitions, and then hold up what we learn to the scrutiny of others in the field, knowing that they will be doing the same. Along the way, we hope to formulate some clearer ideas on at least five issues that seem especially prominent on the horizon just now:

1

Designing the best delivery system.

Nearly every community making a serious effort on large-scale after-school programs has had to assemble working teams of city agencies, community organizations and other nonprofits, schools, parents, experts,

and adult instructors and mentors. Keeping such a diverse coalition functioning — holding it together and making it work efficiently — is a management challenge that no community has yet fully solved. Can these working relationships be maintained by astute but independent brokers like After School Matters or Team-Up for Youth, acting as coordinators and implementers, but lacking any formal power over their partners? Or will cities ultimately need a centralized authority to design, fund, manage, and ensure accountability for a far-flung system? It's clear that some institutional vehicle is necessary to drive change and keep the focus on quality opportunities for all the children who need them. Some central resource needs to direct a range of supports to service providers — linking them with schools, data collection, research, technical assistance on service delivery techniques, and policy advocacy — that can improve their work and keep after-school programs on the public agenda to ensure the continued flow of resources. We hope to learn from on-the-ground experience what configuration of institutional players, resources, and functions needs to be put in place for such a delivery system to work well.

2

Fair expectations about outcomes.

A good deal of research is now under way, though in many cases still in early stages, on exactly what effects can be expected from after-school programs, and what kinds of programs are associated with which effects. At least in the public mind — and often in the policy literature as well — the idea of after-school activity has been touted as an answer to a goodly slice of the American domestic agenda. The risk is that we are burdening a new, still unformed field with unreasonable expectations if we promise too much for it. Is it reasonable, at this stage, to measure after-school activity by

whether it boosts academic performance, cuts crime, improves health, strengthens neighborhood cohesion, promotes parental involvement in schools, and advances half a dozen other worthwhile goals? All these claims appear here and there in the literature of this field, and each of them has some reasonable basis in theory and practice. Taken together, however, they seem to promise too much too fast. We hope the field can find a way to set its sights high without over-inflating the results it is expected to produce.

3 Durability.
The experience of Boston, Chicago, Jacksonville, and the San Francisco Bay Area suggests that it's possible to mount large-scale after-school efforts supported by truly broad-based institutional relationships. That is significant in itself, but it naturally leads to the question: How long can these relationships and the resulting programs endure? And what will it take, in dollars, leadership, and technical support, to help them continue over time?

4 What constitutes quality, and how to ensure it.
The very act of taking programs to a citywide or regional scale poses a risk to the quality of those programs — as, for example, when a small, carefully nurtured program is suddenly replicated in dozens of schools across wide areas and many different kinds of neighborhoods. But in truth, the quality even of many small-scale programs, operating in just one or two places, is still to be determined. Even the meaning of "quality" is in some ways uncertain, given the unanswered questions we listed in item No. 1 above. In short, we know some things — but not enough — about what constitutes a quality after-school pro-

gram. And we know some things — but not enough — about how to expand and replicate programs without weakening them. On both fronts, we still have much to learn.

5 The future of federal and state support.

The largest federal after-school program, 21st Century Schools, represents a more-than-\$1-billion investment in the field, a program whose structure (and maybe goals) changed substantially in the past year. Beginning in Fiscal 2002, 21st Century Schools grants are going to states by formula, to be reallocated to local programs, rather than directly from Washington to those programs. Recipients can now be community-based organizations and other nonprofit groups, not just school boards. It's far too soon to say whether this change will be for good or ill, or whether it will matter a great deal either way. But any time the control and eligibility rules for such a big source of support change, it's reasonable to wonder about the consequences. Will the devolving of these funds to state control lead to better administration, more effective blending of federal and state dollars, more political investment from state leaders, and more responsiveness to local needs and ideas? All of that is possible. We will need to watch and see.

This is an interim report on our activities. A final report is still two years away. We hope, by then, to have more to say on all these questions, and to have considerably more progress to report from the pioneering cities where our initial work has concentrated. Our goal is to help their efforts expand, improve, accelerate, and answer crucial questions that the rest of the country is just now beginning to ask.