

AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS: Building Youth Resilience / Strengthening Families

AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS INCREASE PROTECTIVE FACTORS OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL

- **Social-Emotional Learning (SEL).** Afterschool is an ideal setting to teach SEL skills; youth can focus on building friendships; and programming is flexible. Research demonstrates that children and youth who regularly attend afterschool programs that utilize consistent SEL practices benefit from improved self-awareness, positive social behaviors, increased academic achievement, and significant reductions in problem behaviors.¹
- **Self-Esteem and Workforce Development.** Positive afterschool experiences help children and youth gain essential skills in healthy self-esteem, personal agency, and problem solving. These skills translate to increased employability skills and career readiness.²
- **Community-Wide Support.** Afterschool programs bolster community-wide post-traumatic growth by providing children and youth with a safe place to learn and grow amidst trauma, family addiction, and disruptions. Additionally, programs that provide afterschool and summer meals and snacks make it easier for families to make ends meet, and may be a child's only chance to access nutritious food until the next school day.
- **Healthy Relationships.** Afterschool is a place where youth can build social skills with peers in a low-pressure environment and also develop trusting, stable relationships with adult staff. Across Vermont, only 60% of high school students feel like they matter to the people in their community. For young people who do not participate in afterschool activities at all, this measure of “belonging” drops to 47%, while for teens who participate 10 hours or more per week in afterschool activities it goes up to 71%.⁴

What Makes Sense?

With a proven track record for increasing resilience, supporting positive youth development, and preventing substance abuse, investing in afterschool and summer learning programs is a cost-effective way to help build and support an integrated, trauma-informed system that supports children, youth, and families.

AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS ARE PROVEN TO REDUCE RISKY BEHAVIORS

- **Positive Youth Development.** In addition to keeping kids away from drugs after school, afterschool programs build protective factors that prevent substance use disorders from occurring and can reduce risk factors that lead to misuse of substances. Afterschool programs reduce substance abuse through the development of protective or resiliency factors such as school connectedness, self-control, self-confidence, and quality peer relationships.³
- **Reduced Substance Use.** Vermont’s Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) found that students who participate in extracurricular activities each week (up to 19 hours/week) are significantly less likely to use any alcohol, tobacco, or marijuana than those who did not participate in any activities.⁴
- **Response to the Opioid Epidemic.** Quality afterschool programs also provide trauma-informed practices that offset the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Addressing the impact of ACEs in turn reduces development of substance use disorders and other future health concerns.⁵ As the opioid epidemic continues to disrupt Vermont families this becomes increasingly important.

(1) Durlak, J.A., Weissberg, R.P., and Pachan, M. A meta-analysis of after-school programs that seek to promote personal and social skills in children and adolescents. *American Journal of Community Psychology* 45 (3-4): 294-309, 2010. (2) American Institutes for Research. (2015) Ready for Work? How Afterschool Programs Can Support Employability Through Social and Emotional Learning. (3) SAMHSA’s Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies. (2014). CAPT Decision Support Tools—Strategies and Interventions to Prevent Youth Marijuana Use: An At-a-Glance Resource Tool Using Prevention Research to Guide Prevention Practice. SAMHSA’s Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies. (4) Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2017. <http://www.healthvermont.gov/health-statistics-vital-records/population-health-surveys-data/youth-risk-behavior-survey-yrbs>. (5) SAMHSA - Adverse Childhood Experiences and Substance Use Disorders. <https://www.samhsa.gov/capt/practicing-effective-prevention/prevention-behavioral-health/adverse-childhood-experiences>.

CREATING A STATEWIDE SYSTEM OF TRAINING AND SUPPORT

High quality professional development for afterschool staff around social emotional learning and trauma-informed practices is in demand and on the rise across Vermont. Vermont Afterschool is expanding the scope of training and integrating on-going support through:

- Bringing an evidence-based social-emotional curriculum to afterschool sites across the state;
- Providing basic and advanced level trainings to hundreds of afterschool professionals through on-site workshops, full-day conference strands, and regional summits;
- Providing one-to-one coaching to increase frontline staff competence in therapeutic behavior management;
- Co-planning with afterschool providers to host family outreach events focused on at-home strategies for supporting social emotional learning and development;
- Facilitating communities of practice for leadership-level staff to increase knowledge and skill in addressing toxic stress among the youth and families they serve;
- Developing an intensive Leadership Institute in Resiliency Afterschool, along with a corresponding micro-credential in youth resiliency; and
- Coordinating regional training and collaboration opportunities to connect out-of-school programs with community partners including medical and mental health providers, community justice centers, and social services agencies.



Vermont Afterschool is utilizing a public-private partnership model to support the development of this statewide system of training and support. Funding for this work has come from a variety of sources, including: Vermont's Department for Children and Families- Child Development Division (DCF/CDD), Vermont Agency of Education, Northfield Savings Bank Foundation, afterschool programs and partners, conference sponsors, and contributors.

ESSENTIAL SYSTEM COMPONENTS

- **Appropriate Expertise.** Vermont Afterschool hired a certified social worker on staff at 32 hrs/wk to lead the initiative.
- **Local Investment in Staff.** Afterschool programs have invested in staff time for communities of practice every 2-4 weeks.
- **Ongoing Training and Support.** Building social emotional skills and trauma-informed practices requires consistent and in-depth support, coaching, and training over a prolonged period of time.
- **Local Partnerships.** The most effective models help build a network of support and colleagues for the afterschool program (e.g., mental health specialists, restorative justice centers, etc.).
- **State Leadership.** While Vermont Afterschool funds utilizes a variety of funding sources to support this initiative, the work would not be possible without ongoing state funding, support, and partnership.

One example of the type of feedback Vermont Afterschool regularly receives from the field:

"This monthly meeting has been what I have been waiting for. It is the most useful professional development I have ever done. I am exhilarated and excited to do my job well every time I leave the meeting. Being given an opportunity to talk about the small things that other sites are doing to help organize their program has been incredibly helpful. Talking about specific students and hearing that other sites experience the same thing is so supportive. Thank you!!!"