Programs That Work

The Time for Kids Initiative in Portland, Oregon: Challenges of Effective Multi-partnering

John L. Crompton

ABSTRACT: The Time for Kids Initiative (TFKI) was a 3 year program coordinated by Portland Parks and Recreation (PP&R) in two of the city’s underserved areas which had a high proportion of low income and recent immigrant residents. PP&R partnered with 17 non-profit groups to deliver the program. The primary goal of TFKI was to improve academic performance. High school youth were recruited as academic tutors. Independent, comprehensive evaluations of the program were undertaken which measured registration and attendance, student attitudes, family assessments, and partner assessments. The evaluations indicated TFKI was successful on most of the parameters that were measured.

Five main lessons were learned from TFKI. They were (i) difficulty in reconciling the missions of collaborative partners so they were consistent with TFKI’s asset building goals; (ii) difficulty in getting some partners to think beyond their own narrow, specific focused contributions and, thus, in the overall planning of TFKI; (iii) challenges in operationalizing the desire for the program to be comprehensive, since this conveyed a different meaning to different people; (iv) underestimation of the time needed to launch TFKI; and (v) importance of focusing the program on a single middle school in each area.

Despite the program’s success, it was not expanded to other neighborhoods in the city which would probably have benefitted from it. The political and economic reasons undergirding this failure to expand are discussed.

KEYWORDS: Youth development, after-school programs, recreation, educational performance; financing.

AUTHOR: John Crompton is a Distinguished Professor, Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences, Texas A&M University, MS 2261, College Station, TX 77843-2261. Email: jcrompto@rpts.tamu.edu

Introduction

Like many other states, communities in Oregon are experiencing a shortage of funds for public education. Measure 5, the state’s tax limitation legislation, was passed by referendum in 1990, and its effect was to
substantially limit options for expanding educational funding. Portland is the state's largest urban area and during the 1990s large numbers of ethnic migrant families settled in the city, especially Russians, Eastern Europeans, and Latinos. The language and cultural challenges of responding to the needs of these new children meant that the difficulties confronting Portland schools were accentuated.

The guiding vision of the Portland Parks and Recreation's (PP&R) Recreation Division is "We create recreation opportunities that can change people's lives and bring the community together." The Division believed that creating after-school programs targeted at the educationally disadvantaged was consistent with operationalizing this vision. Thus, it proposed and developed the Time for Kids Initiative (TFKI) which was a three year pilot program designed to enhance academic achievement and contribute to alleviating the perceived educational crisis in Portland.

The vision for the TFKI pilot program flowed from the Division's overall vision statement. It was: "To create recreation and education opportunities that can change people's lives, bring the community together, and increase the personal assets of Portland's youth." It was intended to provide high quality, after-school programming which offered more depth and structure than traditional drop-in programs. Its focus was on youth development, rather than the more traditional goal of skill development. PP&R positioned itself to align with a central problem in the community and sought to demonstrate that it could contribute to alleviating that problem.

PP&R viewed this pilot program as an opportunity to serve as a broker of services rather than as a direct service provider. The intent was to partner with other organizations to shape a common mission which would best leverage the limited available resources. PP&R visualized an approach where partners representing a range of agencies and organizations would have equal status at the table in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of programs, while PP&R's role would be to facilitate and coordinate the overall service delivery. It was recognized that this approach would be challenging. The recreation manager observed, "When everyone has resources, it's relatively easy for partners to cooperate. However, in situations like this where there is an acute shortage of resources, partners are tempted to revise their perspective and view prospective collaborators as competitors for the same resources, rather than partners."

Program Context

The pilot program was undertaken in two of the city's underserved areas: North Portland and Outer Southeast Portland. These two areas had a high proportion of low income residents and relatively little service infrastructure to serve them. These two areas received most of the ethnic migrant families who moved into Portland in the 1990s. North Portland received most of the Latino population—which traditionally was not a
major ethnic group in the city—while Outer Southeast Portland received most of the city’s influx of 60,000 Russians and East Europeans.

The guidelines given to PP&R for administering the TFKI by the city council were:

• Ensure the TFKI is collaborative. This meant involving a wide range of non-profit community-based organizations to utilize their expertise, and recognizing them as being equal partners in vision, funding, and program evaluation. The emphasis on collaboration was intended to minimize gaps in program planning available to the targeted youth. PP&R’s mandate was to serve as a service broker to facilitate onsite service delivery.

• Develop a comprehensive out-of-school hours program focused on two middle schools (6th-8th grades), one in each targeted area, since this was the age range in which the council perceived the juvenile delinquency problem to be most acute. PP&R had a full-time community recreation staff member resident at both of these schools, so some essential existing infrastructure was already in place. (Since much of Portland’s indoor recreation program is dependent on the use of school facilities, PP&R has full-time staff based at 13 Portland schools. Before recent budget cuts, PP&R had part-time staff in an additional 30 schools. They are there for most of the school day and are responsible for organizing after-school programs).

• Ensure the Initiative is well evaluated. The rationale for a pilot program is to test whether desired outcomes are achieved. If they are attained, then the implication is that consideration should be given to expanding the TFKI beyond the initial targeted neighborhoods.

• Programs should be accessible (geographically, financially, and culturally) to unserved or underserved youth.

• There should be a broad array of programs/activities to meet a wide range of youth interests, with particular emphasis on programs designed to promote academic achievement and personal enrichment of youth.

The city council allocated $200,000 per year from the general fund to finance the program for three years. Although the council could only commit to one year’s funding at a time, there was a clear understanding and recognition at the outset that if the pilot program was to provide meaningful evaluation data, it would have to be funded for the full three year period.

Program Development

A broad invitation to participate in the TFKI was sent to all non-profit community organizations which it was believed might have an interest. They were requested to extend the invitation to any other organizations that were not on PP&R’s list which they thought may have something to offer. At the first meeting, approximately 50 potentially interested partners attended. The group met every two weeks for three months discussing and
defining the scope, depth, and content of the TFKI program. By the end of this period the group had self-selected itself to approximately half its original size, as some of the initial organizations realized they did not have the capacity needed to participate.

The Search Institute had recently completed a study with the Multnomah County Commission on Children and Families (Portland is in Multnomah County). Over 10,000 youth in 6th, 8th, and 10th grades were surveyed using the Search Institute's model of 40 assets to identify what was missing in their lives. The study concluded that youth in Multnomah County had an average of only 19 of the 40 assets identified as essential for youth to grow up healthy, caring, and competent. The TFKI collaboration group used the study results as a basis for selecting the 10 they deemed to be most important to Portland's youth, and required that any TFKI funded program should be designed to contribute to one or more of them. However, when the program proposals were received, they all focused on just three of these assets:

- Academic achievement
- Developing work and/or life skills
- Community involvement/ community service.

This suggested that these are the three assets which PP&R and its partners were best equipped to develop.

The collaboration group also extended the original mandate from the city council to focus the programs exclusively on the middle schools. The group recognized that inadequate academic performance and delinquent behavior at the middle schools had been nurtured through earlier experiences at the elementary schools. Thus, to positively impact 6th-8th grade youth, efforts had to be made to address these issues at an earlier age. As a result, programming was extended to include outreach programs to 3rd through 5th graders at some elementary schools in the targeted areas.

Each of the collaborative partners interested in participating in the TFKI was required to write a proposal to PP&R requesting part of the $200,000 budget. An example of a completed proposal is shown in Figure 1. There were two types of partners: (i) those who offered year-long programs which were often school-based or school-linked (such as that described in Figure 1) and, (ii) those whose contribution consisted of repeating or recurring programs that often covered a single topic, subject, or activity.

The whole committee of prospective collaborative partners met to rank the proposals. This process was a complete failure because people were unable to focus on what was best for the overall program and instead insisted on defending and advocating their own proposals. Given this experience, the larger group unanimously agreed to PP&R's suggestion that a small group working with PP&R should rank the proposals. This smaller group was comprised of representatives from a community based
1. **Organization**
   Oregon Council for Hispanic Advancement (OCHA)

2. **Program description**
   The goal of the OCHA/Time for Kids after-school enrichment program is to ensure the educational success of Latino students by implementing an after-school program that offers academic support and recreational activities. 20 Latino 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade children from James John Elementary will participate in this program. The academic component will focus on strengthening students’ math and literacy skills. To meet the diverse academic needs of participants, one-on-one tutoring and small group learning will be utilized extensively. For example, the class will be divided into teams composed of 4-6 students with comparable skills in a particular content area such as math or reading. This structure allows staff to personalize instruction and provide intensive tutoring.

   The children’s classroom teachers will be consulted on a regular basis to ensure that academic activities are adequately addressing the individual needs of students and helping them meet, exceed, or improve toward their grade level benchmark. Program staff will also use culturally-based curricular published by the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), the nation’s largest Latino advocacy organization.

   In addition, the program will integrate academics with a spectrum of recreational and community service activities. These will balance academic instruction with fun activities that teach participants teamwork, increase cultural awareness, and develop neighborhood pride and involvement (see list of partners in #4).

3. **Program duration**
   The program will run for the entire school year, beginning September 8 through June 23; classes will be held Monday-Thursday from 2:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m. Fridays will be dedicated for planning meetings with teachers or parents as well as OCHA staff meetings. Staff will be contracted from August 30 to June 23 and located on-site from 12:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

4. **Partners**
   OCHA has established strong partnerships with several agencies during the past summer and this school year. We expect to continue this collaborative effort in order to provide participants with diverse, high-quality educational and recreational activities. The following is a list of confirmed program partners and their roles.

   - **Multnomah County Library**—students will visit the St. John’s branch on a weekly basis to learn how to effectively utilize the library’s resources, obtain library cards, learn about the Internet, and cultivate good reading habits. In addition, culturally-based storytime will be provided by the Library Outreach in Spanish (LIBROS) program.

   - **Campfire**—Americorp volunteers will teach children the importance of community involvement and help them plan a service program that positively impacts their neighborhood.
Saturday Academy—Saturday Academy staff will make 8 visits to teach youth math concepts using creative, hands-on activities.

St. John’s Community Center—children will have access to a variety of recreational opportunities ranging from organized sports to arts and crafts activities.

Police Activities League (PAL)—students will have access to recreational opportunities at PAL’s Youth Center and participate in their Spring Break activities.

James John School—participants will have access to computers and educational software that help them build their academic and technology skills.

5. **Time for Kids primary objective**
   Participants are meeting, exceeding, or showing improvement toward their grade level benchmark.

6. **Marketing and recruitment**
   Children participating in OCHA’s summer enrichment program at James John Elementary will be given priority to transition into the after-school program. In the event that all positions are not filled, students will be recruited through a teacher nomination process. Every 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grade teacher will receive a description of the summer program as well as a nomination form. Students will be chosen based on two main criteria: (1) student demonstrates a need for additional academic assistance, and (2) teacher is willing to participate in preparing the student’s academic plan and/or provide educational materials for the student to use after school. Following the nomination process, the family will be contacted to obtain parent/guardian consent. It is anticipated that approximately 15 students will transition from the summer program to the after-school program.

7. **Transportation**
   Transportation will not be provided to participants in the OCHA after-school program. Parents will be asked to take responsibility for the daily pick-up of their children.
   Because of the proximity to recreational sites such as St. John’s Community Center, additional transportation will only be necessary for daylong field trips. During such excursions, OCHA will utilize its agency van and rent additional vehicles as needed.

8. **Family/youth involvement in program planning**
   Latino children and families were actively involved in the planning phase of the proposed program. Students currently participating in OCHA’s after-school enrichment program were asked to write what they would like to do next year. Given that many students will transition from the summer into the after-school program, every effort was made to incorporate participants’ ideas into the program design. During a recent parent meeting, parents also provided concrete suggestions regarding program goals, activities, and design.

9. **Family/youth input in ongoing project design**
   OCHA’s after-school program will commence with an orientation for children and family members to describe the program, reiterate the goals set for the school year, and recruit parents as classroom volunteers. Two additional parent potlucks
will be held during the school year as a way to bolster family involvement and obtain feedback regarding project design, implementation, and evaluation. Students’ input will also be obtained during recreational event planning.

10. Enrollment fee
   The program is free of charge.

11. Project location
    The after-school program will be implemented at James John Elementary located in North Portland.

12. Number of youth served
   20 Latino children will participate.

13. Registration process
    Registration materials will be sent home with children two weeks prior to the end of the school year. Parents will also be contacted by phone to give them a description of the summer program, answer any questions they might have, and encourage them to complete and return registration materials promptly. In addition, families that have difficulties filling out forms will be given the option of attending a registration meeting at the school in order to receive individual help during this program.

14. Attendance
    Attendance will be taken daily and parents will be contacted regularly to encourage student and family program participation.

15. Project evaluation
    OCHA will evaluate the after-school program as follows:
    1) Grades—students’ academic records will be monitored to gauge their progress toward their grade level benchmark.
    2) Student survey—pre- and post-tests will assess children’s attitudes toward Latino culture, family, community, and school.
    3) Parent survey—questions will gather descriptive statistics regarding parent educational attainment, language spoken at home, educational expectations, homework assistance, and parental school involvement.
    4) Student attendance—every child will achieve at least a 90% attendance rate.
    5) Family involvement—number of family volunteers and parents participating in at least one event.

16. Program staff
    All program staff are bilingual/bicultural and have experience working with youth in educational and recreational settings. Individuals will also have a demonstrated ability to administer evaluation tools, an interest in working with Latino youth and families, and enthusiasm for the program.

17. Program Budget
    Shown on next page (Figure 1).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NORTH PORTLAND</th>
<th>ORCA - 4th Week After School Program</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PROGRAM ELEMENTS</strong></td>
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organization, school principals from the two middle schools, an organization serving ethnic populations, and a PP&R staff person. This was called, "The Funding Committee" and in a threethree-hour meeting it was able to make decisions that were accepted by the larger group. The challenge was to select programs that offered different kinds of programs and sought different outcomes: "We didn't want to fund only art programs or only those that sought academic achievement as their outcome." During the three years of the pilot program, 17 partners, representing 32 programs, serving 21 sites were funded. A list of partners, showing the program they offered and its location is provided in Table 1.

The primary goal of the TFKI was to improve academic performance. Hence, the central element in the program was 30-40 minutes of homework tutoring immediately after-school. Tutors were young adults re-

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<tr>
<th>Sponsoring Partner</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<td>James John</td>
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<td>Mult. County Library</td>
<td>Library Club</td>
<td>Woodmire</td>
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cruited from high schools with adult supervision. An effort was made to match the TFKI students with tutors from the high school which the students would attend when they left middle school. In Oregon, starting with the 4th grade, all students are required to do a specified number of hours of community service. This is usually part of their health education requirement and they receive credit for it. Thus, the TFKI staff from PP&R recruited tutors by connecting with the school counselors responsible for the community service component of the curriculum. In addition to the academic credit they received, the tutors were able to report their experience on college application forms and this likely enhanced their chances of being accepted at their college of choice.

In this way, TFKI became one of the smorgasbord of activities the high school offered their students to meet this requirement. Students who were interested were required to interview with the PP&R staff supervisor. Tutors were required to commit for one full semester. The interview was used to reinforce the extent of their commitment (e.g. every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, or whatever); clearly articulate their role and PP&R’s expectations; and to identify the academic areas in which they were most qualified to tutor. Special efforts were made to recruit students who were both bilingual and bicultural.

Typically, tutoring was held in the school cafeteria. The TFKI students were there after-school; picked up their snack; then went to the tutoring table which corresponded to their homework assignments. There were one or two tables assigned for each subject area with one or two tutors at each, and each table could accommodate up to 10 students. Thus, each evening as many as 12 tutors were needed, which meant that approximately 20 had to be recruited each semester. In addition to the tutors, PP&R hired an adult at each site for 10 hours a week to oversee and supervise the program for a couple of hours each evening. Grades were assigned to the tutors by the school counselors, but PP&R staff were required to complete evaluation forms on each tutor’s performance. The forms were provided by the counselors and they addressed attendance, quality of work, and commitment. The tutoring component of the TFKI was not intended to be part of a mentoring effort. Mentoring was seen as a one-on-one year long commitment that went beyond providing assistance with academic studies.

Only after the homework tutorial time had been completed were the youth allowed to participate in the array of TFKI leisure class activities. It was their “admission ticket” into the classes. Students did not receive homework tutoring unless they had been in school that day. Before this rule was instituted, some youth skipped school, but were so eager to participate in the art, dance team, music, hoops program or whatever, they showed up for the tutorial session. This was also a mechanism for increasing school attendance, which itself is likely to be a contributor to improved academic performance.

Some of the youth in the TFKI were referred to it by teachers who saw they were having difficulty with their school work. In the first week or so,
such students often tended to be resentful that they had been referred to
the program since it was a public manifestation of their deficiencies. The
types of unorthodox challenges facing some of these children are unimag-
inable to most people. An example is given in Figure 2. However, in most
cases, they quickly came to enjoy the leisure activities, and were also
motivated by improvements which occurred in their academic grades.

Figure 2
The Need for a Light Bulb!

A child in one of the schools was doing badly on homework
assignments. He was obviously bright and intelligent but did consistently
bad homework assignments—sometimes not handing in anything. When
a counselor questioned the boy in-depth seeking an explanation for his
poor work, it emerged there were no working light bulbs in the boy’s home!
It goes dark at 4:30 p.m. in Portland in the winter. Thus, by the time he got
home from school, there was no light available so he could not do his
homework. After coming to the after school program, everything changed.
The PP&R supervisor commented, “We simply cannot understand the
range of problems that some people have in their lives.”

Staff Training

Staff training was limited because very little funding was available to
support it. PP&R did have the report and results of the Search Institute’s
asset study to use as an initial introductory training tool. In addition, before
the program was launched, one full-day retreat was held for all PP&R staff
involved in TFKI. This did not extend to the tutors. Experts were brought
in to advise and guide them. A key resource for PP&R was the Oregon
Mentoring Institute (OMI). Their staff provided the training at one of
these day retreats and made available at no cost to the PP&R an extraordi-
arily comprehensive set of materials, training programs, and manuals
which substantially accelerated the PP&R staff’s learning curve, and which
the PP&R used extensively in subsequent additional internal training
sessions. Two other valuable sources of assistance with staff training were
the Northwest Regional Education Laboratory and The Mentoring Part-
nership. Over time, key lead staff were identified as mentors for their peers,
so they could pass along the experience and expertise which they had
acquired.

The results of the training and the experience gained by staff through
involvement with the TFKI were mixed. Some were excited by the
program, reveled in the opportunity to engage in asset based youth
development, and were effective. However others, in the words of the
recreation manager, “Just didn’t get it.” They remained in the traditional
recreation mode of “recreation for the sake of recreation and diversion”
with which they felt comfortable, and made no effort to redirect the thrust
towards asset building.
Outcomes

One of the innovative features of the TFKI was its strong commitment to evaluation. The evaluation was designed to be two tiered, consisting of partners designing an evaluation of their individual projects and independent evaluators assessing the TFKI as a whole. Evaluation of the individual projects was based on a list of objectives developed by the partners in the early stages of the collaboration. At that time, each approved project was required to identify a primary objective which would form the basis of their individual project's evaluation. A comprehensive evaluation of the TFKI program also was commissioned from an external firm of consultants. The consultants' overall evaluation was drawn from data developed by PP&R and the individual evaluations of each program which the partners were required to undertake under the terms of their funding agreement with the PP&R. The consultants' evaluation was comprised of four main elements:

- Attendance and Registration Analysis
- Student Attitude Survey
- Family Assessments
- Partner Assessments

They noted that "all of the data over the period of the initiative, creates a picture of a program that has struggled with challenges, but has accomplished some important outcomes for kids."

Registration and enrollment data and attendance records were collected by the partners. Partners forecasted a minimum and maximum number of participants when they signed agreements with the PP&R. This was used as the "expected performance" measure in the evaluation. A majority of programs met or exceeded minimum enrollment goals, and half of the programs met or exceeded their maximum expectation.

The Student Attitude Survey was a self-esteem inventory consisting of a 10 question instrument for use with elementary school children, and a 22 question survey which was completed by middle schoolers. A pre-test was administered in the first or second class session, and a post-test in the last class. In over half of the partner programs statistically significant positive increases occurred.

Family Assessments to evaluate level of family support were undertaken in interviews with a sample of parents/guardians identified from the registration lists. A standard questionnaire was developed to guide the interview and ensure it covered key areas which included:

- Satisfaction with the child's experience in the TFKI.
- Confidence in program and staff.
- Importance of program goals to parents/guardians.
- Barriers to program participation.
- Level of parent/family member participation in programs.
Interviews were conducted by phone, in the language identified as the primary language of the household whenever possible. The International Refugee Center of Oregon provided interviewers who were able to communicate with Russian and Spanish speaking families. The Asian Family Center provided interviewers for contacts with families that they served.

Partner Assessments were undertaken by interviewing key people representing each of the collaborating partners. A set of 14 questions was developed to guide the interviews.

Analysis of the data generated from these four sources led to the following overall conclusions and recommendations:

- The TFKI had the support of participating families, school personnel, and community-based organizations because it supported family aspirations for children’s success, an education agenda for academic excellence and school-community connectedness, and a community agenda to enrich the lives of all children.

- Overall, the most successful programs were school-based, 12-month long programs that met the needs of special population groups (Oregon Council for Hispanic Advancement, Asian Youth Club). These had high attendance ratings, positive responses from the significant adult or family member, significant changes in student attitudes, and improved academic enhancement. The second most successful types of programs were those with a strong school link and coordination, focused on a special interest (Tears of Joy, OBC) and/or a school sponsored, school-year long program (the two middle schools). The least successful programs were those that lacked a strong school link, were not necessarily on-site at a school, and did not have a strong interest focus. In addition, these partners seemed to remain weak, even after they had additional experience as part of the initiative.

- Locating projects in schools with close involvement of school personnel dramatically reduced transportation issues and bolstered a sense of safety and well being for participants. Site coordination also seemed critical.

- A school link, including but not limited to direct school sponsorship, and a designated program coordinator were important to the success of a program or activity. A strong and observant coordinator (Parks and Recreation staff or staff from a community organization chosen in collaboration with the school principal) was able to identify gaps or different programming needs necessary to reach the diversity of
children's interests and was in a good position to fill those gaps especially if a) financial resources were available and b) they were knowledgeable about community resources that might fit. They were also in a good position to bridge or link schools with potential partners.

- Nonprofit agencies could be strong partners in school based after-school programming, if they had a clear role and were accountable to a school site coordinator. Developing non-profit resources in a way that meets children's needs and is compatible with school environments and requirements was a role for a liaison person between schools and potential partners. Neither then had to step out of their core mission.

Lessons Learned

Five main lessons were learned from the TFKI. They were: (i) difficulty in reconciling the missions of collaborative partners so they were consistent with TFKI's asset building goals; (ii) difficulty in getting some partners to think beyond their own narrow, specific focused contributions and, thus, in the overall planning of TFKI; (iii) challenges in operationalizing the desire for the program to be comprehensive, since this conveyed a different meaning to different people; (iv) underestimation of the time needed to launch TFKI; and (v) importance of focusing the program on a single middle school in each area.

An important organizational outcome for PP&R, beyond the immediate impact of TFKI, was its success in the role of "service broker." It brought a diversity of perspectives and partners who had not previously worked together, and facilitated the forging of new partnerships. However, the decision to give these partners equal status in the overall collaboration effort failed to consider differences in their missions. Some partners had a primary mission of youth development, while others had a message or subject area as their primary mission and wished to communicate it to youth. Thus, the most important lesson learned was the challenge of reconciling the different missions of the partner groups with the mission of the pilot project. Some partners' commitments to youth focused on "artistic expression," or "cleaning up the river." For example, Northwest Passage, which was a music group, was solely interested in getting flutes or other musical instruments in the hands of youth. They did not understand the broader issues of how the instruments and playing for parents at the end of a session, thus bringing parents and families into the school, had an effect on youth beyond learning to play "Twinkle, twinkle little star" or whatever. Similarly, the mission of the a.k.a. Science organization was to get science into the curriculum and classrooms of 3rd-5th graders, and asset building was not part of their perceived mission.

The school districts, PP&R staff, and some of the partners were familiar with the Search Institute's study which had immediately preceded the TFKI program. They were well-acquainted with the notion of asset building, and
subscribed to the broad mission of TFKI programs. However, others had no familiarity with the assets approach and despite initial training sessions, they had no real interest in it. The PP&R director of TFKI said, “If we were to do this over, I would pick partners based on their understanding of, and commitment to, the broader asset mission of youth development, rather than on their more parochial mission of involvement with an activity.”

A second lesson learned was at the individual site and program level, where it became clear that not all programs were structured so that every “partner” could be an equal partner — some organizations’ contributions were limited to providing a specific service to a particular group of children. In hindsight it probably was not appropriate for them to be part of the decision-making for a site, since they had relatively little interest in investing effort into the overall planning and evaluation of the TFKI. As a result, planning, implementation, and evaluation were not always bound together by a global outlook. It was probably too great an expectation for program oriented people, attached to a particular organization, to become overall advocates and planners for youth development.

The mandate was to develop a comprehensive after-school program and the third lesson learned was that there are two ways of viewing the principle of comprehensiveness. One perspective is to view comprehensiveness as referring to the whole multi-site TFKI, which included outreach programs at the elementary schools and other sites beyond the two middle schools that were its core. Thus, many partners looked at the list of funded programs and felt that it was comprehensive in that it offered art, music, academics, life skills, and community service.

From another, and perhaps more useful standpoint, programs often were not comprehensive when viewed from the perspective of a child or school. From the participants’ perspective the most comprehensive programs typically were those located at the two middle schools. Other TFKI funded programs were “value-added” pieces, included as part of the commitment to provide comprehensive programming, but they seemed to have little connection with the school site. The independent consultants who evaluated the TFKI suggested that Oregon Building Congress classes at Tubman Elementary, and the Campfire program at George Elementary seemed to fit this category. They suggested that future comprehensive programming efforts should be examined site-by-site and customized site-by-site, based on the needs of children at that site.

Two other lessons were noted — one negative and one positive. The negative lesson was that the TFKI took much longer to organize, define, and launch than anyone expected. A positive lesson was the wisdom of the initial decision to focus resources on a single middle school in each area. This facilitated an in-depth, integrated effort which made positive outcomes more likely. The relationship between PP&R’s site coordinator, the school faculty, and the nonprofit program provider was crucial. In those TFKI programs that did well, the site coordinator invariably had a good relationship with the school faculty, who in turn trusted the site coordinator to
bring in good nonprofit programs. The consultants suggested that in future programs of this type the site coordinator should be viewed as being in the best position to look at the overall needs of youth at that location and should play a central role in the programming. The nonprofit programs could utilize the site coordinators both for helping develop the skills they need to work effectively with children and youth and for establishing a strong relationship with school personnel. While some programs obviously succeeded without this liaison, they were the exception.

Conclusions

The evaluation of outcomes suggested that the TFKI program was successful. The independent consultants’ report concluded:

Time for Kids was an important effort by Portland Parks and Recreation to redefine itself to meet the ever changing needs of Portland citizens. It was a very successful effort in establishing partnerships and meeting the needs of underserved youth.

A key factor in the success of the TFKI was the leadership provided by both the PP&R’s director and the elected Commissioner responsible for Parks and Recreation in Portland. This was a “top-down” driven program, characterized by strong political and administrative support and prioritization. The Commissioner ran on a platform of youth advocacy. It was both a personal passion and a high profile political priority for him. The PP&R director was similarly passionate about youth being at the top of the agenda. The Recreation Division staff were initially apprehensive about retreating from their broader focus of recreation for all in order to focus on youth. It took some time for them to buy into the mandate from the top that “kids come first.”

Many in the PP&R initially perceived after-school programs to be a school rather than a PP&R responsibility. However, PP&R’s director viewed this as an opportunity for his department because the school district had no resources to invest in such a program. The director argued forcefully that “Yes, we are leisure professionals, but as part of that mission we are also ‘the after-school professionals.’ We can be instrumental in helping schools produce better students and build students’ assets.” The director’s mandate to the Recreation Division was, “Your job is to make yourself indispensable to the school principals. Figure out how to help them do their job better.” He recognized this was an excellent opportunity to reposition the PP&R’s Recreation Division so it was responsive to a central concern of the city’s voters and elected officials. Only when recreation services are perceived as contributing to alleviating problems which constitute the prevailing political concerns of policymakers who are responsible for allocating tax funds, can they expect to secure additional resources. Indeed, his coining of the term “after-school professionals” as describing PP&R’s role is excellent positioning. It avoids connotations of competition with the schools; it moves PP&R away from connotations of “fun and games”; and it offers a platform which taxpayers and elected officials can support.
Like most departments, Portland Parks and Recreation has a wide array of traditional recreation programs for youth. However, the TKIF differed in that it was a youth development program rather than a recreation skill improvement program. Skill improvements in traditional programs are important and asset building may emerge from them. However, they are not designed specifically to foster specified assets, which is the characteristic feature of youth development programs. In the current context, recreation skill building is the only realistic outcome to which most agencies can aspire because budget limitations preclude the larger investments which genuine youth development programs require.

Thus, despite the evaluation evidence and political consensus that the TFKI was a success, expansion of the pilot program to a larger number of students remained problematic. The substantial investment of $600,000 over three years was targeted at a relatively small number of children. Participation at each of the two middle schools typically ranged from 60-80 students each term. This represented approximately 10-15% of the schools’ enrollments. Thus, the cost per student of the program for the three years was between $3,750 and $5,000, i.e. $1,250 to $1,666 per year. It has long been argued in the parks and recreation field that the critical question is not “how many were there?” Rather it is, “What happened to Jose, Mary, Sam, and Joan in this experience?” Programs like the TFKI which focus on effectiveness of outcomes require that considerable resources be invested in them to be successful. However, the political reality is that in terms of cost per person, the expenditure on programs like the TFKI is substantially greater than the costs associated with traditional recreation programs, so it is difficult to sell to a legislative body.

It is the potential magnitude of the on-going cost which makes legislative bodies reluctant to make a commitment to support such programs out of general fund revenues on a city-wide basis. There are approximately 54,000 children registered in the Portland Independent School District (ISD) with another 30,000 in the Parkrose ISD and 20,000 in the David Douglas ISD, both of which are within the city of Portland. In the Portland ISD alone, there are 20,770 (38%) students who qualify for free or reduced meals. If it is assumed that this 38% is a reasonable surrogate measure for “guesstimating” how many students are academically disadvantaged so they would qualify for the TFKI, then an extrapolation of the pilot program costs suggests the annual bill would be over $30 million. Even to extend the program to the 3,500 students most in need would require a budget increase to PP&R of over $5 million for students in the Portland ISD alone! Given that the total operating budget of PP&R is approximately $30 million, the political reality is that investments of this magnitude are not politically feasible from the city’s general funds. Nor can such programs be funded by the ISD’s. The school districts are 70% funded by the state, and legislators from outside the Portland area have shown little willingness to provide additional resources to the state’s largest urban school systems to help them address the issues arising from the sudden influx of large numbers of students from different ethnic groups.
A reasonably strong case can be made that the annual cost of $30 million to extend TKIF to all those who meet the criteria for benefiting from it would be cost effective in the long-term, given the long-term costs to society of failing to provide youth with the assets and protective factors the program builds. However, there are “disconnects” between (1) the short and long term payers and beneficiaries, and (2) the geographical jurisdictions which pay for, and benefit from, such programs as TKIF.

The short-term actions of many elected officials are guided by their desire to be re-elected. The tax increases needed to fully fund TKIF are likely to be politically unpopular. The general public’s decision horizon and perspective is notoriously short term, and elected officials have to be responsive to this. “Pay now or pay later” is not a convincing mantra to either group. Thus, elected officials perceive it to be advantageous to keep taxes low in the short term, recognizing that the societal, financial, and political consequences of not providing youth with assets through TKIF will become the problem of their successors in the future. There appear to be few political advantages for those in elected positions to be proactive rather than reactive in the context of youth development. The political pressures are conducive to encouraging short-term rather than long-term action horizons.

A second disconnect discouraging local investment in youth development is that the primary economic beneficiary of such programs is often perceived to be state government. The costs associated with unemployment, welfare, incarceration, courts, and other negative consequences emanating from maladjusted young people emerging into society are primarily borne by state agencies. Thus, local jurisdictions who invest in youth development programs see that most of the long-term economic savings that accrue from investing in them are captured by the state jurisdiction, which further reduces the incentive for local elected officials to accept the negative consequences likely to be associated with their support of a tax increase.

The Director of PP&R believes the funding problem is exacerbated because the targeted populations who would benefit from these programs have no political influence. He notes that the SAMs (shakers and movers!) in a community can make a call and get something done, but calls from those benefitting from programs like TKIF are likely to have relatively little impact on legislators even if the constituents had the confidence and knowledge to make them. Business associations downtown meet on a regular basis. They are organized, they have money, and they give major contributions and in-kind assistance to political campaigns, so they have influence. The TKIF clientele can offer an emotional appeal, but they are likely to receive only a pittance compared to what the business community is likely to receive for its favored projects. Even within the confines of PP&R’s primary constituencies, the sports and athletic associations—soccer, Little League and so on—are typically middle class groups, which can organize and be relatively effective, but potential TKIF constituents are...
not organized. Thus, in the opinion of the PP&R Director, the long term prognosis for permanent on-going funding for such programs in Portland is not encouraging.

Although the TFKI was not extended beyond the three year pilot program period, it was succeeded by another program called Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN). The demonstrated success of TFKI was an influential antecedent and precedent for the more comprehensive SUN initiative. Five elementary and three middle schools were designated SUN schools with a mission “to integrate the delivery of quality education with whatever health, social services, recreational activities, and community involvement that is required in a community.” Again, however, there is no long term commitment to funding since it does not come from the general fund or a designated revenue stream but relies primarily on foundation, state, and federal grant programs; SUN operates in a limited number of schools; and it serves a relatively small number of people in the context of Portland’s total population of 600,000.

SUN is a more ambitious program than the TFKI in that it embraces much more than after-school programs and seeks to respond to the needs of children, their parents, and the community. SUN schools strive to be a hub in a community. They are modeled after national full-service schools. They are open before and after-school, at weekends, and during the summer. They partner with a non-profit agency at each site. Together they have a site manager to build, support, and coordinate the network of services offered. Site advisory committees assure that community input guides development. Each SUN school looks different because it is tailored to the needs of its local neighborhood community. Examples of the types of services found in SUN schools are: homework help and tutoring; recreation and enrichment activities, such as art, cultural events and sports; health care, mental health and social services; parent and family involvement activities and skill building; adult education classes; and intergenerational and senior activities.

Sources

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