He has Wings

Warees Shabazz, the peanut guy at Royall Hardware, is a bus driver.

Dan Goleman tells the story of a bus driver in his best-selling book, Emotional Intelligence. Each morning in NY, crabby people would get on the driver’s city bus. Because of his good mood, by the time the bus ride ended, the crabby people morphed into happy people. The lesson Goleman was illustrating: emotions are contagious.

Most every day, Shabazz sits outside the hardware store in his wheelchair with a basket full of peanuts in his lap. What everyone notices first is his joyful spirit. He says, “It’s not about selling peanuts. It’s about establishing relationships, even if it’s just a momentary thing.”

Many years ago, after a drunk driver hit him, breaking his neck and putting him in a coma for 3 months, Shabazz became paralyzed from the waist down. Feeling like a chair and not a person, he became stuck on how he was now very different from everyone else. Ten years later, Shabazz made a choice to make the most of every moment “because there are no guarantees in life.”

Meet Rashawn

At WINGS, sixth-grader Rashawn Lowery has learned to accept himself and do what he enjoys without worrying what others think -- like sewing. One of two boys in the sewing Choice Time, he created a latch-hook rug of a soccer ball and was the first to finish. He’s a very hard worker.

Rashawn is in the Giant Eagles next, and his WINGSLeader is Mr. Tony. He’s tried out many different Choice Times including On Point, where he learned to shoot darts and use a bow and arrow. He even got to hit his WINGSLeader with water balloons!

Rashawn is known as a helpful young man with a great sense of humor. He seems to keep an upbeat attitude no matter what the situation, and his cheerfulness is contagious among the kids and the staff.

AP Touts WINGS

Praising our “unique” program, the Associated Press article about WINGS has appeared in newspapers from Dallas to Charlotte to Jacksonville.

- Maurice Elias, PhD, Rutgers University

“In the process of civilizing and humanizing our children, the missing piece is – without doubt – social and emotional learning.”

- Maurice Elias, PhD, Rutgers University

Click here to read the article
It helps kids when adults provide acknowledgement and practical strategies for coping with the worries and fears that are a normal part of life. Here’s one way to help:

1. Pick a time to talk with your child about any worries.
2. Write down the worries and talk about each in turn. “So, you are worried about doing well on your math test” or “I see you are worried that nobody on the soccer team will like you.”
3. Sort the worries into two stacks – can do something about/can’t do anything about. Put each in a separate jar or bowl. “You can’t control whether people like you – except to be your wonderful self!” but “You certainly can study for math 30 minutes a day so you’re prepared.”
4. Brainstorm solutions and write them down and put the plan in the appropriate jar.
5. A few days or a week later, get together and talk about the worries again. Still worried? How did the plans work?
6. Make adjustments.

Afterschool Programs Boost Scores

A new study of top-notch afterschool programs demonstrates that participants performed far better academically -- 10 percentile points higher -- than students who did not attend. The research examined 35 programs serving 2,900 kids from Connecticut to California.

“Disadvantaged students who regularly attend top-notch after-school programs end up, after two years, academically far ahead of peers who spend more out-of-school time in unsupervised activities, according to findings from an eight-state study of those programs.

Hot Wings

- Help kids wrestle
- Worries and fears
- Ask and listen
- Write out worries
- Sort in two stacks: Can/Can’t Control

Each day at WINGS we recite our Creed which says, “I want to learn more about everyone I meet. I want to step into their ‘shoe’ and see what they are going through.” Step into the shoes of these kids and consider the difference a scholarship makes.

- To learn more about scholarships, please visit: www.wingsforkids.org/scholarshipshtml

GIVE WINGS

Click here to read the article
After-school program offers emotional learning for kids
06:22 PM CST on Saturday, February 16, 2008

The Associated Press

CHARLESTON, S.C. – A typical 10-hour day for young Jordan-Lamont Brown at Memminger Elementary School teaches him far more than the reading, writing and arithmetic espoused in his fourth-grade classes.

Brown is one of 130 children enrolled in an after-school program called “Wings,” which helps them control tempers, deal with nerves and take responsibility for their actions.

“What I like about Wings is that they show us how to do everything. We learn more stuff than we ever learn in school,” Jordan-Lamont said.

With the motto of “Helping Kids Soar,” Wings focuses on helping students understand themselves and their emotions, behaving well, forming positive relationships and making good decisions. And it tries to impart those things using structured lessons and committed staff of college students who make the learning fun.

“The reason Wings is so powerful is it doesn’t feel like school and it doesn’t feel like guidance counseling,” said Ginny Deerin, a one-time corporate fundraiser who started the nonprofit group a decade ago. “If we begin to look or feel like school, we begin to worry, which is why we don’t have a staff of teachers.”

Wings participants are assigned to small groups and mentored by college students who commit to stay the entire school year. It helps the children form attachments and the mentors track their progress with a computer program.

Lessons take different shapes.

In playing basketball, a Wing leader might pull the students aside and ask how they feel attempting foul shots. If nervousness is the problem, the group will discuss how to handle that – maybe by taking deep breaths or relaxing as they dribble a few times at the line.

Jonathan Cohen, president of the New York-based Center for Social and Emotional Education, said thousands of after-school programs teach some life skills but Wings is unusual because its structured curriculum dedicates each day to a specific point.

He said educators usually have little time for teaching emotional skills during the school day, which has become more and more focused on success in standardized testing.

“Most schools have really caring and committed teachers and administrators, but they feel extraordinarily constrained because they are being judged on math and reading scores,” Cohen said.

Jordan-Lamont’s mother, Wanda Brown, a social worker, said Wings keeps her son engaged and there’s no struggle to refocus his attention on homework at night.

“My friends’ kids who go home after school are into video games and music and they are being distracted,” she said.

She said she likes the discipline Wings brought to her son’s life and sees the program’s as an extended family.

“You can tell the difference between a kid who is attending Wings and a kid who is not because of their attitude,” said her husband, Lamont, a small businessman.

Each day after school in Charleston, about a third of the Memminger students, gather for Wings.

On one autumn day, they discussed emotional hijacking, sharing what causes them to lose their tempers. After each spoke, their classmates cheered, thanking them for sharing their feelings.

Continued on next page...
“Life is full of surprises,” said little Asia Wright. “They could be bad surprises and good surprises you don’t re-
ally expect. But you are the one who needs to take responsibility.”

Nicole Lovecchio, the Wings program director at Memminger the past four years, it’s a matter of teaching kids 
things that adults sometimes take for granted.

“It’s OK to be angry but you need to be angry appropriately,” Lovecchio said. “It’s a way to teach them to deal 
with these things we think should be common sense, but they are not.”

NaKeisha Jones, now dean of students and families at Two Rivers Public Charter School in Washington, 
worked for Wings in Charleston and later worked for an after-school program in Virginia, but soon began look-
ing for another job.

“Nothing about that program was intentional – as far as what we want these kids to be in five years,” she said. 
“It was kind of like, ‘What are we going to do with them today? How are we going to survive the next three 
hours?’”

At Two Rivers, she helped mold the after-school program – which had been “here’s a ball, bounce it” – on the 
Wings model that she feels is vital for students.

“You can say we made improvements on test scores, but it’s harder to show improvements on how children 
feel about themselves,” she said.

Deerin, the program founder, said Wings can also pay dividends in later life.

“We help them learn something that many adults never learn,” she said. “Wouldn’t it be wonderful to learn that 
in kindergarten as opposed to when you are 45 and really beginning to struggle?”
High-Quality After-School Programs Tied to Test-Score Gains

By Debra Viadero

Disadvantaged students who regularly attend top-notch after-school programs end up, after two years, academically far ahead of peers who spend more out-of-school time in unsupervised activities, according to findings from an eight-state study of those programs.

Known as the Promising Afterschool Programs study, the new research examined 35 programs serving 2,914 students in 14 communities stretching from Bridgeport, Conn., to Seaside, Calif. The programs, all of which had been operating at least three years when the study began, were selected because of a record of success.

For advocates of after-school programs, the results offer a counterpoint to a controversial 2005 evaluation of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, a federal initiative that finances after-school enrichment programs for 1.3 million elementary and middle school students nationwide.

Conducted by the Princeton, N.J.-based Mathematica Policy Research Inc., the earlier study found that the federally funded programs provided no special learning boost and may even have led to a slight statistical increase in some negative behaviors.

“My hope is that this research can really put to rest the research by Mathematica and really show that after-school programs are making a difference for the children that are participating,” said Jennifer Rinehart, the vice president for policy and research for the Washington-based Afterschool Alliance, which is working to circulate the new results.

But some scholars caution that the latest study, which was underwritten by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation of Flint, Mich., could run up against criticism, too, in ongoing debates over federal spending on after-school programs. One problem cited was that researchers used as a comparison group students who attend after-school programs sporadically, suggesting that those students might have been less motivated at the outset than students who regularly attend such programs.

“What it told me is that kids who are different at baseline are even more different two years later,” said Mark Dynarski, who led the Mathematica evaluation. “That’s not evidence of effectiveness.”

Focus on Quality

In the new study, researchers divided students into three groups: a “program only” group of students who attended their after-school program two to three days a week and did nothing else outside of school; a “program plus” group who visited the after-school programs two to three days a week and also took part in sports, church programs, music lessons, or other extracurricular activities; and a “low supervision” group who dropped in on a mix of after-school activities from one to three days a week.

The researchers found, over the course of the three-year project, that the more engaged students
were in supervised after-school activities, the better they did on a range of academic, social, and behavioral outcomes.

For instance, 3rd and 4th graders in the “program plus” group tallied gains on standardized mathematics tests that were 20 percentile points higher than those of the children who rarely went. The frequent attenders also made more progress in developing sound work habits, task persistence, and better social skills, and in reducing negative behaviors, such as skipping school or fighting.

The 6th and 7th grade pupils who regularly attended after-school programs outpaced the math learning gains their “low supervision” counterparts made by 12 percentile points by the end of the study period. The “program” and “program plus” groups also reported reduced rates of drug and alcohol use, compared with students with spottier attendance.

“What makes these findings interesting, and maybe surprising to some people, is that the math gains are occurring in programs that are not specifically targeted to academic skills,” said lead author Deborah Lowe Vandell, the chairwoman of the education department at the University of California, Irvine. “Children were developing persistence, focus, and engagement, and we believe those are the kinds of skills that maybe children take to school with them and that may contribute to their math gains.”

In designing the Promising Programs study, Ms. Vandell said, she set out to address some of what critics saw as shortcomings in the Mathematica report. Critics and advocates complained, for example, that the earlier study fell short because it involved programs that were young or varied in quality.

So Ms. Vandell and her research partners—Elizabeth R. Reisner of Policy Studies Associates Inc. of Washington and Kim M. Pierce of UC Irvine—zeroed in on the best programs. Not all the programs were funded under 21st Century Schools or based in schools.

The research team selected 35 programs serving low-income elementary and middle-school students from among 200 that were nominated for their successful track records.

“Other work that I have done looking at the association between varying quality programs and child development was suggesting that higher-quality programs were where you expected better outcomes,” said Ms. Vandell. “We do see gains there that we don’t see otherwise.”

Ms. Vandell acknowledged that the comparison-group issue that Mr. Dynarski raised posed a “limitation” for her study, but said her team took steps to minimize potential bias. One way was to compare students’ gains with their own previous performance, rather than looking at the overall achievement levels of the various groups.

**Funding at Issue**

The Mathematica study began in 2000, four years after President Clinton launched the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program and two years after the program was repurposed to provide a more academic focus.

The study became a target of criticism, in part, because President Bush used its early findings to justify his call in 2002 for a 40 percent cut in that program, which at that time was funded at about $1 billion. Congress later agreed to provide $981 million for the program and it has remained at that annual funding level ever since.

The findings from the new study are in keeping with a growing body of research linking after-school programs to gains in social and emotional outcomes for students in organized activities after school.
For instance, a review of 73 studies published this year by the Chicago-based Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning looked specifically at programs aimed at developing youths’ personal and social skills and found that such programs could be linked to a wide range of improvement in students.

Compared with their control-group counterparts, that analysis concluded, program participants experienced greater increases in self-esteem and self-confidence, more decreases in problem behaviors, and improved grades and test scores.

But the sizes of the effects in the Promising Practices study are especially dramatic. The 20-percentile-point gain that “program plus” elementary students made, relative to the “low supervision” group, works out to an effect size of .73. That’s more than three times the learning boost that educators get by reducing an elementary school class by eight students, according to Ms. Vandell’s research. And that, in Mr. Dynarski’s view, may be cause for skepticism.

“How do you get dramatic increases in effects from something that’s not even school?” he asked. “You’re in it a couple of hours a week or a couple of hours a day, but the activities you’re experiencing are very fragmented.”

Ms. Vandell said those effect sizes look large in part because the gap was widening over time between the program students and the “low supervision” group. “You have to remember, these were students who were either hanging out with friends or home alone with siblings for two to three days a week,” she said of the latter group.

Though the final report from the new study has not yet been published in an academic journal, researchers last month visited Capitol Hill to share the data with federal lawmakers.

The spending measure for health and education programs that President Bush vetoed earlier this month included a $100 million increase for after-school programs, the first such proposed increase in years, according to advocates. They credit the results emerging from the new study for helping to turn the tide in funding prospects for the federal program.

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