

The Arkansas Innovations Project

The Arkansas Out of School Network (AOSN), an organization committed to creating safe, healthy, and enriching experiences for Arkansas youth during out of school time, along with the Arkansas School Board Association, is working in the Pulaski County, Lake Village/Eudora community as a part of our first Innovations Project Technical Assistance Grant made possible by funding from the C.S. Mott Foundation. The grant will provide some critical expertise in planning, developing, and sustaining out-of-school-time programs and opportunities for youth. The local community contact in Chicot County is Phoenix Youth and Family Services Inc. a non-profit organization that provides positive youth development programs in Chicot County. This agency has a rich history of providing services to youth and collaboration with diverse groups to build community partnerships, which is why they were selected along with expressing a strong desire to come together as a community to ensure that they have quality afterschool programs for children.

AOSN will assist The Lake Village/Eudora community in utilizing a community engagement process called “Study Circles,” to involve a broad-based grassroots segment of the community in structured discussions about quality afterschool and summer programs and how they can develop such programs in their community. Following the “Study Circles” process AOSN will provide ongoing support and technical assistance to help the community implement the action items they have identified.



A study circle is a small, diverse group of 8-12 people. This group meets together for several 2hr sessions. This group is led by an impartial facilitator who helps manage the discussion with the use of a discussion guide. For our purposes the study circles are designed to meet four times. The discussion will center on how to create the kind of community where all young people will have a chance to learn in and beyond the school day.

We held our first training for the community organizing group on September 29, 2009 in Eudora, Ar. We had more than 20 participants from all segments of the community to attend this orientation meeting.





After a great day of training the group was energized and ready to hit the ground running to plan the logistics and start recruiting study circle participants.



Following the community organizing training we held the facilitator and recorders training in Dumas Arkansas on October 26th. This training was designed for those people who will be facilitating and recording the discussions.



“Phoenix Youth & Family Services is delighted to have the opportunity to become involved in a project that will allow us to receive cutting edge information and the skill set necessary to prepare our community to provide quality experiences in the afterschool hours. We are most excited to receive the training and other technical assistance that will involve the entire community and will ultimately better assist our students in being prepared educationally and developmentally to enhance their communities and be prepared for demand driven jobs.”

Toyce Newton, Executive Director of Phoenix Youth and Family Services

The Study Circles took place November 10, 12, 17 and 19th from 5pm to 7pm each night. Three study circles took place, one in Lake Village, Arkansas at the local hospital and two in Eudora, Arkansas at the local community center which totaled more than 35 participants. On December 1st we held the action forum in Eudora, Arkansas. There was great participation in the action forum with more than 40 people in attendance. All three groups reported out on what they identified as action items for the community to address.



The primary theme for the action ideas centered around have an out of the box after school program that consist of various things like choirs, teaching children respect, having small children in groups instead of having them around everyone. Using peer to peer discussions groups, teaching volunteering and having parents involved in the after school programs along with allowing the youth that attend the after school program to come up with their own ideas of how a after school program should be.

Ideas also centered around working better with the school district and established institutions like parent involvement centers around ways to better address out of school time.



Next Steps

Now that the discussions have been held and some generalized action steps have been identified discussions must now be held as to how we are going to move forward and sustain the project. Once the action forum was completed, individuals were asked to sign up to work in different work groups. As the coalition moves forward it is very important that we re-visit the goals of the coalition make sure that the goals follow the following characteristics:

- **Believable** - They should describe situations or conditions that the coalition believes can be achieved, avoiding "pie- in-the-sky" goals that members do not believe nor find possible to do.
- **Attainable** - It should be possible to do the goals in the designated time.
- **Tangible** - The goals should be capable of being understood or realized.
- **On a Timetable** - A completion date should be included in the goal statement.

Once this is set up we will work with the coalition in “Turning Goals into Action.”

Goals are turned into action by working from the long term to the short term. AOSN will provide technical assistance in helping them decide what must be done and in what order. Next decide what will be done during a specific period.



In March 2010 we selected our second community. We are pleased to announce the second community that we have selected is the University of Arkansas Little Rock (UALR) University District Educational Network (UDEN). The University District comprises a 3.5 square mile area and includes neighborhoods in close proximity to the UALR. This project will help UDEN engage a broader array of partners in the University District to develop a plan to move UALR and the community to action as it relates to afterschool and summer programming.

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