

DISCUSSIONS & ACTION FORM

Community name (city, neighborhood, school, etc...): Lake Side School District
(Cities of Eudora and Lake Village)

Sponsoring organization: Phoenix Youth and Family Services, Inc.

Coordinator(s) name: Clifford Hawkins, Director of Prevention Services

1. *What was happening in your community that created a need for a process like study circles?*

Currently there is no comprehensive, coordinated school linked community based after school program located in either community. The need for such a program is evidenced by the low test scores, high rates of poverty, unemployment, teen pregnancy, and dropouts. The Eudora School District has consolidated with the Lake Village School District increasing the number of students further exacerbating the previously stated problems. The district is in Year 1 of school improvement which means that the State Board of Education has placed a variety of academic improvement stipulations on the District.

2. *What other ways has your community tried to address the problem? Did they work? Why or why not?*

Through prior funded projects Phoenix Youth and Family Services Inc. had a full time office in the Eudora area for many years. There was excellent community buy in for the youth programs being in the city. Program outcomes exceeded funders established benchmarks. The participation level for youth was impressive. Although programs were experiencing successes, there was a reduction in funds. Due to this, the Eudora location had to close its doors.

The City of Eudora has operated both an after school tutoring and meals program that was terminated due to a lack of funding.

3. *How did you choose study circles to address the issue?*

The Study Circle model provided an opportunity for Phoenix to use a best practice approach to convening various segments of the community to work in a unified and comprehensive approach. Through the Study Circle process communities were able to identify strengths and weaknesses, resource mapping, and formulate approaches. The skills acquired will be instrumental in the residents of these communities to carry processes forward and facilitate change.

The Study Circle process through AOSN also gave us a wealth of technical assistance (through printed materials and staff) that was necessary to be effective.

Given the inherent difficulty in bringing together two rival communities into a cohesive and effective body was a challenge that called for unique and innovative approach.

4. *What were your goals for the program?*

The primary goal of the program was to bring together two diverse communities to initiate discussions around solving a common problem. The intent and expected outcome is to utilize a multi-faceted approach that allows these communities to jointly participate in the development of quality after school and out of school time programs that will enhance youth. Paramount in this process was the need to ease tensions between the two communities so that effective and productive dialogue could take place.

5. *What steps did you take to organize your study circle program?*

The very first step was to develop a list of key players that we would be involved in the process that would equally involve both communities and show the diverse make up of the two towns. The list included parents, members of the business community, clergy, school and public officials. We were careful to structure groups that had a mixture of all individual groups.

Another key organizational strategy was to host meetings in both Eudora and Lake Village given the strong animosity of feeling about favoring on community over another. The final action meeting was scheduled for Eudora with transportation being provided.

6. *How many people participated in the study circles each week?*

Week 1: 21 Week 3: 34

Week 2: 21 Week 4: 30

7. *Was there media coverage for the study circles? Please send us copies of articles.*

The media was involved and advertisements were placed in the local newspaper.

8. *In detail, explain the kind of diversity that was represented in each of the following categories (age, race, students, parents, educators, policymakers, business and community members):*

a. *Participants* –

Participants were from both Eudora and Lake Village. There were police officers, educators, students, the Mayor of Eudora, a representative from the Mayor's office in Lake Village, local hospital staff, members of the local business communities, and clergy. School board members also participated in the study circles.

Students as young as 12 years of age participated with the oldest participant being 80 years of age. Following the demographics of the area most

participants were African American, however there were also a small number Caucasians and Hispanics.

b. Facilitators –

The facilitators ranged in age from 25 to 45 years old. Races for facilitators were Caucasian and African American.

c. Recorders –

Ages and races for the recorders are the same.

9. *Were youth involved?*

Youth were actively involved in Lake Village and Eudora groups. They were all participants. All were eager to give input as ideas and recommendation to the Study Circle Process.

10. *Were public officials involved?*

A representative from the Eudora Police Department attended the study circle sessions that was held in Eudora. The Mayor of Eudora was in attendance as well as the Mayor of Lake Village's Assistant. The Chicot County Judge played an active role in the study circles in Lake Village.

11. *How have study circles affected the community?*

The initial impression is that the process was very effective in that it gave all participants and equal voice and an equal opportunity to express their views. All participants seem to anxiously await the next steps.

12. *What were the action steps that came out of the study circles?*

Please be specific. **Major themes:** Stop competitiveness between communities, combat teen pregnancy, expose students to diverse cultures/communities, adults as volunteers to effect positive change, increase overall volunteerism in the community through involvement in Parent/Teachers Associations, Community Service Projects and mentoring. Other major themes were the lack of parental engagement in the school and communities, lack of jobs, not enough exposure, nothing for kids to do, increase in teen pregnancy and no togetherness for communities.

13. *What programs or activities are already happening in the community to address the issues?*

There are sparse activities to address out of school time, but no comprehensive approaches. We know of only one organized church program operating at this time.

14. Did you hold an action forum or some other kind of concluding event?

The action forum was the final event. This forum was held in Eudora with both communities participating. All groups selected a person to report out. Reports were placed on the walls and one activity involved grouping and prioritizing the ideas and suggestions. There were over 50 people in attendance. There were new members to this meeting with the most prominent being the Chicot County Judge who gave his support to this effort.

15. Did new action groups/committees form at the concluding event? How were they set up and how are they being supported?

Groups were formed with the intent to work on specified items. The challenge now is to design a mechanism to provide staff and any other supports that are required to maintain the momentum.

16. Have any specific actions or outcomes resulted from the program already?

There is a sense of cooperation and unity that is connected directly to the possibility that some type of programming might be developed.