

Lighting the Lamp: Including the Voice of Younger Participants in Afterschool Program Planning

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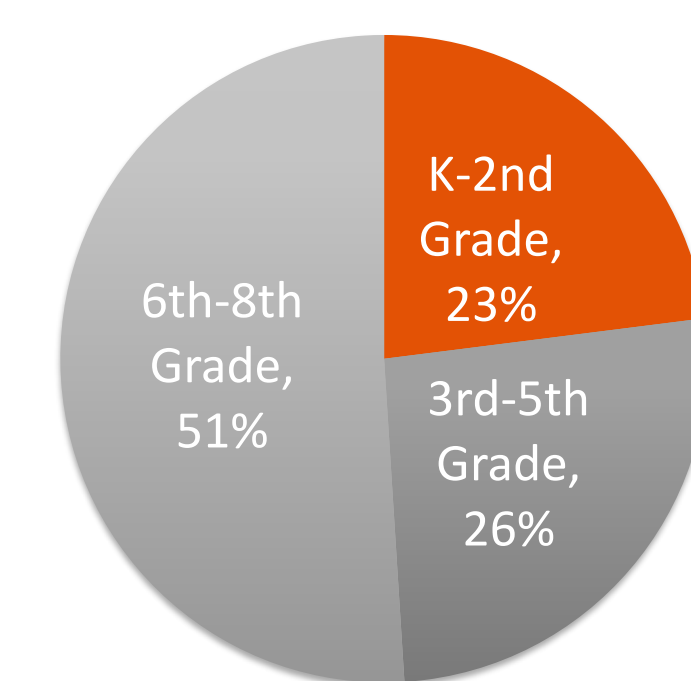
Who We Are: For over 35 years, Good Shepherd Services has provided afterschool programs for youth and families across New York City.

Our Intended Impact: We create safe, engaging and inclusive afterschool communities, rich in developmental opportunities, which help youth to identify their unique talents and gifts and empower them with a sense of belonging, skill mastery and leadership. We seek to be impactful partners with youth and their families to address the needs of under-resourced neighborhoods and work together to strengthen communities.

Who We Serve: Our afterschools serve students, 5 – 15 years of age, seeking to participate in group academic, arts, physical, and community activities during after school hours. In the 2019-20 school year:

2,993 elementary and middle school students
20 after school programs
in the Bronx and Brooklyn.

Participants by Grade Level



WHAT THE ISSUE IS

What We Seek to Measure: Each year, we administer the Participant Satisfaction Survey to all our programs, in order to assess program quality, how participants are experiencing our programs, and to gain the participants' input on how we could improve programming. In previous years, we had only administered the surveys to participants in third grade through eighth grade. It was believed that it would not be possible to survey the younger participants in kindergarten through second grade, due to limited reading skills and comprehension of the questions. But we realized that we were missing the voice of a significant portion of our afterschool programs by not including these younger participants.

Why This Matters: It is important that the evaluation team "collects data using credible, feasible, and culturally appropriate procedures" and "Engages a diverse range of users/stakeholders throughout the evaluation process."¹ However, in an elementary-based afterschool program, it can be difficult to collect data that reflects the voice of younger participants, particularly kindergarten through second grade. These younger grades are often excluded from traditional methods of data collection, as they are viewed as too young or having limited capacity to participate in the collection. By not including the younger participants, we were losing the input of almost a quarter of our afterschool population – and almost half of the elementary population. But these young people have a right to participate in the evaluation and decisions that will affect them.²

The Challenge: Surveys are limited by the reading comprehension levels of the participants. Many validated data tools are not tested for these younger grades. Focus groups are often suggested to have conversations with youth. However, youth often criticize the use of focus groups, as they do not see that they benefit from them and do not get to see what was done with the information that they shared.³ Focus groups also might not be feasible for larger community-based organizations that are running several afterschool programs.

References:

1. American Evaluation Association. The 2018 AEA Evaluator Competencies.
2. B.C Ministry of Children and Family Development. (2013). Youth Engagement Toolkit Resource Guide. Province of British Columbia.
3. Joint Consortium for School Health. (2013). Youth Engagement Toolkit.

HOW WE SURVEYED YOUNGER PARTICIPANTS

How We Adapted the Survey: For this pilot, we decided to simplify the survey we use for the older participants.

- **Reduced Number of Questions** – The original survey had 13 scaled questions and 5 open-response questions. The simplified survey has 9 scaled questions and 3 open-response questions.
- **Simplified Questions** – We simplified the language to be easier for younger participants to understand.
- **Simplified the Question Scale** – Instead of a 4-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree, we used a 3-point scale of Yes, Sometimes and No.
- **Visual Scale** – Instead of checkboxes, we added emojis to give a visual representation of the scale that the participants can color.
- **Space to Draw** – Instead of asking the participants to explain what they like about the program; we gave the participants the entire back of the survey to draw a picture of themselves in afterschool.

How We Administered: We employed several steps to assist in the administration of the survey:

- **Administered in Small Groups** – As much as possible, the surveys were administered to small groups of participants, to allow staff to answer questions.
- **Questions Read Aloud** – In many programs, the survey questions were read to the participants by older program participants. The older participants also developed a guide for how to explain the survey's purpose and questions, without leading them to any certain responses. In programs where older participants were not an option, staff read the questions to the participants.
- **Activities List** – For the open-ended questions where participants are asked about which activities they like and did not like, staff displayed the list of activities available. This helped the participants to recall what they have done throughout the course of the program.

Continuing the Conversation: If you would like to share your ideas and challenges with capturing voice from younger participants, please join our Jamboard: [Capturing Younger Voices Jamboard](#).

Example of Completed Survey

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Acknowledgments: Thank you to the afterschool programs at Good Shepherd Services for all your hard work and especially to program directors, Yvonne Williams and Roland Knight, for helping to develop and pilot this survey.

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