
SUMMER CAMP AND AFTER-SCHOOL MINISTRIES

MINISTERING TO HIGH-RISK
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES



Graffiti 2's Ministry Strategy for High-Risk Families and Children

Graffiti 2 Baptist Church is located in Mott Haven, a “community of need” and one of the most difficult neighborhoods of the South Bronx. But before a church was planted, a ministry center was created, developing programs to help build relationships with and provide support for families and children in Mott Haven. From there, a need to plant a church that paired the gospel with meeting primary needs was realized. For more than 14 years, Graffiti 2 has created a supportive environment through afterschool programs and summer sports camp programs to serve children, teens and families. These programs work together in one emphasis—to provide students and parents access to what professionals consider the greatest weapon in combatting ACEs—meaningful relationships.

Children and families in the Mott Haven are particularly vulnerable to ACEs because of the predominance of risk factors involving education, health, safety, family and environment. The core of Graffiti 2's mission is to create a safe environment, holistic enrichment and meaningful relationships, all of which are proven to prevent or minimize the harmful long-term effects of ACEs.

Kyiva Beasley was told she'd never make it past the eighth grade, that she was bipolar, and that she just wasn't going to make it in life, period. Kyiva describes herself as “a child who struggled with anger, sadness and bitterness.” As her mother struggled with addiction, Kyiva depended on other mother-figures to have a place to stay which meant she often moved around from house to house, and even into another state. However, her experiences did not define her.

Kyiva attended Graffiti 2's after-school program as an elementary school student and continued on through high school. Even college years, Kyiva and Graffiti 2's relationship continued, and she said it made a huge difference in her life. While her life has been filled with bouts of both true joy and deep turmoil, she learned of “God's authentic, unwavering, dependable, never ceasing and all-powerful love at a young age.” Kyiva is just one of the examples of someone who found God's love through an after-school program.¹

Graffiti 2 Community Ministries has graciously shared what they've learned about providing summer sports camps and after-school programs.

¹ Based on an interview by the author, May 15, 2019, and her article, “Fired Up!” in Reach Up: The Magazine to Empower and Enrich Today's Women, Spring 2019, available online at <https://www.reachupmag.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/1903-RU-eng.pdf>



Discover the Needs in your Community

Before you begin any new ministry, it is important to first take time to discover and understand the unique needs within your community. Explore the physical community, listen to and learn from people living and working in the area and seek God's guidance by prayer-driving and prayer-walking the neighborhood.

If preparing your church to develop a ministry to build relationships with at-risk families, children, and teens, is a need and desire within your congregation, keep reading! We have practical steps to help you get started.

To learn more about how to identify needs in your community, download [*How Can You Serve? An In-Depth Guide to Discovering Community Needs.*](#)

If not, [check out some of our other ministry guides](#) for opportunities that fit for your church's gifting and community's needs.



Strategically Consider Ministry Opportunities

Take the next step by enlisting a small group of people within your congregation to assess ministry opportunities by working through the following questions with you:

- **What partnerships in your community could you contact for help to meet this need?** These could include government officials, school officials and teachers, other community churches and leaders, local shelters and other pre-established programs providing summer sports camps and after-school programs.
- **What groups in your community could you partner with to meet this need?** These could include other community churches, community leaders and local civic clubs.
- **Who in your church is passionate and equipped to lead or participate in this ministry?** Consider children's workers, parents and/or families, teenagers or youth groups, Sunday school classes, senior adults—anyone with a desire to help provide resources or serve as volunteers.
- **What resources and relationships has God given your church to support this ministry?** Consider missions offerings, other financial resources, church members who are connected to local schools and community groups and Sunday school class members. One untapped resource could be those who have the gift of couponing and saving money on necessary supplies.
- **What resources have you identified that could work collaboratively with your church meaningful relationships that can prevent or minimize the harmful effects of ACEs?**

These questions can lead this small group of members to determine whether or not:

1. There is desire within the congregation to meet this need.
2. There are resources of people, space and money to meet this need.
3. This ministry is sustainable over time.
4. You feel God leading your congregation in this direction.



Starting a Summer Sports Camp/ After-School Ministry

The core of Graffiti 2's mission is designed to give participants a safe environment, holistic enrichment and meaningful relationships. This core is defined by several principles:

1. **It's about big change, not big numbers.** In communities of need, there will always be more need. It is better to do well with a few than be overwhelmed with many.
2. **Stay above reproach.** For the protection of all participants, volunteers and staff, it is essential that no one ever be alone with a student – no exceptions.
3. **It's about the inside, not the outside.** Plan programs around holistic enrichment, touching physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual needs.
4. **Programs don't change people.** People change people.
5. **Be light, not lightning.** Work to create a lasting ministry presence in the communities you serve.

You can read more about Graffiti 2's core values and ministry strategy [on the church's website](#).

Careful planning will help lessen problems that could come up later, as well as help you plan toward sustainable, long-term ministries.

Step 1: Identify Community of need

“Communities of need” exist in places where people are particularly vulnerable to damaging outcomes. These areas are found in rural, suburban and urban settings. To identify “communities of need,” consider taking the following steps:

- Pray, asking God to help you find the difficult places. Ask Him for the challenging assignment.
- Utilize statistics and data from city, county, state or national resources.
- Ask help from church members, local schools or city officials to find places with unmet need.

Step 2: Build Relationships in Community of Need

Here are a few ways relationships can be built in communities of need:

- Move into the community! Although this is considered by many a radical step, nothing helps a minister build relationships in a community like an incarnational presence—becoming flesh and dwelling among others. Is God calling you to relocate to a community of need?
- Eat with people. Take time to sit, eat, listen and talk with people from all walks of life.
- Complete a community asset survey (Resource Available: [Community Assessment Surveys](#)).
- Prayer walk the community in small groups (Resource Available: [Praying for my Community](#)).
- Identify churches and schools within the community.
- Take time to listen to community members and leaders about what is needed within the community.

- Ask, “Is there something we can join rather than start something new?”
- Is there potential to work with the school to help with literacy needs?
- Consider using [Arise2Read](#) resources.
- Host event(s) that “bless the many.”

To help provide supplies and materials, [Send Relief has the following resources available:](#)

- Backpacks
- Weekend Food Backpacks for Children
- Home Fire Campaign
- Mobile Medical and Dental Unit
- Community Block Party
- Hot Dog Roast
- Holiday Outreach Events
- Thanksgiving Food
- Christmas Toys
- Easter Egg Hunts

Step 3: Determine Location for Programs

Consider partnering with an existing church or community center. In some cases, these will be provided free-of-charge. In other cases, a mutually beneficial partnership allows the local church or community center to generate some much-needed rental income while providing vacant or under-utilized space for community programs.

- If necessary, clean, update and/or renovate space for community programs. Recruit volunteers from the church to clean facility, complete repairs, and renovate.
- If hosting a sports camp, identify local parks in the neighborhood. Apply for any local permits that are required.

Step 4: Determine Policies and Procedures

Develop written policies and procedures that address the following:

- **Sexual Misconduct:** Policies and procedures that prevent as well as remediate sexual misconduct. Policies should, at minimum, address appropriate touch, isolation of adults with students, the training of volunteers, background checks and reporting (Resources Available: [Sexual Misconduct Policies and Procedures](#), [Sexual Misconduct Training Manual](#)).
- **Volunteer Training:** Policies and procedures that create expectations for volunteer involvement (Resource Available: [Policies for Working with Children and Youth](#)).
- **Parental Engagement:** Although programs can be offered free of charge, a holistic afterschool program is more effective when it engages parents through volunteerism and monthly meetings. Consider placing a small weekly monetary fee for students to participate. Parents can be exempt

from the fee by volunteering (i.e., \$10 fee per student per week; \$5 exemption per volunteer hour). Additionally, engage parents by creating clear communication through monthly parent meetings. Find creative ways to incentivize participation in these meetings (Resource Available: [Afterschool Handbook](#)).

- **Emergency Action Procedures:** Create policies and procedures in the event of an emergency. Consider requiring first-aid/CPR certification for at least one adult leader. Create incident reports to document any incident (Resource Available: [Emergency Action Manual](#)).
- **Pick-up and dismissal:** Develop policies and procedures for students to arrive and dismiss from the program. For after school programs, consider not allowing students to arrive or be dismissed on their own, but instead, pick up students from school and require parents to pick up from the program. Requiring a parent to pick-up provides another opportunity to increase parental engagement. Develop a system to ensure student is only dismissed to individuals with permission to pick-up (Resource Available: [Sports Camp Policies and Procedures](#)).

Step 5: Develop Curriculum for Sports Camps/ After-School Programs

Summer sports camps are the easiest to begin for ministry to high-risk children, because of the shortened timeframe of a week or so in the summer. Consider how to use summer sports camps to begin an on-going ministry by adding after-school programs in order to develop a long-term, sustainable ministry.

Sports Camp Curriculum

If hosting a sports camp, it is helpful to develop a theme for the week or month. This theme will guide the development of Bible study curriculum, t-shirts, and banners. Rather than creating from scratch, consider adapting VBS materials. Resources provided in this section were developed for a four-week sports camp which took place four days a week from 9 AM-12 PM.

Coaches and individuals with sports expertise from the church can design activities that strengthen sports skills and allows the students to have fun playing the sports. Additionally, sports camps can include water games, crafts, and snack. Students can be broken down into groups and rotate “VBS style.” A sports camp should include the following components:

- **A Daily Schedule:** See [Sports Camp Schedule](#) for a sample schedule.
- **Large Group Welcome:** Review camp expectations, review camp theme, review memory verse, stretches, fun activities such as music, dance, skits, or games.
- **Sports Skills:** Students are led by coaches to strengthen skills through sports drills and games
- **Snack:** Students are given a healthy snack. Coaches and volunteers take time to visit with students.
- **Bible study:** Students participate in Bible study and the memory verse for the day or week is taught. To incentivize memorization, coaches can provide a small gift to each student for memorizing the verse by the end of the day or week (Resource Available: [Sample Sports Camp Bible Study Curriculum](#)).
- **Water games or fun recreation activities:** cool off in the summer with fun water games.
- **Sports Game:** Students play the sports.

- **Large Group Closing:** A camp pastor teaches a Bible study that emphasizes the camp theme and presents the gospel in accessible, age-appropriate ways.

After-School Curriculum

After School programs should consider having the following components:

- **Snack:** Students are provided a healthy snack.
- **Play:** Students are given an opportunity to relax and have free play
- **Homework Help:** Students are provided assistance with homework
- **Targeted Tutoring:** Provide additional one-on-one assistance to students with specific challenges. Consider utilizing [Arise2Read](#) to help students with literacy.
- **Enrichment:** Students are provided opportunities to learn or enjoy subject areas or activities they may not encounter in school. Consider mobilizing volunteers who are passionate about specific hobbies or activities to provide enriching activities for students.
- **Bible Study:** Students participate in age-appropriate Bible study. Consider utilizing Bible storying to walk with students through the entire Bible.
- **Resource Available:** [Afterschool Handbook](#).

Comprehensive Strategies

A sports program does not only teach sports and an after-school program does not only complete homework. To be effective and holistic, programs must develop strategies and curriculum for the following:

- [Teaching Behavior](#)
- Peacemaking Strategies:
 - **Respect Authority.** The person in authority is in control and determines who speaks.
 - **Respect Others.** Students will demonstrate respectful speech, body language, and attitude. Students will not focus on how they were treated but instead focus on how they would like to be treated.
 - **Respect Yourself.** Instead of blaming others, the student will take responsibility for his or her mistakes. The student will use “I, me, my” statements, not “he, she, them” statements.
 - **Respect God.** God is respected by obeying His commands. After conflict, the Bible teaches us to have:
 - No thought—I will not meditate on the conflict.
 - No grudge—I will not hold a grudge.
 - No talk—I will not talk about the conflict with others.
 - No walls—I will be friendly and forgiving.
- [Goal Setting Enrichment](#)
- [New Train Mentoring Program](#)

Step 6: Determine capacity

It's about big change, not big numbers. Only commit to serving the amount of students that can be served well. The aim is to under-promise and over-deliver, rather than over-promise and under-deliver. Expect for volunteers to wane in commitment, the longer the period of service. To determine capacity, consider the number of adult volunteers and staff who are dependable each day. Plan to have a maximum of a 1:5 ratio of adults to children. Start small and only allow the program to grow if numerical growth doesn't jeopardize effectiveness.

Step 7: Recruit and train volunteers

Consider the following possibilities for volunteers:

- Adults from the church
- Retired teachers
- High school students
- Parents of students in the program — see Step 4 above regarding parental engagement
- All volunteers should participate in a volunteer training where policies and procedures are taught. (Resource available: Volunteer Training Manual — [See Step 4, Policies for Working with Children and Youth Handbook.](#))

Step 8: Advertise

Advertise programs by developing a flyer that can be distributed at schools, community centers, churches and door-to-door. To advertise an afterschool program, consider hosting a school supply sale or giveaway and providing information about enrollment.

Step 9: Register/Enroll

Because of liability issues, registration and enrollment procedures need careful attention.

Sports Camps

For sports camps, require every student to have parent/guardian permission to participate, no exceptions. If the student's parent is not present, then send registration form home with student. He or she can return the next day. (Registration resource: [Sports Camp Registration Form](#)).

Afterschool Programs

For afterschool programs, require every student to have parent/guardian permission to participate. Enrollment resource: [Afterschool Enrollment Form](#).

- Once capacity is reached, it may be necessary to develop a waiting list.
- Once students are enrolled, host a family night to welcome families to the program. Besides reviewing program expectations, consider providing fun activities or hosting a meal.

Step 10: Implement Program

Just do it! But, don't forget to take care of yourself. Here are some principles for self-care:

- Take a day off each week. This rule is one of the “big 10” in the Bible.
- Find a forum with coworkers to vent about professional frustrations in ministry.
- As an adult, do not let at-risk youth or children fill your personal needs for healthy relationships. Associate with peers on your day off.
- Plan your prayer time in the morning and refuse to take engagements at that time. If you don't plan your day, someone else will do it for you.
- When someone demands that you do something on your day off, simply say you have a “previous commitment.”
- Cultivate a little self-deprecating humor, you pompous windbag.
- Schedule rest. Self-care is essential for long-term service.

If we repress self-care and the practice of Sabbath rest, it will reappear, knife in hand, demanding a sacrifice. Then we can't help anyone.

Step 11: Celebrate!

At the end of the week, month or year, provide an opportunity to celebrate successes and victories.

Step 12: Debrief Program

Everything won't go perfect. That's alright! Struggle provides opportunity. Debrief programs for the purpose of improvement. Ask the questions: What went well, what didn't go well, and what can we do to make it better? Remember, some change takes a long time. Behavior change and culture building takes place over years and decades not mere days, weeks and months. Stick to best practices and proven principles. Sometimes if you want to see things change, you have to keep doing what you're doing and wait around long enough!

Conclusion

Richard Besser explains the importance of working with high-risk children and teens: “Every child deserves a healthy start. A loving home, a good school, a safe neighborhood—these things are the foundation for a long and happy life, yet too many children don’t have them. Too often children experience trauma that can be devastating. But trauma doesn’t have to define a child’s life trajectory. They can be incredibly resilient. With policies that help families raise healthy children, and the consistent presence of caring adults in their lives, we can reduce the impact of trauma on children’s health and help them thrive in the face of adversity.”¹

With 45,000 Southern Baptist Churches across the country, imagine the difference that could be made if each one heard Christ’s call to take the challenging assignment of serving the most vulnerable. The outlook, both earthly and eternally, would be radically changed for thousands of children, teens and their families.

WHAT’S NEXT?

Is there any greater mission field in the United States than to help high-risk children, teens, and families combat ACEs by developing relationships with them in the name of Christ?

This is your opportunity to meet a huge need in your community – with Summer Sports Camps and After-School Programs.

***Special Note:** None of the provided information should be considered as legal advice. All forms, waivers, etc. should be developed in consultation with a lawyer.

¹ Traumatic Experiences Widespread Among U.S. Youth, New Data Show, October 19, 2019, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation; available on-line.



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