

Beyond Safe Havens:

A Synthesis of 20 Years of Research on the Boys & Girls Clubs



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Public/Private Ventures is a national nonprofit organization that seeks to improve the effectiveness of social policies and programs. P/PV designs, tests and studies initiatives that increase supports, skills and opportunities of residents of low-income communities; works with policymakers to see that the lessons and evidence produced are reflected in policy; and provides training, technical assistance and learning opportunities to practitioners based on documented effective practices.

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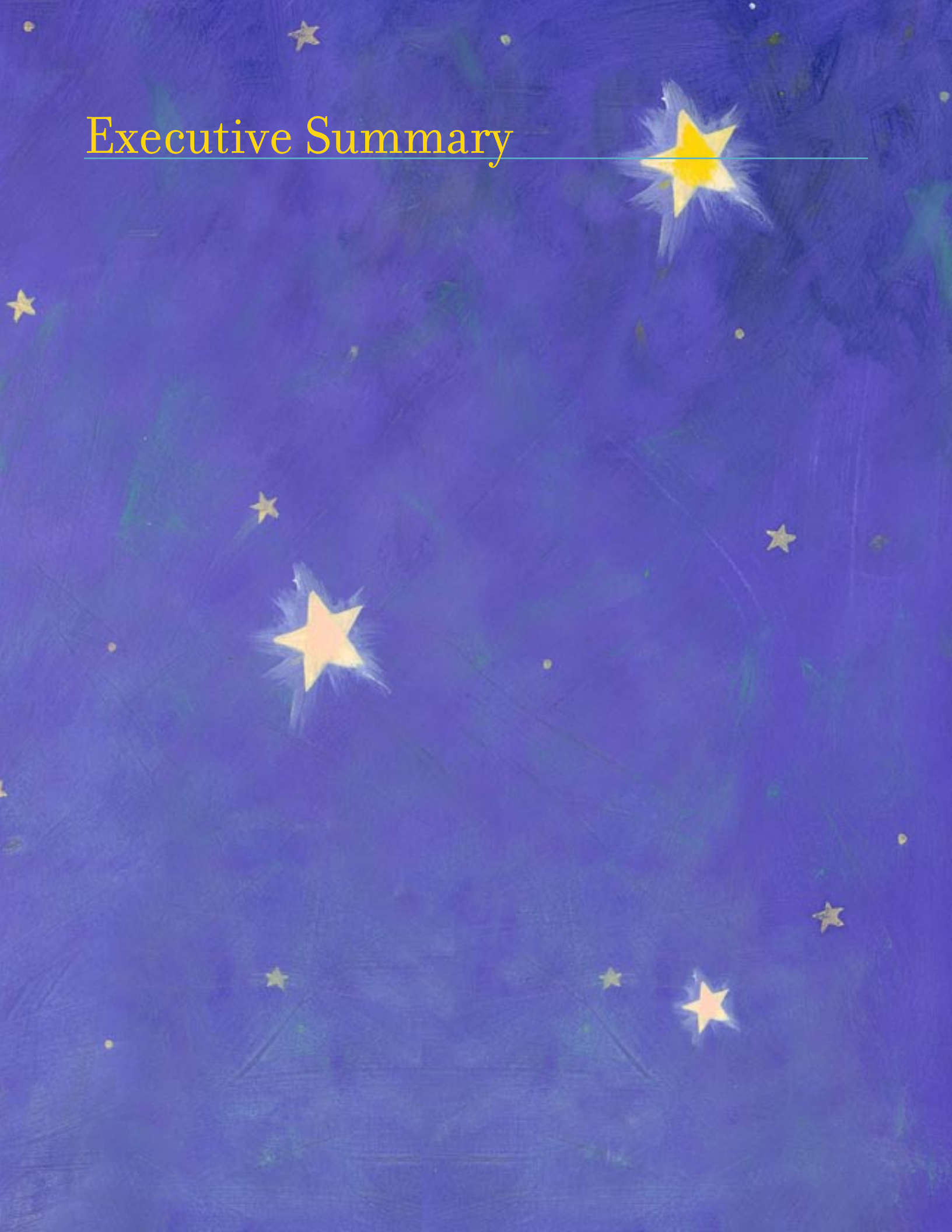
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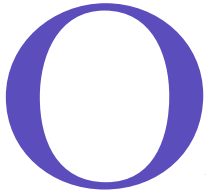
We would like to acknowledge the many people who contributed their support, time and expertise to make this report possible.

Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) provided the funding for this report, and numerous BGCA staff reviewed and commented on early drafts. In particular, we appreciate the helpful suggestions of Ed Mishrell and Karen McDonald, who coordinated the feedback from other BGCA staff and communicated it to us. In addition, BGCA provided the photographs that appear on the cover of the report (copyright 2001).

We would also like to thank the P/PV staff whose contributions to the report were significant. Karen Walker provided important suggestions for framing the report and insightful comments that honed its content and structure. Edward Moran wrote the early draft of the executive summary and provided valuable editing and copyediting services for both it and the full report. Gary Walker reviewed drafts of the report, Malish & Pagonis designed it, and Chelsea Farley coordinated the editing process, as well as the report's publication and dissemination.

Executive Summary





Over the past two decades, Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) has used a variety of programmatic strategies that reflect shifting ideas about what young people need to be successful and which young people should be targeted for services. In the 1980s and early 1990s, the focus of these programs was on delinquency prevention to discourage such behaviors as substance use or gang involvement. From the late 1990s to the present, BGCA has prioritized the integration of career preparation activities, academic support and technology into its Clubs. Importantly, throughout its history and despite shifts in the policy and funding world, the BGCA mission has emphasized providing all its programs within a safe, fun and supportive environment.

To better understand the potential benefits of these programs, more than 20 evaluations have been commissioned over the past 20 years. Although yielding promising findings, the vast majority of these studies have been limited to documenting only the specific outcomes the programs were designed to influence (e.g., increased academic achievement, reduced levels of drug abuse, etc.), rather than considering that these programs are part of the larger fabric of the Clubs' opportunities for leadership, decision-making and positive peer and adult-youth relationships—experiences likely to affect broader outcomes for youth. Even the few evaluations that have looked at club experiences more broadly—while finding support for some broader outcomes—have been limited in the outcomes they explored, and none have looked longitudinally at the Clubs' effects on youth.

At the request of BGCA's national office, Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) has undertaken a multiyear study to understand the benefits that the Clubs may have for the lives and outcomes of early adolescents. As a prelude to this larger study and to help hone its methodological focus, P/PV has reviewed the range of studies that have been conducted on Boys & Girls Clubs over the past 20 years, all of which are covered in more detail in the full report. The report covers three key areas:

- It reviews the research conducted to date on discrete BGCA programs to identify the potential benefits of those programs for youth and discusses three additional studies that examined the broader club experience;
- It outlines the strategies that contribute to the Clubs' successes, as well as any challenges that may have impeded more positive results; and
- It identifies aspects of these evaluations that, together, suggest ways in which the overall "Club experience" may influence young people's health and well-being—dimensions that have not been fully explored in these studies.

The report concludes with a brief description of a planned longitudinal evaluation of Club members as they transition to high school—an evaluation meant to provide documentation of the effectiveness of teens' broad Club experiences on a wide range of outcomes.

Twenty Years of Research on BGCA: Findings

The standard operation of Clubs has made it difficult for evaluators to carry out the most rigorous kind of impact studies, in which youth are randomly assigned to treatment or control groups. Traditionally, Boys & Girls Clubs welcome everyone through their doors and give youth great leeway in determining the extent to which they will participate. The willingness to accept all comers, which is part of the BGCA mission, makes random assignment impossible. Doing so would change the very nature of the Club experience. Given this challenge, the evaluations examined for this report used different strategies to learn about program effectiveness, none of which are without flaws. With this caveat in mind, however, it is possible to ascribe important conclusions to the existing literature, based on the numerous studies of discrete programs, the few studies that examine general Club participatory experiences, and the implementation lessons that emerge when all the studies are examined in sum.

Moreover, the studies' findings lend insight into what additional, broader outcomes—as yet unexplored—are likely affected by Club participation more generally and deserve attention.

Detailed more fully in the report, the evaluations found several outcomes linked to participation in discrete BGCA programs, including:

- **Reduction in delinquent behaviors.** Both prevention classes geared toward all Club members (e.g., SMART Moves, BGCA's signature alcohol, drug and pregnancy prevention program) and targeted outreach models of delinquency prevention that involve recruiting youth with specific risk characteristics to engage in broader Club activities (e.g., Gang Prevention through Targeted Outreach) show evidence of reducing youth's participation in delinquent behaviors.
- **Increased academic achievement.** Studies of educational programs designed to integrate high-yield learning activities throughout the Club and to offer homework help (such as Project Learn and its pilot, the Educational Enhancement project) document increased levels of homework completion, involvement in discussions about books and other discussions with adults, and achievement in several academic areas.
- **Increased access to and safe utilization of technology.** Operation Connect was designed to provide technology centers in Clubs to increase youth access to computers and the Internet. Findings indicate that children increased their level of computer use and technology skills and began to use the computers for homework. A related program, NetSmartz, helped youngsters become more aware of safety issues on the Internet.
- **Increased career goals and improved attitudes toward school.** Two career-oriented initiatives, Broader Horizons and Career Prep, reached and retained a large number of youth in their early teen years. Youth reported that the program helped them set career goals and improved their attitudes toward school.

Although none of the three more broad-based studies reviewed for the report followed youth over time, the evaluation findings suggest a range of positive experiences:

- **Positive relationships and safe places to belong, participate and contribute.** Club members who responded to a one-time survey and respondents in two alumni studies overwhelmingly reported having positive relationships with Club staff. They also reported other benefits from Club participation, including getting along with others, having a safe place to interact with others, feeling a sense of belonging and being afforded opportunities for decision-making, leadership and community service.

The studies suggest correlates of these positive experiences:

- **Participation, tenure at the Clubs and connections with staff.** The extent to which youth and alumni reported positive experiences and benefits from the Clubs was associated with both tenure at the Club and how well they felt they knew or connected with staff. The variety of informal and formal programs and opportunities the Clubs offered, as well as the efforts to provide a rewarding and youth-centered environment, were similarly found to be related to teens' positive experiences, participation and retention in these studies.

In reviewing the numerous evaluations of discrete BGCA programs, the full P/PV report identifies and describes implementation practices that appear to promote the success of those programs:

- **Investment in developing caring relationships between youth and staff.** First and foremost, across all the studies reviewed, caring relationships between youth and staff were identified by youth, parents, Club staff and partner-agency staff as crucial to the success of the program—they were why the youth came and why they stayed in the program. This is in keeping with numerous studies that identify supportive relationships in youth's lives as a key factor in promoting resilience and healthy development. Clubs most successful at facilitating these supportive relationships gave staff sufficient time for working

one-on-one with youth and ensured that enough staff were devoted to the program to provide sufficient support for youth.

- **Targeted recruitment strategies.** A primary goal of many of the evaluated programs was to recruit youth—particularly high-risk youth—to participate. Three strategies for recruitment and retention were particularly effective: street outreach, referral from schools and families, and partnerships with community agencies.
- **Interesting and exciting programming.** Creating programs that youth found interesting and enjoyable was key to retention. Successful strategies employed by Club staff included flexibility in tailoring the program to the needs and schedules of youth, creating “fun” activities and providing rewards and incentives for participation.
- **Partnerships with other organizations, such as schools, the police and justice agencies.** Although Clubs found partnerships with community institutions challenging to build and maintain, when successful, they provided significant benefits for referral and information sharing. Successful partnerships typically emerged when Clubs clarified and emphasized the value of their program(s) and devoted staff time to developing and maintaining relationships.

Finally, P/PV’s review identifies significant implementation challenges that traversed the study findings, primary among them:

- **Staff turnover.** This was a particularly troublesome area for many of the programs, as high levels of staff turnover often diminished a Club’s capacity to provide quality programming and forge lasting relationships. Because of the crucial role of staff-youth relationships, strategies for staff retention were also critical. Clubs increased program effectiveness by recruiting staff with specific skills (e.g., with educational backgrounds or technological savvy), promoting staff from within the club and taking steps to ensure staff buy-in for any new programming.

Taking a Broader View of the Role of Clubs

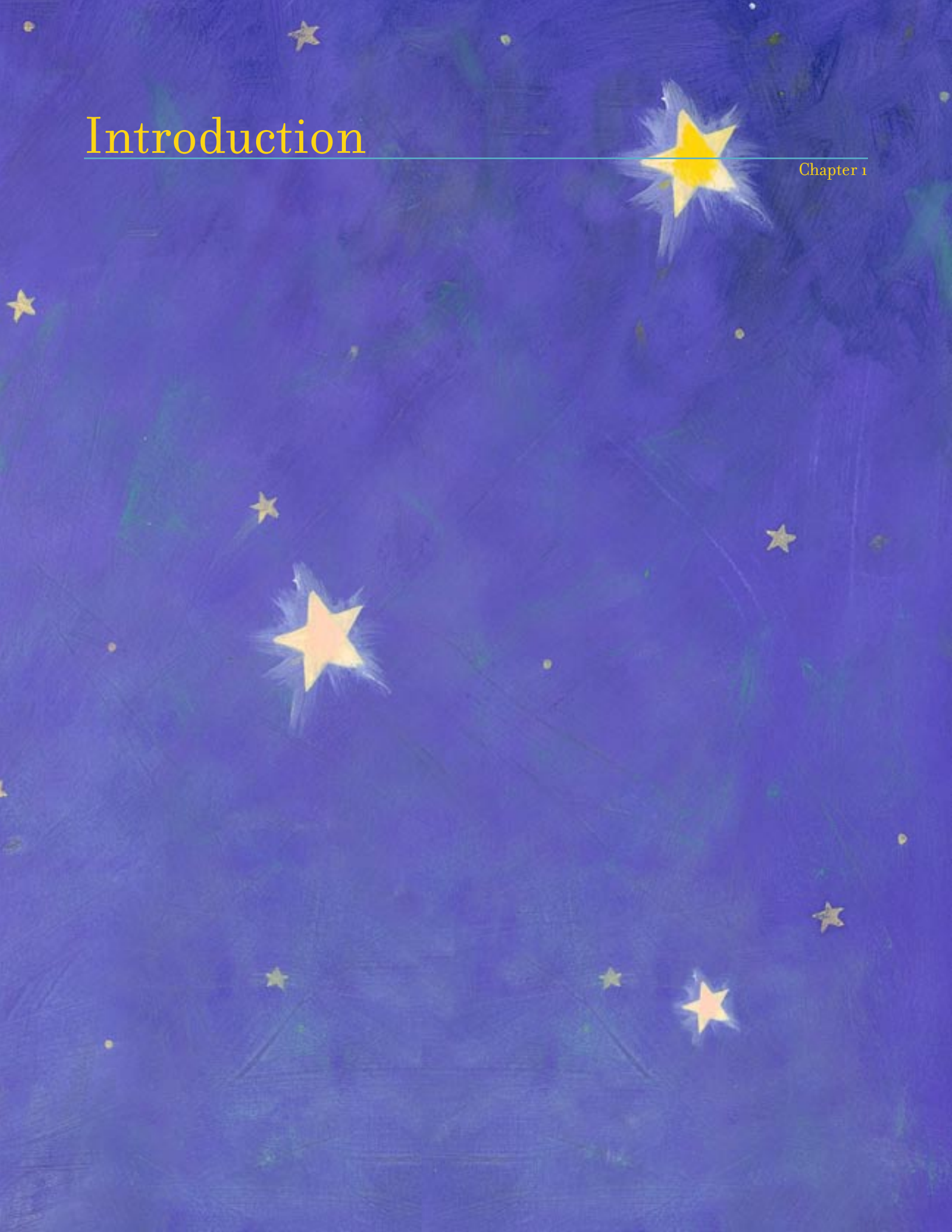
Though the majority of the studies reviewed for this report looked at specific outcomes, such as changes in drug use, academic achievement and career goals, Club members appeared to derive additional benefits from the Club experience beyond what was measured by the studies’ discrete outcomes. Several of these benefits were touched on in the three broad-based studies. Young people were having fun, interacting positively and constructively with adults, engaging in activities that were building their competencies and confidences and interacting with peers in positive ways. By looking more closely at these findings and examining the implementation lessons that traversed them, the P/PV report reveals a host of other areas where Clubs seek to impact members’ lives, including a positive view of the future, commitment to school and learning, integrity and self-efficacy.

The broader potential of Clubs to provide these types of experiences and positive outcomes for members—those that cut across several domains—has not been explored fully in any of the studies conducted to date but is critical to test in order to gain a solid understanding of the role that Clubs play in the lives of the youth they serve. This must include a longitudinal investigation to examine how these Club experiences support youth at critical junctures in their lives.

As the full report describes in more detail, a longitudinal study that broadens outcomes to match the Club’s mission and strategies and that builds on the findings from the past 20 years will appropriately test the role of the Clubs “as a whole experience” in the lives of the adolescents they serve. A study of this nature, designed to learn about the relationship of these Club experiences to the teens’ emotional, behavioral and academic health, will also have implications for other organizations that strive to support positive developmental trajectories for youth.

Introduction

Chapter 1



Boys Clubs of America was founded a century ago to respond to the needs of boys in impoverished urban areas. Expanding its mission to include girls, the organization changed its name to Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) in 1990. Over the years, BGCA has maintained its commitment to provide fun, safe places for youth, where they can be involved in caring relationships with adults and peers and feel a sense of membership and connectedness—all things that research has shown to be important for healthy development and that are frequently lacking in impoverished, resource-poor communities (Eccles and Gootman 2002; Halperin 2004).

Over the Clubs' long history, the nature of after-school programs¹ and their roles have shifted as policymakers and funders have become interested in specific groups of disadvantaged young people and specific outcomes for these youth. While still adhering to their primary goals and mission, Clubs have devised targeted programs that reflect shifting ideas in the policy world and public opinion about what services and experiences young people need in order to be successful and which young people most need those services. To understand whether and how these targeted programs succeed, BGCA and others have funded a variety of evaluations, which similarly reflect contemporary concerns about youth. Early studies (from the late 1980s and early 1990s) tended to examine programs that emphasized delinquency prevention (e.g., prevention of substance use, sexual activity or gang involvement). Those conducted from the late 1990s to the present reflect the burgeoning role of Clubs in promoting learning and academic benefits (e.g., homework help, academic support, Internet access and computer skills). Clubs have also responded to the call for youth programs to be involved in providing job training and career preparation. In the late 1980s, the Clubs took a broad approach to promoting job skill development among their members; revisiting this approach beginning in 1998, Clubs again began providing job skills training to teens.

The evaluations of the Clubs' targeted and discrete programs typically examine specific outcomes of concern to the program's funders, who are most interested in knowing quickly the effectiveness of the dollars they are investing to achieve those outcomes. These discrete programs, however, operate within the larger Club context, which includes all the other opportunities and experiences the Clubs offer. Few evaluations of the Clubs have looked at the overall impact of Club membership or the diverse range of developmental experiences members are exposed to. More than the sum of their programmatic parts, Clubs' successes at drawing in youth and helping them foster positive relationships with staff and peers while encouraging fun and exploration are rarely examined as critical factors in and of themselves.

As a prelude to launching a longitudinal study that will examine these broader Club experiences and their effects on participants, Public/Private Ventures has reviewed—and now summarizes in this report—findings from studies of Boys & Girls Clubs over the last 20 years. The three main goals of this report are to:

- Review the research conducted to date on discrete BGCA programs as well as on young people's overall participatory experiences to identify areas in which Clubs have had positive outcomes for youth;
- Describe more generally the strategies of the programs and the Clubs that contribute to successes as well as any challenges that may have impeded more positive results; and
- Identify aspects of these evaluations that, together, suggest ways in which the overall "Club experience" (rather than participation in any one discrete program) may be affecting participants' positive development in terms of health and well-being—dimensions that have not yet been fully explored in these studies.

A Note About the Methodologies of the Reviewed Studies

The nature of Boys & Girls Clubs poses a challenge for evaluators. On the assumption that young people benefit from having safe places where they can come as needed, Clubs have not traditionally required youth to arrive at particular times or attend particular activities. Attendance for almost all activities is voluntary, and youth can participate in some activities and not in others, at their discretion. Every child has a different experience. Importantly, the Clubs also welcome all who wish to attend and therefore do not have waiting lists of interested young people.

Evaluators, thus, are unable to implement the most rigorous kind of impact studies—those that randomly assign young people either to a group that attends Club programs or to a control group that does not participate, and then examine differences between the groups. Doing so would change the very character and mission of the Clubs.

Given the problems posed by random assignment, the evaluations reviewed for this report used different strategies to learn about program effectiveness, none of which are without flaws.

About a third of the program evaluations discussed in this review (particularly in the areas of job readiness and education) were conducted fairly early in the implementation of the studied programs. In these cases, the research focused on how effectively the staff were able to meet specific program goals, such as implementing components of the curricula, recruiting the desired number of new members and serving youth with specific needs. In a few of these cases, the studies conducted surveys of youth and staff to assess satisfaction with the program or the respondents' beliefs that the program had somehow been helpful to them, but there was no assessment of change over time. These studies are helpful for understanding how Clubs work with youth and how responsive youth are to the programs, but they are limited in the extent to which they provide convincing evidence of program effectiveness.

The remaining two thirds of the program evaluations assessed change over time in youth's beliefs, attitudes or behaviors, using pre- and post-test surveys or assessments. Although none of these studies utilized random assignment, about half of them developed a comparison group strategy—comparing program participants to other (non-program) Club members or to participants in other organizations. These studies can indicate whether the young people who receive the interventions exhibit any change from the beginning of the study to the end or experience different results from the youth who do not receive the intervention. However, researchers must be cautious about attributing changes to the programs, as the positive attributions may reflect bias in who stays in the program and their motivation for joining the program in the first place.

Table 1 provides an overview of the studies reviewed for this report, the goals of the programs evaluated and the methodologies used to examine program implementation, youth outcomes or both. Three studies listed in Table 1 are not evaluations of discrete programs, but are studies that provide general information about youth involved in the Clubs, their participation and experiences and the role of the Clubs in their lives. These studies are useful for providing a more inclusive view of how Club membership might affect youth's lives; however, they also are limited because they are based on self-reported, retrospective data gathered at one point in time.

In spite of the limitations of the study designs, the findings—particularly when examined together—reveal useful insights about the effectiveness of programs implemented at the Clubs.

Overview of Findings from the Reviewed Studies

P/PV's review of these studies indicates positive outcomes related to career development, delinquency prevention and academic achievement that have resulted from implementation of several discrete prevention programs at the Clubs. At the same time, it is clear from this review that the potential for Clubs to make a difference in children's lives has not been fully tested by the evaluations completed to date. Targeted programs have their own mechanisms for improving youth outcomes; however, the Clubs' overall approach to working

with the young people and connecting them to the Clubs and staff are also critically important. Thus, the results revealed by these studies of discrete programs and narrowly defined outcomes may not be indicative of the larger potential for Clubs to play a role in children's lives. In essence, the discrete programs are not happening in a vacuum; they are part of the larger fabric of the whole Club experience.

The few studies that have taken a broader approach to understanding young people's overall experiences find that Clubs are accessible to youth, serve a needy group of children and provide them with rich developmental experiences in a fun and engaging way that keeps them wanting to return. Club staff strive to use this atmosphere to promote a range of healthy child, adolescent and adult outcomes, many of which have not yet been explored fully via research.

Report Outline

Chapter Two of this report synthesizes findings from evaluations conducted of programs that had one or more of the following goals: 1) preventing children from engaging in risky behaviors, such as drinking alcohol, taking drugs, engaging in sexual behavior and involvement in gangs; 2) fostering academic achievement and technological skills; and 3) career development. Chapter Three describes the strengths of the Club programs that were reported to lead to positive outcomes for youth and analyzes challenges Clubs faced in program implementation, within that context. Chapter Four reviews the small number of studies that have attempted to document the reach and effectiveness of Clubs more generally. Finally, in Chapter Five, the report concludes with a summary of results, an examination of what is missing from existing studies and a discussion of why studying the broad youth development experiences Clubs provide will be the most informative approach to take at this point—offering a solid understanding of the role that Clubs play in the lives of the children they serve.

Table 1: Overview of Studies on Boys & Girls Clubs

Program Implementation Measures
 Youth Survey Outcomes Measures
 Pre- and Post-Test Measures
 Comparison Group Measures

Report Title	Program Evaluated	Author	Publication Date	Components of Evaluation				Methodology	Number of Participants	Response Rates
Delinquency Prevention										
Process and Outcome Evaluation of a Boys Clubs of America Substance Abuse and Pregnancy Prevention Program	Project SMART and Life Skills	Institute for Policy Research and Evaluation Center of Research on Human Resources, The Pennsylvania State University	October 1987	x	x	x	x	Evaluators rated the level of implementation at 9 Clubs with delinquency prevention curricula, and administered pre- and post-tests to participating and control youth.	191 program participants; 100 control participants	For Project Smart, 74% of participants had pre- and post-test data. For the Life Skills curriculum, 79% of participants had pre- and post-test data.
The Effects of Boys & Girls Clubs on Alcohol and Other Drug Use and Related Problems in Public Housing	SMART Moves	Columbia University (Schinke, Cole and Poulin)	May 1991	x			x	Included 15 public housing areas in the study: 5 with new Clubs with SMART Moves program; 5 with old Clubs without program; and 5 areas without a Club. At these sites, researchers interviewed community leaders, housing authority administrators, residents, school and police officials, and also examined criminal statistics and observed the areas.	N/A	N/A
Drug Prevention in a Community Setting: A Longitudinal Study of the Relative Effectiveness of a Three-Year Primary Prevention Program in Boys & Girls Clubs Across the Nation	SMART Moves	Institute for Policy Research and Evaluation Center of Research on Human Resources, The Pennsylvania State University	1992		x	x	x	The study included 14 Clubs: 5 Clubs offered the basic prevention program as well as a booster program for older youth; 5 offered just the basic program; and 4 offered no prevention program. Researchers administered surveys to a sample of youth at each Club at 4 points in time.	191 participants across 3 types of demonstration sites	Not reported
Involving Parents of High-Risk Youth in Drug Prevention: A Three-Year Longitudinal Study in Boys & Girls Clubs	SMART Moves	The Pennsylvania State University (St. Pierre, Mark, Kaltreider and Aikin)	1997		x	x	x	Administered pre- and post-tests to youth across 16 different Club sites: 4 with SMART Moves, a parent involvement component and monthly activities; 4 with SMART Moves and monthly activities; 4 with just SMART Moves; and 4 with no program.	300 participants across 4 types of demonstration sites	Of youth who completed the pre-test, about 60% completed all subsequent post-tests.
Youth Gang Prevention and Early Intervention Programs	Gang Prevention through Targeted Outreach	Feyerherm and Pope	December 1992	x				Conducted observations and interviews and reviewed case management records at 33 Clubs.	Reviewed case management records of 1,917 participants	Not reported
Targeted Outreach: Boys & Girls Clubs of America's Approach to Gang Prevention and Intervention	Gang Prevention through Targeted Outreach	Public/Private Ventures	March 2002		x	x	x	At 24 Club sites, researchers reviewed youths' case management records and interviewed Club directors and youth. They administered pre- and post-surveys to a sample of participating youth as well as a comparison group. Researchers observed activities at 6 of the participating Clubs.	Reviewed case management records for 1,036 participating youth. Administered pre- and post-surveys to 299 participating youth and 264 comparison youth.	Prevention Club program youth response rates were 236/292 (81%) for participants and 216/297 (73%) for comparison youth. Intervention Club program youth response rates were 66/85 (78%) for participants and 48/98 (53%) for comparison youth.
Increasing Opportunities for Older Youth in After-School Programs: A Report on the Experiences of Boys & Girls Clubs in Boston and New York City	Teen Initiatives	Public/Private Ventures	2003	x	x	x		Across 8 participating Clubs, researchers surveyed youth at 3 points in time, as well as conducting interviews, focus groups and observations. Researchers also surveyed staff at 2 points in time, conducted cost surveys in the second and third year and collected attendance data in the first and second year.	Participation varied each year: 645 participants in Year 1; 662 participants in Year 2; 583 participants in Year 3.	Youth were sampled from the Club population. Pre- and post-tests were conducted to examine group- rather than individual-level change.

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Education Initiatives									
Clubs Using School Facilities: An Effective After-School Educational Environment Initiative	Project Learn	Rowan University (James Coaxum)	2002		x	x	At the 15 participating sites, researchers conducted interviews and focus groups with staff and youth.	356 in pre- and post-test.	Of the 20 demonstration sites, 15 submitted materials to participate in evaluation. Of youth who completed pre-test, 79% also completed the post-test.
Evaluation of the Boys & Girls Clubs of America Packard Foundation Learning Centers Project: Final Report	Project Learn	Policy Studies Associates, Inc. (Jeanine Hildreth with Dwayne Smith)	June 2003	x	x		Researchers conducted site visits and telephone interviews, reviewed relevant documents and collected surveys from youth and staff at 10 participating Clubs.	Surveys received from 81 staff and 514 youth.	A total of 69% of staff returned completed surveys; response rate for youth is not reported.
Evaluation of the Boys & Girls Clubs of America Ingram Foundation Learning Centers Project	Project Learn	Policy Studies Associates, Inc. (Jeanine Hildreth with Dwayne Smith)	June 2003	x	x		Conducted site visits and staff surveys at the 8 Clubs included in this study. Also administered surveys to youth at 2 of these Clubs.	Surveys received from 27 staff and 185 youth.	A total of 63% of staff returned completed surveys; response rate for youth is not reported.
Enhancing the Educational Achievement of At-Risk Youth	Educational Enhancement	Columbia University (Schinke, Cole and Poulin)	2000	x ^a	x	x	Data were collected for youth from 15 Boys and Girls Clubs sites, as well as a comparison group. At 4 points in time, researchers collected youth surveys, youths' grades in school, and teacher ratings for 3 groups of youth: those participating in Educational Enhancement at Clubs; those attending Clubs but not in the Enhancement program; and youth not in Clubs.	283 youth across 15 sites: 5 Clubs with EEP, 5 Clubs without EEP, 5 youth-serving organizations.	At 30-month follow-up the response rate was 67.5%, consistent across all three groups.
Project Connect: Bridging the Digital Divide: Final Evaluation Report	Project Connect	The Center for Children & Technology	July 2000	x			Researchers conducted site visits and telephone interviews at 13 Clubs participating in a pilot of Project Connect.	N/A	N/A
Operation Connect Evaluation: Boys & Girls Clubs of America Year Three (Final) Report: The Impact of Technology on Youth in Boys & Girls Clubs	Operation Connect	Branch Associates	June 2004		x	x	Researchers conducted interviews, focus groups, and observations at 10 participating Clubs. They also reviewed computer usage reports at these Clubs and administered pre- and post-tests to over 300 youth.	Participation varied each year: 565 participants in Year 1; 518 participants in Year 2; 302 participants in Year 3.	53 youth completed all three surveys. 165 youth completed surveys in Year 1 and Year 2; 153 youth completed surveys in Year 2 and Year 3.
NetSmartz Evaluation Project: Internet Safety Training for Children and Youth Ages 6 to 18	NetSmartz	Branch Associates	2002		x	x	Conducted pre- and post-tests with participants in the NetSmartz Program at 10 BGCA sites during summer 2002 (a total of 186 youth completed both tests). Also conducted focus groups with youth and interviews with Club staff at these 10 sites.	394 pre-test; 186 post-test.	Of youth who completed the pre-test, 47% also completed a post-test.

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Job Readiness							
Boys Clubs of America Productive Futures Career Exploration Program Evaluation of Broader Horizons	Broader Horizons	Formative Evaluation Research Associates	January 1989	x x	At 3 Clubs in Michigan implementing Broader Horizons, researchers conducted interviews with staff and youth and administered surveys to 100 youth.	Interviews with 41 youth, 8 club staff and 10 host (field trip) agencies. Administered surveys to 100 youth.	Not reported.
Evaluation of the Boys & Girls Clubs of America Career Prep Pilot Program: Year Two Final Report	Career Prep	Policy Studies Associates, Inc. (Marzke, Hildreth, Smith and Bangser)	December 2000	x ^b	Researchers conducted site visits to 10 clubs, conducted telephone interviews with Career Prep staff at the remaining 30 clubs, and analyzed the program enrollment/tracking forms of participating youth at all 40 involved clubs.	Exact number of interviews not reported; results from analysis of enrollment/tracking forms also not reported.	Not reported.
Evaluation of the Boys & Girls Clubs of America Career Prep Pilot Program: Year Three Final Report	Career Prep	Policy Studies Associates, Inc. (Marzke, Hildreth and Smith)	December 2001	x ^b	Researchers conducted site visits to 10 clubs and distributed surveys to all 41 Career Prep staff members. Researchers also analyzed the program enrollment/documentation forms of participating youth.	Analysis of enrollment/tracking data for up to 2,265 youth.	Enrollment forms (82%); Status Change forms (69%); Matched Enrollment and Status Change forms (52%); Matched Status Change and Follow-up forms (32% of youth with enrollment forms); Career Prep staff surveys (93%).
The Boys & Girls Clubs of America Career Prep Pilot Program: Building a Job Training and Placement Program for Teens in Boys & Girls Clubs: Final Evaluation Report	Career Prep	Policy Studies Associates, Inc. (Marzke with Smith and Stephens)	January 2003	x ^b	Researchers surveyed Career Prep staff from all clubs funded prior to Year 4 (38 clubs). Telephone interviews were attempted with all clubs returning Career Prep staff surveys (31). Researchers analyzed the program enrollment/documentation forms of participating youth at all 45 involved clubs. The study presents these data as well as data from previous years of the program.	Analysis of enrollment/tracking data for up to 2,268 youth (for Year 4).	Enrollment forms (84%); Status Change forms (60%); Matched Enrollment and Status Change forms (53%); Career Prep staff surveys (82%); telephone interviews with Career Prep staff (68%).

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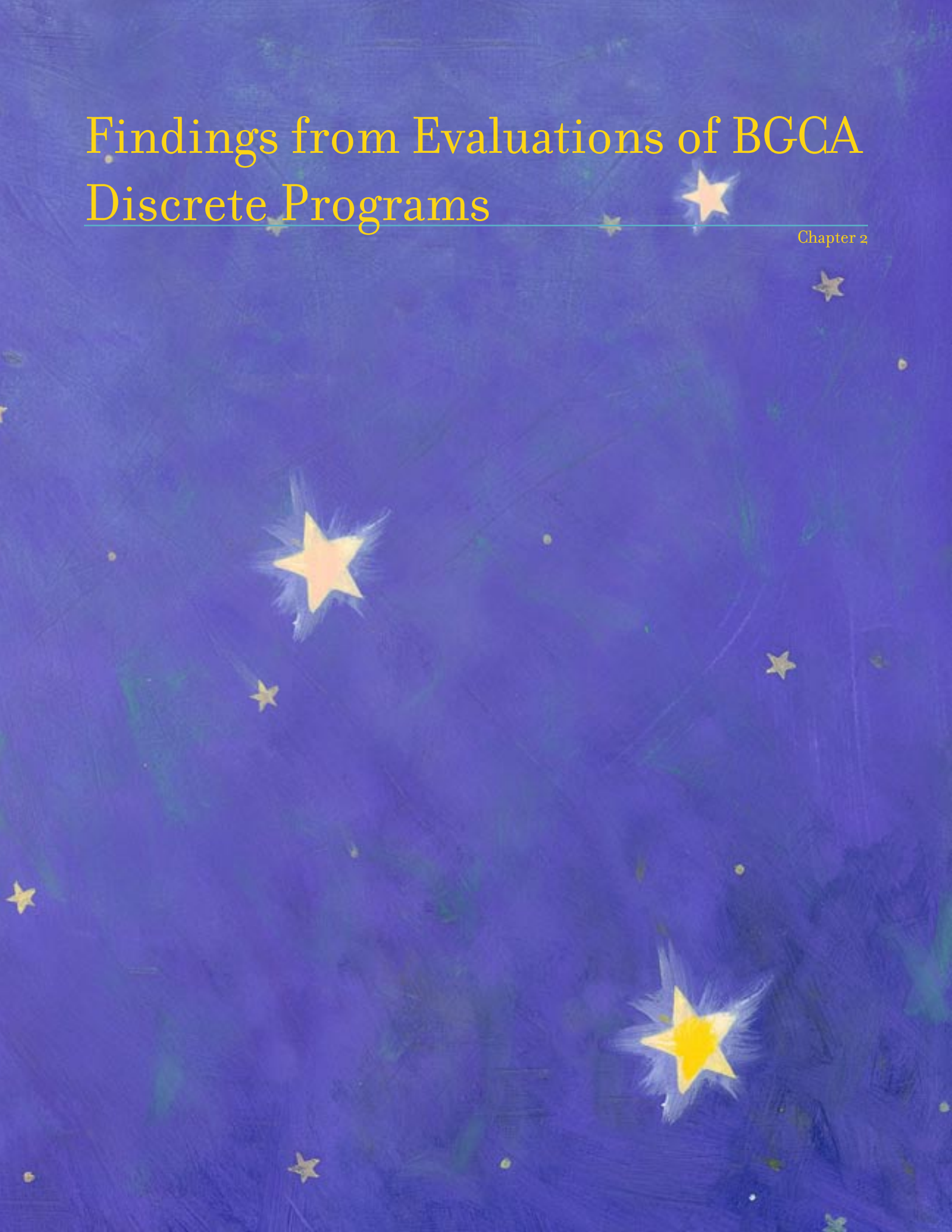
Report Title	Program Evaluated	Author	Publication Date	Components of Evaluation			Methodology	Number of Participants	Response Rates
Club Experiences									
Report on the 1985 National Survey of Boys Clubs Alumni	N/A	Louis Harris & Associates, Inc.	1985	x			A telephone survey of a random sample of Club alumni.	Interviews with 1,202 alumni.	81-91% of eligible alumni reached.
1999 Alumni Research Study (Presentation to the 93rd Annual Conference)	N/A	Louis Harris & Associates, Inc.	May 1999	x			A telephone and online survey of a random sample of Club alumni.	Interviews (telephone or online) with 1,592 alumni.	N/A
A Study of Nationally Affiliated Voluntary Youth-Serving Organizations: Boys & Girls Clubs	N/A	Public/Private Ventures (Kotloff, Wahhab and Arbreton)	February 1997	x			At 5 large urban clubs, collected youth surveys and attendance data from youth 10 to 18.	Not reported.	Survey responses were weighted to represent attendance patterns for 1159 participants attending the Clubs over a 1-month period, by gender and age subgroups.

a This research included evaluation of the program's implementation, but these results were reported only in the research report, not in the published article.

b This research included an outcomes study, including pre- and post-tests and comparison groups, but those results have not yet been reported.

Findings from Evaluations of BGCA Discrete Programs

Chapter 2



As part of its mission to “inspire and enable all young people, especially those from disadvantaged circumstances, to realize their full potential as productive, responsible and caring citizens,” Boys & Girls Clubs across the country implement a wide range of programs and strategies. As noted in the introduction, the content of these discrete programs has followed the progression of funders’ and policymakers’ interests in various roles for after-school programs. Although the prime mechanism for supporting the mission of BGCA has always been youth-centered, building-centered, open enrollment, with varied and diverse programming supported by full-time, caring staff, the Clubs have also implemented discrete programs to foster specific outcomes.

In this section we review evaluations of three types of programs:

- Delinquency prevention (SMART Moves, Gang Prevention Through Targeted Outreach, Teen Initiative);
- Education and Technology (Educational Enhancement Project, Project Learn, Operation Connect, NetSmartz); and
- Job Readiness (Broader Horizons, Career Prep).

Most of these studies examine the Clubs’ successes both in recruiting and retaining at-risk young people and in operating strong programs. To a lesser degree, the evaluations address questions about youth outcomes.

For each program type, a brief review of the goal(s) is followed by the main findings from the evaluation(s). All of these studies are referenced in Chapter 1, Table 1.

Delinquency Prevention

Boys & Girls Clubs have used two broad models in their efforts to prevent youth from engaging in risky or potentially harmful behaviors such as drug abuse, gang involvement and early sexual activity. The programs developed and evaluated in the 1980s and early 1990s provided specific and structured prevention classes. These classes, offered to a range of Club members, attempt to prevent delinquent behavior by imparting knowledge and involving youth in activities designed to promote positive social skills, interactions and behavior. More recently, Clubs have developed broader strategies involving outreach and targeted recruitment of youth who may not otherwise join a Club—efforts designed to intervene with young people who are most at risk of or who have already engaged in negative behaviors. By providing these youth with creative and innovative activities to address their specific needs and interests, and by having staff interact with other realms of the participants’ lives (schools, families and probation), the Clubs seek to help them develop positive interests and behaviors while, at the same time, decreasing their likelihood of engaging in delinquent behaviors.

Both of these approaches have shown success. The discrete prevention classes have yielded a significant impact on youth’s attitudes toward delinquent behavior, while programs using outreach and a “shift in Club philosophy” show success in recruitment of at-risk youth, positive changes in youth’s attitudes and reduction of negative behaviors over time.

SMART Moves is the BGCA signature alcohol, drug and pregnancy prevention program for youth members. Adapted from school-based curricula for the after-school setting, this program is designed to instill personal and social skills in youth and to help them identify and resist peer pressure to use drugs and engage in early sexual activity. The program consists of 10 to 12 classes in which youth participate in role-playing, group activities, discussion and other programming aimed at developing personal and social skills. In addition to the basic SMART

Moves curriculum, some Clubs have implemented additional components, such as a parent involvement piece (FAN Club), monthly social activities and a two-year follow-up program for youth who have completed SMART Moves.

Two examples of the targeted outreach approach to delinquency prevention are **Gang Prevention Through Targeted Outreach (GPTTO)**, a BGCA initiative implemented in Clubs around the country, and the **Teen Initiative**, which was implemented in eight Clubs in Boston and New York. In both projects, staff reach out to youth who, because of personal or environmental factors, have a higher than average risk of engaging in delinquent behaviors. The GPTTO program reaches out to youth who are at risk of participating in gang activity; it also has a sister program, Gang Intervention Through Targeted Outreach (GITTO), which targets youth who are already gang members or on the fringes of gangs. GPTTO and GITTO provide these youth with case management related to the juvenile justice system, school and family, and also try to involve them in Club activities available to all members.

The Teen Initiative follows a similar philosophy in an effort to increase outreach to teenagers who have been particularly hard to engage in after-school programming. These efforts involve street outreach and collaboration with schools and other community agencies to find new members. Like GPTTO, the Teen Initiative does not include any specific classes or programs as part of its efforts. Rather, Clubs have expanded their schedules to include more activities that would appeal to teens, such as job preparation and academic programming.

How Successful Were Clubs at Preventing Delinquency?

Although all models of delinquency prevention share the long-term goal of limiting youth's involvement in delinquent behaviors and facilitating their transition to a productive adulthood, these models have different short-term goals for youth. One of the goals of the prevention-class model, for example, is to increase youth's knowledge of facts about drugs and early sexual activity. The targeted outreach model, on the other hand, aims to consistently engage youth in interesting Club activities that will draw them away from negative peers and

behaviors and toward involvement in more healthy activities. Both models have shown success at meeting their unique goals.

- **By implementing specific outreach strategies, Clubs were very successful at bringing at-risk youth into their programming.** In the targeted outreach studies, all Clubs came close to or exceeded their outreach goals. For example, GPTTO sites met about 88 percent of their target recruitment goals (of 50 new members over a nine-month period), and GITTO sites met about 97 percent of their target numbers. Clubs in the Teen Initiative met and often exceeded their target of recruiting 50 new teen members each year.

Additionally, those youth who were recruited were often at-risk and unlikely to have participated on their own without outreach efforts. The gang prevention study found that 64 percent of “prevention” youth and 96 percent of “intervention” youth exhibited multiple personal or social characteristics that would put them at risk for gang involvement, including having family members and friends who belong to gangs, living in a neighborhood with many gangs and having a record of delinquency. Between 60 percent and 80 percent of recruited youth in the teen initiative received free or reduced-price lunches or were living in public housing.²

Clubs also managed to sustain the involvement of many of their recruits. The Teen Initiative retained about 50 percent of recruits two years into the study. One year after joining the Club, 73 percent of prevention youth and 68 percent of intervention youth were still attending the Club at least once a month. Retention is important, as continued participation over time (typically a year or more) has consistently been seen as a critical factor for whether a program is found to play a role in affecting participants' lives.

- **Youth who participated in SMART Moves reported an increased knowledge about drugs and ability to refuse drugs, compared with youth who did not participate.** Two studies of SMART Moves found that youth who participated in the program showed significantly more knowledge about drugs than youth in the comparison group. One of these studies (using pre- and post-surveys) further found that—over time—youth in the program maintained or increased their ability to refuse alcohol,

marijuana or cigarettes, while comparison youth showed a decreased ability to refuse these drugs. As youth get older, they often face more pressure to use drugs; this study suggests that SMART Moves provides youth with the skills needed to continue to refuse drugs as pressure increases.

Acknowledging this increased pressure, some Clubs have instituted a two-year booster program for graduates of SMART Moves. However, a 1991 study of this booster program found little additional impact on youth who participated, compared with youth who remained in the Clubs but participated only in the basic SMART Moves program. The authors speculate that these limited findings may be due in part to the Club participation itself acting as a form of “booster” to youth. Even without a particular prevention program, joining Club activities in general may contribute to youth’s ability to refuse drugs and alcohol.

- **Both the prevention classes and the targeted outreach models of delinquency prevention show evidence of reducing youth’s participation in delinquent behaviors.** As mentioned above, Clubs have implemented two forms of delinquency prevention. One model—targeted outreach—recruits at-risk youth and engages them in general Club activities. The second model—prevention classes—provides discrete classes such as SMART Moves to Club youth, regardless of their risk characteristics. Studies of both of these models included surveys that asked youth about their participation in various delinquent behaviors, such as alcohol, cigarette and drug use. One of the targeted outreach studies also asked about delinquent behaviors related to school and to the justice system. The studies suggest positive outcomes for youth who participated. For example, youth in the 1991 study of SMART Moves reported less alcohol, marijuana and cigarette use than their peers in the comparison group. Another study found that public housing areas with a Club that offered SMART Moves had a significantly lower presence of crack cocaine and significantly lower rates of drug activity than areas without SMART Moves.³

A 2002 study of GPTTO and GITTO also found several positive behavioral outcomes for targeted youth. Relative to comparison groups, the GPTTO youth showed a decrease in marijuana usage, were less likely to cut class, were more likely

to seek an adult for help with homework and increased their involvement in after-school activities. GITTO youth showed a decrease in cutting class and skipping school, spent more time on homework and improved their family relationships. More frequent participation was associated with more positive outcomes for youth (such as fewer gang-related behaviors and less contact with the justice system).

Although these findings suggest that delinquency prevention efforts have positively affected youth’s behaviors, there are areas where the programs have shown little to no effects. For example, a 1987 study of SMART Moves found no significant difference between youth who participated in the program and comparison youth in terms of alcohol, cigarette or other drug use. Similarly, a 1997 study found no significant differences in terms of alcohol or marijuana use. The 2002 study of GPTTO and GITTO, which, as noted above, found several positive outcomes, did not find any differences in participants’ likelihood of joining or leaving a gang.

Education and Technology Initiatives

In the 1990s funders and policymakers began to devote more attention to strategies involving after-school hours and after-school programs as a means to achieve the academic gains that schools were struggling to realize (Halperin 2004). Homework help had been a core area for Boys & Girls Clubs for years. However, during this decade, programs at the Clubs aimed more specifically at creating positive and fun learning environments for homework and academic learning. Also, Clubs developed opportunities for positive experiences with technology. These activities became more popular in tandem with the growing interest in the role of after-school programs in addressing the achievement gap.

Project Learn and the Educational Enhancement Project (the pilot program on which Project Learn is based) are examples of two such approaches that grew from this trend; they were adopted by Clubs around the country and evaluated during the late 1990s. The launch of Operation Connect and NetSmartz represented the Clubs’ and the nation’s growing interest in closing the digital divide; closely linked to the implementation of other academic

programs—in particular for teens, who might use computers for homework, research and projects—these technology programs were implemented and evaluated in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Focusing more attention on children’s academic needs and strengths in the after-school hours, working more closely with schools and bringing in technology as a tool have changed the way that program staff, Club members and communities view the Clubs. Taken together, the studies of Educational Initiatives show positive increases on several indicators of children’s academic performance and behavior, and also show increased access, use and knowledge related to computers, technology and Internet safety.

How Successful Were Clubs at Promoting Academic Benefits?

The **Educational Enhancement Project (EEP)** was a pilot program geared toward increasing educational opportunities at the Clubs. Activities included weekly discussions between Club members and adults at the Clubs, creative writing assignments, leisure reading, homework completion, helping others with homework, and skill-building projects and games. A broad array of strategies were utilized, but the program brought an intentional focus to educational activities taking place at the Clubs. Incentives such as field trips, computer time and school supplies were also offered, and parents were encouraged to be involved with their children in these activities.

After the pilot phase, the EEP was slightly revised and renamed **Project Learn**. A key goal of Project Learn is to enable Clubs to “bridge knowledge and skill gaps, particularly for at-risk youth, by integrating fun, educational activities throughout Club programs” (Hildreth and Smith 2003). This includes, but extends beyond, time for homework and homework help. The vision also includes incentives for participation, involvement of parents and relationships with schools. Project Learn incorporates the high-yield learning activities that were part of the EEP pilot: leisure reading, writing, discussions with knowledgeable adults, helping others, and games that sharpen cognitive skills.

- **Early adolescents involved in EEP increased their enjoyment of and engagement in a variety of academic domains, as well as their achievement.** A national study⁴ of this initiative tracked children 30 months after the EEP program began. In several areas, EEP youth showed more improvement than Club members who did not participate in EEP programs as well as other youth organization participants. EEP participants reported greater engagement and enjoyment in reading, verbal skills, writing and tutoring, and enjoyment of geography. Overall averages on grades, reading, spelling, history, science and social studies scores, as well as attendance, also favored the EEP youth.

Interestingly, in a few areas, Club members (those who participated in EEP and those who did not) performed similarly and better than the comparison group (e.g., the youth attending other organizations), suggesting that some aspects of the Club program without EEP may be helping children in their educational attainment: Specifically, data from teacher reports indicated more positive reading, writing and games skills and better overall school performance and interest in class material for Club members (both those in the EEP program and those not) compared with the comparison group of youth. Club youth also had better grades in math than the comparison youth.

As the authors note, however, the positive benefits may be biased by self-selection. Club members who stayed in the program and thus were included in the follow-up assessment, may be those most likely to have gained from the program.

Process outcomes were included in a final report, but were not noted in the published article: Over time, EEP activities became increasingly integrated into the overall Boys & Girls Clubs program (rather than just delegated to the education core area or one room in the Club). For example, EEP leaders began to use other activities to integrate learning opportunities, such as in cooking, where youth can practice reading and writing recipes.

- **Project Learn helped children complete their homework and increased their involvement with book discussions and other discussions with adults.** One of the three Project Learn evaluations used a pre- and post-test survey design

indicating change over time in the following areas: More children were involved in Kidzlit (a literacy program designed for implementation in the after-school hours), a slightly higher percentage of children finished their homework,⁵ and discussions about books increased as did other discussions with adults.

- **Homework help was the most fully and consistently implemented component of Project Learn.** All three studies of Project Learn had similar conclusions in regard to implementation issues: Homework help was the most consistently implemented program component, possibly because it is the most concrete aspect of Project Learn and is easiest to sell to funders and school collaborators. In fact, the evaluators suggest that Project Learn has helped to build or solidify relationships with schools and teachers because it has given teachers a concrete idea of how Clubs can help the children. Most Clubs also implemented the incentive piece of the Project Learn program.

How Successful Were Clubs at Providing Access to Technology and Helping Participants to Develop Skills and Stay Safe on the Internet?

Operation Connect, BGCA's technology initiative, was developed as the result of a public/private partnership formed among BGCA, Microsoft Corporation and basketball star Shaquille O'Neal in 1999. The goal of Operation Connect is to implement technology centers at Clubs and provide skilled staff to increase access to computers and the Internet for youth who might not otherwise have it. To reach this goal, Clubs received computers with Microsoft NT operating system software, Internet access, laser printers, digital video cameras, scanners, software and technical support and training.

Clubs took different approaches to implementing Operation Connect—and these approaches tended to change over time—but they typically consisted of one or more of the following strategies:

- An open lab, characterized by limited structure and programming;
- A programmatic strategy, with instruction and programming on specific computer skills and software;

- A project strategy, with projects or ideas driven by the youth or staff (e.g., designing webpages, newspapers or magazines);
- An integrated strategy, incorporating technology into all aspects of Clubs programming (e.g., sports teams might use technology for digital team photos, cooking clubs to search for recipes, etc.); and
- A combined strategy, entailing a mixture of these approaches.

NetSmartz was introduced to Clubs in 2002. This software program was developed in response to the growing number of youth who have access to the Internet (at Boys & Girls Clubs and elsewhere) and was designed to “educate Club members and staff about how to enjoy the benefits of the Internet while avoiding potential dangers” (Branch 2002). Boys & Girls Clubs of America worked with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children to create the program. Its goal is to support young people's sense of competence and safety on the Internet, create a fun and interactive learning environment and encourage youth to tell a trusted adult when they encounter something online that makes them uncomfortable.

- **Operation Connect was successful at providing increased access to computers and the Internet for many youth who would not otherwise have had such access; youth also increased their levels of computer use and technology skills and began to use the computers for homework.** At the time of the evaluation of the Operation Connect pilot program, data collected from site visit interviews and usage reports found 13 of the 14 pilot Clubs located across the country were operational with an average daily attendance of 50 youth; the technology centers were open for 30 to 40 hours per week. Access was provided equally to girls and boys, as well as for all age groups. Within the first pilot year, the use of technology was beginning to be integral to the Clubs' other educational programs.

A final report on Operation Connect followed ten Clubs over three years of implementation (2000 to 2003) and included surveys of members gathered over this period, along with data on usage by age and gender. The findings from the report suggest that the technology centers

provided by the Clubs allowed access to computers and the Internet for Club youngsters, many of whom could not access computers or the Internet from home. Computer literacy scores increased from Year Two to Year Three, particularly in basic computer operation and file management. Computer use overall also increased over the three years of the study. Schoolwork, games and searching the Internet were the most popular activities. About 22 percent of Club members were frequent users (three or more hours per week) and they generally had more positive outcomes (e.g., higher computer literacy scores) and were more likely to use the computers at the Clubs to do schoolwork, to learn more about computers or to learn about college. Among frequent users, boys outnumbered girls, nearly two to one. The percentage of youth reporting that using computers at the Clubs made them think about a job in technology also increased over time. Fewer youth over time reported not wanting to work with computers or thought there was little need for computers in most jobs.

From a Club perspective, staff and parents reported that the increase in technology made the Club a more “fun” place to be and, in Clubs with strong technology centers, more members were being drawn in. Staff also felt there was increased Club attendance because of the new labs. The presence of technology was also reported to increase community members’ positive perception of the Clubs as providing activities beyond sports and recreation.

- The evaluation of NetSmartz revealed children’s baseline lack of knowledge about Internet safety and showed an increase over time in their knowledge of how to stay safe, behave conscientiously and communicate with responsible adults when needed.** The NetSmartz study⁶ illustrated that teens routinely practice high-risk behaviors online. At pre-test, they didn’t appear to understand how such behaviors could put them at risk. Their Internet safety awareness was disturbingly low (5.2 for younger and 5.7 out of 7 for older youth) but awareness increased over the six-week study period (to 6.0 for younger and 6.3 for older youth). For youth 12 and under, one area in particular that changed was their realization that it was not safe to meet someone in

person who they had met online or tell an online acquaintance their real name. For teens, Internet safety awareness increased the most in terms of understanding the dangers of meeting someone in person after communicating online, posting a picture online, being rude, or telling someone online where they go to school. In addition to increases in their awareness, the study showed an increase in the number of youth who reported that they would talk to an adult about Internet safety (e.g., talk to an adult if something on the Internet made them uncomfortable).

Interestingly, the Operation Connect evaluation also examined Internet safety scores, but no increases were found. Baseline and follow-up Internet safety scores for youth from the Operation Connect Clubs were similar to the NetSmartz program baseline findings (between 5 and 6 out of 7), but the scores did not change at the Clubs that hosted Operation Connect. The NetSmartz program showed an increase from about 5 to about 6, indicating that more targeted attention to Internet safety may be important before change can be seen.

Job Readiness

The Boys & Girls Club national office has implemented two job preparation programs that are included in this review.

Broader Horizons, a component of the Productive Futures Career Exploration Program, was designed to help current Club members understand their job-related skills, develop career interests and learn about a variety of occupations through field trips (FERA 1989). The program takes a broad approach to career development, working with youth in their early teen years.

Career Prep, introduced to Clubs a decade after Broader Horizons, was a four-year pilot program for older youth designed to provide them with job-related skills, job placement and supports to retain their employment for at least 90 days. In its first two years, program staff targeted youth with very specific risk characteristics;⁷ in the last two years, they expanded the program to include youth without these risk factors. The program was also part of a broader effort (the TEENS supreme initiative)

to increase teen membership and retention by attracting new members and providing them with age-relevant programming and skills. The project's funders—the U.S. Department of Labor and the U.S. Department of Justice—further saw the program as a way to provide job-related skills to teens, particularly adjudicated and out-of school youth who might be unfamiliar with the Club but could receive broader benefits through Club participation.

How Successful Were Clubs at Promoting Job Readiness?

- **The Broader Horizons program reached and retained a large number of youth in their early teen years; youth reported that the program helped them set career goals and changed some of their attitudes about school.** The Broader Horizons program evaluation involved 338 Club members across three Michigan Clubs, with 16 dropouts recorded across the involved sites over the period of nine months monitored by the evaluation. The study did not quantitatively measure how many of these members were new to the Club or came there as a result of the program, but staff thought that the program motivated youth to increase their participation in other Club programs.

Although the study did not use a pre-/post-test design, a one-time survey administered to 100 Club members measured a handful of perceptions about the program. About half (47%) of surveyed youth agreed that the program helped them develop their talents and skills, while 87 percent indicated that the program taught them something about setting career goals. However, 45 percent reported that their career plans did not change as a result of participating in the program. In addition, youth interviewees, asked to reflect on how the program had helped them, reported that their attitudes toward school had changed as a result of their involvement in the program. Some were interested in going to college, but others realized that there were also possibilities open to them if they decided not to continue on to college. Almost all interviewed youth reported that the program helped improve their self-esteem.

Staff from two Clubs further felt that the program created cohesive peer groups—youth met other youth through their participation and developed friendships that lasted beyond the program.

- **Career Prep achieved several recruitment, retention and job-related goals over the four years of its implementation.** The Career Prep program was able to serve many minorities (69 percent were African American or Hispanic in the last two years of the project) and youth with targeted risk characteristics, particularly in earlier years of the program when risk status was stressed as a criterion for involvement. For example, in Year Two, 27 percent of participants were either out of school or attending alternative schools and 18 percent were juvenile offenders.

In addition, Clubs enrolled nearly 14,000 participants in Career Prep over the four years of the studies, ranging from an average Club enrollment of 137 in Year One to 60 in Year Four. Between two thirds (in Year One) and three quarters (in Year Four) of the youth enrolled completed the pre-employment training.

In assessing employment, the study found that an average of 45 percent of participants in Year One and 53 percent in Year Four were placed in jobs. Additionally, although most employed participants worked 20 or fewer hours per week, a substantial percentage (39 percent in Year Four) worked 31 to 40 hours per week. In Year Four, 72 percent of employed participants received wages above minimum wage.

Summary

As noted in the introduction to the report, the methodologies of the studies limit the conclusions that can firmly be drawn; however, the studies reviewed suggest that positive benefits accrue from the Clubs' efforts to prevent delinquency, support academic achievement and promote job readiness, as well as from the overall supports Clubs provide to members. Although several studies revealed that the programs did not meet all of their intended goals over the study periods, it is important to note that several programs were relatively young when they were evaluated. As programs mature and become more firmly established, the likelihood of finding positive outcomes is increased. Of note, two studies

found that youth who belonged to Clubs—regardless of whether they participated in the particular program being evaluated—demonstrated positive outcomes on several dimensions compared to youth who did not belong to a Club. These findings suggest that exposure to the broader aspects of Club programming and relationships with staff, rather than any specific activity or discrete program, may be sufficient to produce some of the outcomes of interest.

In many ways, Boys & Girls Clubs emerge from this review as a prime setting for success in all these areas. Clubs have the infrastructure necessary to promote positive developmental experiences that may help young people avoid risky behaviors and make more healthful choices. For youth who are not fully engaged in school, for example, Clubs can provide a safe place and positive relationships to deter them from engaging in delinquent behaviors and encourage them to set aside time to finish homework and to learn in creative ways. Clubs also have developed partnerships with families, schools and community agencies to aid in delinquency prevention and the promotion of job readiness and academic achievement. And the Clubs' locations—typically in the heart of impoverished areas—give them access to children who may not otherwise have constructive places to go after school, helping Clubs to achieve the outreach and recruitment goals established for these programs. These topics are explored in more depth in the next chapter.

Implementation Lessons

Chapter 3



Consistent and strong implementation lessons emerged across the evaluations of discrete programs reviewed in Chapter Two. These lessons suggest commonalities across Clubs that speak to the larger picture of how they serve their participants beyond simply providing discrete program components. These include the strategies implemented by the Clubs to reach, retain and serve at-risk youth.

Primary among the implementation strategies revealed across the majority of the studies was the Club's emphasis on providing and maintaining positive and caring adult-youth relationships, no matter what the curriculum of interest was. Successful strategies for recruiting and retaining youth were also themes that traversed the study findings. In addition to these more direct, programmatic strategies, the organizational supports Clubs had in place—such as mechanisms for recruitment and retention of quality staff, relationships with institutions, and how those relationships are created and maintained—emerged in a number of studies as critical to Club success, particularly in those where recruitment was an important goal. Each of these topics and the specific strategies Clubs used are discussed in this chapter.

Programmatic Strategies

Programmatic strategies refer to those efforts Clubs took to directly improve services to youth, such as particular outreach strategies and increasing their opportunities for interacting with youth. Later in this chapter we discuss organizational supports, which refer to strategies undertaken by Clubs to improve their organizational structures and long-term success.

Positive and Caring Adult-Youth Relationships

Providing youth with adult support is a critical component of youth development and a central focus in the Club's mission. Among other things, supportive adult staff can provide youth with guidance at key moments and ensure that they are participating in the most useful Club programming. Across the

studies reviewed for this report, the majority of Club and program participants reported high levels of adult support and individual attention from staff. And, among those studies that explored associations between implementation and outcomes, the caring relationships that developed between youth and staff were key to the success of the program—*they were why the youth came and why they stayed in the program.*

The following two strategies are highlighted as important in promoting adult support in the Clubs:

- **Sufficient time for working one-on-one with youth.** This proved to be an essential component of successful programs. In *Broader Horizons*, several youth needed individualized attention to ensure that they understood and completed the exercises. In *Career Prep*, the increased focus on high-risk youth in the second year of the program went hand-in-hand with more individualized attention to youth's needs; case management was made an integral part of the program after the first year, which enabled staff to spend more one-on-one time with youth, to focus on skill areas needing improvement and to get to know youth in ways that encouraged their continued participation. In the *GPTTO/GITTO* programs, *Project Learn*, and the educational enhancement program, staff regularly interacted with and questioned youth about their school progress, grades and educational activities—letting them know that they were interested in the child's academic development. The *Teen Initiative* study also highlighted the importance of the staff's connections to youth, their high expectations and awareness of the teens' interest, needs and goals.
- **Hiring additional staff devoted to these programs.** This is another strategy Clubs used to ensure that all youth receive individualized attention. For example, the *Teen Initiative* Clubs reported hiring additional staff devoted specifically to serving teens; more than 80 percent of youth in this study reported that at least one Club staff person served as a confidant and source of support;

about 75 percent reported that at least one of them knew their interests and goals. In the gang prevention study, almost all youth reported that they received support and guidance from at least one Club staff member; more than half reported that they received support from two or more staff.

Successful Recruitment of Youth

Several of the programs reviewed in this report defined recruitment of youth—particularly high-risk youth—as a primary goal. The programs used various methods to reach these youth, but in the end found that three strategies were most effective:

- **Street outreach.** This was among the most successful source of recruitment for the delinquency prevention programs. In the Teen Initiative, as well as in some GPTTO sites, direct outreach to youth was the primary means of recruitment. Staff of the Teen Initiative noted that direct outreach was their most successful strategy, in part because it allowed them to reach teens in nontraditional places, like game rooms and housing developments, and to talk to teens “on their level.” Several Clubs reported that outreach was most successful when they hired members of the local community with whom families and youth felt comfortable.
- **Referrals from schools and families.** Referrals were also an important source of outreach for the delinquency prevention project.
- **Partnerships with community agencies.** Partnerships were also key to recruitment for the Teen Initiative and Career Prep programs, both of which targeted higher-risk and harder-to-reach teens. The most productive partnerships included those with schools and juvenile justice agencies.

Retention of Youth Over Time

Because the Clubs are voluntary centers, creating programs that youth find interesting and enjoyable is a crucial step in ensuring that they are involved often and long enough to receive potential benefits. The reviewed programs were no exception. Staff developed several strategies to ensure that youth stayed involved:

- **Tailoring the program to the interests, needs and schedules of youth.** In efforts to retain youth, Career Prep staff offered the program at different times of the day and week. They also offered it at different levels of intensity so that youth could choose to come for long meetings over a short period of time or for shorter meetings stretched over a longer period of time.

High-risk youth brought several issues to the program, including significant emotional and personal needs, behavioral problems, poor academic and learning skills, and negative attitudes about the traditional job market. These issues compelled Career Prep staff to cover relevant topics in their workshops, and in the program’s second year, to incorporate more career exploration, goal-setting activities and educational guidance.

The Teen Initiative study and gang prevention studies also indicated that the appeal of the program for youth was based on the ability of the Clubs to create and adapt programming to meet their needs and interests.

- **Creating “fun” activities to hold youth’s attention.** Making activities fun is important across all Club programs, but it is particularly important when working with high-risk youth or topics that aren’t traditionally “fun”—like job skills or other educational programs. The only way to retain youth in a program that isn’t mandatory and to sustain their active participation is to make it enjoyable for them. For example, youth had difficulty understanding and using some of the materials in the job preparation programs, and staff felt that pencil-and-paper activities were not the best way to achieve program goals. Staff sensed that the programs could benefit from integrating more “fun” into their activities. This was especially true in Career Prep, in which high-risk youth were turned off by the school-like atmosphere of the program and needed more hands-on activities to keep them engaged. To get around this problem, staff continued to develop interesting activities, games and role-plays over the four years of the program. These revisions probably contributed to improvements in training completion rates every successive year.

- **Providing rewards and incentives.** This was a useful strategy for retaining youth who are more difficult to involve in Club activities. Broader Horizons gave participating youth T-shirts and held awards ceremonies. Some Career Prep specialists used cash incentives to keep youth in the program. In some programs (e.g., Career Prep and some Clubs involved in the Teen Initiative) adjudicated youth were required to continue in the program as part of their sentence, which also helped with retention. Project Learn, the Educational Enhancement Project, Operation Connect and NetSmartz all included incentives in their programs.

Organizational Supports

In addition to revealing the usefulness of the implementation strategies discussed above, the findings in these evaluations suggest that certain foundations or organizational supports need to be in place to make these strategies and programs successful. In particular, retaining qualified staff and forging partnerships with local organizations appear to be key to successful programming. Without qualified staff and strong partnerships, it is difficult to implement strong adult-youth relations and successful recruitment and retention of youth.

Recruitment and Retention of Qualified Staff

Although recruiting new youth participants was a primary goal of many programs reviewed here, recruiting and retaining quality staff also proved to be an important element of successful programming. Staff turnover was particularly troublesome for many of the programs, as high levels of staff turnover often diminished a Club's capacity to provide quality programming and forge lasting relationships with youth. Turnover not only harms gains made in understanding how best to run programs but also relationships with youth, other staff and outside agencies. For instance, youth from Teen Initiative Clubs with the most extensive turnover in key staff positions reported the lowest levels of adult support. The following are some of the strategies Clubs used to hire and retain high-quality staff:

- **Recruiting staff skilled for specific programs,** such as technology or case management. The implementation of new programming—beyond

the usual Club offerings—often required skills particular to the specific goals of the program. For example, the implementation of academic components in Career Prep and Broader Horizons, the Educational Enhancement Project and Project Learn meant that Clubs had to require a higher level of skills in Club staff. Similarly, the technology programs found that the prior experience of tech-savvy staff working with youth were key to success.

- **Promoting personnel from within the Club** to positions in new Club programs was one strategy used to ensure high quality and experienced staff. In later years of the Career Prep program, staff were more likely to be hired from within the Club and to have had experience working with high-risk youth.
- **Ensuring the buy-in of staff to any new programming** from the very beginning. For instance, Clubs experienced initial staff turnover during the implementation of Project Learn, as some staff resisted the shift in Club focus and philosophy. Upon hiring new staff, Clubs discussed the goals and intentions of the educational strategies and sought buy-in from prospective employees.
- **Providing sufficient staff training** to meet the demands of changes in Club programming. More training was helpful, particularly when implementing discrete programs that involved more high-level skills or experiences, such as the educational and technology programs. For example, in Broader Horizons, staff wanted to provide youth with better information on different kinds of jobs and their requirements, and needed specific training to obtain this knowledge.

Club Relationships with Partner/Community Organizations

All Clubs struggled to build and maintain community partnerships with agencies such as schools, probation and police officers and other community-based providers. Although all Clubs found it challenging to build and maintain such partnerships, when successful, those relationships provided significant benefits. Among other things, these relationships facilitated the referral of youth and made it easier to obtain

academic information about the youth from schools. Schools were the number-one referral source for Career Prep and several of the agencies implementing GPTTO and the Teen Initiative. Staff of the Teen Initiative used schools to post fliers and talk to counselors as a means of recruiting new youth.

But community partnerships provided additional benefits to Clubs beyond just recruitment. Clubs that had strong ties to community agencies were able to expand the opportunities for their youth. For example, one Club offered youth a leadership course led by staff from a local U.S. Army post. At another Club, a local ad agency offered a course in which youth designed and produced an anti-gang ad campaign. Broader Horizons and Career Prep also relied on the experience and expertise of professionals in the community to host field trips and describe their jobs (in Broader Horizons) or, in a few Career Prep programs, to lead training sessions. Strong community partnerships also enabled Career Prep staff to more easily find employment for program graduates.

Clubs face several challenges in developing and maintaining successful partnerships with community agencies. One of the major problems is the frequency of staff turnover, both at Clubs and in partner agencies. When staff from either agency leave, relationships must be rebuilt and information must be shared all over again. Even if employee retention is high, the staff at community and youth-serving organizations often have many demands, making it difficult to devote the time and resources necessary to forging effective partnerships. In light of the difficulty of establishing and maintaining relationships, some Clubs have used the following strategies, including:

- **Emphasizing the value of the program.** If organizations do not understand the importance of a BGCA program—both to youth and the community—they are less likely to engage in a serious partnership. For example, a study of Project Learn Club sites located in schools found that teachers at the school assumed the Club was mostly a child-care and recreation organization and, as a result, were hesitant to share their space and resources. In cases where Club staff clarified the purpose of the program, particularly its educational components, relationships with schools were stronger. Similarly, Career Prep staff
- found that many employers were hesitant to offer employment to the high-risk youth served by the program. To help employers understand the value of the program, its training and the qualities youth could bring to the job, Career Prep staff called employers directly and set up appointments with them to make formal presentations. Several staff of the delinquency prevention programs also made presentations to partner agency staff about the Club's mission and programs. Since there was often high staff turnover at partner agencies, whose staff often had many responsibilities, these presentations were most successful when done frequently and regularly (e.g., biannually).
- **Focusing on key relationships.** Given the limited time available to both Club and partner agency staff, some Clubs have found that it is most useful to focus limited staff time and resources on developing relationships with a few key agencies, rather than spreading staff too thin in reaching out to multiple agencies. Staff at one gang prevention program indicated that they initially spent a year reaching out to several organizations, with little success. In the second year, they focused their efforts on fewer agencies and as a result developed a very strong partnership with at least one.
 - **Devoting staff time to developing and maintaining relationships.** When possible, devoting staff time specifically to community partnerships is often the most successful strategy. For example, most of the Clubs in the delinquency prevention studies didn't have a staff member who was specifically responsible for tending to community relationships, and it was difficult for staff to manage such relationships on top of other responsibilities and time constraints. However, certain sites were granted extra funding with the additional goal, among others, of partnering with other agencies. Of all the delinquency prevention sites, those sites with extra funding and resources had the most notable successes in terms of partnering.
 - **Offering benefits to the partner agency.** When developing partnerships with community organizations, it is important to remember that these relationships can also benefit the partner agency as well as the Club. In one case, a probation officer took advantage of his partnership with a Club

to use their space to host an alternative high school during the day.

- **Formalizing aspects of the relationship.** Though many arrangements involved simply bringing in partner staff as guest speakers, occasionally inquiring with partner staff about youth recruitment and sharing in the resources of their agencies, these partnerships may be most lasting when they involved ongoing, regular collaboration. For example, some Teen Initiative and Career Prep sites had partnerships with Departments of Probation so that teens could fulfill their community-service requirement through participation in Club activities. In a different strategy, one of the delinquency prevention programs employed teachers as after-school instructors in order to build an immediate relationship between Clubs and schools.

Summary

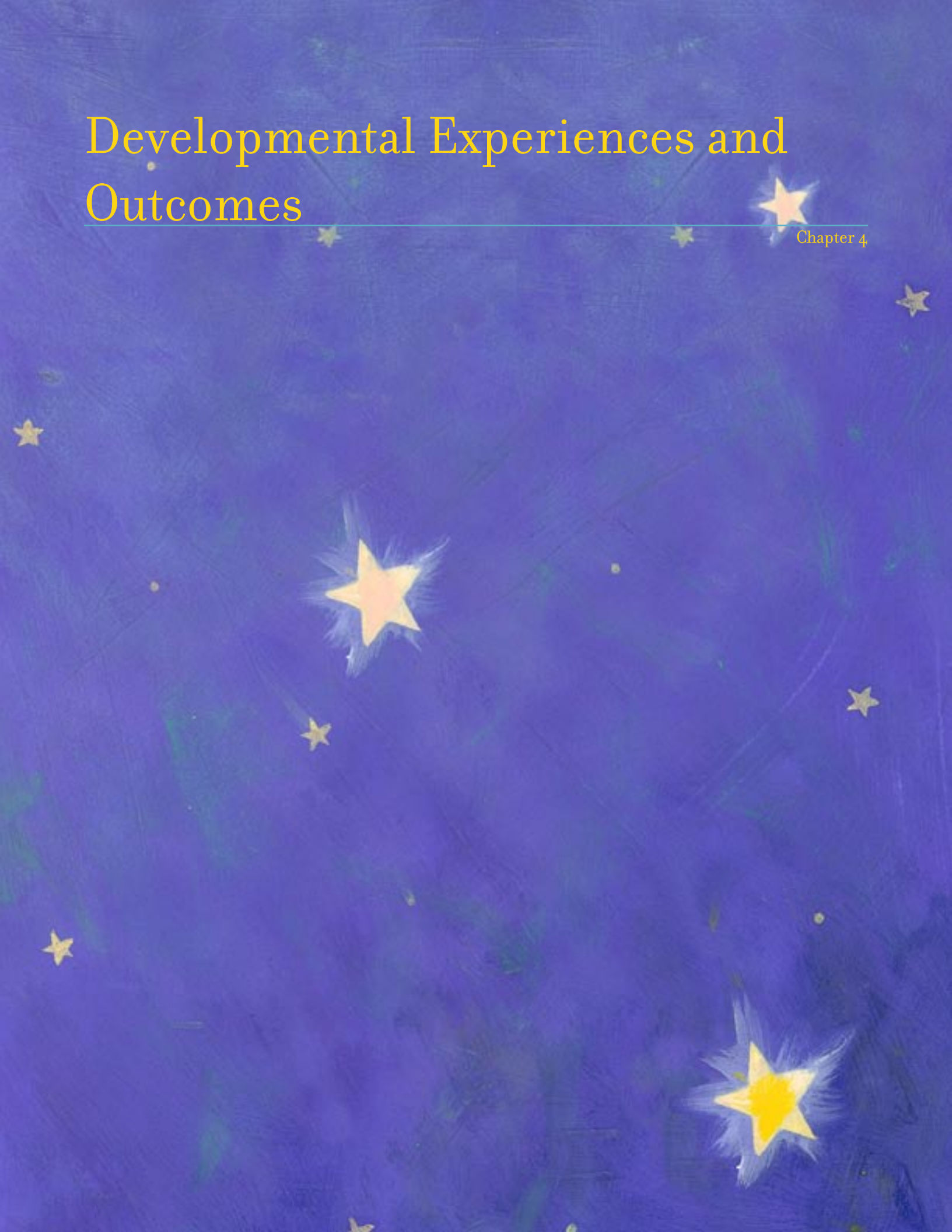
Across the studies, the findings suggest that certain Club practices and characteristics were most likely to have led to successful implementation and outcomes. These include caring, qualified staff and creativity and planning on the part of the staff to implement the program successfully. The reports also described the vibrant and fun ways that the programs were implemented in the Clubs as crucial for attracting and involving youth.

Across all the studies, it was a challenge to get the right staff and provide the right kind of training needed to offer solid educational, career-oriented or delinquency prevention programs as opposed to recreational programs, although Clubs did develop strategies to provide the training and support that were needed. Regardless of the staff's skill level, children tended to participate in activities when they developed strong relationships with individual personnel and received attention from them.

The more global strategies or approaches that Clubs take to effectively implement discrete programs may be linked with other positive experiences for youth—beyond those previously explored in the evaluations of the programs. These are discussed in the next chapter and revisited in the conclusion of this report.

Developmental Experiences and Outcomes

Chapter 4



The vast majority of the studies of Clubs completed to date have provided little, if any, information on the broad developmental outcomes that are part of the mission of BGCA. Instead, the studies have focused on the specific outcomes targeted by the discrete programs being evaluated, such as job readiness, delinquent behaviors and academic achievement. And, while several studies of the Clubs' implementation of these discrete programs have shown outcomes in these specific areas, the real benefits that they provide likely go beyond helping children complete their homework, gain technology skills or stay out of trouble. Clubs are intended to be safe places where kids can learn and grow, develop relationships with caring adults, be exposed to new opportunities, have life-enhancing and character-building experiences and feel a sense of hope.

The findings suggested by the studies reviewed for this report allude to broader developmental effects of being involved in Clubs, in particular, the strong relationships and ties to Club adults and the importance of these staff in affecting other aspects of children's lives. Broader outcomes of Club involvement, however, have rarely been explored. Indeed, we found only three studies that have taken a broad-based approach to understanding how Clubs might affect their participants' life trajectories, and even these studies leave many unanswered questions.

In this section, we review these three studies, which broadly examine the role Clubs play in the lives of the children who participate. Two "alumni studies" used random-digit dial techniques to screen for past BGCA membership; they asked participants about the impact they felt their Club experiences had on various aspects of their lives. Alumni were also asked about when they joined and left the Clubs, how often they participated and in what activities. The alumni studies were completed in 1985 and again in 1999.⁸ A third study (Kotloff, Wahhab and Arbretton 1996) included a one-time survey of Club members from five large urban Clubs across the nation to learn about their broad developmental experiences and the extent to which Club practices

and activities provided those experiences for participants.⁹ Four weeks of attendance data were also gathered, including the types of activities in which Club members participated.

Participation

The 1985 alumni report indicates that most respondents had joined around the age of 10 and stopped going to the Clubs at about age 14 (54 percent left by age 14; 67 percent by the age of 15). The average length of membership was 4.3 years. The 1999 alumni report revealed the same average age for joining the Club, but indicated a later age of last participating (15.4 compared to 14.3), suggesting that members are participating longer and a little further into their teens, perhaps in response to intentional efforts to retain adolescents.

For most respondents in the 1985 study, the Clubs represented the primary available resource in the after-school hours: Almost three quarters of the respondents felt that when they were involved in the Clubs there were either not very many (59%) or no (17%) other organized activities for boys to engage in where they grew up.

In this same study, when former members were asked about their most memorable activities using an open-ended format, the most frequent responses were organized team sports (79%); recreation, exercise, games (63%); swimming lessons (30%); and arts, crafts and shop (26%). The 1999 study asked about attendance in specific activities and revealed a similar pattern of activity involvement: Over three quarters of the respondents recalled participating in recreation, organized sports and social activities. Reflecting efforts in the 1990s to provide career development and educational support, a quarter of the youth recalled involvement in career development; a third recalled involvement with tutoring and/or help with homework.

The Kotloff et al. (1996) study paints a similar picture. According to attendance data gathered over a four-week period, youth typically came to the

Clubs two to three times a week, stayed for almost three hours and were involved in a range of activities, including sports, social recreation, education, the arts, leadership and service. In line with reports by alumni, the most popular types of activities in all sites were sports/physical education and social recreation, with half to three quarters of youth participating over a four-week period. Education and skill-building were the next most popular, drawing between 17 percent and one third of the youth across the five Clubs. Leadership and community service reached between 5 and 10 percent of the youth. The youth programs included both structured activities across the Clubs' core areas along with time for more informal interactions between staff and peers: between 80 percent and 100 percent of the youth reported spending time "hanging out with friends" over the previous four weeks, higher than what was reported in other youth-serving organizations (Gambone and Arbreton 1997). Similar to the alumni study, for a majority of youth involved in the Clubs (between 60 percent and 95 percent across the five Clubs), this was their only after-school activity.

Experiences and Outcomes

In the alumni studies, adults were asked to think back on their participation in the Clubs, the activities in which they were involved, their relationships with staff and how the Club had affected them. The 1996 Kotloff study surveyed youth ages 10 to 18 in five Clubhouses in five different cities; the surveys asked the youth questions about why they went to the Clubs and measured their reported developmental experiences while there. Survey responses across the three studies support similar conclusions:

- **Club members had positive relationships with staff.** Positive adult-youth relationships were rated as one of the most important reasons why youth come to the Clubs, along with getting help from staff and because they can have fun (Kotloff et al. 1996). In addition 73 percent of Club members indicated there was at least one adult at the Club who provided positive support in their lives. In the alumni studies, 37 percent of those surveyed in 1985 and 48 percent in 1999 indicated they remembered a particular staff member "as having been important to their life." The alumni often said the adult staff member had been
- important in their lives because they provided a role model or father figure for them. They also mentioned that the staff person had helped them learn skills (like sports), had taught them right from wrong, and had been there for them as an emotional support.
- **Getting along with others was a primary experience at the Clubs.** When asked (with an open-ended question) what was the most important way in which involvement had affected their life, by far the most frequent responses (58%) in the 1985 alumni study involved learning how to interact socially. In addition, 82 percent of respondents reported making good friends among other boys after they joined the organization. And, 67 percent reported that being in the Club was a big help in learning how to get along with people of other races, religions and backgrounds.
- **Youth found the Clubs a safe place to be.** Almost two thirds (63%) of the youth surveyed in the Kotloff study reported that their Clubs provided safe places. And, as noted earlier, the Club was reported to be one of the main activities available in the after-school hours.
- **Youth experienced opportunities for leadership roles and community service.** Over half of the alumni reported that being in the Club was a big help in learning how to be a leader. Of the youth surveyed in the Kotloff study, just over three quarters reported having had various opportunities to participate in leadership roles at the Club over the previous year. Just under a quarter of the youth had participated in community service activities during that period.
- **Youth felt a sense of belonging to their Club.** Over half of the youth surveyed (59%) felt a sense of belonging to the Club, that they mattered and that what they had to say was listened to at the Club.
- **Youth felt they had opportunities to engage in challenging and interesting activities.** Sixty percent of the youth surveyed reported the activities were new and different from other experiences they had and provided interesting opportunities that they may not have had before.

Youth experienced opportunities for decision-making. Fifty-nine percent of the surveyed youth reported some way in which they were involved in the decision-making of the Club, by helping to establish rules, make choices about activities or provide input on plans for activities.

Alumni reported a range of other positive outcomes. Respondents were asked whether their experiences in the Club had a positive, negative or not much effect on several aspects of life. Over half of the respondents felt the Clubs had helped them in a diverse array of areas, from school life (59%), to family life (60%), to work life (64%), to being able to avoid difficulty with the law (74%), to their health and fitness (83%) and ability to work well with others (85%). Most of these outcome areas were not tapped by the evaluations of discrete programs reviewed in Chapter 2.

Correlates of Positive Experiences and Outcomes

The studies examined how a number of factors were related to the experiences reported by the alumni and the current Club members.

- Tenure at the Clubs was important.** Across all three studies, the respondents' tenure at the Club was a significant factor in determining the extent to which they had positive experiences (1996; 1997) or felt the Club had helped them in any way (1985; 1999). For example, among those alumni interviewed in 1985 who had participated five or more years at the Club, 60 percent suggested that the relationships they formed with staff were critical in helping them succeed later in life and the extent to which they were able to stay out of trouble, compared with 34 percent of those who had participated three to four years and 17 percent of those participating one to two years. Similarly, the Kotloff et al. (1996) study found that youth whose tenures at the Clubs were longer reported higher levels of developmental experiences in all seven areas examined by the study (adult support, sense of belonging, sense of safety, opportunities for input and decision-making, leadership, engaging in interesting and challenging activities, and community service).
- Clubs placed an emphasis on adult-youth relationships.** There are high expectations for staff to get to know the youth, to follow up on how they are doing at home and at school and to be available to talk informally with youth during Club hours. Staff share information about individual youth in meetings to help the team problem-solve and work effectively with the children. Youth are routinely provided time for informal interactions with staff. All of these practices help staff develop positive relationships with youth, who report feeling very supported by Club personnel. In 1985, alumni who reported greater familiarity with staff (i.e., getting to know adult staff "very well" as opposed to "somewhat well" or "not too well") were more likely to report receiving several benefits from club attendance, including positive effects on school and family life.
- The Clubs provided a variety of activities.** Clubs provided both informal and formal mechanisms for leadership roles, through such programs as Keystone and Torch Club (leadership programs for older and younger teens), through entrepreneurial programs and through regular opportunities to serve as team leaders, referees and assistant coaches. Clubs also provide a wide range of informal and formal activities, classes and structured and unstructured activities from which youth could choose to participate. That variety of activities is linked with youth's positive responses to how interesting they think the activities are, the level of support they receive and their experience of leadership opportunities.
- The Clubs made efforts to provide a rewarding and youth-centered environment.** Staff reported routinely praising the youth for their efforts, provided a formal "youth of the month" award to recognize Club members and decorated the spaces for kids with art work reflective of the community served by the Clubs. Many Clubs designated space, such as teen centers and youth lounges, that youth could call their own and hang out in with their friends. Recognizing and involving youth was seen as a way to engage and retain youth and to promote a strong sense of belonging to the Clubs.

Summary

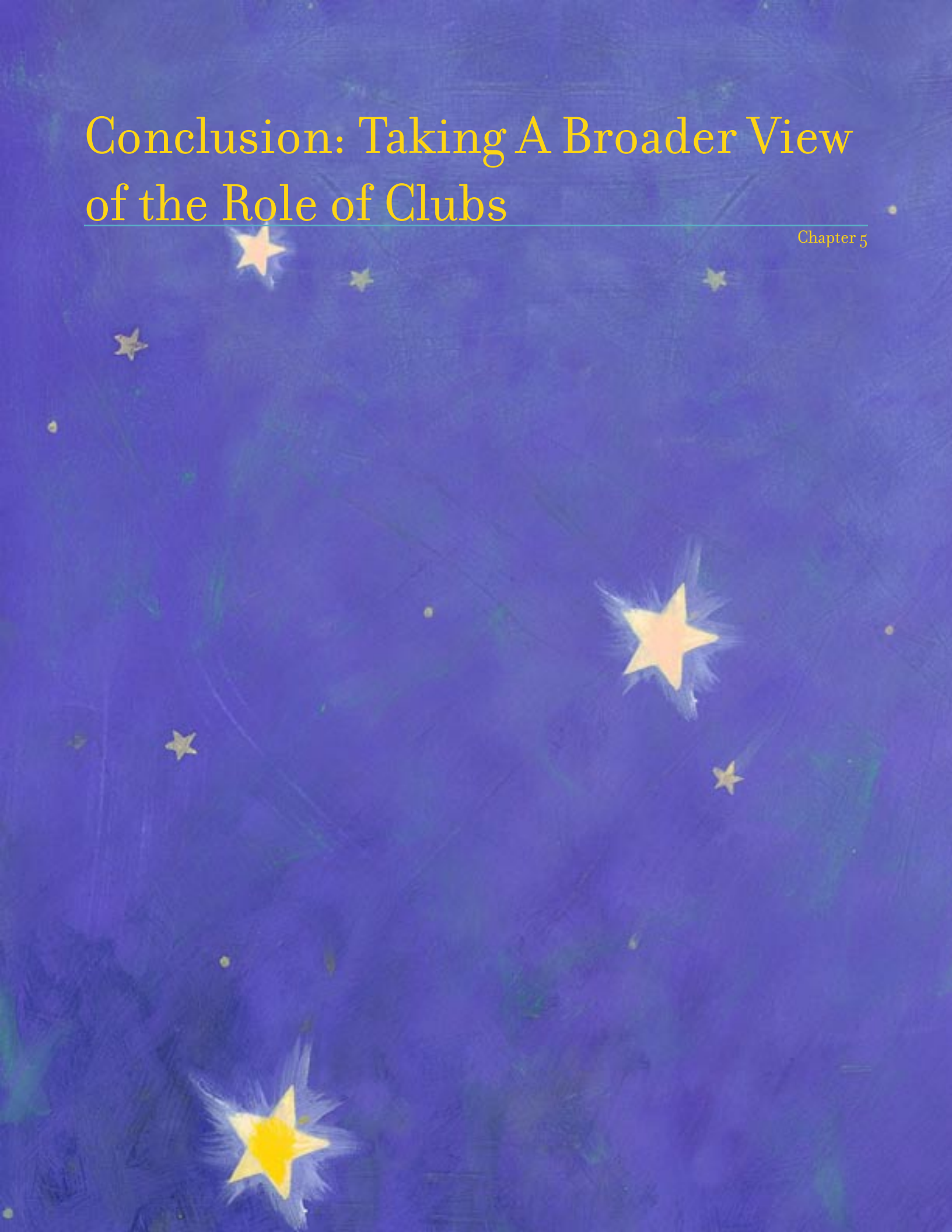
These studies point to the range of positive experiences many youth have at the Clubs, beyond participation in educational, delinquency prevention and job readiness or any other discrete program.

The studies suggest that how long members stay involved in the Club is an important determinant of the strength of the Club's effect on their lives. However, no studies of BGCA have tried to empirically link youth's developmental experiences at the Clubs to broader more long-term outcomes of resilience, competence and efficacy.

Additionally, all three studies reviewed here are limited in the way they characterize the potential for positive developmental experiences at the Clubs and in the range of outcomes they explored. For example, Clubs also provide fun and high expectations, aspects that were only explored in a limited way in these studies. In turn, Clubs may instill problem-solving strategies and decision-making skills that have not yet been examined. These studies lay the groundwork for future evaluations of Clubs that do not focus on targeted outcomes alone, but explore the more creative aspects of what Clubs can provide for youth. In the final chapter of this report, we examine areas where these studies and the studies of discrete programs may have fallen short, and suggest directions for further exploration of the BGCA experience and the role the Clubs may play in the lives of teens over time.

Conclusion: Taking A Broader View of the Role of Clubs

Chapter 5



The 1990s witnessed a significant increase in the number of philanthropic funders calling for a greater focus on outcomes and evaluation (Walker and Grossman 2000). That trend is evidenced by the studies reviewed for this report, the majority of which examined implementation of discrete programs in the Clubs and discrete outcomes in the realms of delinquency prevention, academic achievement, computer skills and Internet safety, and job readiness. Most of these studies looked at specific classes or approaches offered by Clubs and evaluated their effect on very particular outcomes, such as computer literacy, use of specific drugs or rates of homework completion.

Overall, these studies showed that the discrete programs have had positive effects on participating youth. Among other outcomes, the studies found that:

- Youth who participated in drug, alcohol and pregnancy prevention classes reported an increased knowledge about drugs and ability to refuse them;
- Youth who participated in academic programs reported greater engagement, enjoyment and grades in reading, writing and other subjects; and
- Youth at Clubs with computer labs increased their knowledge of operating computers and were more likely to think about pursuing a career in technology.

On another level, in addition to these specific outcomes and others documented in this report, these studies revealed successful strategies for youth programming that are important to share with other Clubs and the field in general. The studies give particular insight into strategies for recruiting hard-to-reach youth, providing supportive adult relationships and working with other community organizations. Further, the review of these studies offers information for funders and evaluators who hope to learn about the impact of Clubs and other programs. Finally, the review provides information helpful for designing a new study of Clubs, one that

takes into account programmatic, intermediate and long-term goals of the Clubs. These issues are discussed in the next sections of this chapter.

What More Can We Learn from These Past Studies?

One lesson to take away from the studies reviewed for this report is the importance of thoughtfully considering the appropriate timing of process and/or outcome evaluations. Many studies, in an effort to meet funders' interest in measuring results in a feasible and fundable time period, will offer assessments before programs can reasonably be expected to have strong outcomes. The result is often similar to what we saw across a number of the studies conducted early in the initial implementation of the programs examined for this report: positive but sometimes modest gains on some of the key longer-term outcomes of interest (e.g., likelihood of leaving a gang or decreased levels of drug use). An alternative is to shift the focus of evaluations, when they occur early in the life of an initiative, to the process of implementation (as we saw in the studies of Career Prep, Broader Horizons and Project Learn, for example) and shorter-term outcomes. Short-term outcomes such as depth of adult-youth relationships, positive peer interactions and high-quality instruction that promote Club members' sense of belonging, competence, and willingness to try new experiences are precursors to (or benchmarks for) more long-term youth outcomes, and often are more realistic to expect either early in implementation or early in the tenure of youth's participation in a program.

Another lesson funders and evaluators can draw from these studies is to look beyond the immediate targeted youth outcomes that a program has established as goals—especially when the program is embedded in a larger context, as is the case with programs in the Clubs. The studies included in this report do show positive evidence in terms of discrete skills and outcomes. Reading between the lines, however, much more appears to be going on for the youth, as Club members, than what was targeted for evaluation by the studies: Children

were having fun, interacting positively and constructively with adults, engaging in activities that were building their competencies and confidences, and interacting with peers in positive ways. Consistently, the studies suggest that, in all that they do, the Clubs are places that make discrete programs work through the dedication of the staff, the integration of innovative and fun ways to communicate with children and youth, and the provision of varied and interesting opportunities for growth.

Thus, for example, although evaluations of Career Prep focused on career-related outcomes, the staffing (case management) makes it likely that youth were benefiting in multiple ways from the program, many not enumerated by the evaluators. The one-on-one attention provided by the staff was critical and likely yielded increased levels of adult support and guidance in the targeted youth's lives. The Club staff were helping the participants in many areas of their lives, for example, with their education and goal-setting; thus, educational outcomes may have been affected over the long term by these job readiness programs. Similarly, although staff worked with youth on skills for positive social interaction, the extent to which youth were actually able to develop and cultivate these skills was not reported in the reviewed studies. An expectation of these same broader outcomes could be stated for the GPTTO case management and the Teen Initiatives approach as well, since staff also developed strong positive relationships with the teens and worked on integrating needs and interests of youth into a variety of creative program offerings.

Additionally, GPTTO and GITTO Club staff and Teen Initiative staff reported developing activities aimed at helping young people to interact and express themselves; SMART Moves contained elements of role-playing; and Career Prep staff included activities to build "soft skills": job etiquette, how to dress and the importance of respecting employers. These kinds of skills are likely to help teens in other interactions, outside of the Club environment. But again the extent to which youth were actually able to cultivate these skills was not reported in the reviewed studies. Similarly, effects of the program on youth's self-efficacy, confidence in learning new things, educational and job-related goals, development of pro-social behaviors and positive views of their future were not discussed, although the framework of the

Clubs in which the programs are embedded indirectly supports these outcomes.

What Are the Next Steps in Designing a Strong Study of BGCA?

The broader potential of Clubs to provide these types of experiences and positive outcomes for members—those that cut across several domains—is critical to test at this point, in order to gain a solid understanding of the role that Clubs play in the lives of the children they serve. And the test must also look over time, to examine how these experiences provided by the Clubs support youth at critical junctures in their lives.

Broaden the Outcomes to Match the Clubs' Mission and Strategies

To develop a strong evaluation of the Clubs, any study undertaken should build on the mission of the Clubs and the findings from the evaluations reviewed in this report—including the outcomes and implementation lessons that were revealed as well as the broader themes that emerge in looking at the ways the Clubs work to support youth. Namely, the following represent important programmatic, intermediate and long-term youth outcomes that would help test the role of the Clubs "as a whole experience" in the lives of the early adolescents they serve:

Programmatic Outcomes:

- **Safety:** Do the Clubs offer a place where youth are both physically and emotionally safe? How do they do so? Do they provide supervision in a safe place that many youth lack in the after-school hours?
- **Fun:** Are Club activities fun for youth? How do the Clubs nurture a sense of fun?
- **Opportunities, expectations, validation and recognition:** Do the Clubs provide opportunities for youth to succeed? Do they communicate expectations that youth will be successful? Do Clubs provide opportunities for input? And do they provide validation and recognition that the young people did meet with success?

- **Supportive relationships:** Do the Clubs foster opportunities for youth to form positive, caring relationships with peers and Club staff? How do they do so?

Short-Term Youth Outcomes:

- **Positive relationships with adults:** To what degree do youth experience positive relationship with one or more adults at the Club and how has this affected them? How has it helped them to negotiate external relationships, at school, within their families and in other institutions?
- **Positive relationships with peers:** How have Club activities and the relationships with positive adult role models helped the youth to develop ties and connections to peers that are supportive and positive?
- **Connection or sense of belonging:** Do youth feel a sense of belonging or attachment to the Club? How important to them is this connection?
- **Sense of competency:** What have youth learned to do well at the Club that they and others recognize as an accomplishment and/or talent?

Long-Term Youth Outcomes:

- **Character development/positive values:** How has the Club shaped the character of participating youth? Has it helped them to make good (healthy) choices for behavior—socially (toward others), physically, emotionally, mentally and academically? Do they have a connection to the larger community?
- **Commitment to learning:** Has the Club helped youth to do well in school, get their homework done every day, attend school regularly and behave appropriately in school? Has the Club helped youth to develop a sense of efficacy—that they can learn if they try? Do Clubs improve teens' attitudes toward school, including levels of engagement and school liking?
- **Aversion to risk:** Has the Club helped youth to stay out of legal trouble; eschew drugs, alcohol or tobacco; avoid self-injuring activities; etc.?
- **Hopeful view of their future:** Has the Club helped youth to develop a positive view of the future?

Following Youth Over Time and Over Critical Transition Years

At the request of the BGCA national office, Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) has undertaken a multiyear study to examine the developmental progress of early adolescents who participate in Clubs across the United States. P/PV's study will examine youth's progress in academic, social, emotional and behavioral domains more broadly than past evaluations of discrete programs. The longitudinal evaluation will focus on Club members as they transition to high school, a particularly vulnerable time for adolescents, when commitment to school and sense of self-efficacy typically decline steeply, especially for young people growing up in resource-poor neighborhoods (Halperin 2004).

The middle school and high school years, when youth are transitioning from childhood to adolescence, are recognized as a critical time in their development—a turning point of sorts. During these years, youth must confront and make choices about behavior (e.g., high-risk delinquent behaviors, physical activity, and social interactions), make a more significant commitment to education to succeed in school and make important choices about their future. Choices about the peer groups they spend time with and whether they use their free time in constructive and positive ways can influence school and behavioral trajectories. Research on transitions suggests that the types of developmental supports and outcomes supported by Clubs bolster a youth's chances of staying in school and developing a sense of competence and efficacy; thus the teen years and the transition to high school provide an optimal time to test the extent to which Clubs do indeed provide such supports and foster such outcomes. P/PV's longitudinal study will build on the findings from the alumni study, providing prospective evidence of the effectiveness of Clubs.

Considering the Context

With all of these outcomes, it is important to keep in mind that a range of factors—such as the quality of the schools young people attend, parental/familial influences and other potentially stressful circumstances (e.g., loss, death, violence, crime, frequent moves)—may affect the extent to which the Clubs can benefit youth. Thus, understanding contextual factors and influences on young peoples' lives is an

important component of understanding how much young people have benefited from Clubs.

Additionally, learning what youth would probably be doing if the Clubs were not available will help illuminate the role Clubs play as institutions in the communities where they reside. Keeping young people safe in the after-school hours is a key policy concern. School-based after-school programs have had limited success in attracting middle school youth more than one or two days a week and have not been effective in increasing supervision after school. Given the age of youth who attend Clubs and their patterns of participation, there is a strong possibility that Clubs do, in fact, increase supervision.

Final Thoughts

Conducting a study of the Club experience will not be without its challenges, as noted in the beginning of this report: the very nature of Clubs, their open-door structure and their commitment to serve all youth who want and need them make it almost impossible to conduct a random assignment study to test their effectiveness. Nevertheless, if the study has strong theoretical support for the way the intervention might work (in this case, the Clubs' provision of broad developmental experiences that have been found to be related to positive outcomes for youth) and for the relevant measures—and if it has good response rates and empirical findings that indicate differences in outcomes that vary by exposure, this will certainly support the idea that the Clubs are effective.

This report represents an important first step in the process of evaluating the role of Clubs in the lives of the young adolescents they serve: it reviewed the facets of children's lives that Clubs have been able to influence and described the mechanisms (e.g., positive relationships) by which they have been successful. The next step will be to work closely with Club staff to ensure that the programmatic and youth outcomes ultimately being measured by the evaluation align as closely as possible with the Clubs' missions and goals for youth. It is our hope that the ensuing study will be an important contribution to understanding the effectiveness of Clubs, and that it will also inform the after-school field more generally.

Endnotes

- 1 Although “after-school” usually connotes the hours immediately after the school day ends, we use it here to refer to any hours after school, including evenings and weekends, that youth may have available.
- 2 Clubs typically serve a high proportion of children who are at-risk in terms of economic, social and behavioral needs. The targeted approach tries to recruit youth who are both at-risk and would not necessarily have joined the Club on their own.
- 3 Rather than examining changes in a specific sample of youth, this study assessed changes in the entire public housing environment in which these Clubs were located, by conducting observations and reviewing crime statistics for the housing areas.
- 4 The study Clubs were located in New York City, Oakland, Cleveland, Tampa, and Edinburgh, Texas.
- 5 It is important to note that, although teachers and parents value homework completion, empirical associations between homework completion and academic outcomes are not consistent.
- 6 NetSmartz was evaluated during a six-week study in summer of 2002 at 10 Clubs nationwide, relying on pre- and post-surveys, focus groups and interviews with Club staff.
- 7 For this study, “at-risk” is defined as out-of-school youth, youth who are incarcerated or involved in the juvenile justice system, youth in alternative schools or youth in high-risk communities.
- 8 Louis Harris and Associates on behalf of Boys Clubs of America called about 41,000 men in randomly chosen households (with telephones) across the country. Through these efforts, 2,357 men passed screening for Boys Club membership (600 later proved ineligible) and 1,202 eventually completed phone interviews for the study. Only those who reported “participating regularly” were included. The sample is a representative sample of the U.S. population. The 1999 study included women and men and reached 1,592 past members.
- 9 The Kotloff, Wahhab and Arbretton (1996) report was completed as part of a larger study of national youth-serving organizations (Gambone and Arbretton 1997). Although it was a one-time survey, the information was weighted to reflect the Club population’s attendance patterns by gender and age groups to reduce the overrepresentation of frequent attendees as respondents.

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September 2005