

STARTING AN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM

This creative and fun ministry has many benefits for children, churches and community. If your church is considering this type of ministry, here are some tips...

Consider the Need

- Does your local school already have these programs? If so, do they need volunteers? If not, ask the Principal what type of program is needed.
- Is your church easily accessible to students during their school day? If not, is there a better place to run the program – school, community centre, park or arena?
- Is there a need for free meals/activities for to occupy students during these times? Are kids wandering the streets with nothing to do after school, or are they busy with teams/lessons/etc?

Consider Your Purpose

If the purpose of your program is to provide religious instruction as well as hospitality, you must make that purpose obvious in your advertising, so that parents and school are aware of that component. If the purpose of the program is to provide hospitality without religious instruction, you must make that obvious in your advertising to the parents, school and your congregation. Either purpose can be a blessing to your church and the students.

Consider Your Options

- Breakfast Program: provide a meal prior to the start of the school day
- Lunch Program: provide a meal and a place to hang out during lunch
- After-School Program: provide a snack or meal and a hang-out, homework and/or activity-based program
- Will you provide this program every day during the school week, or only on some of the school days?

Consider Your Assets

- You will need cooks and shoppers
- You will need people to supervise the students and run the activities.
- You will need money.

OUR PLAN...

THE NEED...

OUR PURPOSE...

OUR BEST OPTION...

OUR ASSETS...

OUR PARTNERS...

OTHER DETAILS...

Consider Your Partners

- Older students can lead games and help students with homework in exchange for a bursary, volunteer hours or a co-op placement.
- Local businesses may be interested in sponsoring your program by providing funding (The Royal Bank has funding for such activities), or materials (food, art or sport supplies)
- Local service organizations and other churches may be willing to partner with you or to provide funding, materials or volunteers.

Back to Basics

(by Pam Rayment)

Shelter, nourishment, play and most of all love.

These are the basics provided to children at the Back to Basics after school program run at St. John's Evangelist in Sault Ste. Marie. The not-for-profit organization, which began in September 2007, is a licensed after school program that has partnered with Etienne Brule public school in order to provide free childcare for students. The school has a high number of students who live in less than ideal situations such as poverty, broken homes, and situations of abuse and addiction. Located across the road from Etienne Brule, St. John's is the ideal location for the program and as long as the school is open, Back to Basics is open; a fact that program coordinators Heather Nisbett and Nancy Cardiff are adamant about.

Both Nisbett and Cardiff are dedicated to the program and are happy to see God's hand in the growth and development of Back to Basics. Cardiff explains that the idea to start the program came in recognizing responding to an obvious need in the neighborhood. "I would be out walking in this area and see that many kids were still out at 9 o'clock with their backpacks still on – they had not be home yet." Nisbett also recognized this need and says that they simply realized they had to step out in faith and begin the program – they didn't have any other choice.

The program runs much like any other after school program does, however some customization has been done to meet the needs of the children enrolled in the program. For example, when they first started out, an after school snack was provided; now a full meal is served. For some of the children this meal is the only one they will have until they get to school the next morning and partake in the breakfast program. Other unique experiences provided for this diverse mix of children vary from special quilting and sewing projects to pet therapy. Nisbett explains that such experiences help to build relationships with the children and shares the story of one child who began to learn relationship skills through the act of reading to a dog that would come in for pet therapy.

Such unique experiences however, would not be possible without the generosity of people willing to come in and spend time with the children. The program has received support from both the church community and those in the Sault and area. There are people who donate milk and juice on a weekly basis and others who use their Air Miles to purchase grocery cards to donate to the program. And there are the volunteers who come and work in the kitchen or with the children; some of whom are student volunteers who have gone through the program themselves. Nesbitt and Cardiff do welcome those interested in helping and find that volunteers usually end up as excited about Back to Basics as they are!

One often wonders if such a program actually makes a difference. If the effort is worth it and if it should continue. For Back to Basics, there is a distinct tell tale sign that it is in fact making a difference. Prior to starting the program, windows on the church hall were broken on a weekly basis. Since the program has begun not one window has been broken. Coincidence? Not according to Nisbett and Cardiff!