

Businesses, Children and Communities Benefit from After-School Programs

By Tracy Johnson, President, Martin Luther King Jr. Community Services and member of the Illinois After-School Partnership

After-school programs create opportunities. When children and youth participate in healthy, safe and engaging activities during the hours they are not in school, they enrich their lives and develop the tools they need—leadership, self-confidence, academic success—to fashion a bright future. Communities are safer and stronger when they have positive outlets for their young people. Businesses thrive when their future workforce is learning the skills that will lead to success on the job and when their current employees can focus on the task at hand because they know their children are well cared for while they are at work.

Martin Luther King Jr. Community Services of Illinois is committed to providing programs that build character, improve academic performance



and encourage healthy lifestyles among children ages five to 17. We want children to succeed, and we cannot reach this goal alone.

Martin Luther King Jr. Community Services of Illinois is working closely with the Illinois After-School Partnership to improve the ability of social service programs, schools and school districts, civic institutions and communities to develop and sustain quality activities for our young people before and after school and during the summer months. Since 2001, the Partnership, co-chaired by the Illinois Department of Human Services and the Illinois State Board of Education, has developed policies

that make it easier for programs to deliver quality services and has promoted the practices that research and experience show have the best impact on children. The Illinois After-School Partnership is now forging relationships with businesses across the state to expand private support for out-of-school-time programs.

In northern Illinois, we know first hand what can be achieved when private corporations and public institutions collaborate to improve the opportunities for our children. Through partnerships with area employers such as Honeywell, Newell Rubbermaid and Kelly Springfield Tire, Martin Luther King Jr. Community Services of Illinois has expanded its programs, improved business practices and involved hundreds of volunteers in tutoring elementary and high

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To determine and collect data that represent the availability of after-school programs

school students. The support of these businesses and others has allowed the agency to do more with the public funding provided by state and federal agencies.

The Illinois After-School Partnership's efforts to build public-private collaborations across the state will create opportunities

that otherwise wouldn't be available. Illinois business, Illinois children and youth and Illinois communities gain when there are safe, structured and enriching activities available during the hours outside of school.

Tracy Johnson is in his 15th year with Martin L. King Jr. Community Services of Illinois in Freeport, serving as the agency's president for the past seven years. The non-profit agency provides prevention and intervention services as well as community mobilizing and economic development services to over 1,100 children and their families. Johnson

has worked in the field of violence, alcohol and tobacco prevention and he has worked extensively in communities to address issues of cultural diversity, community organizing and strategic planning. He currently sits on the Board of Directors of Voices for Illinois Children.

