

Youth clubs strengthen kids' self image to keep them out of trouble

June 10 2010, by Pam Frost Gorder

When children belong to a youth club, they gain a stronger sense of who they are as a person, an Ohio State University study has revealed.

The study suggests that even small improvements in self concept go a long way toward keeping [children](#) out of trouble.

"The more kids participate in these clubs, the better self concept they have," said Dawn Anderson-Butcher, an associate professor of social work at Ohio State. "And then that self concept makes children less vulnerable to engaging in [problem behaviors](#)."

Even children who don't attend a club every day still benefit, she added.

"We're finding that daily attendance isn't as important as whether the kids feel attached to the organization and have a good relationship with a staff member. Those two things predict the best outcomes and the least amount of vulnerability."

This study, which appears in a recent issue of *Children and Youth Services Review*, surveyed nearly 300 children from age 9 to 16 in a city in Utah. About three-fourths of the children were members of a local branch of Boys and Girls Clubs of America. The rest were children who weren't members, but lived in the surrounding community.

The children filled out the Utah Division of Substance Abuse Needs Assessment Survey, which gauges how attached children feel to their

family, neighborhood, and school; whether they have a strong sense of who they are, and strong self-esteem; whether they earn good grades; and whether they feel that they receive positive reinforcement for good behavior from their community.

It asks whether they have engaged in problem behaviors in the last 30 days. Problem behaviors include alcohol, marijuana, and cigarette use; academic failure; and gang involvement.

Anderson-Butcher and Scottye Cash, also an associate professor of social work at Ohio State, compared the survey data with the last six months of the children's attendance records from the club to see if there was any association.

Because club attendance is voluntary, some children come more frequently than others. They freely choose among recreational activities (such as playing basketball), academic assistance, and life skills classes. This study simply counted time spent at the club, and not children's specific activities.

The study revealed that the more children participated in the club, the stronger their sense of self. Participation in the club boosted their social skills, as well as the positive reinforcement they felt they received from their community.

Children who experienced all these benefits were less likely to engage in problem behaviors.

"As kids' self-concept improves, it reduces their vulnerability to negative influences, which in turn decreases their likelihood of using drugs and alcohol, joining gangs, or failing in school," Anderson-Butcher said.

This study is the latest in a series of studies in which Anderson-Butcher

has examined the benefits of youth clubs. She frequently works with federally funded programs including the [Boys](#) and [Girls](#) Clubs of America and the 21st Century Community Learning Centers. All such clubs offer free educational programs that are meant to help children better themselves.

Her previous studies have shown that just getting children off the streets and into the clubs benefits them greatly. But children who participate in the educational programs gain an even stronger benefit. So do children who form strong bonds with adults who work there.

Based on this latest study, the researchers suggested that clubs target self concept as a core component of their educational programs. Getting adequate funding for programs is always a challenge for these clubs, Anderson-Butcher said. So is getting children to attend the programs.

"If a kid has to choose between playing basketball or going to a life skills class, which are they going to choose?" she asked. "Engagement techniques are key to helping children join these educational programs and stick with them."

Employee retention is another critical issue. When children get to bond with an adult whom they see regularly, they build a stronger affinity for the club. That in turn leads to positive changes in their lives.

"Strong relationships are built over time," Anderson-Butcher said. "It takes time for the children to develop an attachment for the club -- to feel committed to it, like they have ownership of it. And with that commitment comes the adoption of norms and positive behaviors."

Provided by The Ohio State University

Citation: Youth clubs strengthen kids' self image to keep them out of trouble (2010, June 10) retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-06-youth-clubs-kids-image.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.