

An Evaluation for the Boys and Girls Clubs of the Twin Cities

Translating research to practice may be difficult, yet a better understanding of current research is necessary to ensure child welfare workers engage in best practices when working with children and families. The Minn-Link Discussion Guide is designed to help facilitate thoughtful discussions about the information presented in the research brief in order to inform practice and enhance discussion surrounding meaningful issues.

In this issue, we examined the characteristics and experiences of youth who participated in the Boys and Girls Clubs of the Twin Cities (BGC) and evaluated their academic achievement as compared to that of their peers. In particular, we were interested in how school attendance and academic proficiency of BGC youth differed by Club tenure, Club participation, and age, whether they had differential academic outcomes compared to their peers, and which experiences and characteristics of youth predicted positive academic outcomes. Overall, findings indicated that BGC youth had high levels of service needs and attended school at high levels over time, similar to that of their peers. BGC youth performed slightly lower on the MCA math and reading assessments than their peers, but further analysis revealed that youth characteristics and service needs contributed to academic achievement.

Discussion on Practice Implications

1. Boys and Girls Clubs programs operate throughout the Twin Cities metro areas, serving young people in neighborhoods with the highest level of needs. These programs offer experiences for youth to strengthen academic and social skills, develop positive leadership traits, and learn healthy living behaviors. The results of this baseline study confirm that BGC programs are indeed reaching young people with incredibly high levels of need. What programs or organizations could benefit children with whom you advocate or work? In your role, how can you assist families in overcoming barriers associated with participation in these types of programs?
2. Community-based programs provide opportunities for children, youth, and families to broaden their safety net. In addition, these programs often offer services that differ from those provided by agencies with formal connections to child welfare and education systems – in terms of the nature of, and the way in which services are provided. In your role, how do you utilize the rich array of community-based programs in your work with children, youth, and families? How might you improve your efforts in this regard? What services or programs are missing?

Discussion on Agency- & System-Level Changes

1. Given that one out of every four BGC youth has a history of child protection involvement and one out of every 10 BGC youth has experienced out-of-home care, what strategies might your agency employ to assist BGC programs in their work with children and youth? For example, what training might be helpful (or necessary) for BGC staff to work most effectively with children and youth who have child protection histories?
2. The Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) standards (federal standards for the evaluation of child welfare service provision) require that child protection agencies attend to the educational needs of children and youth placed in out-of-home care. What programs are available to support child protection's efforts in this endeavor? What changes are needed to improve child protection's efforts?