

Beyond the Book Drive  
National Convention Seminar  
Friday, September 28, 2018

Welcome to “Beyond the Book Drive.” Today we focus on developing, enhancing and maintaining early learning programs. By program, we mean an ongoing and organized effort to provide a highly needed service. In other words, beyond the occasional book drive.

The Christ Child Society chapters currently have 38 programs that work to address the 400:1 deficit in face-to-face reading hours between middle class children compared to under-resourced children. Some ask why is National pushing the Challenging Poverty: One Child at a Time Initiative? Let’s begin with a brief refresher about poverty.

Several studies show that the stresses of poverty –things like poor nutrition, unstable child care, exposure to violence - actually inhibit children’s brain development. Sometimes these are labeled Adverse Childhood Experiences, or ACEs which are instrumental in creating future life struggles, including mental, physical and emotional health. People in poverty tend to experience them more often and have less access to resources to help them work through the issues and build resilience to deal with them than those from other economic groups. A study found that, while children from wealthier families may not be genetically “smarter” than children from poorer families, they have more opportunities to reach their potential — and differences in cognitive development begin to appear very early in a child’s life. Poverty affects academic outcomes by suppressing children’s intellectual abilities and potential for achievement. Twenty five percent of children in the US between birth and age 5 live in poverty – that’s a lot of little brains trying to develop!

And that is why CCS initiated Challenging Poverty: One Child at a Time and why NCCS encourages all chapters to develop, improve and grow early learning programs.

## **DEFINITION OF CCS PROGRAM**

Let’s start with how do we define a CCS program? Christ Child Society programs depend on the basic premise that our chapters and volunteers can have a positive impact on a child’s future through building a relationship, creating positive interactions and nurturing the seeds of success. CCS programs are initiated, operated and staffed by CCS members. Program design, volunteer functions and financial responsibilities are established primarily by the chapter and may be in collaboration with partner organizations or schools.

Now, let’s break that down into useable information.

***Positive impact on a child’s future through building a relationship, creating positive interactions and nurturing the seeds of success.***

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Christ Child programs can be life changing. While addressing the need for closing the literacy gap, we can develop programs with the intention of helping each child realize his potential. We can show a child that someone is in his corner. We can show him that we have his back when he struggles to deal with the adversity of learning a new language and culture. We can show our children that we are with them on a journey, as our Keynote Speaker Mathew Deevers noted, a journey where success is defined as putting one foot in front of the other and continuing to move in the right direction and becoming the best they can be.

How do we help children be the best they can be? Our own *Challenging Poverty Manual* notes, "Education, literacy and enrichment programs are impactful because they nurture children individually, help build resiliency, and provide a support network to facilitate social and emotional development that will endure over the child's life."

A recent story about ACEs on NPR noted that building resilience was key in overcoming these experiences. "Resilience reflects using skills, and the beauty of that is that skills can be learned, taught, modeled, practiced and reinforced, and kids learn better when they're in relationships," the article says. "We need to do better job of primary prevention by focusing on emotional learning and promoting safe, stable, nurturing relationships."

The CCS program definition is intentionally vague so that each chapter can find the needs within their own communities and address them in unique ways. Whether we decide to tutor children in a school, read to preschoolers or staff a library, the key words are relationship, interaction and nurturing. Universally, the children we serve benefit from the presence of a caring adult who models persistence, instills motivation and excitedly joins them on a journey in the right direction.

Our chapters offer a wide variety of programs that fit this paradigm:

- Tucson's Literacy Program works with Native American children to improve reading skills;
- Columbus focuses on providing a quality Kindergarten readiness program at St. Stephen's- Christ Child Society Child Care Center;
- Albany invited a fireman to read about Curious George calling the fire department in their monthly pre-K and Kindergarten *Read to Me* program;
- Fort Wayne's Reading Rangers help parents understand how to share books with their children after the children have experienced the books with volunteers in class.

***CCS programs are initiated, operated and staffed by CCS volunteers.***

Get the ball rolling by designing a successful plan:

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Your chapter may have an early learning program, but you want to get more volunteers, you wonder if it really is a program and not a project, or you think it can grow. Maybe your chapter hasn't yet gotten the ball rolling and you don't even know how to start. Here are some nuts and bolts

As you plan or reexamine your program, keep in mind some **key characteristics of successful program** plans:

- Aligns with organization's mission and strategic plan
- Innovative
- Plays to your chapter's strengths
- Clearly states the plan of action, who will benefit, time frame and cost
- Includes plan for long term success
- Description of why your chapter has the capacity to address the identified need
- Mutually respectful and open relationship with a partner
- Is prepared to change and grow
- Creates an identity

- *Programs Should Tie to the Organization's Mission and Strategic Plan*

First, each program should be strongly associated with your chapter's overall mission and fit into your long-term plans. Strategic planning typically includes both review of the organization's mission, values and goals and consideration of strategies to reach those goals. By the way, if you haven't revisited your mission statement and strategic plan in a while, please do. Make sure it reflects the work you are doing today and what you aspire to do in the future. It should reflect that you are working with a purpose, serving children intentionally. Your board should be in tune with the planning team to be sure they don't go too far off the rails – or the budget.

- *Innovative*

Your program should not duplicate readily available services. You can work with your partner to be sure others aren't providing the same service for your chosen clients.

- *Play to your chapter's strengths*

Then, play to your strengths. This includes your membership, your finances and your reputation. What can your members bring to the table in terms of know-how, experience and enthusiasm? Does your chapter have the funds to purchase materials, even restock a library, or will you use whatever materials are on hand at your partner agency? Are your members on board? If your community knows of your good work and reliability, that reputation is a strength that works to your advantage when finding donors and working with a partner.

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- *Plan of Action*

*Challenging Poverty Manual page*

Create a plan of action. Look to the *Challenging Poverty Manual* for step by step program planning, including where you will conduct the program, what you will do and how you will do it.

There are informational resource lists in the manual to get you started. Also, in the convention materials you will find some tools for program planning and goal setting.

Don't worry about developing a perfect program plan. If you involve the right people, if you focus on the nature and needs of your chapter, and if everyone participates wholeheartedly, then you will develop the "perfect" plan for you.

Use tools available to you from a variety of sources, including your partner.

Cleveland's Merrick House Literacy Enrichment Program began considering Ohio state education goals for childhood literacy and attempted to address them as they planned activities related to books they used. They used a tool already available on their state's education website.

- *Plan for long term success*

Will you have funds in the future to continue this program? Will all of your volunteers fly south for the winter, right when you need them to tutor? Is your membership aging without younger members joining? Think about 5 years in the future – will you still be able to fulfill your commitment to your program and your partner? These are important considerations as you begin planning.

Later, once you start operating, valuations are important for sustaining quality and commitment. *The Challenging Poverty Manual* has a section on evaluations you may find helpful. Also, included in your binder resources is an easy to use chart that captures the pros and cons of methods of gathering information for evaluation.

One of the easiest evaluation methods is the "**Four Lists**" method of reviewing a program or project in which you list 'what's right,' what's wrong,' what's confusing' and what's missing.' Don't forget to gather stories from volunteers and participants as a means of evaluation. You can learn from them and use them as PR for fundraising and awareness. Doing frequent reviews/evaluations will keep you on a sustainable path of improvement and growth.

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- *Capacity: Members, money, minutes and motivation*

Your capacity is what you have to work with, how much you can handle. Your plan should address this clearly. How many members will step up to volunteer and can they do the job? Do you have the funding (or available grants) for the materials you want to use or the books you want to buy? How much time can your chapter devote to this program? Does your chapter enthusiastically support this program?

- *Partners*

Finding a partner is often serendipitous – a member's daughter teaches at an inner-city school; you had a speaker at a meeting who inspired you to read to children at a homeless shelter; your parish partners with a local impoverished parish whose young mothers really need a better child care facility. But you can also reach out to schools or organizations that service children in your community. Do some research first about their mission and methods – do they align with yours?

We will talk more about partners in a minute.

- *Be prepared to change*

The beauty of a well-designed program is that it has room for innovation, creativity and change. You and your partner should both gracefully accept a change in strategy, a change in schedule or an exciting innovation as long as your basic working agreement is respected. No program is written in stone, or it would quickly outlive its usefulness. Use input from your partners, your volunteers and the children you work with to continually tweak your program in an ever-present effort to improve. Build room for change into your plan, as a natural response to evaluations and feedback. Remember Matt's advice to "keep the clay wet?"

Atlanta's Summer Skills program, itself an outgrowth of their reading program, easily adapted to suit the needs of their students when they realized the schedule needed tweaking.

- *Create an Identity*

Give your program a name, an identity. This is useful not only internally, as you discuss the program, recruit volunteers, budget and solicit book donations. It is especially valuable externally, as part of fund raising and awareness campaigns. A foundation will recognize the reputation of your program when you apply for a grant and a donor will know exactly where his money is going if you identify the program by name. Don't be too cute, but certainly be descriptive.

Reading Rangers, SUCCESS, Girls on the Rise, and Book Buddies identify programs with clear purpose. Try not to duplicate existing names in your region and don't use trademarked names.

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A quick Google search of US government Patents and Trademarks (uspto.gov) will clear that up.

***Volunteers are key to a program's success.***

Your members are the key to a successful program. They must be willing to make connections with children and to accept them as they are while encouraging them to be the best they can be. Without their investment of time, talent, energy and love, even the most promising of programs will fail. Make the experience of your volunteers one they value.

Set clear expectations about the tasks they will be asked to do, the skill set that is required, and the time commitment that is expected. As you plan the program, involve your potential volunteers in designing activities as a way to get them fully invested and prepared. Then, be honest about your expectations as well as aware of your volunteers' capabilities.

Training is important! Train your volunteer how to read to children effectively. Lillian Baumann is a member of the Boca Raton Chapter, has a PhD in Educational Psychology, did extensive research into reading processes and wrote a book for parents – and grandparents – about how to read with children. She spoke to the 2017 Conference and generously shared copies with every chapter.

The Read to Me Card, which should be included in your layettes, has some good tips for your volunteers, too!

Training can also include basic conscious discipline techniques, safety measures, rules of your partner's facility, and knowing age appropriate behaviors. You must collaborate with your partner; some schools require background checks and appropriate conduct training, safety procedure instruction and privacy rules. Many Catholic schools require a risk protection training which is often available on line through your diocese. (Vertus training)

Consider Matt Deevers' ABC's of persistence. **A**bility, **B**elonging, and **C**ontrol. These are important for your volunteers if they are to succeed at connecting with and relating to children successfully. They need to feel ABLE to do the work, comfortable with the tasks, unafraid to plunge in and play.

They need to feel they BELONG, that is, they are part of the CCS mission and program, they are part of changing children's lives, to ensure they have opportunities for success. They should feel welcome and appreciated by your partner

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And, they need CONTROL. Your volunteers should always be in the loop of decision-making about how the program is run, what activities will be organized, who will read today... Their opinions matter so be sure to routinely survey your volunteers for input and evaluation. Give them choices and be sure they are heard.

The Pasadena PALS program truly reflects the love shown by volunteers as well as how the chapter values the volunteers and make them feel like they belong. They build in social activities and meetings so that members can share stories, learn from each other and build a team.

Early Learning programs will benefit your chapter membership, many of whom are nearing or past retirement. According to the periodical *Nonprofit Quarterly*, "Older Americans have more resources to bring to volunteering than their predecessors...those with college degrees are volunteering at a higher rate than in the past which keeps them mentally active. Research suggests that regular volunteering improves physical and mental health and may even lengthen life expectancy. When your members feel engaged and valued, knowing they are truly making a difference, they are energized and eager to attract more members.

If you are looking for a new pool of volunteers, don't forget high school and college students. There has been a dramatic increase in volunteering among this age group. Offering a diverse range of well-managed, high impact opportunities will attract younger volunteers. Many of this age bracket and Millennials are looking for short term or one-time volunteer opportunities. You can add those kinds of activities to your reading program – like bringing in a varsity soccer player to speak in conjunction with a book about soccer, or a music major demonstrating different instruments to supplement *Never Play Music Right Next to the Zoo* by John Lithgow. Exposing young people to CCS plants seeds for future involvement as a member.

Baltimore annually invites dental hygiene students to talk about oral health in conjunction with reading *Gus Loses a Tooth*. A nutritionist is invited to speak about healthy eating and volunteers read *Eating the Alphabet* or *Gregory the Terrible Eater*. Each child takes a copy of the books home. **Make a Difference Day** is also an excellent opportunity to create awareness of your chapter and draw in new volunteers.

Effectively embracing new ways for volunteers to give their time requires a strategic approach to volunteering. Draw up a strategy, plan outreach to parishes and senior groups, visit schools and set up a booth at college activity nights. When you have done the work to design a good program, you should be able to sell it!

***Financial responsibilities are established primarily by chapters in collaboration with partners***

As you plan to begin a program or as you venture to branch out or remodel an existing program, you will probably have at least one board member ask, “how much will this cost?” Many chapters struggle with having chairmen of Layettes wondering if a literacy program will pull resources from her budget.

For smaller chapters with a tight budget, this can be a big challenge. The good news is, you can do an early learning program on little more than the cost of gas to get to a preschool. Starting small is never anything to be ashamed of! What the children really need, more than a clever craft or exciting field trip, is the warmth, care and attention that your volunteers can give. Everything else is gravy.

That said, we do have many chapters who do have the resources – or good grant writers and fundraisers – to buy books, craft materials, snacks... whatever their creative juices can find to reinforce an early learning experience. The purpose of any expenditure should always be in accordance with the goals of your program. It is important to educate your board on the purpose of the expenditures and to provide a line in the annual budget for the program.

As you work with a partner to develop your program, be sure to establish what financial responsibilities will be met by CCS. You want to avoid becoming a “Sugar Daddy” and be careful not to buy the children’s affection or attention with things that are superfluous to the lesson.

Below is a sample list of financial responsibilities that could be included with your partnership agreement. Be specific up front to avoid uncomfortable discussions later.

- Make a onetime purchase of a table and chairs to be used for tutoring
- Buy supplies for monthly reading/craft sessions with the Kindergarten
- Give each student a copy of the book you read

***Partnerships***

The ideal partnership

- Clear responsibilities
- On the same page
- Collaborative, respectful and trusting
- Open to change and feedback

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- *Clear Responsibilities*

Partnering can require delicate negotiations. I mentioned a partnership agreement before because it is important to set the ground rules early. You need to spell out your responsibilities. If reaching an agreement is very difficult early on, you might as well run for the hills now. Working together is not going to get any easier.

The agreement you reach with your partner should be clearly spelled out and structured so the program is replicable, not solely partner-dependent. The program should be initiated and created by your members. That means CCS is not a 'helper' or a group of volunteers to be used as the "boss" partner directs, but rather a separate entity that defines its role, the role of the volunteers, accepts some financial obligations, determines the ultimate scope of the program and periodically evaluates the program.

- *On the Same Page*

Define your program at the start and establish clear responsibilities. Clearly state your goal and be sure to acknowledge the positive qualities of your partner. Below is a sample agreement

"Based on an awareness that St. Joan School does extraordinary work with often limited resources, the Christ Child Society will provide a support system for the school to maximize students' educational opportunities. "

The CCS support system will include, but will not be limited to:

- Planning, funding and chaperoning 2 cultural field trips per year.
- Purchasing educational technology (up to \$400).
- Improving the library – update books, add books with faculty input, volunteer in the library (Purchase of books will not exceed \$600)
- Provide support to Kindergarten teacher by providing a reading hour and relevant craft activity each 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday from September through April.
- CCS representative(s) will meet once a month with the school representative

St. Joan School will

- Provide space for the CCS Kindergarten reading program and follow up activities
- Handle field trip permission slips and insurance
- Submit suggestions for educational technology by October 1<sup>st</sup>
- Submit a list of preferred library purchases by October 1st
- Assist in providing training for volunteers
- A school representative will meet once a month with the CCS representative(s)

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Your agreement will most likely be more in-depth with the addition of things like who does training, insurance coverage and whatever legal details need to be noted.

- *Supportive and collaborative*

A successful partnership is supportive and collaborative, grounded in the mission and the value of the work being done by both parties. Each side of the agreement should appreciate the worth, the contributions and the expertise of the other. All partners need to trust that they can come together congenially so that their needs and concerns can be met and realized. The Phoenix chapter and their partner, St. Matthew School have developed a congenial relationship and work together well for the benefit of the students.

- *Open to Change and Feedback*

Ideal partnerships should be open to change as each entity works through the learning curve of their collaboration. Some things may work, others will not, but a good partnership will work together to find a resolution. There should always be the freedom to provide constructive feedback without repercussion.

The South Bend Chapter's SUCCESS program was in need of revamping. Their good partnership with St Adalbert's School made change and growth possible.

## **PERSISTENCE**

Matt Deevers gave us some tools for improving relationships and understanding each other. Those can apply directly to our task of establishing the ground rules with our partner. There must be give and take, letting go, and willingness to change.

Matt's Persistence Paradigm lends itself to building a strong partnership: setbacks are not failures, contributions from both sides are valued, and we can consistently strive to improve, to persist, to succeed. You may realize your program is not working out, or your volunteers are uninspired, or maybe there is no discernable improvement in the students. That is a setback, but not a failure.

Fort Wayne found success after struggling with an unsuccessful tutoring program. They persisted and created a very successful Reading Rangers program – the winner of the 2018 Red Wagon Award.

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### **CALL TO ACTION**

You may be thinking, after listening today, that your chapter's program doesn't fit the CCS definition. Maybe it really isn't really self-directed, or you really don't interact with kids much, or volunteers work at the whim of the partner alone.

If you haven't yet decided to start an early learning program, I hope today's talk and this afternoon's workshop help you visualize your chapter taking up the call to change a child's life. Even if you feel you don't have the capacity to add a program now, can you add an element of early education to what you do now? Perhaps you can add a "how to read to your kids" information sheet for parents with books you give out. Maybe try a once or twice a year literacy event at a local school or pre-school to test the waters and estimate your capacity.

In South Bend, the chapter started to give out a book to every child who received clothing; each book came with age appropriate reading guidance for parents. They also put up reading posters throughout the clothing center. There are lots of little ways you can include literacy elements into what you do now until you are ready to initiate a program.

\* Check out the "Taking Your Program to the Next Level" Workshop Notes for more ideas.

### **TAKE THE LEAP**

Now is the time to take a good look at your program to make sure it reflects the professionalism, the mission, and the guidance of NCCS. Verify that you really do follow the "Guiding principle of the Society [which] has always been personal service rendered for the love of the Christ Child to the least of these little ones," as Mary Virginia Merrick said.

We encourage you to think seriously about making your chapter's programs the best they can be so that we, as a national organization, can help children become the best they can be. That leap is a catalyst for change. It wakes us up, gets juices flowing and pulls us out of a rut, so welcome it as an opportunity for growth, personally and as a chapter.

Our goal, as a national organization, is to build early learning programs under the **universal framework** of intentionally helping children become the best they can be. As varied as our program operations are, as diverse as our capacities may be, as unique as a chapter's approach to early learning is, all of our programs are vehicles for showing a child we are in his corner, that persistence breeds success. All of our programs can – with intention - change a child's life.

Let's do this!

Beth Barrett  
NCCS VP of Programs