Saint Paul's Commitment to Quality Youth Programs

In Saint Paul, we believe that young people will be successful and best prepared to build their skills as learners, contributors and navigators when they have hope for a positive future and have support as they strive to meet their goals.[1] **We know that quality out-of-school time programs can have a positive impact on academic achievement and contribute to the development of youth.**

Why does Quality Matter?

Quality is not neutral. Quality programs help youth do better in school and in life. Without quality, programs may not benefit youth and, in some cases, may even lead them to do worse. Quality influences the participation of youth, the satisfaction and retention of youth workers, and the impact programs have on young people, families, and the community. Research has sparked a statewide emphasis on quality by showing that quality matters, quality is measurable, and quality is malleable.[2] There is strong evidence that quality out-of-school time learning opportunities can produce positive change in academic achievement, social, and emotional development of youth. However, research also shows that without effective staff and intentional, focused programming, participants in afterschool programs can fail to achieve positive outcomes or even begin to perform worse than their peers.[3]

Defining Quality

Sprockets recommends that out-of-school time organizations focus on three areas of practice: quality program features, youth worker expertise and engaged youth.

In April 2009, University of Minnesota Extension and Youth Community Connections partnered with Out-of-School Time representatives to create *Once We Know it, We Can Grow It: A Framework for Quality Nonformal Learning Opportunities and Youth Work Practice.*[4] As a result of this groundbreaking work, Sprockets is committed to adopting the statewide framework in support of our young residents.

Youth Worker Expertise / Engaged Youth / Quality Program Features

We believe that when these three elements are actively practiced in out of school time, young people will be able to improve academic achievement and acquire the skills necessary for life-long success. Sprockets will help to advance this common approach through quality school and community-based learning opportunities.

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[1] Saint Paul's Framework for Youth Success, http://www.stpaul.gov/DocumentView.aspx?DID=14045
[2] Forum for Youth Investment. (July/August 2003). Forum focus: Quality counts, 1(1).
[3] Little, P. M. (2009). Harvard Family Research Project. *Supporting student outcomes through expanded learning opportunities*. http://www.hfrp.org/out-of-school-time/publications-resources/supporting-student-outcomes-through-expanded-learning-opportunities
[4] Walker, J., Gran, C., and D. Moore. (2009).University of Minnesota Extension Youth Development. http://www1.extension.umn.edu/youth/docs/once-we-know-it-whitepaper.pdf

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Recognizing Quality
By understanding what quality looks like in programs, caregivers and community members can help young people make choices that will contribute to life-long success. In Saint Paul, we believe each young person will be better able to identify and achieve their dreams and goals when the community, in partnership with parents and guardians, support young people to build their skills as learners, contributors, and navigators. The following table summarizes a number of quality program elements youth, caregivers and community members can look for in youth programs.

Indicators of Quality[5]

Characteristics of a Quality Youth Program	Core Competencies for Quality Youth Workers	Rings of Engagement for Youth
Safety & Appropriate Structure	Applies human development principles	Participation: young people feel connected
Supportive Relationships	Develops positive relationships	Passion: the "spark" youth recognize as part of their learning, they commit to it
Opportunities to Belong	Uses effective program design and delivery methods	Voice: youth actively have input in what they experience and do
Positive Social Norms	Promotes inclusiveness	Collective Action: collective leadership, opportunities created with and by youth-shared power
Emphasis on value and importance of youth	Encourages youth engagement	
Opportunities for skill building	Connects to family and community	
Integration of family, school and community efforts	Attends to health and safety	
	Demonstrates professionalism	

Assessing & Supporting Quality

Sprockets believes youth serving organizations must commit to continuous improvement of program quality. Sprockets offers our network partners access to a variety of workshops, technical assistance and coaching that aligns with the above indicators of quality. In addition, we believe program features can be assessed by observing youth programs and their staff in action. Sprockets promotes use of the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) tool developed by the HighScope Educational Research Foundation. The YPQA provides a standardized metric that gives data about what youth workers and program staff can actually control – their practice skills. Observational measures of program practices and staff/youth interactions are fundamental to improving program quality because they give staff a shared language for talking about their interactions with youth, suggestions for behaviors they should adopt, and feedback about their performance to guide improvement steps.[6]

Sprockets supports youth programs in Saint Paul to learn how to utilize YPQA within their programs. To learn more about this and other quality support, contact Erik Skold, Sprockets Associate Director for Quality at 651-209-3519 or at skold@augsburg.edu.

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[5] Minnesota Alliance with Youth. (2010). Indicators of quality. http://mnyouth.net/about/initiatives/quality-task-force/

[6] Granger, R.C., Durlak, J., Yohalem, N., & Reiser, E. (April, 2007). *Improving after-school program quality.* New York, NY: William T. Grant Foundation.