

# **AFL Prevention Programs: Lessons Learned**

## ***Lessons learned with clients, partners, and communities***

### **Engagement of parents and partners is critical to program success**

- Develop a sense of “buy-in” through engaging others in the development and implementation of the program.
- Endorsement from schools can go a long way.
- Design your program to fit the need you see.

### **Recruitment for youth and parents needs to be intentional**

- Take advantage of existing events to recruit youth and parents.
- Recruitment should be personal. Use phone calls, emails, and face-to-face mechanisms to recruit.
- Timing of recruitment is important.
- Allow for plenty of time to recruit into your program.

### **Staff is key to success**

- Use modeling and rapport building through staff to create a more solid program and increase retention rates.
- Staff training should be ongoing throughout the life of the program.
- Staff must have a sense of “buy-in” to the program. They should be engaged in all phases of development and implementation.

### **Implementation for youth and parents needs to be carefully planned**

- Consider key specifics when you are planning your groups:
  - Group size should be relatively low to allow for discussion and sharing (anywhere between 10 and 25) for both youth and parents.
  - Plan your location carefully. This means knowing your community and understanding where they might want to meet (schools, community centers, churches, and so forth).
  - Take into consideration the community and school calendar when planning groups. Make sure that you account for school breaks or testing as you may not be able to conduct group during these times.
- Be unique in the services you offer! Activities should be fun, engaging, and multi-faceted. Keep the program entertaining and take into consideration limited attention spans when planning.
- Include youth development principles, character education, and cultural experiences to ensure the group is holistic in nature.
- Make sure all materials used are appropriate for the population with respect to culture and literacy.

### **Relationship building should be a major focal point throughout your program**

- Nurture relationships with partners early and often.
- Programs should align themselves to meet the needs of schools. Programs that meet needs and requirements schools have (health and literacy class standards for example) are more likely to be accepted.

- Reach out to key people/organizations in the community. Allow enough time to build these relationships because they will prove invaluable down the road.
- Programs that work in the schools should ensure that the school district provides approval and support for their work. Create support at all levels of the school system by educating staff about the program and reaching out to them regularly.

**Market your program for success**

- The way in which you present your program to others makes a big difference. Be sure that everyone on your team presents the program in the same way.
- The name of your project can create interest from others. Be original and creative in naming your project. The name should project the image desired.
- Become involved in community collaborations and use word of mouth to create interest in your program.

**Be realistic in what you can accomplish**

- Be flexible in your program design. Programs should be responsive to the community and offer services that are needed and realistic.
- Make sure you are not trying to serve a need or community that is already saturated.
- Allow for enough time in the beginning of the program (first year) to appropriately plan and make adjustments. Planning is critical to success.
- Create a helping environment with your program. Go beyond the basic services you offer and fill any additional needs in the school or community.