

MODEL PROGRAM IN DES MOINES MAKES SUMMER LEARNING GAINS A REALITY

A Profile of Awesome Summer Days at Children and Family Urban Movement (CFUM)

Des Moines, Iowa, Summer 2014



ABOUT AWESOME SUMMER DAYS AT CFUM

Dates of Operation: June 5 – July 3 (4 weeks)

Grades served: K - 5

Total students served: 65

Student demographics: 54% black, 27% Latino, 8% white, 5% Asian, 5% mixed race

Paid staff: 3 certified teachers, 8 college students, 1 high school student, 2 regular CFUM staff

Family Needs Don't Go Away in the Summer

Of the 3,500 households that make up the Des Moines, Iowa, River Bend neighborhood served by CFUM, 52 percent are headed by single parents; the per capita income for the neighborhood is below \$11,500. All students attending Moulton Extended Learning Center, the neighborhood school located directly across from CFUM, receive free meals. The school experiences a mobility rate of more than 50 percent each year. Unfortunately, children in poverty are disproportionately affected by the “summer slide,” or the loss of reading proficiency developed during the school year. Studies have shown that low-income students lose more than two months in reading achievement over the summer months, despite the fact that their middle-class peers make slight gains.¹ More than half of this achievement gap can be explained by unequal access to summer learning opportunities. As a result, low-income youth are less likely to graduate from high school or enter college.²

Program Design

Awesome Summer Days at CFUM uses project-based learning built around a broad, summer-wide theme. In 2014 the theme was “Roots Rock!” which included activities around a range of definitions of roots, including:

- » plant and tree roots
- » ethnic and family roots, and
- » neighborhood and city roots

The program is distinguished by time dedicated to academics, which is planned and resourced by certified teachers. In this targeted learning time students read, kept journals, and participated in field experiences, weekly trips to the neighborhood library, and a week of swimming lessons. Students were also served breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks five days a week.



Without the programming at CFUM, we would not be able to do what we do with our students. Our parents rely on their programming to provide support during our various breaks throughout the year and during the summer. Our students talk about the great experiences they have with CFUM with enthusiasm! **That's what it's all about: happy kids that want to make learning a priority.**

– Cheri Dixon, Principal,
Moulton Extended Learning Center



Mitigating the effects of the stresses of poverty for the young people CFUM serves is a central focus of the organization's mission and a primary goal of Awesome Summer Days. To that end, key objectives of the program include building long-term mutually beneficial relationships with families and students, employing a variety of methods to address the diversity of the participants, connecting literacy to all areas of academic studies as well as to outside experiences and events, and mitigating summer learning loss. In addition to helping students maintain and build on the learning gains they'd made during the school year, the program also provided a safety net for working families and academic support and enrichment for children during out of school times.

¹ *The Effects of Summer Vacation on Achievement Test Scores: A Narrative and Analytic Review*, Cooper, 1996.

² *Lasting Consequences of the Summer Learning Gap*, Alexander et al, 2007.

Impact of Awesome Summer Days

Appreciation and awareness of the impact of CFUM's work abounds. Parents see changes and growth in their children and neighborhood leaders see irreplaceable support for students living in poverty in CFUM's work. A parent who has had three children in the program has seen incredible growth in her children through their participation in Awesome Summer Days and CFUM's school-year programming. She has seen her kids transition from participants to mentors and leaders, volunteering their time and taking on new independent projects. Cameron Nicholson, the Executive Director of the Grubb YMCA, a close partner of CFUM, says that the organization's programs are high quality and staffed "with caring and trained adults, creative and fun activities, in a safe environment."

Best Practices for Replication

As summer enrichment opportunities expand nationally, it's increasingly important to direct limited community resources to programs that are highly effective and replicable. Dissecting CFUM's strategies and impact highlights a number of distinct, replicable components that are essential to its success. Most importantly, the year-round programming offered at CFUM and the smaller scale, neighborhood focus of the organization allows for close relationships with kids. They have created an environment where each child is known by name and appreciated. Program leaders and staff set high expectations for participant behavior, attendance, and engagement, and then follow through on rewards and consequences based on those expectations.

Long-term relationships with families are another building block of CFUM's success, as are the breakfast, dinner, and snack options CFUM provides year-round to serve its community. These points of connection to family and community have gone a long way to build trust and neighborhood and family buy-in that makes the program so successful.

Achieving a positive relationship among the critical partners of the provider agency and the neighborhood school is a component successfully developed and maintained by CFUM and Moulton Extended Learning Center, and one that is critical to replication of the CFUM summer model. There is data and information sharing and a symbiotic relationship of two entities working towards the same goal. This is not something that was established overnight; such a strong collaboration takes time and can be put at risk when any one individual changes roles or leaves the organization. However, it cannot be overstated how important this component is to making any impact on academic outcome.

Other components for replication include the focus on literacy and the use of a project-based approach with the support of highly qualified staff. Sometimes considered a challenge for cash-strapped organizations, ensuring quality staffing is possible even for organizations with smaller budgets. CFUM's model of staffing programming with teachers from the neighborhood school, in addition to building the capacity of other, non-certified program staff, is one that assures quality of all program content. CFUM also utilizes service learning and hires college students. A mix of certified and non-certified staff makes replication more reasonable.



87% of participants' reading levels progressed or stayed the same over the summer break. 58% of these students made **gains** of at least one reading level over the summer. Of this group that made improvements in their reading level, almost one-third improved by **two or more** reading levels over the summer!

SUMMER PROGRAM BUDGET

Staffing (wages and benefits):
\$36,000

Program expenses: \$6,800

Operational costs: \$22,000

Total cost summer 2014: \$64,800

Partnerships

- » 6th Avenue Corridor
- » Des Moines Parks and Recreation
- » Evelyn Davis Center for Working Families
- » Forest Avenue Library
- » Grubb YMCA
- » Habitat for Humanity
- » Iowa Cubs Baseball Team
- » Literacy Coach through United Way of Central Iowa Out-of-School Time Literacy Initiative
- » Red Cross
- » River Bend Neighborhood Association
- » Seven area colleges and universities
- » Staff from Moulton Extended Learning Center

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