**DEVELOPING PROGRAMS: How Christ Child Chapters Serve**

EXPANDED Text

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

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 where success is defined as putting one foot in front of the other, 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? As noted in the CCS *Challenging Poverty Manual* (2015), “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.”

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. As people whose mission is to serve children, we can focus on emotional learning, too 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.

1. ***CCS programs are developed, operated and staffed by CCS volunteers.***

Get the ball rolling by designing a successful plan. 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.

**Program Design and Development**

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** (link to President’s Toolkit: Chapter Strategic Planning Checklist) 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.

*Be 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. Your chapter membership is a great resource for a new program. Many members are involved with multiple volunteer groups and agencies. Ask for their suggestions about programs in need, schools lacking aides or a demographic in need of parenting skills (as examples).

*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.

*Plan of Action*

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.  A Program Committee should be assembled to provide leadership guidance for the development and on-going coordination of the new program. The Program Committee will be most effective if it includes members who possess leadership qualities as well as interest in the proposed program. It may also be beneficial to include representatives from the school administration or the social service organizations with whom the Chapter chooses to partner in launching their program.

Other Christ Child Chapter’s programs are available for your review **here** (Program descriptions). If there is an existing program that fits a need in your community, consider replicating the good work and good practices of other chapters.

On the NCCS website, you will find a **program development** **resource list** to get you started as well as tools for **program planning** and **goal setting.**

Most CCS programs involve education, reading or literacy development. Resources are easily found; a suggested list can be found **here (**link to Literacy and Education Resource List).

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

The Program Committee can collaborate with school or social service representatives on the logistics of their partnership involving Christ Child volunteers. Important elements to consider include:

*Identifying a location* where Christ Child volunteers can meet with under-resourced children identified by the Chapter’s partner, to provide educational support in the form of tutoring, group sessions or of a mentor/student relationship. It is essential that the meeting place be one where all can feel safe, where clients can get to easily, and that is accessible to volunteers .

Possibilities include: a school Facility, space provided by your Partnering Agency or local Catholic Charities Affiliate, community meeting room (Parish, Knights of Columbus, Library or Hospital).

*Establish the duration of the program*. This can be discussed with a school/social service partner; a defined program, such as an etiquette or parenting class can be repeated throughout the year or be introduced to multiple schools/agencies. A minimum of one year is recommended for a tutoring/mentoring program enabling participants to build trust and develop relationships.

*Plan for long term success*

The Program Committee should set short and long-term goals to further develop and refine the program in a manner consistent with the resources and needs of its chapter and the community. First decide what outcomes you would like to see after one year. Most likely, these will be “baby steps” in terms of commitment and investment.

Will you have funds in the future to continue this program? Will all of your volunteers fly south for the winter or north for the summer, right when you need them? 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. Again, your Strategic Plan is a key tool.

If pursuing a granted program idea, don’t fall into the trap of seeing a grant application and striving to create a program that fits its funding profile. Creating a new program merely to acquire new funding makes little sense in the great scheme of things. Finding a granting source or other community backer who is of the same mindset as your program can be a beautiful marriage of two partners that creates a long-term funding solution.

Some Chapters create a new fund-raising campaign or an event with all proceeds specific to the new program. Still others replace an existing program that is “tired” with a new one and utilize the same budget allocation for the new project. Some Chapters have partnered with another agency to raise the dollars and the people-power to make the program vision a reality.

However you source your program funding, you will want to be certain to keep the donor or donors advised as to how their generous dollars are being spent.

*Evaluations*

Later, once you start operating, evaluations are important for sustaining quality and commitment. See the **Evaluations** section for more information. Also, **here (**link to **Program Evaluation Process),**  is an examination of program performance, quality and impact and an easy to use chart that captures the pros and cons of methods of gathering information for evaluation can be found **here** (link to **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.

*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? **Cleveland’s Needs Assessment** (link to assessment tools if Cleveland shares them)

See below for details about the financial and legal relationships with your partner.

*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.

*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. Try not to duplicate existing names in your region and don’t use trademarked names. A quick Google search of US government Patents and Trademarks (uspto.gov) will clear that up.

**Volunteer Functions**

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. You have all had that experience of being asked to volunteer without full disclosure -- “You just have to drop off some books” turns into collecting books from 4 different donors, box them, take them to a school and up a flight of stairs….

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. Your young chairperson may think – “Lets’ read *Casey at the Bat* and then all go outside to play baseball! Maybe a book about yoga would be better?

Training is important! Train your volunteer how to read to children effectively.

Lillian Bauman, a member of the Boca Raton Chapter with PhD in Educational Psychology, did extensive research into reading processes and wrote a book for parents – and grandparents – about how to read with children titled, *How to Make the Children You Love Really Good Readers* (2013). She spoke to the 2017 Conference and generously shared copies with every chapter. Her summary of its main points can be found **here**. (Link to Bauman summary from Conference 2017)

The **Read to Me Card,** link to how to order) was developed by NCCS and should be included in your layettes. It 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 online through your diocese. (Vertus training).

Work with your school/social service partner to determine the appropriate forms that are required to participate in the type of volunteer activities the chapter wishes to establish. For example, Christ Child members should fulfill Diocesan requirements for protecting youth, e.g. a workshop and fingerprinting. Check with the Chapter’s local Diocese for these guidelines.

Be sure to provide an orientation for all volunteers at the beginning of each new session which includes:

* Program goals and objectives;
* Awareness of poverty and culture
* Chapter volunteer guidelines that are written with the partner agency
* Review of Diocesan Child Protection guidelines;
* Legal issues that may arise;
* Roles and responsibilities of tutors, mentors, group support participants and other volunteers;
* Profile of children being served, including the typical needs and problems to be addressed within the program
* Expectations of volunteers in terms of duration and level of commitment;
* Forms and any other paperwork to be completed;
* Schedule of upcoming volunteer training.

Some partners may already have established training that CCS volunteers can join or legal forms that must be signed. Be sure to check with your partner.

Matt Deevers, who spoke at the 2018 NCCS Convention, talked about the ABC’s of persistence. Ability, Belonging, and Control. 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

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.

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. **Junior Member Program** (link to guidelines under Membership). 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 field trip experiences, bringing in a varsity soccer player to speak in conjunction with a book about soccer, or a music major to supplement *Never Play Music Right Next to the Zoo* by John Lithgow. Exposing young people to CCS plants seeds for extended involvement as a member.

**Make a Difference Day (**link to MDD info**)** 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!

1. ***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*

The ideal partnership has:

Clear responsibilities

Both parties on the same page

Collaborative, respectful and trusting relationship

Open to change and feedback

Partnering can require delicate negotiations. A partnership agreement 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.

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.

**A basic sample partnership 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 1st and 3rd 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 1st
* 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)

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.

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.   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.

Building a strong partnership involves the knowledge that 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.

**Conclusion**

You may be thinking 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 children much, or volunteers work at the whim of the partner alone. It is never too late to amend your plan.

If you haven’t yet decided to start an early learning program, try to 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. There are lots of little ways you can include literacy elements into what you do now until you are ready to initiate a program.

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.

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.