

After School Program Encourages Community Service

Agency: Sioux Falls Family YMCA

Program: After School Program

Service: Provides after school care at five Sioux Falls Middle Schools. Students participate in a variety of activities, including games, crafts, arts, music, dance, field trips and more. Transportation home is provided to participants at the end of the day.

Need: Research shows that the hours between 3:30 and 6:00pm on weekdays are the highest levels of incidence for crime, drug, sexual and alcohol related activities for middle school students.

Impact: Over 350 middle school students participate in healthy activities, receive a healthy snack and have homework help daily through the Y's After School Program. Research of similar after school programs finds that students who participate in such programs miss fewer days of school, have better homework completion, better school behavior, and higher test scores.

A ring of the school bell at 3:30 and suddenly a swell of students rush into the cafeteria. Students talk with their friends as they check in at the front door, drop their school bags off in the corner and rush to the snack line for some juice and chips.

And while you would think that most students look forward to the end of the day bell so they can head home, these hundred plus students choose to stay at Whittier Middle School after the bell rings for the YMCA's After School Program.

"I've been coming here every day after school since 6th grade," says Shawna, who is now an active and energetic 8th grader. "The staff are cool, we get to do fun activities, take field trips...I like doing the crafts."

Shawna is one of hundreds of middle school students who attend an After School Program at one of five participating middle schools.

"If I didn't come to ASP, I'd just go home and watch TV," continues Shawna. "I like ASP so much that my sister started coming once she started 6th grade too."

ASP participants have a variety of activities to choose from. Students can do everything from create crafts, to play video games, to use the gym to burn off energy. The kids can also utilize the library or computer lab and receive help with their homework.

But ASP isn't all fun and games. Participants strive to be a part of the Inside Outside Program of ASP, which rewards students for good behavior, by letting them participate in community service projects that are often held off site. Students who participate in IOP collect points for their community service projects and for being "caught" doing something good.

"IOP is the best," Shawna states. "We've cleaned up garbage, help do dishes, things like that. Last year we raised enough money that we got to go to Minneapolis to the zoo, a museum, the mall and a Twins' game!"

And thanks to Sioux Empire United Way's funding of the After School Program through Sioux Falls Family YMCA, over 1000 middle school students are registered for the After School Program, creating opportunities to not only participate in fun activities like IOP, but to also create lifelong relationships and friendships.

"I'll miss ASP next year," ends Shawna. "I'm going to have to come back and visit even after I'm in high school."

