



Building the foundation for successful adulthood

Parent and Student Focus Groups

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Keene Housing Kids Collaborative provides low- or no-cost enrichment opportunities for Keene Housing resident children, such as after-school programs, YMCA classes, and scholarships to sports and arts activities. The purpose of these programs is to help children build skills for success in life, guided by these Benchmark Goals:

Benchmark Goals:

- Children residing in Keene Housing will enter kindergarten with acceptable pre-reading and numeracy skills.
- Children residing in Keene Housing will enter kindergarten with behavior that is generally school appropriate.
- Elementary aged children residing in Keene Housing will be at grade level or higher in reading by third grade.
- Elementary aged children residing in Keene Housing will be at grade level or higher in math by fourth grade.
- Elementary aged children residing in Keene Housing will have well-developed socio-emotional skills.
- Youth residing in Keene Housing will graduate with a GPA of 2.5 (C+) or higher.
- Youth residing in Keene Housing will graduate from high school without having become a parent.
- Youth residing in Keene Housing will graduate from high school without becoming involved in the juvenile justice system.

To determine the extent to which the Kids Collaborative programs help participating children achieve these benchmarks, and to discover whether there are other benefits associated with the program, Keene Housing Kids Collaborative partnered with faculty, administrators, and students from Keene State College for a series of research studies. In one of these studies, reported here, parents and students took part in focus groups to share their experiences with the Kids Collaborative activities.



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Key Findings:

- Elementary school children and their parents identified clear benefits for the second and fifth benchmarks:
 - **learning school-appropriate behavior** and
 - **developing socio-emotional skills.**
- For some older students, the programs also support them in earning **good grades** in school (the sixth benchmark).
- In addition, the focus groups revealed other benefits from these programs:
 - developing **athletic and artistic skills,**
 - connecting with **positive adult role models,**
 - the **opportunity to connect with and give back to the wider Keene community.**
 - **counteracting stereotypes** about Keene Housing residents, and
 - **enriching activities that families could not afford otherwise.**



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Benchmark 2: Learning School-Appropriate Behavior – The Value of Play

Younger participants in Kids Collaborative activities learn school-appropriate behavior by meeting other children and learning to get along with them, developing early social skills, and learning to divert energy into sports or active play, which might otherwise go into inappropriate behavior. These are some sample comments on this theme.

What the Kids Say:

“I liked it when we practiced. Like the drills, liked the scrimmages where the different teams wear pinnies. We saw slam dunks!”

“I like the games and running around and stuff.”

“I like when we play outside. I have best friends there which I really like.”

“I learned to be best friends with everybody.”

“I liked all the other kids I met.”

WHAT THE KIDS SAY:

**“I learned to be best friends
with everybody.”**

What the Parents Say:

“We wanted her to have interaction with other kids, since she’s an only child. Where we live there are ... no kids her age. This gives her other kids to play with.”

“Her father is out of the country, so there is a lot of wanting and missing there. [Until she was involved in Keene Collaborative activities] she had the lonesome only child thing going on.”

“She gets to meet other kids that she might go to school with.”

“My daughter has been invited to more sleepovers since being involved in these activities.”



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Benchmark 5: Developing Socio-Emotional Skills – The Power of Confidence

Children develop self-confidence through Kids Collaborative activities. For some children, this confidence is hard-won. The following are some comments that reflect this theme.

WHAT THE KIDS SAY:

“I liked jumping in – when I go under water. It helped me not be afraid of the water. I was afraid of the water before that.” (a child with social anxiety)

What the Kids Say:

“I thought it was cool. When the horses trot I bounce up and down and giggle. It helped me not to be afraid of horses. I like it when I feed the horse a snack – peppermint candy or apples.” (a child who was formerly afraid of horses)

“I like when we do the shows – I get to dance in front of everybody.”

“I liked jumping in – when I go under water. It helped me not be afraid of the water. I was afraid of the water before that.” (a child with social anxiety)

“It has increased my confidence on stage and in myself.”

What the Parents Say:

“We had tried a couple of classes when she was smaller. It is wonderful to have the opportunity again to let her do these things – to watch her light up.”

“She is learning not to be afraid. She sees other kids close to her age being able to do things, so she feels she can try it. These are activities that are appropriate for her developmentally.”

“The first time she took a class at MoCo she didn’t want a part, she said she just wanted to dance. The second performance class she took, she said she wanted to try out for the narrator part in the performance. ... To see her go from not wanting to have a part at all, to trying out for a big speaking part was really incredible!”



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“Her self-confidence really increased. She had a difficult time of it [during our divorce]. I and her grandparents and little sister would all go watch the dance performance every Friday. It made me cry sometimes – It was great to see her up on stage without a care and having fun. I hadn’t seen that side of her in a long time.”

“Within five [horseback riding] sessions, my daughter was no longer afraid of horses. She kisses them, and hugs them. Her favorite part is caring for the horses and mucking out the stalls.”

WHAT THE PARENTS SAY:

“To see her go from not wanting to have a part at all, to trying out for a big speaking part was really incredible!”

Benchmark 6: Good Grades

Parents of older children reported that participating in Kids Collaborative activities helped them keep their grades up. While there was general agreement with this point in the parent focus groups, one parent’s comment stood out.

WHAT THE PARENTS SAY:

“Her grades have skyrocketed.”

What the Parents Say:

“My daughter’s father is not in the picture. She started getting depressed. ... [Then she began participating in these activities.] Now she is not depressed, her grades have skyrocketed. I tell her, ‘As long as you keep your grades up, you can do as many things as you want.’ She’s happy and that’s what I care about.”



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Artistic and Athletic Skills

One of the chief developmental tasks of children in elementary school is developing competence – physically, socially, and academically. This is a time for skill building, and it is the feature of Kids Collaborative that the children mentioned most frequently. The following comments are examples.

What the Kids Say:

“I really enjoy at the end of each class we get to face off in matches – after learning the techniques and exercises.”

“I got more flexible in gymnastics and I got better in horseback riding.”

“I learned new things in gymnastics.”

“It can be really fun to act – sometimes you have to do some things that aren’t actually there.... I really like to ... use my imagination.”

“I like MoCo because it’s really fun and I learned more acting skills and a lot of new dances.”

“I learned more hand/eye coordination by dribbling and looking up at the same time.”

“I learned lots of basketball stuff, there were four different stations.”

WHAT THE KIDS SAY:

“It’s really fun and I learned more acting skills and a lot of new dances.”

What the Parents Say:

“With the activities she is not as bored and she’s learning more skills.”



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Connecting with Positive Adult Role Models

Several parents sought out activities for their children specifically to connect them with positive adult role models. For children whose fathers are not in the home, the opportunity to develop appropriate connections with nurturing men is particularly important. These comments are examples.

WHAT THE PARENTS SAY:

“My son looks up to Mr. Bailey [Project KEEP teacher] as a mentor and father figure.”

What the Parents Say:

“I sought out activities to find a positive male role model for her. I’ve found that in the coaches for the sports and in other parents in the community.”

“These activities help kids connect in a positive way with figures of authority in the community.

“My son looks up to Mr. Bailey [Project KEEP teacher] as a mentor and father figure. He talks to him about basketball and all kinds of things. His father isn’t around, so it is great to see that he can have that kind of a relationship and look up to someone.”

Connecting with and Giving Back to the Greater Keene Community

Parents and one older student spoke about the value that Keene Housing Kids Collaborative provides in connecting children to the broader Keene community. The following comments are examples in this theme.

What the Kids Say:

“At 15, I have more opportunity to give back to my community. I’m a CIT [Counselor in Training] at the C.A.K.E. camp.”



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What the Parents Say:

“Mrs. Daniel’s classes at MoCo are wonderful. She acknowledges each child and what they can contribute. She has my daughter help with the younger kids, she gives her responsibility. This lets her know that she is trusted and can be relied on, and lets her have the feeling of giving back, as well.”

“It not only gets my child out in the community, it gets me out there, too.”

“Kids Collaborative provides networks for parents in the community.”

WHAT THE PARENTS SAY:

“It not only gets my child out in the community, it gets me out there, too.”

Counteracting Stereotypes about Keene Housing Residents

Many parents appreciated the fact that involving their children in Kids Collaborative activities helps them counteract negative stereotypes about Keene Housing residents, attitudes that they feel deeply. There were many comments on this theme, and these two are good examples:

WHAT THE PARENTS SAY:

“These activities ... give a positive reflection on Keene Housing. They benefit the community, too, in overcoming stereotypes of the people who live in low-income housing.”

What the Parents Say:

“I’m happier now that I’m getting out of the Keene Housing community and into the larger community. There is a stigma associated with Keene Housing. It is good to get out and be with ‘normal’ people, so we can be normal, too.”

“We’ve gotten a lot of negative response because of where we live. These activities give parents a chance to social network within the larger community. They give a positive reflection on Keene Housing. They benefit the community, too, in overcoming stereotypes of the people who live in low-income housing. They help us expand our own social networks within the larger community.”



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Enriching Activities that Families Could Not Afford Otherwise

Regardless of income, parents want the best for their children, and they want to be the best parents they can be, saying yes to good experiences that their children want. For these parents, Kids Collaborative activities allow them to say yes.

What the Parents Say:

“It has helped me to be able to keep my kids active. We can meet friends at the Children’s Museum...we never would have been able to afford to do that.”

“Gymnastics is something that my daughter has wanted to do for a long time. It is so nice to be able to say to her, ‘Yes, you can take gymnastics.’”

“It really helps with parent morale not to constantly have to say ‘no.’”

“This program levels the playing field for our family.”

“Parents can be the best they can be by providing resources for their children.”

“We see our children being elevated. It also gives us a certain amount of pride in ourselves that we are not always saying ‘no.’ We can have our head up just as high as everyone else.”

“We don’t have to say ‘no’ anymore.”

“The financial subsidy is huge in allowing my child to have the benefit of experiences that are important to her.”

WHAT THE PARENTS SAY:

“We see our children being elevated. It also gives us a certain amount of pride in ourselves that we are not always saying ‘no.’”