



The First Step—News from The After School Project

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Point of View:

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

Welcome to the first After School Project e-newsletter and join us on our first step to share what we and our partners in Boston, Chicago, and the San Francisco Bay Area are learning in our work together.

In writing this e-newsletter, we are mindful of the steps taken by a great many before us to bring the afterschool field to where it is today—on the cusp of maturity, prepared to deal with the complex issues surrounding the delivery of quality afterschool programs to all children and youth who need and want them.

Our intention for the e-newsletter is not to substitute or repeat information from others but rather to add to the emerging knowledge about how afterschool intermediaries add value to their cities' youth development delivery systems. With an increasing spotlight on the educational and health problems faced by our country's poorest children, the nation is looking to the organizations and practitioners who have been learning how to provide quality opportunities to vulnerable children. The cities supported by the After School Project have a lot to report, as the numbers on our

pilot program start to roll in. Through the After School Project, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) supports intermediary organizations in three cities—Boston, Chicago, and the San Francisco Bay Area—which in turn serve as catalysts in their communities and provide technical assistance, funds, and policy support to local afterschool organizations that play a major role in guiding young lives.

Did you know that ...

- RWJF has allocated **\$16.9 million** to the Project since 1998 to help connect substantial numbers of young people in urban, low income neighborhoods with quality programs during the non-school hours?
- The three cities, in turn, have **matched RWJF's investment with over \$78 million** in local public and private funds?



- After just three years in operation, these organizations are **reaching more than 28,000 children** from their cities' poorest communities?

We cannot think of a more effective way to bring about social change for young people than by supporting effective local youth development programs. Afterschool programs—from sports and physical fitness to education, arts, technology, and job training—have a positive influence on the development of large numbers of young people. The true measure of the quality and success of any afterschool program is whether it deeply engages young people and provides enriching experiences that they will carry with them into the future. Just taking the first step goes a long way to reaching this goal.

Are you starting to see the staircase? We are. And we plan on using this e-newsletter to share what we're learning in our efforts to take the right steps on behalf of children.

Carol Glazer and JoAnne Vellardita
The After School Project

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The First Step Inaugural Issue

This is the first issue of The First Step. It comes appropriately just before the first of the year, a time of new beginnings and many first steps for us all. The First Step is a forum for sharing updates on the After School Project, news from the afterschool field, and issues critical to the healthy development of young people.

Quote of Month:

“You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.”

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

After School Project Updates:

“After School Grows Up” Symposium—

The After School Project teamed up with the National Institute of Out-of-School Time (NIOST) to co-host the *After-School Grows Up, Building Knowledge About Good Practices in Citywide After-School Initiatives Symposium*, December 1–3, 2004 at the Sunburst Resort in Scottsdale, Arizona. The three-day symposium brought together over 100 participants—teams and individuals engaged in expanding access to high quality local afterschool programming—from across the country.

With an agenda designed to provide opportunities to share and build upon knowledge that is being developed in cities throughout the nation, in-depth discussion and honest reflection were an integral part of the meeting format. The level of commitment and thoughtful practice was inspiring. A quote from one participant captures the spirit at the conference, “...we’re not going away ...political agendas will come and go... we’re in it for the long term.”

Look for an overview of the highlights of the Symposium in an upcoming After

School Project e-newsletter in early 2005. Also, a more in-depth summary of the meeting will be posted on both the After School Project’s and NIOST’s websites in January: <http://www.niost.org/citywide>; <http://www.theafterschoolproject.org>.

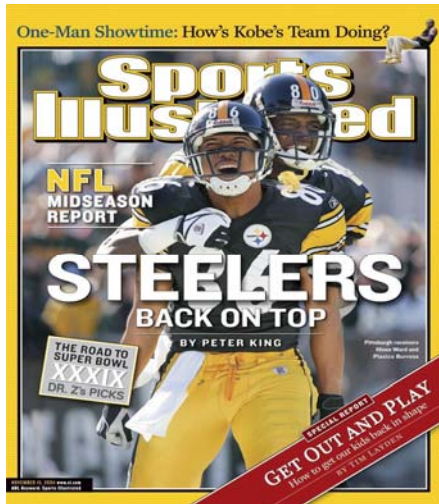
Sports Illustrated—

Check out the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s (RWJF) After School Project in

the November 15, 2004 issue of *Sports Illustrated* (SI).

Sixteen-year old Kasha Ambrose of G-ROW BOSTON, an afterschool rowing program for girls in Boston public schools that teaches them to compete on the Charles River and in college admissions, is featured in the article, “A Weighty Issue for Minorities,” part of SI’s *Get Out and Play* special report.

G-ROW BOSTON is part of Boston’s After-School for All Partnership program network. The Partnership is one of three intermediaries nationally supported by the After School Project, all of which share the common objective of engaging significant numbers of young people from minority and inner city populations in healthy activities in the communities in which they live. The SI article also quotes RWJF’s President, Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, on the Foundation’s goal: “Our objective is to help halt the rise of obesity in children by 2015 and with three cities, we are just scratching the surface.”



Breaking News:

Childhood Obesity Report—

According to *Preventing Childhood Obesity: Health in the Balance*, a recent draft report from the Institute of Medicine (IOM), a national effort involving schools, government, parents, local communities, and the food and beverage industries is urgently needed to combat the epidemic of childhood obesity.

The statistics are alarming: almost nine million young people in the U.S. are overweight or obese—twice as many children and three times as many adolescents as twenty years ago.

While no single action or group can stop the epidemic, the IOM calls for increased and improved opportunities, *including afterschool programs*, for children to engage

in physical activity for at least 30 minutes per day.

Other recommendations include:

- Enactment of nutritional standards for all food and beverages served in school and development of programs to teach health education with annual assessments of student weight;
- Voluntary development and setting of guidelines for advertising and marketing to children;
- Changes in zoning to include sidewalks, bike paths, parks, and playgrounds in our communities;
- Availability of healthy foods at home as well as limiting children’s recrea-

tional viewing of television, video games, and computers to less than two hours a day; and

- Creation of a federal interagency task force to coordinate activities.

A final version of the IOM report is due out in early 2005.



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Case in Point: *G-ROW BOSTON*

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's (RWJF) After School Project (ASP) supports intermediary organizations in three cities that in turn help connect local after-school programs to the funding and resources they need to provide a wide range of enriching activities that engage children and youth in their own communities. Each e-newsletter will feature Case in Point, a case study highlighting one of these after-school programs.

THE START GUN

Launched in the fall of 1998, G-ROW BOSTON (Girls-Row Boston) is a non-profit program of Community Rowing, Inc. that gives girls in Boston public schools the opportunity to row and grow. The first program of its kind for girls in the Boston public schools, G-ROW builds girls' strength and confidence and aims to diversify the traditionally exclusive sport of rowing.

G-ROW BOSTON is based on two fundamental beliefs:

- Adolescent girls need to form healthy relationships and a sense of belonging in order to truly express themselves and be themselves; and
- Rowing for girls promotes self-confidence, determination, strength, and personal growth in a tangible and powerful way.

STROKE, STROKE!

Under the vision of Olympic Gold Medalist Holly Metcalf, G-ROW BOSTON provides girls with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity: to learn to row and compete on the Charles River. The girls practice three days a week throughout the school year to develop new skills, including on-water rowing and racing, weight and erg training, boat maintenance, swimming, and leadership. The novice girls learn to row on rowing machines and stable rowing barges, and then "graduate" to the sleek, eight-person rowing shells. This year, G-ROW BOSTON was the only Boston public school entry in the famous Head of the Charles Regatta.

Rowing is a very collegiate sport, and the girls practice and play on college campuses. This introduces the girls to the idea of going to college and the options it can provide: meeting new people, participating in activities, and furthering their futures.



All of this makes rowing a perfect partner with G-ROW's other focus: encouraging the girls to apply to college.

G-ROW not only provides tutoring options, but goes one step further, offering free college counseling through a partnership with Bottom Line, a non-profit that helps the girls apply and even arrange visits to college campuses. Many of these girls would be the first in their families to go to college, so their parents do not always know or understand the college application process. G-ROW works with the girls one-on-one, giving them the support they wouldn't otherwise receive at home. In addition, some of these girls believe that they cannot apply to college because they or their parents are not U.S. citizens. G-ROW helps overcome these obstacles by serving as a bridge to the resources they need, such as pro bono legal assistance to help them understand and maneuver through immigration matters.

THE CREW

G-ROW BOSTON's year-round program participants are from the Boston public schools. Current participants attend the John D. O'Bryant High School, Timilty Middle School, Madison Park Technical Vocational High School, Fenway High School, Brighton High School, and Boston Latin Academy. The girls are 11 to 18 years old and come from many neighborhoods in Boston. The coaches meet the girls at school and transport the team in the program van. The ride to and from practice is a surprisingly powerful part of each practice, as it gives the girls a chance to bond and talk openly with their teammates and their coaches in a no-pressure environment. The program also provides mentoring for the girls.

VICTORY AT HAND

G-ROW BOSTON's program design is firmly rooted in some of the most respected

and successful research and programming in the country. The combination of physical challenge and emotional support creates a dramatic and lasting impact on the lives of girls and women. Rowing teaches the girls teamwork, discipline, accountability (if one girl doesn't show, they can't row), determination, and the power of hard work, all of which translate into other areas of their life both in the present and future. A team of researchers from the Harvard University Graduate School of Education is currently evaluating the program's effects. For more information on G-ROW BOSTON, please visit www.growboston.org.

STEP UP TO THE WINDOW: KASHA JOSE AMBROISE

Step up to the Window profiles a student or team member connected to one of the ASP-enabled programs to offer insights into the tangible effects of our collective efforts.

ASP: Where do you go to school?

KJA: I am a junior at the John D. O'Bryant High School of Mathematics and Science in Roxbury, Massachusetts.

ASP: How did you get involved in G-ROW BOSTON?

KJA: I got involved in G-ROW through my friends in the 7th grade and stayed for a full winter season but had to stop due to health issues. I got re-involved last year as a sophomore. I wanted to see if I could control my health problems and be part of something that helps me as a young woman to grow maturely and endure the most painful workouts—that somehow, in the end, is a great accomplishment.

ASP: Did you row or play other sports before joining G-ROW?

KJA: I had joined other sports programs but only for brief moments of time because I did not believe that I could compete against those who I thought were better than I. Learning to compete against those people was one of the hardest things about my G-ROW experience. So was having to compete when I was outnumbered and looked at differently because of the color of my skin. Now, being a minority only gives me more confidence to compete and prove that I am stronger than some may think.

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Case in Point: G-ROW BOSTON, Continued

ASP: What can you tell me about your position in the boat?

KJA: I row starboard in the three or five position. My job is to keep the boat set and keep the people behind me at the right speed. It's a job that takes stamina, energy, and leadership.

ASP: Have you noticed any physical benefits from the exercise rowing requires?

KJA: My back muscles got stronger and helped me stand straighter than I had before. I also have type-2 diabetes, and all the exercise I get from rowing (and the better eating habits I've picked up because of it) helped me decrease my medications. I also don't have to check my blood-sugar as often now (only once a day!), which is great because it was such a pain to have to check it several times a day.

ASP: What about emotional benefits?

KJA: I've gained strength to go against those who thought that putting me down would stop me from racing or being a crew member. G-ROW has helped me gain control of what goes on in life when things get tough and given me the ability to talk to the coaches about the things that I deal with. In my daily life I've been able to handle the people I come across. Crew has helped me build up the confidence to stand tall and face competitors.

ASP: What has been your single most proud or happy moment during G-ROW?

KJA: Our last race at the Housatonic. I was so proud that we did a three-mile race in under 20 minutes. And it took all of the G-ROW girls to row with togetherness and strength to do it. That race felt good and

made us all feel good because of what we accomplished. Even though we were 17th, we finished with one of our best rows.

ASP: What are your hobbies/interests?

KJA: Reading. My favorite book is *Before We Were Free* by Julia Alvarez. It is narrated by a young girl in the time of a revolution in the Dominican Republic having to see her family suffer. This book demonstrates her transition from childhood to womanhood, and it relates to me in her constantly wanting to break free and show that she is more than what many had named her and her family to be. I like to learn about new places, subjects, and things to take me to a higher level of thinking. My interests include traveling, learning a new language, and being as outspoken as I can.

ASP: Do you have a favorite song or

"Let's get it started...Inch by inch with the new solution."

lyric?

KJA: "Let's Get It Started" by the Black Eyed Peas. The song symbolizes the start of a revolution, a transition from the old way to the new. This is motivational and moving.

ASP: Who is someone whom you truly admire?

KJA: Someone who inspires me is my mother. She left her mother and first child (my sister) in Haiti to find a better way of living but found it even harder in America than it was in Haiti. Though she has gone through many things in life, she manages to

take care of my sister, brother, and me.

ASP: Have you made any new friends as a result of G-ROW? Can you name one or more and tell me what you like about her, something you do together?

KJA: I have made many new friends from the other schools that are incorporated with the program. One of them, Sandra, from Brighton High School, just came into the United States from Guatemala nine months ago. I've learned so much about her and her country and her love for rowing and how she has encountered many other sports in her past. Even though she is just understanding a new language, she teaches me her dialect of Spanish, which is different from what I am learning in school.

ASP: What kinds of things do you do to make yourself a better rower?

KJA: I constantly remind myself that I am not the only person going through the pain and technique problems that we all face now and then. As a rower, I focus on encouraging others and what I have to do to keep the boat set or keep everyone on the boat rowing on time.

ASP: What are your future plans?

KJA: I see myself continuing with rowing and sports in general to stay fit and active in life. I plan on going to a college or university to major in Spanish, Pharmacy, and later get a Doctorate in Endocrinology.

ASP: Impressive!