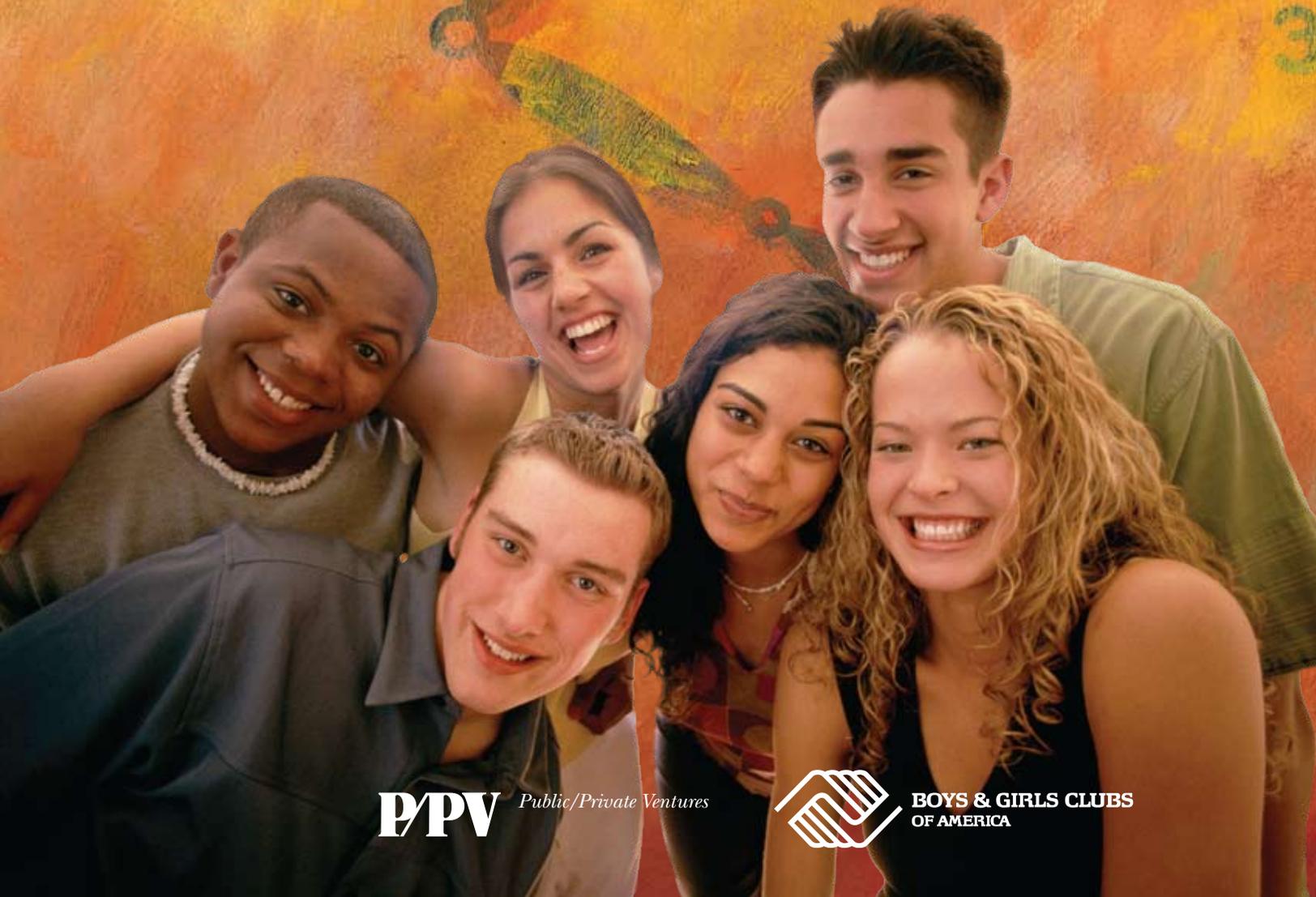


More Time For Teens:

Understanding Teen Participation—Frequency, Intensity and Duration—
In Boys & Girls Clubs

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a national longitudinal evaluation
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Boys & Girls Clubs play in the lives of
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Public/Private Ventures is a national nonprofit organization that seeks to improve the effectiveness of social policies and programs. P/PV designs, tests and studies initiatives that increase supports, skills and opportunities of residents of low-income communities; works with policymakers to see that the lessons and evidence produced are reflected in policy; and provides training, technical assistance and learning opportunities to practitioners based on documented effective practices.

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- Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston, Charlestown Boys & Girls Club
- Boys & Girls Clubs of Broward County, Marti Huizenga Boys & Girls Club
- Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Fort Worth, Martin Branch
- Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Fort Worth, Panther Branch
- Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee, Mary Ryan Boys & Girls Club
- Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater San Diego, Linda Vista Club
- Boys & Girls Clubs of Omaha, South Omaha Boys & Girls Club
- Boys & Girls Clubs of San Francisco, Columbia Park
- Colonel Daniel Marr Boys & Girls Club, Dorchester
- West End House Boys & Girls Club of Allston/Brighton

Club staff took the time to recruit teens for the study, to survey them, and to coordinate and send attendance information to Public/Private Ventures (P/PV). The many teens who participated in the study also made invaluable contributions—we appreciate their willingness to complete surveys and talk with us about their experiences at the Club.

Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) provided the funding for the research and this report, and numerous BGCA staff reviewed and commented on early drafts. In particular, we appreciate the helpful suggestions of Karen MacDonald and John Arigoni, who coordinated the feedback from other BGCA staff and communicated it to us.

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We would also like to thank the P/PV staff whose contributions to the report were significant. Chelsea Farley provided important suggestions for framing the report and insightful comments that honed its content and structure. Tina Kauh helped conceptualize the framework for the data analysis. Laurie Kotloff and Carla Herrera reviewed drafts of the report and provided excellent feedback that helped structure the final text. Edward Moran provided copyediting for early versions of the report. Malish & Pagonis designed the report, and Chelsea Farley and Laura Johnson oversaw the final copyediting, proofreading and production of the report.

Researchers believe that the teen years are a critical time for providing services to youth because it is then that young people are adopting behavior patterns that can have lifelong consequences. Indeed, teens' participation in out-of-school-time (OST) programs has been found to relate to positive outcomes, but studies have also shown that as children enter the teen years their participation in OST programs drops off—due to a shortage of programs and the fact that most existing programs lack the ability to attract or sustain the participation of older youth.

To extend our understanding of programs that successfully engage teens, Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) is conducting a national longitudinal evaluation examining the role Boys & Girls Clubs play in the lives of the youth they serve, particularly as youth transition from middle school to high school. The evaluation investigates whether participation in Clubs is related to positive outcomes for teens in three areas: school success, positive health behaviors and positive character development.

Relying on data captured to the mid-point of the evaluation, the current report documents findings related to a key question of increasing interest to funders, policymakers, parents and programs: *What does it take to involve teens in out-of-school-time programs?* Involving teens over time is important if programs expect them to gain measurable benefits from their participation.

The Study

The longitudinal study follows 432 youth from 10 Clubs across the country¹ who completed surveys at their Clubs in Winter 2006, when they were in seventh and eighth grades. These youth completed a follow-up survey in Winter 2007 and will complete a last round of surveys in Spring 2008, when they are in ninth and tenth grades—roughly two and a half years after the study began. In addition, in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted in Spring

2007 with the sample of youth who were in ninth grade at that time. Finally, club staff are collecting daily attendance information over the 29-month study period for all participating youth. The study follows the teens regardless of their levels of continued involvement in Clubs during the study period.

The current report is based primarily on data gathered from the first wave of surveys, the interviews with ninth graders, and approximately 17 months of attendance data, which captures the cohort's attendance at the Clubs as they move into eighth and ninth grades.

Findings

The following pages summarize the findings and conclusions of the full report, available at www.ppv.org.

The Teens

The surveys of seventh and eighth graders reveal the following picture: The teens in the sample are ethnically diverse and primarily low-income, similar to the overall population served by Clubs nationwide. The youth, a majority of whom had been involved in the Club for more than two years at the time the study began, typically lived relatively close to the Club and tended to report performing fairly well in school and having engaged in few risk behaviors.

The Clubs' Approach to Serving Teens

The Boys & Girls Clubs strive to provide a safe place for youth to enjoy ongoing relationships with peers and adults and life-enhancing programs that offer character development, hope and opportunity. The Clubs provide an array of activities across broad program areas; the goal is to attract youth with a variety of interests and expose them to new and diverse activities that they may not otherwise have the opportunity to experience. The Clubs serve youth ages 6 to 18, but use a modified approach with their teen participants, providing supports and opportu-

nities that are tailored to the needs of this older age group. The Clubs usually provide a special place for their teen participants, flexibility in terms of what activities youth participate in, more time to socialize with peers, and an increased emphasis on leadership and role modeling.

Teens' Experiences at the Club

The survey findings suggest that teens use the Club in different ways; for some youth, their only out-of-school activities are at the Club, while others combine their Club activities with other pastimes. A common theme described by participants is that, regardless of how much they use the Club, they feel connected to the Club and feel that even if they are not using it right now, they could go back. The teens reported participating in a wide range of activities at the Clubs and getting involved in leadership roles. They also reported receiving high levels of support and opportunity at the Clubs, enjoying the time to “hang out” at the Club and valuing the friendships they have there. Teens also rated the Club as safer in comparison to other places where they spend time. On average, teens rated the Clubs 8.62 on a scale ranging from 1 (very dangerous) to 10 (very safe). In comparison, the teens rated how safe they feel at their schools as 7.19 and the neighborhood around the Club as 6.66.

Participation Rates and the Factors that Explained Higher Rates of Ongoing Participation

Teen participation in out-of-school-time programs can be sporadic and difficult to examine, particularly in drop-in programs like the Clubs where teens can leave for months at a time—and still be welcomed back. Thus, to account for some of this complexity in participation (particularly in considering retention, given that youth can return at any time), the study examines participation along three “dimensions”:

- **Frequency:** How many days the teens attended the Club over a 17-month period.
- **Duration:** How many months they attended the Club at least one day during the 17-month period.
- **Retention:** Whether they have attended the Club in the last 6 of the 17 months during which attendance data were collected.

Categorizing teen participation in this way shows relatively high levels of attendance. Just under half (45.1%) of the teens came at least once in each of the 13 or more months during the 17-month study period, with about one quarter (24.6%) coming 172 or more days (roughly two to three days per week or more, on average). Over three quarters (76.2%) had attended the Club in one of the last six months of the 17-month data collection period.

Further analyses were conducted to test the associations between Club practices as experienced by the teens at the start of the study (when they were in seventh and eighth grades) and their attendance and retention rates over the study period.² The findings indicate that the most significant factors (measured at the start of the study) in relation to ongoing and sustained teen attendance were:

- The number of years the youth had been involved in the Club prior to the start of the study;
- The proportion of their friends who also go to the Club;
- The number of leadership opportunities in which they were involved;
- The variety of activities in which they engaged at the Club;
- The time to just “hang out” and socialize with peers;
- Their perception that the Club was a physically safe place to be; and
- Whether the youth had easy access (via self transportation) to the Club.

Lessons Learned

A number of important lessons about attracting and sustaining teen participation emerged from the qualitative and quantitative data gathered for the study:

1. Building strong ties when youth are young is likely a key strategy for keeping them connected to the program as they become teenagers.
2. Flexible attendance policies and special programming for teens may be crucial to keeping a wide range of teens involved.
3. A special teen space that offers the opportunity for an “unprogrammed” social dynamic is a main attraction for teens.
4. For teens, many of whom are making their own choices about how they spend their time after school, having interesting activities available when they arrive is particularly important.
5. Outreach and programming for teens must take into account the importance they place on friendships.

Early Indications of the Value of Participation

Although we will follow the teens for one more year to assess the role Clubs play as all the teens in the study move into high school, analyses of the degree to which one year of participation is related to changes in outcomes suggest that keeping teens involved in Clubs may be beneficial. Specifically, a higher level of attendance in Clubs over a one-year period was linked to positive change in each of the three outcome areas the longitudinal evaluation is tracking:³

- Character development (integrity, social competence and positive approaches to resolving conflicts),
- School-related outcomes (school liking and school effort), and
- Health and risk behaviors (delayed initiation of sexual intercourse).

Next Steps

A final report will address the larger question of the evaluation: What role do Clubs play in youth’s lives? It will examine how attendance in the Clubs over 29 months is related to outcomes and, to the extent possible, explore whether there are thresholds of participation—frequency, duration, retention—that are more likely to achieve those outcomes. In addition, as the study progresses, we will explore the variety of attendance patterns that emerge—in terms of involvement in activities inside and outside the Club—and the degree to which they are associated with key outcomes.

Out-of-school time can be ripe with positive opportunities for teens. The key is creating settings and options that are attractive to teens and that sustain their participation in ways that make a difference in their healthy development. With their diversity of programs and opportunities, and the wide range of ages served, Boys & Girls Clubs provide a powerful setting for learning more about how to effectively serve teens and, ultimately, what threshold levels of attendance may be necessary to promote positive outcomes.

Endnotes

- 1 The Clubs are: Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston, Charlestown Boys & Girls Club; Boys & Girls Clubs of Broward County, Marti Huizenga Boys & Girls Club; Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Fort Worth, Martin Branch; Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Fort Worth, Panther Branch; Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee, Mary Ryan Boys & Girls Club; Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater San Diego, Linda Vista Club; Boys & Girls Clubs of Omaha, South Omaha Boys & Girls Club; Boys & Girls Clubs of San Francisco, Columbia Park; Colonel Daniel Marr Boys & Girls Club, Dorchester; West End House Boys & Girls Club of Allston/Brighton.
- 2 The number of possible months an individual youth could attend the Club following his or her completion of the first survey ranged from 12 to 17 months.
- 3 The analyses we conducted control for confounding variables that were also related to higher levels of attendance. Absent a control group, the findings are suggestive of the benefits of Club participation, but not conclusive. For additional information, please see Appendix D in the full report.



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