
EFFECTIVE PROGRAM PRACTICES FOR AT-RISK YOUTH

A CONTINUUM OF COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS

**James Klopovic
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Preface: Thoughts on “Effective Practices for At-Risk Children”

Difficulties in society usually can be traced back to the neighborhood, the home, the individual, even the nursery, and society’s ineffectiveness in addressing obvious shortcomings in the social fabric before they become expensive, intractable problems. When we do not address problems (upstream), our prisons fill, social service calendars are booked well in advance, and an unending train of people need public assistance. Why is this when we are at our best when coming to the aid of our fellow Americans, especially in a crisis? One of the problems is that we need to “see” that crisis before we act. It is tough to see a fellow citizen going sour when he or she is just entering kindergarten; often it is easier when he or she drops out of school, or heads to court; however, at this point it is much too late. So it is that the idea for this book arose and that a decade of working with local governments and seeing, firsthand, how difficult it is to muster an appropriate response at an appropriate time for appropriate people and wondering about a better way, a practical and feasible way, to help people reach their potentiality followed.

Why have a book like this at all—one that attempts to make sense of the real confusion of bringing the community together to heal and strengthen itself. Goodness knows libraries are filled with thoughts and directives on how to go about the process. Entire governmental agencies are constructed with a mission to do the same. Also, the work is some of the most difficult, some of the most frustrating, some of the least productive ever undertaken. Of those who attempt it, few really succeed. The simple answer is that there is a sensible, productive way to go about making communities stronger. There is a way to enable communities to address their own problems their own way in their own time with a large measure of their own sweat. It is neither simple nor easy, but it is possible for the collective strong of heart. And because it is possible, the process of making strong communities has to be undertaken; the payback is inevitably worth the cost.

This book reflects the experiences of many communities—what practitioners have found to be effective practices. It is a way, proven by the people actually making it happen, to build stronger communities that are more capable of helping their neighbors become content and productive. It is a way to build infrastructure ahead of and as persistent as the difficulties any community wants and needs to address. It is a way to build permanent answers to problems that seem to defy solution.

This book is an idea, not *the* idea for gathering and focusing the knowledge

base from good works, able talent, and real concern for promoting the common good. It allows all levels of government, all sectors, to participate while being guided by a large dose of local determination. The actual path taken to stronger communities is as unique as the community that accepts the challenge. It is an answer to the problems of bringing the community together in a logical way, with a logical process, and a series of field-proven actions. It allows the targeting of limited resources to the people who need it most while it is defined to reach the entire neighborhood, especially our younger neighbors. It focuses on programs that make a difference. It orders and organizes the complex and confusing task of problem solving at the grassroots level. It makes making a difference possible.

What we hope happens as a result of reading this volume is that community by community people see the advantages of building a strong collaborative organization. This permanent operation, this partnership, then guides the best performance-based ideas to make the greatest difference. This difference is made by answering specific needs of our neighbors, usually our youngest, as they progress along the path of success as an individual and as a contributing member of society. This path of development that we all must follow offers the most opportune times for guidance, sometimes as little as the right word at the right time, that makes all the difference between success and failure. Yet many times the opportunity is not taken because we are not prepared to take advantage of it. The developmental continuum outlined in this volume is a way to be prepared when opportunity presents itself.

The process of being prepared, of collaborating, partnering, and building, is done slowly with permanency in mind. It is achieved by tactfully offering assistance when and where needed instead of waiting until the community and the individual suffer the disappointment and disgrace of downfall and failure. We will never eradicate social blight such as juvenile delinquency, teen pregnancy, drug abuse, domestic violence, and the ultimate expression of failure, crime. But we can make a profound difference in the way things are. All that is needed is to begin.

— J.K.

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