



A Place of Their Own

Celebrating Ten Years of Success • After Hours Teen Center
Loudoun County Public Library

Summary

The After Hours Teen Center (AHTC) at Cascades Library, a branch of Loudoun County Public Library (LCPL), was developed for teens in 2005 in direct response to a Loudoun County Board of Supervisors initiative that focused on meeting the gap of community services for youth ages 12-18. Available every Friday evening, the AHTC became - and continues to be - the county's only non-sport centric program offered weekly to teenagers. There are no comparable weekly programs of this frequency or longevity elsewhere in the Commonwealth of Virginia or the nation. The AHTC plans educational and engaging activities to keep youth occupied and safe, therefore helping to prevent youth from engaging in problematic activities or behaviors. In addition to being a safe place for teens to spend time, the AHTC aligns with The Search

Institute's framework of 40 developmental assets for teens, which states that inclusion in youth programs promotes and strengthens the advancement of well-being in adolescents. Since its inception, the After Hours Teen Center has been consistently appreciated by parents as an enriching environment. The success of the AHTC is demonstrated through the attendance which averages 90 teens every Friday night with approximately **45,000 youth served since 2005.**

The AHTC is a place where intellectual and physical disabilities are not a barrier for participation and social integration. Educational and recreational activities planned with and for all youth in attendance ensure involvement and a valued experience.

...inclusion in youth programs promotes and strengthens the advancement of well-being in adolescents



...the county's only non-sport centric program offered weekly to teenagers



The After Hours Teen Center was selected as one of 15 programs in the country to be featured in the American Library Association's 2008 publication "Excellence in Library Services to Young Adults." In 2005 LCPL won the prestigious \$10,000

Challenge

In 2005, Loudoun County Board of Supervisors undertook a major youth initiative which focused on assessing current adolescent needs in the community. The goal was to develop an action plan that would engage the total community in meeting those needs. Faced with the challenge of a rapidly growing community, Loudoun County leaders reached out to government agencies and community groups, tasking them to find ways to create and support activities for teens.

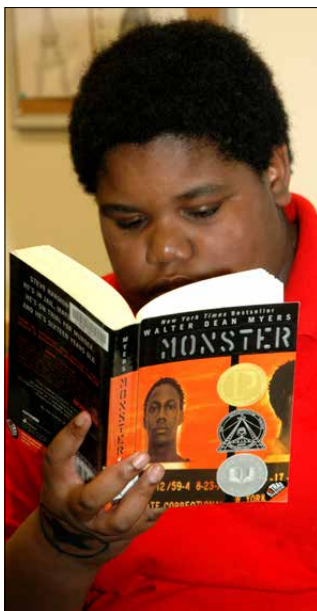


...youth in Loudoun County are assured every Friday night that they have a place that they can call their own

John Cotton Dana Award for the development of the After Hours Teen Center. Celebrating the tenth anniversary of the inception of the After Hours Teen Center, youth in Loudoun County are assured every Friday night that they have a place that they can call their own.

... one-third of the population of Loudoun County is under the age of eighteen

Loudoun County Public Library was one of the most active and engaged members of the initiative - bringing forward ideas and developing creative solutions for out-of-school activities for middle and high school-aged youth.



Loudoun County Public Library also fully embraced the spirit of the initiative, reaching out and listening to the county's youngest citizens and enlisting them fully in the development of those ideas and programs. Instead of looking at young people as recipients of services and programs, LCPL looked at youth as resources and as partners who can make valuable contributions in planning and implementing activities. Understanding the importance of youth as leaders now - not just in the future - and wanting to assess their needs, LCPL and other organizations hosted hundreds of youth forums. Through these "Listening to Youth" discussions, teens were asked two questions:

What do you see as constructive forces supporting growing up in Loudoun County?

What do you see as the biggest challenges and major obstacles to growing up in Loudoun County?

Participants recognized a strong sense of community as well as identified the lack of programs, resources and dedicated teen space in the county. By naming their specific needs, the teens helped form the mission of the Loudoun County Public Library's service to teens for 2005 and into the future. Teens identified "a place of their own" as critical to their well-being. Paramount to the identified goals of the project was the establishment of a weekly After Hours Teen Center at a branch of the library system. This innovative program would establish the library as a leader in its services to youth.



...LCPL looked at youth as resources and as partners who can make valuable contributions in planning and implementing activities. Understanding the importance of youth as leaders now - not just in the future.



Implementation

To make the After Hours Teen Center a reality, teen representatives from the community and LCPL approached the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors for out of budget cycle funding of \$50,000 to create a dedicated space for young people to meet.

The program would be staffed with three part-time library assistants, two security guards and a Teen Services Librarian. Teens using the After Hours Teen Center would have access to programs, educational games, music, computers, food and activities - all dictated by the interests of the teens. Beginning in June 2005,

...the Cascades Library became the place to be for teens on Friday nights

the Cascades Library became the place to be for teens on Friday nights. The center was publicized in area schools throughout the county and through non-profits and county agencies working with youth in the community. Throughout the summer months

AHTC is a welcoming, entertaining space for all teens, with no regard to popularity or abilities.

young people participated in the activities with the attendance growing each week. Continual marketing of the center's activities was done through the media and the youth themselves.

Ten years later the After Hours Teen Center continues to grow and provide the same high quality service that it did at its inception. This is accomplished by staff regularly evaluating the achievements of the center and its

programming and adjusting the presentations based on comments from teens. Utilizing 15,000 square feet of the building, regular Friday night activities include: youth using PCs, iPads and gaming consoles; watching a movie; listening to music; creating craft

projects and eating pizza. Each week a unique program is hosted by an outside

presenter or staff member. DJ-led dance parties, fashion shows, laser tag, iMovie workshops on iMac computers and holiday celebrations are presented throughout the year. AHTC is a welcoming, entertaining and educational space for all teens, with no regard to popularity or abilities. Perhaps the most telling observation by the youth participating in the AHTC activities is "We want to keep it going forever!"



Recognition

The achievement of the Loudoun County Public Library's After Hours Teen Center has been acknowledged by many groups and organizations. The Advisory Commission on Youth, which is comprised of representatives appointed by the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors, yearly presents to the county the status of Loudoun Youth Report. Each presentation has featured the Loudoun County Public Library's After Hour Teen Center as a positive example of an opportunity for adolescents to engage in meaningful activities as both participants and decision makers. The Loudoun Youth Initiative, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to support programs that provide teens positive out-of-school activities, recognizes the After Hours Teen Center as a significant opportunity for young people to develop connectedness and healthy relationships. The national awards that the After Hours Teen Center has received have established it as a model for public libraries throughout the nation.

The After Hours Teen Center addresses one of the most significant issues in positive youth development today: how to create social inclusion for teens. Every Friday night for ten years Loudoun County youth know that they have *a place to call their own*.

