

Sanctuary United Church of Christ's
Bright Stars After-School Enrichment Ministry Proposal
2015-2016

Presented by Kim Grubb

Let me give you a little bit of background and information about BS. 13 years ago the church began investigating ways to generate income for our church. We formed a committee to figure out the best way. Given our space we investigated if we would have a preschool program but at the time there were many preschools and home daycares. We then decided to go with an Afterschool program due to the fact that at the time there was only 1 or 2 in the city. For the first year it was hugely successful, we ended up increasing our licensing capacity from 40-52.

Although we did not have a very accurate accounting in those first few years or took out utilities, we estimated that the program made approximately \$35,000 each of those years. This worked for a few years with us making a profit until the public schools ended up opening their own Afterschool programs in the local elementary schools. This significantly changed our enrollment due to the Brooks school right next to us opened their Afterschool program. Over the years we went up and down with enrollments and therefore our profits went up and down.

Bright Stars is an enrichment Afterschool program. The reason we call it enrichment is because we try to go above and beyond just a place for Afterschool kids to hang out until parents can pick them up. It has substance. It provides

- homework time (which allows kids to get homework done so when they go home at the end of the day, they can spend quality time with their families),
- arts and crafts,
- fitness programs,
- outdoor time after a long day at school, and
- many more things throughout the year.

The program offers sanctuary to the children because

- it is a safe, welcoming environment,
- all are treated with respect,
- the children have a sense of belonging,
- and there is a spirit of joy in the program that restores the children after what can sometimes be an exhausting day at school.
- We take state vouchers for families that qualify with the state for help with tuition. Even though a child has a state voucher we still get full tuition between the state and the family for that child (for ex. If the tuition is \$200 and they qualify for 175 the family is responsible for the remaining \$25 to make up the \$200.)
- We also offer to families a discount for those who just barely miss the income cut off for state vouchers. (Of course this is done only with income verification and the family inquiring about a discount).
- We have always tried to keep our prices more affordable than other Afterschool programs.

We have always had a dedicated staff. I have seen many Afterschool programs in our city and outside of our city and BS is one of the best I have seen. They work hard and are always up to speed with all the rules of EEC (the state) which Afterschool programs function. BS is also a program that takes the overflow from other Afterschool programs. So continually through the year we get inquiries for enrollment.

Last year we did lose significantly, due to the fact we had to inform families that we might not be here once the building was sold. Many families had to find alternative care to ensure a spot for the following year. These spots are difficult to come by as more and more families have to work full time and are in desperate need of good quality childcare.

My goal has always been to be at the very worst for this to be a break-even program and at best making even the smallest profit. Do I want it to be a program we will have to financially support because it is losing money? Absolutely not. As dedicated and passionate as I am about this program I am not blind to the fact that we cannot continue to support a huge losing program. So as a break even/small profit I would classify this under mission.

So as we enter a new year we have been presented with a few challenges. The new owners of 400 High St have been less than respectful and courteous to us as Renters. We are anticipated that they would not renew our lease after June or if they did it would be at a significantly higher rent which would put us in the red. We have found out that they are not renewing our lease or Gentle Dragons.

So our challenge was to try and find space. Most commercial buildings were expensive and would need significant renovation to accommodate our program. So our next plan was to find maybe another church since most churches would have the space or configuration to accommodate an Afterschool program. We found a few candidates and narrowed it to one. They were warm and welcoming and were willing to rent to us at \$1,000 and to work out sharing of equipment and cleaning. So we came up with a budget that showed that it could be a break even/ small profit. (see separate document).

Now the next item is to make sure the program is inline with "Being Sanctuary." We have brainstormed many ideas that would make the program connected to The Sanctuary, we came up with many ideas. Some are

- having children in the program become pen pals with the children of the Lakota Pine Ridge Reservation. This we felt would be very good for BS children and the Lakota's.
- We thought someone could do a presentation on the Lakota's and their culture.
- Since we service a lot of low income families the church could possibly supply "food ministry" once a month or once every other month,
- creating a wish list of things that some of these low income families might need and the church donating to them (such as used clothing, toys or other things they may need.)
- Since sanctuary will be doing more things revolving around art and music, maybe the connection can be made with artists and the children can do artwork that is displayed at the sanctuary. (Julie did an art project with the children of BS and it was a great success.)
- There could be a music collaboration or someone from our church doing a musical presentation. (Charlotte did this one-year and the children loved it.)
- Working in collaboration with the new location church to do some of these things together.

All these ideas were just some initial brainstorming, but the BS staff would also look to The Sanctuary leadership or teams to help collaborate on ideas. I do believe that our basic philosophy of trying to offer a good quality safe program to our families in need in our community is in line with Being Sanctuary.

Let me recap by saying I believe in this program and have always supported its mission. I understand if it does not at the very least break even, I would be the first one to say its time to close it. I for one feel very happy and satisfied that we have been able to help many families over the years. I think people need to look at the program in a different light than what it's original purpose was, which at the time was to generate income and think of it as more of a mission program. So all this being said, I know one of the bottom lines is the financials. Although we can do a budget that we feel makes us a break even/small profit program, we do not have a crystal ball as to enrollment especially once we move to a new location. We can only estimate on past enrollment with a realistic low-balling of enrollment for the fall.

We would also hope that if the congregation voted to continue the program we would ask for at least a 2 year commitment as the first year would be a transition year and would need at least one extra year to stabilize and hopefully grow. Although I realize that we do not do the budget for 2016 now, I would hope in people's minds it would be recognized that if we support moving forward we would also try to commit to 2016, unless of course it does not prove to be financially stable. I know for everyone it may sound like a huge leap of faith, but the staff has brought back families to the program from the devastating loss last year of children due to the possibility of the program closing. Although they gained families back the whole process was not enough to recover all the losses.

The staff is also aware of the program being in jeopardy of closing and has fully accepted that this could be the end for BS. If that is the case they will continue to run a safe, quality program until June. The staff is confident and has the dedication and commitment to continue on with the program. Their sole purpose is to provide an affordable, quality, safe program and the staff does this with minimal pay, but with a huge heart.

Additional Notes from the Jan 25 presentation at congregational conversation: Discussion and observations were positive and affirming of the value of the program. The sense of the room was that most present felt we should proceed to operate Bright Starts as a ministry and mission of Sanctuary UCC. At least five members of the congregation raised their hands to volunteer to participate in the making the shared mission a reality with things suggested above by the staff—bringing art, food, values based experiences and relationship connections. One member offered to co-chair the Bright Starts Ministry.