



Summer of love-to-learn

Endowment leads effort to support and improve youth programs.

Concord Center has offered summer camp to children in the Southside Indianapolis neighborhood it has served since the 1950s. Back then a few-dozen kids came to the community center just to have fun. Today, fun is still part of the program, but so are academics and fitness programs aimed at reducing a high rate of childhood obesity. The pop and candy machines that kids used to raid are gone; in their place are healthy snacks and lunches. Tutors work one-on-one to raise reading levels and use math and science kits for hands-on educational activities.

Summer has taken on a different meaning, says Niki Girls, who has seen the program evolve during her 27-year tenure as director of Concord Center. In 2008 Concord Summer Day Camp served 185 children, many of whom would have had nowhere else to go on summer days when their parents were working or seeking work in the poor and working-poor neighborhood.

"We're taking on meatier issues like math, science and reading," Girls says. "We still try to make it fun, but without 'nagging.'"

Without day camp to structure their summer vacation, Girls knows that some kids would be unsupervised—and might even be providing care for younger siblings. There would be little learning and a lot of opportunities to engage in risky behavior.

Recent studies suggest that the summer hiatus explains as much as 50 to 60 percent of the widening of the achievement gap between low-income students and their higher-income peers. Summer learning opportunities can help bridge some of that gap. For example, Project SEED, a national nonprofit

organization with a branch in Marion County, has had success in helping students progress in math during the summer. It uses a highly interactive, question-based mathematics teaching method.

During the summer of 2008, a Lilly Endowment grant allowed Project SEED to employ 40 low-income Marion County high-school students who learn to teach mathematics to elementary-school students, master advanced topics in algebra and calculus, visit college campuses, and complete a personalized college preparation plan—all the while earning a small stipend.

Pre- and post-program testing reveals that Project SEED elementary students can improve their math knowledge by up to 75 percent, according to Tim Davidson, director of Project SEED of Indianapolis. “Many students spend a lot of time hanging out with friends doing a lot of things that will not get them ahead,” he says. “They can lose so much. Read a book with them, do some math, and the achievement gap is a lot less.”

Summer on a shoestring

Concord Center and Project SEED are just two among hundreds of summer youth programs serving Indianapolis-area youth that depend on the Endowment and other local philanthropic organizations to help fund their programs. Like Concord Center, some have a long history and a relatively stable funding base, and they may receive limited federal funds for lunch programs. Others, however, are run on a shoestring budget of donations and rely entirely on volunteers.

The Rev. Malachi Walker, for example, has no full-time paid staff working for the African American Male Summer Empowerment Camp at Great Commission Church of God in Indianapolis. The 10-week program provides 75 boys, ages 9-16, with scheduled academic-enrichment time and other activities to teach conflict resolution, personal development and problem-solving skills.

The biggest expenses are food and transportation. The church leases and maintains several vans to make sure the boys have a way to get to and from camp and field trips, Walker says. Teen counselors earn a stipend, too, to keep the young men involved and to provide role models for younger campers.

“Those three things alone take up the grant money we receive,” Walker explains. Although the budget may be small, the goal is big. “Our goal is to

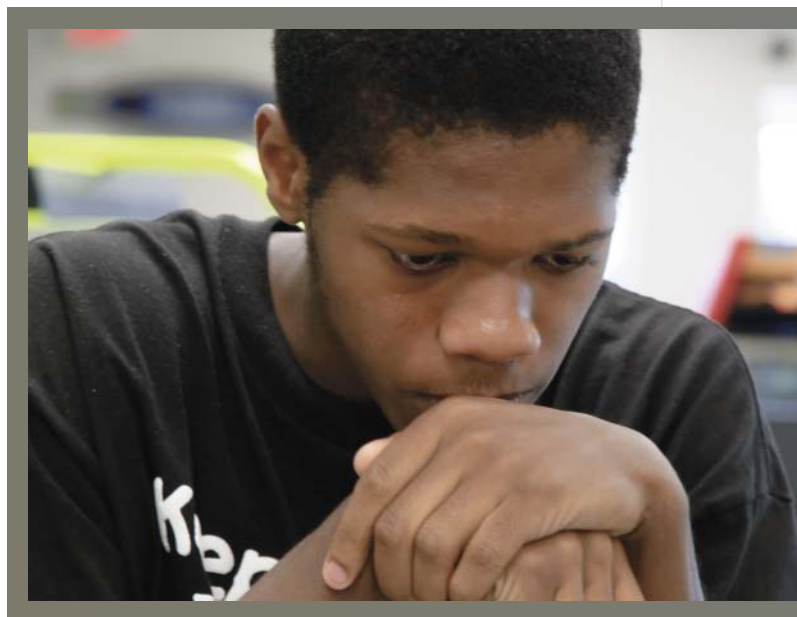
empower young African American males and help them cope with the issues they face to succeed in life. We’re basically trying to help them become men through a very structured and disciplined program.”

Recognizing that these youth-serving organizations fill an important need—especially for economically disadvantaged, high-risk and physically or emotionally challenged youth—Lilly Endowment has supported summer programs since 1982.

For 2008 the Endowment allocated \$1.7 million to 170 summer youth programs in Marion County—\$1.2 million to support programs and approximately \$400,000 for modest capital projects ranging from vans to computers and from a new gym floor to kitchen upgrades needed to provide meals for hungry campers.

A model of support

For the past several years, the Endowment’s support has been in the context of a collaborative project with 12 other funders in an effort called the Summer Youth Program Fund (SYPF). Through this collaboration, prospective grantees are offered a common orientation and application process to ease the difficulty of finding support. The fund provided



Thousands of Indianapolis-area young people benefit from the almost 200 summer youth programs supported by Lilly Endowment and other funders. Kids still enjoy the fun of summer like those at Speedway Baptist Church (*opposite*), but more attention is being paid to an injection of academics so students won’t lose so much knowledge over the summer. A young man (*above*) concentrates during a program at the Good News Mission.



a total of more than \$2.2 million to Marion County programs in 2008.

“What is distinctive about SYPF is its scope in terms of offering both operating support and capital funds in an effort to cultivate enriching opportunities for young people,” says Ron Fairchild, executive director of the Center for Summer Learning at Johns Hopkins University, the only university-based center in the United States dedicated just to summer learning. “The combination of shared leadership and collaboration with other funders is unique and special,” he adds.

The fund may not be unique for long if the Cen-

ter for Summer Learning is successful in its quest to help other communities throughout the United States adopt SYPF as a model.

In 2007 the Endowment awarded the center a grant to help further strengthen Indianapolis-area summer youth programs, as well as to document the success of SYPF and disseminate information about what makes it work.

During 2008 the center advanced toward several of the grant’s goals by collecting data on the public and private resources devoted to summer programming and working to further build relationships among key youth-serving institutions in Indianapolis. Plans are

under way, too, for the center’s 2010 national conference in Indianapolis for more than 400 professionals from around the nation.

The center also is providing intensive coaching through a “professional learning community” made up of six summer learning sites in Indianapolis to build on program strengths and address challenges, according to Brenda McLaughlin, director of research and evaluation for the center. “Our goal is to strengthen programs, strengthen collaborations across the public and private sector, and document those successes so we can help other communities, too,” she says.

Much work lies ahead, according to Fairchild. Very few communities offer summer learning programs that are consistent with research-based principles and characteristics of high-quality, out-of-school-time programs, he notes.

“Summer days still should mean a break from the traditional school formula, but learning can be simultaneously fun and instructive,” Fairchild says. “Summer is a great time to blur those lines and embrace the unique character of what a summer day camp is. There are challenges associated with that model, but we’re seeing people working in this field ready to embrace that ideal.”

Summer Youth Program Fund Partners

Besides Lilly Endowment, contributors to the Summer Youth Program Fund include:

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Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust

Summer fun and summer learning characterize many programs, such as the one at Indianapolis’ Forest Manor Multi-Service Center (*above*). The one-of-a-kind Center for Summer Learning at Johns Hopkins University has found Indianapolis’ Summer Youth Program Fund “distinctive” and plans a national conference for youth-serving professionals in Indianapolis in 2010.
