

Alex Area Stewards have defined 13 key destiny drivers that will work to strengthen economic vitality for the region. Over the next thirteen weeks you will read about each destiny driver and its importance to the region. If you find a destiny driver that ignites your passion for the future, call the stewardship committee at 763-4545 or go to www.alexareastewards.com and become a part of shaping the destiny of our region.

TITLE: Guiding our Youth

Destiny Driver – **After school programming**

After school options for students can be a big challenge/problem for many in any community.

Once the bell rings in the afternoon, millions of children and young people have nowhere to go.

Education ranked number one when asked what three categories were most important to their quality of life. Nearly 80% of survey respondents in both the Douglas County and the Pope County areas indicated that education was very important. **Nearly 50% responded that Alex Area is a great place to raise a family. That percentage increased to 60% in Pope County.**

Through Stewardship meetings it became abundantly clear that there is a tremendous shortage of affordable after school programming options. Several of the issues that came up included, but are not limited to, access and affordability. Many families have no options but to have their children come home from school to no adult supervision, simply because it costs a Douglas County family of 4, over \$47,600 (22.92 per hour) to meet their most basic needs. It cost a single parent with two children \$35,600 (\$17.11 per hour) to meet his/her families most basic needs. Many families can not afford the cost of after school or summer child care; and even more families work evening and weekend shifts limiting/eliminating access to childcare options.

These children not only lacking supervision, they are often time required to do tasks beyond their abilities, such as watch younger siblings or make their own meals.

Locally, agencies such as Lakes Area Recreation recognizes the importance of offering affordable summer programming due to the fact young people in grade 3-8 are often too old for daycare, and yet too young to stay home alone unsupervised. For many families with no other options, the impact on children is clear:

- The peak hours for juvenile crime and victimization are from 2-8pm and all day during the summer.
- Eighth graders unsupervised for 11 or more hours a week experience twice the risk of substance abuse.
- Absent of meaningful/healthy attachment to a group, some kids are drawn to gangs and un-productive environments

After school programming can be much more than a means to meet the needs of working parents who sought safe environments for their children when the school day ended. It can also play a powerful role in improving the academic achievement of the students they served. By providing affordable, focused, supports to children during out-of-school time, many students, including those most at risk, have received additional support needed to reach their potential.

A Harvard Family Research Project on expanded learning in environments such as high-quality after school and summer programs, reports that well-designed expanded learning programs can improve school performance, increasing positive academic, developmental, and health outcomes. High-quality after school and summer programs can have positive impacts in three key areas of a students' development:

- Academic outcomes, including but not limited to grades, improved assessment results, and school attendance
- Developmental outcomes (e.g., improved behavior and self-esteem)
- Health outcomes (e.g., increased physical activity)

The Alex Area Stewards are committed to providing all children with access to affordable, life-enriching after school programs that foster their academic, physical and social development. The community has a role to play in providing quality educational after school experiences and care.

Locally, even more children in our community can succeed if we embrace new partnerships with the after school providers. These programs will compliment our local school districts' school improvement initiatives and have tremendous implications for the future success of our students.

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