**VOLUNTARY QUALITY STANDARDS TRAINING SESSION CASE STUDY**

**INTRODUCTION**

Off-the-Clock Kids is an afterschool program located in a vibrant suburban community. The program serves children between the ages of 6 and 12 and operates from Monday to Friday, providing care and enrichment activities from the end of the school day until 6:00 PM. The program is held within the premises of a local community center, offering access to spacious indoor areas and a secure outdoor playground.​

The mission of Off-the-Clock Kids is to create a nurturing and inclusive environment where children can develop social skills, explore their interests, and receive academic support. The program is staffed by a team of dedicated professionals, including retired public-school educators and enthusiastic college students pursuing degrees in education or related fields.​

The program recently committed to align with voluntary quality standards to further enhance the quality of care and support offered to the children and families they serve. The staff understands that embracing these standards will not only benefit the children but also contribute to building stronger connections with parents and community partners.​

**ENVIRONMENT STANDARD 1**

Off-the-Clock Kids has established indoor and outdoor areas that cater to the needs of its students. When it comes to cleanliness and safety, they employ a nightly custodial service and staff have been trained to clean messes as they arise. The spaces are designed to be age-appropriate and free of hazards. Facilities such as restrooms are well-kept, and safe water stations are placed conveniently. Local safety, fire, and health certificates are posted behind the receptionist’s desk.

Inside, tables are stocked with an assortment of art materials, and these stations are complemented by clusters of comfortable seating, fostering an environment that encourages collective creativity. Noteworthy is the organization's approach to storage solutions. Discreetly interwoven within the layout, color-coded bins, cabinets, and shelves store supplies and personal belongings, reducing clutter and maintaining a sense of belonging for children.

Outside is a playground that features a variety of ramps for children of all abilities along with a locked shed that features balls, frisbees, chalk, and other outdoor activities for kids to play with together.

Staff are posted indoors and outdoors with the goal of supervising kids based on whatever activity they are interested in at the moment. And with such a well-stocked environment, Off-the-Clock Kids is ready to accommodate whatever kids are interested in!

**RELATIONSHIPS STANDARD 1**

Meet Emily, a 9-year-old girl who has been attending Off-the-Clock Kids for the past six months. Emily is a creative and imaginative child who loves to draw and write fantastical (and sometimes nonsensical) stories. She has a lot of potential but has been struggling to stay focused during homework time.​

One afternoon, Emily approached one of the staff members, Ms. Johnson, seeking help with her math homework. Ms. Johnson responded, "Great job asking for help, Emily! I understand that math can be challenging, but I'm here to support you." Ms. Johnson patiently explained the concept to Emily and guided her through the problems.​

During a group art activity later that day, Emily became restless and started distracting other children. Mr. Davis, another staff member, noticed the situation and calmly approached Emily. He said, "Emily, let's find a way to focus on the art project together. How about we work together to follow the directions and complete this project?” She quieted and finished without disturbing the activity.​

As she was leaving, Emily ran back to Ms. Johnson, who was logging attendance on the program’s administrative platform. She enthusiastically tugged at Ms. Johnson’s arm and yelled, “Fear not! Super Emily will return in the morrow!” Ms. Johnson’s eyes remained focused on her task but she replied mutedly, “Sounds good, Emily. Have a good night.”​

**COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT STANDARD 1**

Emily's parents, David and Sarah, are no strangers to the rhythm of the program. As they drop Emily off each afternoon, their exchanges with the staff are full of joyful connections. It was in the warm smiles and knowing nods that a trusting relationship has quietly bloomed. Sarah and David sense that the program is more than just a place for Emily; it is a community invested in nurturing every child's potential.

One crisp afternoon, as the children engaged in various activities, Sarah and David found themselves engaged in conversation with Ms. Johnson, one of the dedicated staff members. The casual chatter soon meandered into deeper territories. Ms. Johnson leaned in, her eyes reflecting genuine interest, and asked a question that lingered in the air like an unspoken promise: "How do you envision Off-the-Clock Kids best supporting Emily's growth?"

Taken aback by the question, Sarah and David exchanged surprised glances. The mere notion that their perspectives were valued was heartening. Sarah hesitated for a moment, her gaze shifting to Emily, who was engrossed in a creative project nearby. With a nod of encouragement from David, Sarah shared her thoughts.

Though the conversation was happenstance, Emily’s parents observed over the next few weeks a subtle transformation taking root within the program. Small shifts in activities, the introduction of new materials, and a renewed emphasis on individualized attention – these changes reflected the imprint of the conversation that had unfolded that fateful afternoon.

Ms. Johnson's efforts were emblematic of the program's dedication to creating an environment that embraced collaboration with parents. The fact that staff recognized the significance of in-the-moment feedback was a testament to the program's dynamic and responsive nature.

PROGRAMMING STANDARD 5

The Wonder Room is an enchanting and imaginative space tucked away within the Off-the-Clock Kids program. As children step into this specially designed area, they are greeted by the warm glow of fairy lights suspended from the ceiling, creating an inviting and cozy atmosphere. The room itself is adorned with colorful murals depicting scenes from nature and space, igniting a sense of wonder and exploration.​

There is an array of intriguing materials and supplies neatly organized on shelves and in inviting bins. The shelves are lined with an assortment of books, ranging from classics like Moby Dick by Herman Melville to thought-provoking reads like fiction by Toni Morrison. Many of these texts were written by authors of color.​

In one corner, STEM-focused activities beckon the children. The materials are neatly stacked and alphabetized with step-by-step instructions printed and taped outside of the boxes for children’s individual use. There are cubbies for children to read or work at their selected activities with dividers and headphones in case they would like to drown out any distractions from their peers.​