

What's one thing all parents know to be true? Striking a balance between home, work, and their other obligations is a constant tug of war.

Even with its challenges, most would agree that providing enrichment and care for children is the top priority of families and communities everywhere. When children are fulfilled, we all benefit—simple as that.

So, how can communities invest in enrichment that doesn't break the bank and gives parents a break? It's simple: quality afterschool programs.

Offering some relief to parents is a huge benefit of afterschool programming, but it's just the tip of the iceberg. Students with access to afterschool programming have been observed to have a more well-rounded educational experience, as well as better educational outcomes. For example, research shows that high-quality afterschool programs lead to [better attendance, behavior, and grades](#) for participating students.

An investment in afterschool enrichment benefits children and the community both, but some schools still struggle to make it work. Schools are facing unprecedented challenges in the wake of COVID-19, and teachers across the country are experiencing [record levels](#) of burnout and dissatisfaction. It seems impossible to expect school districts steeped in burnout to find the resources to build quality afterschool programs and execute them year-round.

This is where local entrepreneurs, like Hayley Marcous, are taking a passionate approach to after school enrichment for children to make a much needed positive impact on local communities.

A Local Solution to a Universal Problem: Your After School

Hayley Marcous has a soft spot for working parents. As a working mom, childcare is more than just an issue she cares about—it's been a lifeline for her and her family. Childcare plays a crucial role in every child's life and has an enormous impact on family units as a whole. With an entrepreneurial spirit and the first-hand experience of parenting and working full-time, she built Your After School 10 years ago with her business partner to give parents a break while offering children the enrichment opportunities that help them go further academically and socially.

Like many businesses, Your After School faced immense challenges during COVID-19. Hayley remembers the week of March 9, 2020 in vivid detail. She had schools requesting 500 flyers for programming, while schools less than an hour away were shuttering their doors because of COVID-19. In a matter of days, the world shut down bringing afterschool services with it.

“Going through that experience was hard, especially the refund process, because you're sometimes dealing with hysterical families while we were hysterical for our own families,” Hayley recalled.

Despite the emotional and financial strain of the pandemic, she and her business partner were committed to quickly refunding and/or crediting families while pivoting to a new programming model to keep children busy while their parents worked from home.

“We looked into different ways to mobilize the community of parents we had, just through our network... We tried to come up with ideas to help...unfortunately, we just had to keep it simple with virtual classes,” Hayley said.

While virtual classes were the most straightforward idea, they were impactful nonetheless. Young students were facing a social-emotional crisis, and some of the first classes Your After School ran were social/emotional learning focused.

“Parents wanted their kids to have an outlet to simply socialize without it being a lesson on how to socialize,” Hayley said. She had to keep her finger on the pulse of what the community needed, which was constantly changing. Cooking classes, math classes, lego building classes, around-the-house scavenger hunts—you name it, they tried it. It was an endless obstacle course of meeting community needs while running a business and managing her own family.

“Liane and I had conversations where we were like, ‘Why are we doing this?’ and I always said, ‘There are parents out there, stuck at home with their kids, and they need to get work done, and their kids need something to do.’” She recalled. “I was so happy to do it...having the experience as a single mom really pushed me to keep going.”

Coming Out of the Pandemic Stronger Than Ever

After an arduous couple of years, Your After School is seeing the fruits of their labor pay off in the communities they serve. They now put on in-person after school programming for children in school districts in New York and Connecticut. They’ve built strong partnerships with local businesses, coaches, and teachers to build out exciting curricula that students can look forward to attending.

“We faced unprecedented obstacles during the pandemic, and we’re so grateful to all of our volunteers and parents, as well as the families who have supported and been patient with us throughout the process,” said Hayley.

At the core of their programming is the promise to make everything as seamless as possible. Burnt-out teachers don’t have to worry about writing entire curricula on their own, nor do they have to make time to shop for their materials. Your After School handles the less-than-glamorous, but just as critical, aspects of after school programming: tackling customer service matters, creating the curricula, purchasing supplies, and working directly with parents to find the right fit for their child. Through these efforts we’ve seen record numbers of teachers and school staff involved with our programming.

After school programs can help students impacted by the pandemic [close the achievement gap](#), and Your After School seeks to make this programming as accessible to communities as possible. You can contact them today to get started bringing high-quality afterschool enrichment to your community.