



MINDSET MATTERS: DEVELOPING THE LEADERS OF TODAY AND TOMORROW

A Case Study with Boys & Girls Clubs of America

Mindset Matters designs and delivers educational products to Boys & Girls Clubs of America that prepare middle school-age youth to take positive action in all aspects of their lives.



mymindsetmatters.org

Executive Summary

Mindset Matters delivers a comprehensive character-building and leadership program to Boys & Girls Clubs of America. Citing success in a number of clubs, Mindset Matters delivers valuable content primed to grow the leaders of today and tomorrow through the following ways:

- Increasing positive behaviors and actions to support citizenship
- Creating open dialogue on character and leadership topics
- Promoting a mindset shift by learning a common “leadership language,” experiencing different aspects of leadership, and applying newly learned leadership skills

“The Mindset curriculum teaches a lot of concepts that I wouldn’t have thought to teach. It ties together leadership concepts in a really practical way.”

Carin Neal, Teen Court and Special Projects Coordinator, Boys & Girls Club of Brookings, South Dakota.



“The Mindset program was really easy to get started. I could download the [entire] program and print off as many copies as needed.”

Justin Lowndes, Impact Coordinator for Character and Leadership, Boys & Girls Club of Rochester, Minnesota

LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES

Boys & Girls Clubs of America state their objectives clearly in their mission statement: “enable young people to reach their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens.” However, empowering youth to be leaders is not without its challenges.

Challenge: Building Meaningful Connections

According to Carin Neal, Teen Court and Special Projects Coordinator of the Boys & Girls Club of Brookings, South Dakota, one of the greatest obstacles she faces in fostering leadership in her club is forging meaningful connections to students’ lives through content and activities. Justin Lowndes, Impact Coordinator for Character and Leadership of the Boys & Girls Club of Rochester, Minnesota, echoes Neal’s challenges confirming that “it’s important to get buy-in from kids in order to have an impact.” The need to reach and motivate a diverse audience with varying backgrounds and skills is a central challenge faced by many clubs.

Challenge: Cultivating Consistency

“A lot of our kids come and go. They might come a few weeks and we might not see them again for a couple of months,” says

Amber Klemish, Academic Success and Outreach Assistant Director for the Boys & Girls Club of Bemidji, Minnesota. Finding character-building programs that speak to the impermanent nature of club populations is a barrier shared by other program directors. “We have different kids coming everyday so trying to get everyone involved can be difficult,” says Neal.

Challenge: Motivating Real Change

While many Boys & Girls Clubs utilize leadership and character-building programs, some directors note frustration in motivating real change in their club members. For example, Klemish describes a reward system her club uses in which youth earn points for doing good deeds, such as helping another club member or having a positive attitude. While some kids exercise positivity for the sake of leadership, Klemish describes other kids as motivated solely by the rewards and not necessarily by the acts of kindness. “They aren’t actually connecting the actions to leadership,” says Klemish.

BRINGING IN MINDSET MATTERS TO REDUCE CHALLENGES

As an emerging leader in character education, Mindset Matters believes that everyone is capable of having a growth mindset and the ability to lead, regardless of age, gender, or ethnicity. Operating under the foundation that leaders are developed through education and experience, Mindset Matters partnered with Boys & Girls Clubs to help their program directors address common leadership challenges and promote the message that building character is a personal choice.

Solution: Quality Content

The Mindset program is divided into eight modules containing three, 15-minute mini-lessons, each addressing a core leadership tenet: Courage, Honor, Respect, Responsibility, Communication, Confidence, Perseverance, and Innovation. Designed to empower youth to learn and experience leadership in safe and constructive ways, Mindset Matters resonates with Boys & Girls Clubs because of the practical, real connections made to adolescents' lives.

"The activities in the program really helped because it wasn't just me talking at the kids. They got to give their input and get really involved," says Neal.

Klemish agrees that the content has an impact because kids are able to interact with other club members, form a common bond, and advocate positive behavior throughout the club. The content motivates the participants by connecting topics, activities, and discussions to real-life youth experiences and interests.

Solution: Instruction Flexibility

Mindset Matters delivers lessons in short bursts with high impact to meet the unpredictable attendance within many Boys & Girls Clubs. "It is a very well-rounded program where kids can still get value out of each part and become a leader even if they aren't able to attend the whole program," says Klemish.

In addition to creating consistent leadership practices in an inconsistent population, the program offers flexibility with comprehensive student and teacher guides. "The program allowed me to have a ready-to-go curriculum so that I could recruit kids into the room and the activity. I can use the lessons in a short timeframe when needed," says Lowndes. Neal agrees that flexibility and ease of the program appeals to her club: "As the instructor,

the program was really easy to pick up and go. Everything was really laid out and easy [to deliver]. I didn't have to put in a lot of [prep] time outside of the lessons."

Solution: Reframing Mindsets

While simultaneously enlisting youth participation and creating flexible instruction, the eight leadership tenets scaffold a framework ripe for character-building. According to Lowndes, the program is unique because it doesn't reiterate the negative dialogue about respect and responsibility youth often hear at home or school.

Rather, the program frames leadership in positive actions and conversations, enabling youth to learn and experience tangible actions and behaviors to build character. "The Communication lesson was the best because it framed something kids aren't used to talking about. Honor and Courage stand out and connect too because those are things that are primal in some ways. Honor was a new conversation for them—especially learning from failures," says Lowndes. Viewing and appreciating failure as a positive, not a negative, helps create a fundamental mindset shift.

I would recommend the Mindset program to other Boys & Girls Clubs if they don't have a solid character-building program. It's in our mission statement to create people that go [out] into the community and be good leaders and respectful citizens...it's really important and it's our job [to key in on those things]."

Amber Klemish,

Academic Success and Outreach Assistant Director, Boys & Girls Club of Bemidji, Minnesota



RESULTS AND IMPACT

Mindset Matters helps Boys & Girls Clubs meet their goals and achieve greater impact in character development by improving communication, generating a safe environment to practice leadership, and shifting how youth view themselves—and the world at large.

Impact: Open Conversations

Encouraging youth to explore and discuss real-world examples of leadership and character is fundamental to the Mindset program. “We did the Venn diagram activity for Courage and the kids went out into the club and asked other club members what their fears were. The activities that have kids going out into the club and coming back to share are the biggest ways that I can make an impact,” says Klemish. It is in conversations and peer-to-peer sharing through the Mindset program that youth are learning to be leaders.

Impact: Failure is Good

Nurturing a safe environment for youth to learn, practice, and apply leadership skills is another key asset to the Mindset program. “For the Confidence lesson, we had one boy come up with a question about how to ask a girl out. The whole group was really into his question and being okay to fail,” says Klemish. She notes that the young boy was only able to attend the Confidence session, but that he left a lasting

impression on the entire group while building his own self-confidence and recognizing the value of failure. Klemish describes this example as a powerful payoff of the Mindset program because it validated for her that the curriculum and activities influence all members of her club—from those kids that only attend singular sessions to those that return regularly each week.

Impact: Mindset Shift

Facilitating activities to encourage a growth mindset is one of the most significant impacts Mindset Matters has in Boys & Girls Clubs. Fueling a forward-looking mindset shift is one of the program’s core leadership tenets. “Honor wasn’t something [the kids had] really thought of before,” says Neal. She describes each lesson as important to the program’s success because students are able to see themselves and their personal experiences within each one. “They relate it back to their friends and everyday lives,” says Neal. The practical application of real-world connections promotes a growth mindset. “It’s important to take a break from math and science and focus on how we can treat others better and [become] better citizens in the world,” says Klemish, adding that the Mindset program makes it easy to initiate and sustain regular conversations and actionable moments to build a growth mindset.