EVALUATION REPORT

More Than My Brother's Keeper
December 2015
The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race & Ethnicity
The Ohio State University
Funding & Support
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Executive Summary

The More Than My Brother’s Keeper program emphasizes a collective impact approach that leverages the community’s assets, stakeholders and existing programmatic interventions. The program is focused on deep engagement and seeks to build a cohesive and holistic community-based support system for participants and their families. The pilot program was designed as a way to model innovative intervention approaches for youth and document the experience of at risk boys of color in Franklin County.

The MTMBK pilot program worked with a cohort of highly at-risk youth and their families on the Southside. Families and youth living at less than 200% of the poverty line face some of the most challenging conditions in Franklin County. Deep poverty, family instability, community violence, trauma, food insecurity, housing instability and health challenges plague our MTMBK families and create tremendous obstacles for success for MTMBK youth. The program provided in-depth family engagement, intensive experiential learning, community building, life skills coaching, youth advocacy, mentoring and ongoing family assistance. Through intensive engagement, MTMBK staff worked to connect participants to resources to meet family needs and fostered resiliency in youth who face perilous conditions.

Evaluation results from the pilot program support the intervention as having a substantial positive impact on the well being of youth participants. MTMBK staff generally report a strong positive response to the program, from families and youth. Survey responses from MTMBK parents/caregivers found the overall program to be very beneficial and to have positive impacts on optimism, self-image, behavior and grades. Some parents have identified the program as a critical life-changing opportunity for their child. Parents report that their children can better control their emotions, are more self-reliant, and also more willing to engage in a positive manner with their peers. All participants have avoided involvement in serious negative interactions with law enforcement, no gang involvement, or other negative juvenile justice outcomes.

Data from the Learning Circles data system for Columbus City School students supports the feedback from staff and parents/caregivers. Overall, the majority of MTMBK students experienced an increase in Learning Circle scores and outperformed a small sample of peer students. 67% of students experienced an increase in overall performance scores.

- 70% of students experienced an increase in attendance or maintained near perfect attendance scores.
- 85% of students experienced an increase in behavior scores or maintained near perfect behavioral outcomes in school.
- 59% of students experienced an increase in core academic scores, and another 11% of students maintained core academic scores above 60 (the highest scores among the MTMBK cohort).
- The average Learning Circle performance index score for MTMBK youth increased by 28% and the median performance index score for the MTMBK cohort increased by 32%.

The experience with More Than My Brother's Keeper illustrates the potential for focused, holistic and deep engagement with marginalized and at-risk youth in Franklin County. The program also demonstrates the value of leveraging networks of existing community-based assets to support youth and families. In a challenging neighborhood, with youth who have faced intensive adversity and continued challenges, the program has produced very positive results for youth involved. By focusing on building strong relationships, creating opportunities for youth that they could have never imagined, helping support families, and providing youth with adult role models who demonstrate their commitment to seeing youth thrive, programs like More Than My Brother's Keeper can foster resiliency and future success at at-risk youth. With appropriate planning the results of MTMBK could be replicated in other neighborhoods and among other at risk youth populations.
More Than My Brother’s Keeper youth and field staff at The Ohio State University.
I. INTRODUCTION

More Than My Brother’s Keeper Program Evaluation
December 2015
Introduction

The following evaluation report documents the experience and outcomes from the first year of the More Than My Brother's Keeper program. More than My Brother's Keeper is a youth development program focusing on the needs of highly at-risk boys of color age 9 to 15 living in the South Side of Columbus, OH. More Than My Brother's Keeper (MTMBK) was initiated and funded by Franklin County Department of Jobs and Family Services and inspired by President Obama’s “My Brother's Keeper” initiative launched in 2014.

Launched in September 2014, More Than My Brother's Keeper works with a cohort of highly at-risk youth and their families. MTMBK emphasizes a collective impact approach that leverages the community's assets, stakeholders and existing programmatic interventions. The program is focused on deep engagement and seeks to build a cohesive and holistic community-based support system for participants and their families.

The program was designed as a pilot program, in which program experiences would be documented to better understand the needs of at-risk boys of color in Franklin County, and to understand the opportunities and challenges with new and innovative models of family and youth development.

The program evaluation covers program activities from pilot program inception in the fall of 2014 to Fall 2015. The evaluation report includes an overview of program and participant characteristics, an assessment of metrics of youth development, lessons learned, and recommendations from the pilot program experience.

I am so proud to have obtained the support of the Franklin County Commissioners to pursue this exciting new initiative, More Than My Brother’s Keeper. Through my engagement with the community, particularly with young African American males, I’ve seen first-hand the challenges they face. This program will equip them with the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to successfully navigate these challenges, and achieve their hopes, dreams and aspirations.”

Statement from former Franklin County Department of Job and Family Services Director Anthony Trotman describing the goals of the MTMBK program.
Challengees Facing Boys of Color

The More Than My Brother’s Keeper program supports the needs of one of this nation’s—and our own community’s—most marginalized populations. African American youth live in some of the most stressful and challenging neighborhood environments in the United States. In fact, research shows that conditions and outcomes for African American males have actually worsened since the 1980s, and continue to decline due to the disparate impact of the recession. Numerous studies have documented persistent gaps in education and economic outcomes (and other metrics of social stability and advancement) for African American men and boys. These disparities are exacerbated by poorer health outcomes, a higher likelihood of being ensnared in the criminal justice system, and shorter life expectancies.

Structural barriers to opportunity and continuing bias against African American males (both explicit and implicit) fuel these disparities. African American male youth have disproportionately borne the most severe impacts associated with a host of major structural changes in the country—from the decline of blue collar employment in the industrial sector; to the intersection of K-12 zero-tolerance policies and the school-to-prison pipeline; to concentration in neighborhoods with histories of profound disinvestment and underperforming schools; to the impact of changes in criminal justice policy and the explosion in the nation’s prison population. As a result, members of this cohort are forced to navigate a system of unparalleled impediments to becoming productive leaders of their communities and achieving life success. Failure to reduce and eliminate the structural and other barriers that African American men and boys confront daily will jeopardize their advancement even more and impose inestimable costs on our community, the state and the nation.
II. PROGRAM OVERVIEW

More Than My Brother's Keeper Program Evaluation
December 2015
Program History

In the summer of 2014, More than My Brother’s Keeper was designed to be a pilot program on the South Side of Columbus (zip codes 43206 and 43207) that sought to provide support and opportunity to at-risk African American boys age 9-15. Utilizing a collective impact approach, the program was designed around three major components: experiential learning, after-school programmatic intervention, and mentoring. Community Development For All People (CD4AP) and the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity were the primary partner agencies. CD4AP served as the fiscal and administrative agent for the program, assisting with recruiting and providing structured family engagement opportunities. The Kirwan Institute ran all direct program activities (youth and family), staffed all youth engagement activities, provided research support, and conducted evaluation activities.

The four experiential learning sites identified were Browser’s Welcome, iResolve Fitness, Bikes 4 All People, and Nationwide Children’s Hospital. Experiential learning sites were designed to be visited 2-3 times a month. Once a month MTMBK would hold programming at Ohio State. Originally, programming was slated to run in four ten-week sessions, with the boys rotating to a new site after each session was complete.

In addition to the experiential learning sites, which the boys attended Saturday mornings from 10:00 a.m. – noon, More Than My Brother’s Keeper also required program participants to be enrolled in an after-school program. In addition, MTMBK was committed to establishing an infrastructure for mentoring, in which each participant would have three mentors: near peer (high school), college level, and adult/professional. The goal was to have MTMBK staff facilitate the recruitment and placement of these mentors.
MTMBK Mission, Vision & Program Goals

Mission Statement and Vision: The More than My Brother’s Keeper program emphasizes a collective impact approach that leverages the community’s assets, stakeholders and existing programmatic interventions. The program focuses on deep engagement and seeks to build a cohesive and holistic community-based support system for participants and their families. We are a program that looks to make a collective impact in the community and in the lives of these boys and their families. We involve the boys in experiential learning sites around the South Side that help develop their education, learning skills, and self goals.

Goals:
• Enhance the life chances of enrollees and their families and foster resilience in youth participants.
• Build social capital for youth participants.
• Put enrollees and their families in contact with resources throughout Columbus.
• Successfully facilitate Saturday experiential programming.
• Assess progress of each participant and their families throughout their time within the program.

Demographics:
• Focus on the South Side of Columbus (Zips 43206 & 43207)
• African American Boys 9-15

Eligibility information: More Than My Brother’s Keeper (MTMBK) serves boys of color between the ages of 9-15 years old living on the South Side of Columbus at 200% FPL or below.
More Than My Brother’s Keeper (MTMBK) is a Franklin County-funded program that aims to provide support, structure and opportunity to the lives of African American boys residing on the South Side of Columbus. With the long-term goal of watching these young men graduate and successfully enter the workforce, the program utilizes a collective impact approach to provide the boys with an experience that is holistic, immersive, and uplifting, all while being applicable to their everyday lives.

The core components of More Than My Brother’s Keeper are as follows:

- Saturday Experiential Learning
- Family Engagement & Support
- School Advocacy
- Mentoring
- Healthcare
- Special Experiences

MTMBK seeks to use these components to guide program participants along the pathway to opportunity, while also cultivating the following values: respect, brotherhood, integrity, and achievement. The program also is a “learning” initiative. We seek to better understand how to holistically support youth and families and to document the experience of marginalized and at-risk youth in the community.
Program Design II

Saturday Experiential Learning: The foundation of More Than My Brother’s Keeper is the Saturday experiential learning component. Experiential learning is intended to be immersive, and uplifting, all while being applicable to their everyday lives. Saturday programming operates in 10-12 week sessions. The boys are picked up from their homes in the morning and taken to Community Development for All People, where they are served a hot breakfast. They sit in groups (pre-determined based on which experiential learning site they will attend) and engage in quick activities and discussions about their week, led by a student shepherd. Following breakfast, the boys depart to head to one of five different experiential learning sites. Every ten weeks, the boys rotate (with their group) to the next experiential learning site. The boys are at the experiential learning sites from 10:00 a.m. – noon. Following programming, the boys are brought back to CD4Ap for lunch, and then they head home for the day.

Bikes 4 All People
- Learn how to build and repair bicycles
- Learn about bike safety
- Weather permitting, they go on bike rides around the community (led by the instructor)
- Receive a bike and helmet at the end of the quarter

Nationwide Children’s Hospital
- Take part in a variety of STEM-related science projects

iResolve Fitness
- Engage in physically challenging fitness routines
- Learn about healthy eating habits
- Learn about healthy practices related to life and relationships

Transit Arts
- Engage in various art projects each week
- Practice and present their own open mic event

CD4AP/Music Module
- Interact with various music groups in the community
- Learn new music-related skills such as drumming and composing

The Ohio State University – University Visits
Three times a quarter, participants visit The Ohio State University and engage in some type of activity or team-building exercise. Examples of previous activities have included:
- Rockwall climbing at the ARC
- Judo at the RPAC
- College preparation activities with I Know I Can
- Team-Building activities at the Hale Black Cultural Center
- 2015 Spring Football Game
Program Design III

**Family Engagement:** The second most important work More Than My Brother’s Keeper does is engaging with the families of the participants. Family engagement within MTMBK consists of the following elements:

Regular (bi-weekly) home visits with the family. The purpose for these meetings is typically to check in about the boy’s progress within the program, and also check to see about any needs the family may have that MTMBK can assist with. Home visits may also be to distribute food, resources and/or get necessary forms signed. In some cases, if the child appears to be struggling inside or outside of MTMBK, staff members will meet with the families to see how our program can be supportive.

Weekly calls to the participants and their families. Typically these calls are made to check on the boys and remind them of Saturday programming. Calls are also made to notify parents of any behavioral issues related to programming. Many staff members have made their cell phone numbers available to the parents and families, so often times parents/guardians call because they have a need.

Emergency Assistance. This is typically related to moving. When available (and if comfortable) staff members have gone to help them relocate (eviction, bed bugs, and domestic violence have been some reasons for relocation).

Resource Assistance. This includes furniture and material assistance, moving assistance, food assistance, holiday dinners, connections to a social worker, and referrals to legal services. Families were also offered parenting and self-improvement courses from the Pathways Out of Poverty curriculum; these courses were provided by Community Development for All People.

**School Advocacy:** Similar to our work with family engagement, More Than My Brother’s Keeper has been developing its school advocacy work, which relates to our goal of being holistic in our support of program participants and encouraging academic success. Examples of school advocacy in MTMBK are:

Advocating on behalf of student and parent. Many times parents will reflect a frustration with school administration. Perhaps there is a gridlock with a guidance counselor, or their child has been failing for quite some time before they were notified. MTMBK staff members will typically meet with the families and see where they can be of assistance. Usually this means identifying the school and then working to find and contact the appropriate person.

Recruitment. By building relationships with the schools and administrators, we have a more targeted recruitment strategy and are then able to enter the schools and talk to classrooms or even work with counselor to identify boys who would be good for the program.

Learning Circles Analysis. MTMBK staff members were trained on Learning Circles and have been given access to the school data concerning all of our participants. This allows us the opportunity to observe how their grades are trending, and where we may need to offer support.

Healthcare. As part of the partnership with Nationwide Children’s Hospital, More Than My Brother’s Keeper has provided free health screenings to almost all of our participants. Parents were encouraged to attend the appointments with their child, but if they could not, certain staff members were given permission to attend. Having a caring adult present was a source of comfort for the participants, and in two cases screenings themselves led to the potential early diagnosis of diabetes.
Program Design IV

**Mentoring:** Mentoring within More Than My Brother’s Keeper takes place on two levels. Institutionalized relationships with Big Brother's Big Sisters allows us to utilize their existing infrastructure to match participants with mentor and informal mentoring/rapport. The MTMBK staff members have built genuine rapport and trust with boys, especially those (both staff and participants) who have been in the program longer. These dynamics act as an informal mentoring opportunity, especially with staff taking the following steps:

- Calling the boys once a week to check in and see how everything is going.
- Engaging with them on Saturday’s during a sit-down breakfast to ask about how their week went and if there are any major events they want to talk about.

**Special Experiences:** Every quarter, More Than My Brother’s Keeper seeks to give the participants multiple opportunities to experience an activity they may not otherwise have the chance to participate in. Whether it be community service, participating in a local event, or an exciting field trip, MTMK boys have been exposed to some extraordinary opportunities this year. Examples include:

- J.C. Penney $500 shopping spree | December 2014
- Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service | January 2015
- City-wide My Brother’s Keeper Community Forum | July 2015
- Columbus African American Male Wellness Walk | August 2015
- Big Brother's Big Sisters Camp Oty’Okwa | August 2015
Necessary Modifications to Program Design

Since the launch of More Than My Brother’s Keeper in 2014, many changes and developments have occurred, leading to the implementation of new tenets and roles for the program, and ideally, a higher success rate for participants. Such changes are outlined below.

Transportation: Transportation was not originally built into the program budget. Parents/guardians were responsible for getting their children to programming on Saturday mornings, unless the participant had permission to walk. There were eight boys on the first programming day. Staff noticed that many families were interested but expressed a need for transportation. Later in the fall of 2014, we began contracting transportation for Saturday mornings, and attendance nearly tripled, to between 20-25 participants.

Recruitment: The initial recruitment strategy for MTMBK involved going to various schools and after-school programming sites on the South Side to engage with boys from the community. The program did recruit a few boys using this method, but the Program Assistant Josh Bates discovered that he received the highest response rate from spending time on the South Side, deeply engaging with boys and their families. Josh would talk to boys on the street, ask current program participants about family and friends, and even made home visits to meet parents/guardians and get the necessary paperwork signed. Essentially, we concluded that in order to successfully recruit boys from this particular population, the strategy would need to involve deep engagement and commitment to spending a significant amount of time in the designated community.

Summer Programming: For summer programming, a 10-week Digital Storytelling module hosted by Mosaic Education Network (Melissa Crum) was conducted. More Than My Brother’s Keeper also sent 25 participants to Camp Oty’Okwa (Big Brother’s Big Sisters) for five days in the beginning of August.

Program Participants: When the program was launched, participants were required to be African American (from the African Diaspora), between the ages of 10-14, and residing in zip codes 43206 and 43207. To avoid excluding optimal participants, the age range was expanded to ages 9-15. Participants who would turn 10 within three months of entering the program were accepted and participants who would turn 15 while enrolled would not be removed.

Family Engagement: Family engagement was another aspect of programming where we saw increased success from deep engagement. Program staff began meeting weekly with families to identify what particular needs they had, and where our program may able to assist. Needs assessment forms were created, and the data collected from these interviews and engagements were used to assist in finding support services for families. Regular home visits have been implemented into programming, and staff members now utilize this opportunity to build trust and rapport with the families, while still identifying areas of need. To date, this deep engagement model has afforded MTMBK the opportunity to provide furniture, legal aid, housing, food, and holiday support to the participants and their families.

Accountability: In the fall of 2015, MTMBK staff members implemented an accountability plan for program participants. The purpose of this plan is to encourage a culture of respect, brotherhood and growth. It also allows staff the opportunity to identify participants who may need to be connected to a more intensive intervention and/or program. The accountability plan consists of the following: basic rules for Saturday programming; core values of MTMBK; documents for staff to record behavior; documents for participants to rate their own behavior; a plan for communicating with parents/guardians; and protocols for holding participants accountable (and removal if necessary).
Family Services: Needs and Service Provided for MTMBK Families

In addition to core experiential programming, MTMBK provided a variety of services to families to meet family needs. These included the following activities:

Moving Assistance
- Provided vehicles for moving assistance
- Staff provided assistance with moving logistics

Housing Assistance
- Aided participants’ families in navigating public housing system and private housing options to locate a new home.

Food
- Holiday food drive
- Local Matters meal kit distribution
- Food pantry referral

Medical Screenings
- Made appointments for all participants to receive a physical at Nationwide Children’s Hospital. Participants received vaccinations and booster shots and some individuals were identified as having pre-diabetic symptoms.
- Transported participants to medical appointments.

Furniture Assistance
- Furniture Bank referral
- Matched informal furniture donation with program participant needs

Legal Assistance
- Referrals and contact made with legal aid
- Meeting with schools in regards to IEP’s

Employment
- Job referrals – referred families to Godman Guild Job Fair

Clothing & Material Goods
- Matched informal clothing donation with program participant needs
- Provided sleeping bags, mesh bags and socks for participants attending Camp Oty Ok’wa
III. PARTICIPANT PROFILE

More Than My Brother's Keeper Program Evaluation
December 2015
MTMBK youth represent some of the most impoverished, ACE- (Adverse Childhood Experience) exposed and at-risk youth in the community. The More Than My Brother's Keeper youth represent a unique cohort of boys, who face tremendous challenges and the stakes of success or failure for these boys are not just related to academic success, but also their risk of victimization, risks associated with the long-term effects of untreated trauma, risk for entanglement in the criminal justice system. In some cases, the stakes are life or death. Program leaders have recognized the program as not just an intervention to address test scores or academic measures, but to create a transformative impact in the life trajectory of youth.

Some of the most significant challenges facing youth and their families include trauma, housing instability, food insecurity and the risk from violence. The typical MTMBK family is a family of 4 to 5 with an income of approximately $16,000. Only one MTMBK family is a two-parent (in household) family with the remainder of participants living in single-parent or non-parent (caregiver only) households. MTMBK participants typically live in neighborhoods where nearly 1 in 2 people live in poverty, 1 in 5 working age adults are unemployed, and nearly 1 in 4 homes are vacant. Participants live in some of the most violent neighborhoods in the City and most youth exhibit significant indicators of trauma. Furthermore, they are attending schools that have received “D” and “F” ratings from the Ohio Department of Education, and whose school-level educational outcomes for males indicate a widening achievement gap for males as they age. Positive outcome data should be reviewed within the context of challenges facing MTMBK youth.

“The youth in our program experience poverty in many ways, both within their homes and their community. Many have had to go without food, have had utilities turned off, sometimes multiple times in a very short period, have moved to new neighborhoods, and experience stress about money. In their community, they deal with many vacant houses, high occurrence of various types of crime and gang activity, and attend schools that are failing them as many of them do not read and write at their grade level, and many do not receive the attention they need.” – Reflection from MTMBK Field Staff
**Program Enrollment & Participation**

**Overall Enrollment:** Fifty-five youth have enrolled for the MTMBK program during the 18 month pilot period. Forty youth enrolled during the 2014/2015 school year and 15 youth enrolled after June 2015. Currently, 35 youth are still actively engaged in Saturday programming. It should be noted that engagement is also impacted by other youth activities (for example, some youth suspend participation temporarily for sports activities). Program staff still remain engaged with families whose youth are no longer actively attending programming.

**Enrollment Strategies:** Enrollment was a major challenge at the beginning of the program. MTMBK focused on a particular youth demographic (at-risk youth) and relied heavily upon community- and organizational- based referrals. Given the quick start-up time of the program (enrollment began August 2014), program staff were very proactive to increase enrollment, recruiting at schools throughout the neighborhood and with other service providers. In the past six months, new enrollments have primarily come from referrals from existing MTMBK youth and families.

**Participation:** Since January of 2015, Saturday participation has ranged from 60% to 80% of active participants (this absence figure includes excused absences). Participation generally peaks during the school months and declines near fall/winter holidays and over summer months. OSU experiential days are generally the most well-attended days within normal programming cycles.

**Participation Strategies:** Participation in Saturday programming was also a major challenge for the pilot program in its early months. The first Saturday sessions in the fall of 2015 had participation rates of 20% of active enrollments. To quickly address this challenge, the MTMBK staff utilized follow-up phone calls, home visits and offered transportation assistance. These additional measures tripled Saturday participation and were seen as critical to the success of the program.

![MTMBK Attendance Graph](image-url)
General Characteristics

The typical MTMBK youth is 11 years old, comes from a family of four, and lives with a single parent or other non-parental single caregiver. MTMBK youth families have an average income of $16,000, placing them at approximately 45% below the federal poverty rate for a family of four in Franklin County in 2013.

An assessment of family and caregiver characteristics found that of a sample of 35 MTMBK youth, 3% live in two-parent households, 82% live in single-parent households, and 15% live with non-parental caregivers. MTMBK youth are often the oldest male family member in their homes and our older youth participants must act in a parental role with younger siblings. While some MTMBK families do not have a working adult present, most have family members who are working to support the family, although their wages (and hours) are low enough to keep families in poverty.

Families exhibit many of the challenges of living in poverty and in stressful and unstable conditions. Chronic challenges for MTMBK families include: housing instability, homelessness, food insecurity, exposure to domestic violence and abuse, lack of material goods (furniture, beds and clothing), and the chronic stress of insecurity created by poverty. Multiple caregivers have had to seek medical attention due to anxiety, depression and other significant mental health side effects from stressful life circumstances.

MTMBK families represent a snapshot of the cumulative and chronic struggles for impoverished families (and highly vulnerable youth) in Columbus. As described by MTMBK field staff:

“The boys we work with have witnessed, experienced and endured things that no child should ever have to experience. However, the culmination of their situations at home, at school and their being situated in the South Side is what leads to them being identified as at-risk children. As a whole, it can be said that the youth we engage with come from homes that struggle with stability. Specifically, the boys’ families struggle immensely financially, in which they have difficulty meeting their basic needs (food, clothing, shelter). Ultimately as a whole, the families are transient. The youth are often uprooted and moved elsewhere as a result of familial conflict or because they are evicted.”
Family Characteristics & Legal Interactions

**Family:** The majority of the boys live in single-parent households. Very often, the children are expected to take an elevated leadership role in their household due to lack of resources. Several participants experience sporadic engagement with otherwise absentee parents. Some of the boys live with their grandmothers or other family members, rather than their parents, or may spend significant lengths of time staying with other family members either regularly or for part of the year. It is very common for our program participants to have half-siblings and live in three-generation households. The boys experience varying amounts of parental involvement. Many families strongly value strong relationships with extended family members and close family friends.

**Legal Interactions:** Many of the boys have been the object of negative attention from law enforcement. This includes being mistaken for family members who have a criminal past, seeing family members arrested, or being directly questioned on the street by police. One student reported that due to being harassed by the police, he felt that he had never had a positive interaction with a white person before coming to More Than My Brother’s Keeper. Despite this apprehension of law enforcement, some participants identify law enforcement as a possible career, because of the perceived power of the police. Future programming should seek to engage programs such as the Columbus Police “explorers” program to foster better youth/ police relations and provide potential career inspiration for youth.

**Incarceration & Arrests:** Many program participants have reported having family members currently in prison. No MTMBK participants were arrested for juvenile offenses during the pilot program.
Transportation: The majority of the families in the program do not have access to a vehicle. They generally rely on rides from friends and family, public transportation, or walking to get where they need to go. Most of the program participants take the bus to school. When they miss the bus, they either miss school or have to walk several miles. The bus routes can take over an hour to transport the boys home. Many of the boys have used the bikes that they assembled through the program to transport themselves and are able to travel longer distances.

Relationship With Schools: Some of the families in the program have expressed feeling that schools were not responsive to the needs they tried to express. One mother has been trying to get an IEP, and has had the counselor and other school staff say that they would help with it, but has still not seen it happen. Caregivers have also noted challenges with teachers communicating regarding school-based challenges. Parents with children facing significant behavioral issues also express frustration with the volume of suspensions received by their children and lack of attention paid to IEP’s. It should be noted that MTMBK children generally have significant trauma issues and potentially undertreated or untreated physical and mental health challenges. All of these factors will contribute to student behaviors in school.

The majority of MTMBK students attend Columbus City Schools, attending either Livingston Elementary, South High School or Lincoln Park Elementary. But, in total, MTMBK students attend up to a dozen different schools and mobility of students between schools has occurred throughout the program. Students also attend charter schools. Students primarily attend D- and F-rated schools (based on Ohio Department of Education ratings). Local school data shows sharp disparities for male proficiency scores.

Proficiency Scores for Male Students 2013/2014: Ohio Department of Education

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<th>5th Grade</th>
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<td>Livingston Elementary</td>
<td>38%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Math % Proficient or above</td>
<td>3rd Grade</td>
<td>4th Grade</td>
<td>5th Grade</td>
<td>6th Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livingston Elementary</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>17%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Proficiency scores for male students at Livingston Elementary 2013/2014 (Ohio Department of Education).
Housing & Furniture

**Housing:** The families in MTMBK have a fairly broad array of different types of housing. Some live in full houses that are generally clean, in good repair, and meet the needs of their family. On the other end of the spectrum, participants live in dilapidated units and are homeless. The most challenging housing conditions include hallways that are small and smell of urine, and substantial graffiti on the walls. MTMBK staff have witnessed drug deals taking place just outside the front door of some of the more distressed housing units.

A number of families have experienced eviction, or have moved for various reasons, some more than once since the program began. Some families have struggled to find a new place to live, due to difficulty finding an affordable home or navigating the public housing program. One mother lost six hundred dollars in an online scam when using a website that she believed to be a legitimate public housing resource.

Moving can be especially difficult for some families who may not have access to a vehicle, or who may not have enough help, especially with carrying heavy furniture and appliances. One family had to move due to a severe infestation of bed bugs. The family was comprised of just three boys, all under the age of fifteen, and their grandmother, so they needed a significant amount of assistance to coordinate the move, obtain new furniture to replace the pieces that had been ruined by the infestation, and ensure that all of the clothes and other items that they were bringing over had been heat treated and were free of bed bugs. They were able to utilize MTMBK and other resources to make the move work, and luckily the new house was just across the street.

**Furniture:** While some families have homes that are fully furnished, many families have struggled to have beds for all members of their family, in addition to couches and other typical kitchen and living room furniture. Some families do not have enough mattresses for everyone in the house, or don’t have any at all. Some people have to sleep on the couch, an air mattress, or even on the floor. One family was evicted from their home and were able to find a new house but were not able to move all of their furniture. They reported having to sleep on the floor for several months until they got a furniture bank referral through MTMBK. They were able to get mattresses, couches, and other furniture to fill their home. Program staff make efforts to meet furniture needs with informal donations, however there are still families who need mattresses.
Physical & Behavioral Health

***Medical Conditions***: For a small cohort of youth, MTMBK participants have extensive physical and mental health ailments, some untreated. Program staff have identified untreated health conditions directly impacting school and behaviors. For example, one youth was suspended from school for fighting, but this incident was influenced by the pain from an untreated ear infection which had persisted for two weeks. MTMBK staff transported the student to seek medical care in this situation.

Many of the boys in the program suffer from ADHD and may struggle to focus on the planned tasks for the allotted time while at the program. This difficulty is also experienced at school. Often, when recognizing these effects, boys will make comments such as, “that boy hasn’t taken his medication today.” Many boys take multiple medications and families may not always remember to administer the prescription or may decide to take the child off of the prescription due to its side effects.

As part of the MTMBK program experience, youth received health screenings at Nationwide Children’s Hospital and many participants had not had prior health care screening or contact recently. Health screenings identified multiple youth who were at-risk for diabetes. Many youth were scared to go for medical screenings, and MTMBK staff provided emotional support in assisting them with screenings.

***Documented Health Challenges***: Physical and mental health challenges identified for MTMBK youth the following.

- Asthma (Multiple Cases)
- Depression (Multiple Cases)
- Reactive Attachment Disorder
- Oppositional Defiant Disorder (Multiple Cases)
- ADHD (Multiple Cases)
- Learning Disabilities (Multiple Cases)
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Multiple Cases)
- Chronic Headaches (Multiple Cases)
- Vision Disorder (Multiple Cases)
- Hearing Disorder
- Speech Disorder (Multiple Cases)
- Behavioral Disorder Misc. (Multiple Cases)
- Anger Management
- Obesity (weight gain) (Multiple Cases)
- at-risk for Diabetes (Multiple Cases)
- Hospitalized for Self-Harm
- Leukemia

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Neighborhood Conditions

Almost all of the More Than My Brother’s Keeper youth live close to Parsons or Livingston Avenue on the South Side of Columbus. While this neighborhood is a space of recent redevelopment and positive transformation, the youth generally live in parts of the community that are still struggling. An analysis by the Kirwan Institute of youth neighborhood conditions found that most lived in “low” or “very low” opportunity areas, and lived in areas with extremely high poverty, unemployment and vacant property challenges.

From the experience of program staff, the conditions in the neighborhood and the life experience of MTMBK youth are intricately intertwined. Youth have expressed internalization of the “distress” found in their community and its impact on their feeling of self-worth.

“Look around at the houses in this neighborhood - no one cares about us.” – Statement from MTMBK youth participant
Community Crime Risk

The participants regularly report exposure to violence and illustrate their fear of violence. Youth participants have been shot at, have had relatives, friends and neighbors victimized by gun violence, and exhibit signs of chronic stress from constantly hearing gun shots. Initially, program staff thought violence concerns would be episodic, but after the first three months of programming, violence and fear of violence has been identified as a chronic problem facing youth. Data analysis supports the fears of youth, with most youth participants living in some of the highest crime areas in Franklin County.

In the short 18-month duration of the pilot program, boys have reported the following:

- Pressure and recruitment efforts to join local street gangs
- Homicide of a close family member
- One parent was shot in front of her children from an altercation across the street
- Witness to shootings and homicide (multiple cases)
- Gun shots fired at or in the proximity to youth participants (multiple cases)
- Youth have been assaulted and robbed in the neighborhood
- Being encouraged to fight by peers and family members
- Being forced to move because of fear of violence

“I don’t like my neighborhood. It is dangerous.” – MTMBK Youth Participant Statement

Violent crime “heat” or incidence map for area near MTMBK participant homes, analysis by the Kirwan Institute.
Community Gun Violence

Participants in MTMBK report significant trauma related to gun violence in the neighborhood and near their homes. Gun violence and shooting in the community is a major source of anxiety for youth participants. The reports of MTMBK youth are supported by analysis of gun violence and homicide patterns in the City and County. As seen in the accompanying maps, MTMBK youth live in an area with one of the densest clusters of youth gun victims of gun violence (using 2012 data) and recent homicide activity (2014 data).

“The youth that comprise MTMBK are a group of boys that are greatly exposed to violence and trauma. An overwhelming number of reports and accounts that we receive from the boys note instances in which they have witnessed a shooting outside their home or reported a death of a loved one.” - Reflection from MTMBK field staff

Homicide map

2014 Homicide Map, From The Columbus Dispatch.
Traumatic Life Events

**Adverse Childhood Experiences & Trauma:** Beyond the stress related to living in poverty, youth participants have experienced a significant amount of trauma or “adverse childhood experiences” or (ACE’s). The impacts of childhood trauma or ACE’s can be profound on youth mental and physical health, and depress educational, social and other life outcomes. MTMBK staff has sought to assist youth in connecting to mental health providers and have had to adopt various “trauma-informed” strategies to support program goals. Although a formal ACE examination was not conducted, reported trauma and ACE experience has included the following experiences for participants (and many children have exposure to multiple experiences):

- Parent or caregiver/close family member incarcerated (multiple cases)
- Sexual abuse (multiple cases)
- Physical abuse (multiple cases)
- Victim of violence or assault (multiple cases)
- Exposure to domestic violence (multiple cases)
- Death of parent/caregiver (multiple cases)
- Gun violence victimizing close family member/parent (multiple cases)
- Witness to gun violence and homicide (and gun violence near home) (multiple cases)
- Guns fired in the direction of youth participants – felt life was in danger (multiple cases)
- Parental neglect or abandonment
- Victimized by theft/robbery (multiple cases)
- Miscellaneous (multiple cases): food insecure/malnourished, experienced forced relocation/eviction, homelessness, sibling placed in foster care

“A stress response system that is not strengthened and engaged in positive ways (some stress is actually good and physiologically necessary) can have a powerful, debilitating effect on a child's development. Children can and should experience a certain amount of stress, but stress that is layered and long-lasting becomes toxic, and literally can make children sick, even well into adulthood.”

IV. EVALUATION APPROACH

More Than My Brother's Keeper Program Evaluation
December 2015
Evaluation Approach

A traditional program-oriented evaluation approach was utilized to assess the program. This approach can be used to gauge overall program goals and objectives. A logic model of anticipated outcomes was created to identify outcome measures.

In addition, objective-based and theory-based evaluation activities/metrics were incorporated. Objective-based measures include identification of academic and behavioral benchmarks, utilizing the Franklin County Learning Circles data system to track outcomes for participants. The theory-based approach includes engagement with stakeholders to set additional goals for youth participants. The evaluation will also be participatory in nature, including ongoing and intensive engagement with program stakeholders.

The evaluation is designed to ascertain how effective the program is in helping a selected cohort of at-risk African-American boys aged 10-14 improve, based on a series of metrics. Therefore, the primary evaluation efforts have followed the children as they participate in the program activities. However, the success of programs such as these is dependent on a variety of people who touch the lives of these young boys. The reactions of these individuals to the program are also very important to determining the outcomes of the program. Thus, the program evaluation also measures the reactions of parents and program staff in order to ascertain their journey through the program.
## Program Logic Model

### Input
- Staffing
- Experiential learning sites
- Service organization partners (Boys & Girls club, Big Brother's Big Sisters)
- Materials/ resources (food, transportation, etc.)
- Mentors

### Output
- Experiential learning activities
- Community building activities
- Social capital development activities
- Services provided (to at-risk youth and families)
- Advocacy on behalf of youth

### Outcomes
- Improved educational outcomes for youth
- Increased resiliency for youth
- Increased social capital and community support for youth
- Youth avoid risky behaviors, avoid victimization from violence, and avoid negative interaction with the criminal justice system

**Assumptions:** Youth & family engagement, skill building, social capital & advocacy can build resiliency, confidence & success for at-risk youth.

**External Factors:** Activities of external organizations directly impacting youth (Columbus City Schools, Columbus Police, Social Service Agencies),
Evaluation: Program Goals & Outcomes

The More Than My Brother’s Keeper program is focused on positively impacting the lives of at-risk boys on the South Side and setting them on a course for future success in their social, emotional, scholastic, and civic lives. The program is designed to encourage a positive change in a number of different aspects of the children’s behavior, performance, and outlook. The general categories for these changes are as follows:

**Academic Outcomes:** The program evaluation utilizes data from Columbus’ Learning Circles database to track the academic performance of youth participants at the beginning of the program and at the end. For youth not included in the “Learning Circles” database, supplemental academic measures will be gathered.

**Character Outcomes:** The program will also be aimed at encouraging positive changes in personal character, behavior, and personality traits among the boys in the program. Surveys and engagement with the systems in which participants operate will be used to track character outcomes.

**Personal Optimism:** The program will also measure changes in the boys’ outlook on their future life chances. Research suggests that prolonged exposure to poverty and lowered opportunities for success encourages lowered expectations for young people as they grow. The program hopes to make a positive change for boys living in these circumstances.

**At-Risk Measures:** The evaluators have identified certain factors as highly predictive of youth who are at-risk of criminal or violent activity. The evaluation will measure the change in relationship to these factors in the boys of the program from beginning to end.
The evaluation triangulated multiple sources of data to assess if program goals and outcomes were met. These data sources included:

- Learning Circles database for Columbus City School District students, utilizing Learning Circles overall, attendance, behavior and core academic scoring indices.
- Surveys and interviews of MTMBK parents and caregivers, measuring impact of the program on youth and families.
- Document review of MTMBK staff field reports and other relevant reporting documentation from program experiences.
- Review of youth program feedback, documented by MTMBK staff.
- Interviews and focus groups with MTMBK program staff.
- Evaluator observation of MTMBK programming activities and related events.
V. PROGRAM OUTCOMES

More Than My Brother's Keeper Program Evaluation
December 2015
MTMBK staff generally report a strong response to the program, from families and youth, as demonstrated in the following field staff reflections:

“While some families use us as a resource more than others, overall I have heard a great deal of positive feedback. Families are grateful that their kids are involved in a positive program, and generally feel like we provide good experiences for the participants. Some families have also expressed great appreciation for our help outside of Saturday programming.”

“Mostly positive feedback, many of the kids express enjoyment in the program. Some kids want more individual attention or activities geared more towards their interest. Expressed desire to have additional contact or activities during the week.”

“I have seen that the program becomes an integral part of their lives. Many of the boys genuinely look forward to Saturday not because they don’t have to go to school, but because they have MTMBK programming.”

“MTMBK is a source of consistency for kids who may experience a high degree of instability. They know that they can come, almost every Saturday, and get a hot meal, see familiar faces, and participate in programming that was designed for them. This shows that they are valued by their community and the individuals that make the program possible each week.”

“One Mom cried because her other children hadn’t had the chance to experience More Than My Brother’s Keeper. She felt her other children’s life chances would be stifled without a program like this.”

“Whenever I am on the South Side, the boys and families recognize my vehicle and come up and talk to me. Even though MTMBK is comprised of a diverse group of individuals, we have been almost universally welcomed by participants’ families to come into their home and engage in their lives. I have been referred to as a mentor, a teacher, and a role model. I honestly feel like I have become part of their community and network.”

Benefits of the Program: Results from Parent Surveys

Survey results from family members supports the positive feedback reported by field staff. When asked to rate the benefit of the program on the following scale (1 to 5) a survey of 27 caregivers of MTMBK youth found caregivers indicate the program has been very helpful along several dimensions. Survey responses found the overall program to be very beneficial and strong impacts for optimism, self-image and behavior. Impact on grades was also a positive score, although not as strong as the program’s impact on other outcomes.

Parent Survey Results: 21 Family Caregivers Were Asked to Rate the Impact of MTMBK on a 1 to 5 Scale for the Following Factors
(1 = Lowest Score; 5 = Highest Score)
Family & Youth Response to Program: Family Reflections

Family feedback has also been very positive throughout the MTMBK pilot program. Parents and caregivers have shown strong support and appreciation of the program. Some parents have identified the program as a critical life-changing opportunity for their child, as illustrated in statements from family members below.

“My son really needed a male mentor and I’m thankful that you have given him that. He had a wonderful time this summer. Y’all are awesome.”

“You have helped us in so many ways. He has grown so much since being in the program. I don’t know what I would do without you guys.”

“I tell every mother in this neighborhood who has a son this age that they need to get in contact with More Than My Brother’s Keeper.”

“...you know you are always welcome in my house. The program has been such a great influence in my son’s life.”

“Of course I have time for you. Y’all are always welcome and your program has been great for my grandsons.”

Confidence: Parents report their children being more willing to participate in a number of activities. Anecdotes include children “holding their heads higher,” “looking adults in the eye,” and taking on leadership roles at school, on sports teams, and in extracurricular organizations.

Maturity: Parents report that their children can better control their emotions, are more self-reliant, and also more willing to engage in a positive manner with their peers. Even within the program, boys will attempt to stop conflict rather than escalate it. All participants have avoided involvement in serious negative interactions with law enforcement, no gang involvement, or other negative juvenile justice outcomes.

Career: Many of the boys have altered their life goals based on their experience within MTMBK. Boys have expressed interest in becoming engineers, doctors, lawyers, police officers, community workers, and even MTMBK staff.

MTMBK participants on The Ohio State University campus.
Learning Circle Analysis: Measuring Changes in School-Based Outcomes

The MTMBK evaluation utilized the Learning Circles database to track school-based outcomes for participants. While not all MTMBK participants are in the Learning Circles database, 27 participants were included in the database for analysis.

Learning Circles rates students on a 0 to 100 scale for several school-based outcomes. The analysis for this evaluation focused on four outcome measures: overall performance, attendance, behavior, and core academics. The analysis focused on the change in Learning Circles scores from the beginning of the 2014/2015 school year to the beginning of the 2015/2016 school year. The analysis looked at baseline scores in comparison to the most recent high score in fall of 2015 (either September or October 2015). It should be noted that Learning Circle scores have very high variability throughout the year, the analysis attempted to minimize the impact of this variability to perform a more stable analysis of outcomes.

Overall, the majority of MTMBK students experienced an increase in Learning Circle scores. Additionally, students in the highest risk categories decreased for most indicators.

**Overall Performance:** 67% of students experienced an increase in overall performance scores.

**Attendance:** 70% of students experienced an increase in attendance or maintained near perfect attendance scores.

**Behavior:** 85% of students experienced an increase in behavior scores or maintained near perfect behavioral outcomes in school.

**Core Academics:** 59% of students experienced an increase in core academic scores, and another 11% of students maintained core academic scores above 60 (the highest scores among the MTMBK cohort).

The proportion of MTMBK students in the two highest risk categories (Alarm & Warn) for their overall scores decreased from 47% of students in the fall of 2014 to 38% of students in the fall of 2015.
Learning Circle Analysis: Change in Average and Median Learning Circles Score for the MTMBK Cohort (Overall Performance Score)

The MTMBK evaluation also analyzed the Learning Circle data for the entire cohort of 27 students with accessible data. The analysis looked at the change in the average and median score for the entire cohort of students between the beginning of the 2014/2015 school and the fall of the 2015/2016 school year. The average score and the median score increased for MTMBK youth during this time period. The average performance index score increased by 28% and the median performance index score increased by 32%.

MTMBK Student Cohort (Overall Performance Score Change)

Percentage Change in Overall Performance Score (Average & Median Score) for MTMBK Cohort (Fall 2014 to Fall 2015)
Learning Circle Analysis: Change in Average and Median Learning Circles Score for the MTMBK Cohort (Attendance & Behavior Score)

The average and median scores for attendance and behavior also increased from the fall of 2014/2015 to the fall of 2015/2016.
Learning Circle Analysis: Change in Average and Median Learning Circles Score for the MTMBK Cohort (Core Academics Score)

The average and median scores for core academics increased from the fall of 2014/2015 to the fall of 2015/2016. The average core academic score for MTMBK students increased by 16%, and the median core academic score for MTMBK students increased by 12% during this time period.

MTMBK Student Cohort (Core Academic Score Change)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Median</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early 2014</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>50.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early 2015</td>
<td>57.4</td>
<td>63.0</td>
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Percentage Change in Core Academic Score (Average & Median Score) for MTMBK Cohort (Fall 2014 to Fall 2015)

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<th></th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Median</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>12%</td>
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Learning Circle Analysis: Comparison to Peer Group (Overall Performance Score)

We were not able to develop an exact peer group for comparative purposes with Learning Circle data. Data for students not in our program is not available due to student confidentiality. As discussed earlier, outcomes must be contextualized with respect to MTMBK youth being “at-risk,” vulnerable, or marginalized youth. Similarly, peer comparisons would compare youth in similar life circumstances as MTMBK youth. MTMBK youth as a whole primarily attend schools rated F or D by the Ohio Department of Education and schools which have high disparities in outcomes for impoverished, male students.

Although we did not have comparable peer data, we were able to analyze youth who entered the program late (entering in summer of 2015) to measure their outcomes in the 2014/2015 school year in comparison to MTMBK youth who attended the program during the school year. Our analysis of overall performance index data for youth demonstrates that youth who were in the program throughout the 2014/2015 school year outperformed their peers who entered the program at a later date.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peer Comparison Group (Not in MTMBK Programming 2014/2015 School Year)</th>
<th>Fall 2014</th>
<th>Spring 2015</th>
<th>Change</th>
<th>% Change</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average Index Score</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>-4.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Median Index Score</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>2014/2015 MTMBK Youth Cohort (In MTMBK Programming 2014/2015 School Year)</th>
<th>Fall 2014</th>
<th>Fall 2015</th>
<th>Change</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average Index Score</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>68.1</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Index Score</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Return on Investment: Understanding the Risks

All social programs seek to support a strong return on investment. Unfortunately, easily calculating return on investment is challenging, particularly for programs that have a short time span and for those working with high-risk participants. For MTMBK youth participants, it is important to contextualize the profile of youth participants when assessing return on investment for the program. Given the at-risk nature of MTMBK youth, these youth in particular are at risk for a number of negative individual and social outcomes.

- MTMBK youth are in families which are severely impoverished. Research has found that impoverished high school age students are more than six times as likely to drop out of school.
- The majority of MTMBK youth have multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences or (ACE’s). Research has found that youth with more than four ACE experiences have higher risks for diabetes, heard disease, stroke, bronchitis, substance abuse, and suicide. Programs such as MTMBK can help mitigate these risks, which have significant social and societal costs.
- MTMBK students are also more likely to have experienced neglect or abuse throughout their lifespan. Studies indicate that these children are more likely to develop learning disorders and be involved in the juvenile justice system.
- MTMBK youth are more likely to have been housing instable. Research has found that students who move more than four times in a six-year span present a one-year educational gap compared to their peers who are housing secure.
- MTMBK youth have higher rates of parental incarceration, a factor that has been shown to significantly impact behavior and academic outcomes for children.
- MTMBK youth have high rates of food insecurity, which has been documented to lower academic outcomes significantly, increase emotional withdrawal, and increase aggressive behavior.

Return on Investment: Discussion

After 18 months of intervention, MTMBK youth (as a cohort) have experienced improvements in academics, attendance and behavior, and parents have documented substantial improvements in self-image and optimism. Youth have had no interactions with the juvenile justice system and have picked up additional skills through experiential learning activities. MTMBK staff have worked to stabilize families to the best of their abilities. All of these outcomes suggest a positive trajectory for high school completion for at-risk MTMBK youth.

The benefits of avoiding the juvenile justice system and high school completion are profound, as documented in the 2014 United Way of Central Ohio Champion of Childrens report:

- An at-risk child avoiding the juvenile justice system, can produce annual savings of $118,000 for Franklin County.
- High school graduates (who did not attend college) will earn on average an additional $10,000 annually more than their peers who did not complete high school. High school graduation also places these students at a greater likelihood of pursuing higher education, which further increases future earnings.
- A high school graduate who avoids drop-out is estimated to add a net public economic benefit of $127,000 (calculated by future tax revenue generated from higher earnings and reduced social service costs).
- Higher educational attainment results in less dependence on public health care systems, resulting in savings of $40,500 for every additional high school graduate.
- Juvenile justice infractions and high school drop out create tremendous risk for entanglement in the adult criminal justice system. It can cost more than $25,000 per year to incarcerate an adult.

It should be noted that while MTMBK students as a whole are on a positive trajectory, a small number of students are still struggling and will require greater attention. Additionally, high school completion is several years away for MTMBK students, and their challenging life circumstances will continue throughout their teen years. It is critical to keep these youth “on track” in order to maximize the investment made and achieve the outcomes discussed above.

Lessons Learned & Recommendations Part I

Needs were greater than anticipated: The needs for youth and families were much greater and more chronic than initially anticipated. Although the program anticipated significant family need, the persistence and depth of need (extending to basic necessities like clothing and beds) was unexpected. Additionally, the program encountered much more food insecurity than anticipated.

The Impact of Violence & Trauma: The chronic nature of violence and the depth and extent of trauma (and post traumatic challenges) were not anticipated. Trauma also contributed to significant behavioral challenges, some of which proved detrimental to the quality of programming. Future programming should focus explicitly on trauma-informed strategies and engage issues of community violence and safety through programming interventions.

Unanticipated positive outcomes: The program produced outcomes that originally were not envisioned in program design. For example, youth participants formed significant social capital within the cohort of boys. Relationships between MTMBK boys were formed that are strong and have persisted throughout the program. These additional relationships produce an additional social support (and positive peer) group for MTMBK youth.

Staff development (and avoiding burnout): Given the short start-up time for the program, staff development had to be accelerated and many field staff were not well-prepared for the intensity of the challenges facing youth participants. Intensive development activities had to be structured into the program to maintain the efficacy of field staff. Due to the high emotional demands of the program, staff fatigue or “burn out" was also a challenge. Future programming should focus explicitly on supporting staff wellness and emotional resiliency.
Lessons Learned & Recommendations Part II

The Value of Non-Traditional Educational Space: The youth participants repeatedly expressed excitement about the experiential educational sessions and program staff have seen value in creating a space that does not resemble traditional “school” and where “the boys can be kids.” This finding is supported by literature that demonstrates the need for young boys (particularly those with behavioral challenges) to be in an environment that is structured differently than traditional classroom settings. Downtime should also be semi-structured, ideally, focusing on creative ways to keep participants occupied during transitional moments. For example, providing opportunities for participants to reflect on their experiences throughout the previous week and allowing staff to gather important anecdotal data.

The Value of Experiential Learning Activities: Experiential learning activities are very beneficial to youth, providing very concrete and “hands on” skills while engaging participants in an interactive format. Music, arts and physical activity are particularly effective in helping youth struggling with emotional and behavioral challenges.

The Value of Social Capital & Consistency: The early months of the program were critical for building trust, relationships and deep social capital. The program benefitted from the deep relationships established in the first months. These relationships have aided in creating an environment where participants can openly identify daily challenges that impact their well-being (for example bullying, school issues or family challenges). The deep and consistent engagement has been critical to building trust.
Lessons Learned & Recommendations Part III

Challenges Associated with Gender Norms: Misguided gender norms was found to undermine authority of female staff. Hyper-masculinity impedes our effectiveness in building positive identities for program participants. Future programming should focus explicitly on engaging, discussing and countering detrimental gender norms with program participants.

Benefits to Staff Diversity: Staff composition was intentionally diverse to present the participants with strong African American male role models but also expose them to the diversity of the broader community. The staff includes significant African American male representation (particularly in leadership roles), participation of staff who grew up in the South Side, and female and White staff. The program participants benefit from both seeing strong African American male role models as direct program leaders and participants, but also from the exposure to the diversity of program staff, along the lines of race and gender.

Internalized Racial Bias & Racial Trauma: Explicit and implicit racial bias and racial anxiety produce a tremendous burden on boys of color and place a unique challenge on programming for young men of color. Youth participants demonstrate that many authority figures have repeatedly asserted (or assumed) negative stereotypes about them. Internalization of negative racial stereotypes diminished young black males’ conceptualizations of self-worth, self-value, and self-actualization.

Youth Resilience: Despite the challenges facing MTMBK youth, youth participants demonstrate tremendous resiliency, particularly when provided support and enrichment.

Replication in Other Communities: Programs with a similar structure to More Than My Brother’s Keeper could be replicated in other communities, and with other youth demographics or genders. To be effectively replicated, the program would need to first spend significant time building community relationships and identifying community assets to leverage. Utilizing a long-standing community organization will enhance the potential for success with replicating the program. Assessment of the at-risk youth population and their families would help orient particular programs to best meet the needs of participants.
Conclusion

The experience with More Than My Brother's Keeper illustrates the potential for focused, holistic and deep engagement with marginalized and at-risk youth in Franklin County. The program also demonstrates the value of leveraging networks of existing community-based assets to support youth and families. The needs of these youth and families are significant, but the depth of engagement, quality of interactions, and consistency of engagement have all shown to be very effective in fostering self-esteem, building skills, improving behavior, and instilling hope for youth.

As a program, More Than My Brother's Keeper represented a new and novel approach that had a very steep learning curve. Strategies needed to be modified throughout the program to assure effective programming. The program requires significant staff attention and support services, but these programmatic costs should be contextualized in relation to the high potential social costs of future negative outcomes for youth. In a challenging neighborhood, with youth who have faced intensive adversity and continued challenges, the program has produced very positive results for youth involved.

The More Than My Brother's Keeper approach is not a “silver bullet” to address the impacts of poverty, trauma and youth vulnerability. But, by focusing on building strong relationships, creating opportunities for youth that they could have never imagined, helping support families, and providing youth with adult role models who demonstrate their commitment to seeing youth thrive, programs like More Than My Brother's Keeper can foster resiliency and future success for at-risk youth.