

## **HOW TO ESTABLISH A LEARNING CENTER**

The model we propose is the W.E.B. DuBois Learning Center, Inc., housed at 5501 Cleveland Avenue in Kansas City, Missouri. The purpose of the Center is to offer enrichment and remedial tutorial services in academic skills to children in the Kansas City area. Since 1973 the Center has concentrated on tutoring in reading, mathematics and science. In the mid-nineties it began to offer sessions in computer science and Information Technology.

The prime movers of the program should be volunteers who have the dedication and enthusiasm to stick it out, come what may. There will be lean times when you may wonder if it is worth it. During these times, think of the children. They are worth it!

In order to overcome some of the acquired skepticism found among our people, you have to be determined to “hand in there” over the long haul. It will take roughly five years to capture the imagination of the community such that they will look upon your program as a community institution with some permanency. To help this process along you must establish consistency and regularity of the tutoring sessions.

When you think the time is right, you may want to consider incorporating and acquiring tax-exempt status. This will allow people and businesses to make tax-exempt donations that could include monies, material, equipment and even a building.

### **VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT**

The identification and recruitment of skilled volunteers is an essential element in the development of a Learning Center. The first and most important step in this process is to determine those areas where volunteers are needed. Second, get the word out about the program and the need for volunteers through personal contacts, friends and family, and by word-of-mouth. (Avoid recruitment through advertising, rallies, etc., because they invariably attract some unstable and non-compatible personalities that create unnecessary hassles and headaches.) As interested persons respond, explain

the program and list the volunteer positions that are needed. Allow the volunteer to work in the area in which he/she feels most qualified. In addition to tutoring, volunteer positions could include some of all of the following:

- Classroom Aides
- Board of Directors and/or Advisory Council Members
- Management Consultants
- Counselors
- Secretaries/Office Assistants

## **CENTER OPERATIONS**

### **Tutors**

Identify key people to head up each area of tutoring. Approach area professionals, teachers or any community person with the desired skills and talent to volunteer in some capacity.

You should anticipate that there will be many people who will start out enthusiastically, but will fade out of the picture. Many of the reasons for not participating will be valid. However, some will be just plain “jive.” Take care not to offend anyone because some of them will return and some will give support in other ways. Only time will tell who will be tried and true, reliable over time, time after time.

### **Students**

For starters you will need a core group of students who will attend regularly. To accomplish this, identify any children that you have some control over. Among these are children in your families and children of your friends. This core group of students will lend stability to the program. Other children from the community should be offered an opportunity to attend as well.

Do not be alarmed if only a few children attend at first. Rather use this situation to get you techniques down pat and to iron out some kinks. This way, when you do get a large influx of students, you will have acquired some experience and will consequently be able to handle them more smoothly.

## **Assessment**

Key people, knowledgeable in the areas to be tutored, should head up each subject area. These individuals will evaluate the test taken during registration so that students are grouped according to skill level rather than grade or age. This way, students can progress at their own rate. However, our common sense should be applied according to the situations in a student's progression from one level to the next.

Remember, a salient feature to be taken advantage of in a program such as this is that in many instances we know better what is best for our children than anyone else. We should not hesitate to make use of this inherent wisdom.

## **Schedule**

The schedule for tutoring should be based upon the availability of the volunteers. Evenings and weekends have been the most successful times for us. Tutoring sessions should be limited to two hours in each subject. We recommend having a different day for each subject so the students who need tutoring in several subjects can take advantage of them.

## **Subject Matter**

We tutor computer science (Information Technology), mathematics, reading and science. Make sure that the subjects are limited to those for which volunteers are comfortable teaching. All others should be referred elsewhere. The last thing you want to do is to offer help in areas that the tutors cannot handle. For example, if your tutors only feel comfortable with reading, then only offer that. Refer the other subjects to people who can handle them. This cannot be overstressed. What you do, you should do well. In areas where you are weak, you should recruit competent persons first, and then offer the subject. Remember you have to develop a reputation of excellence. Our people deserve it and need it to identify with.

## **Materials**

Many of the materials you would need, you can get from the teachers in your community.

For reading materials, you can use articles from magazines, newspapers, books, words to popular (but relevant) songs, etc.

Most bookstores will carry some material you can use for computers, math and science. You can always make up your own materials. And you can also find some on the Internet. Often it will be better than what you buy because it will be designed specifically for your needs.