

A young girl with curly hair in a ponytail is shown in profile, sitting at a desk. She is wearing a white hoodie with a colorful floral and butterfly pattern. Her right hand is raised high in the air. In front of her is a pink tray containing various colored markers and a piece of paper with a drawing. The background is a blurred classroom setting with another person in a yellow shirt visible.

ENCOURAGING YOUTH, EMPOWERING FAMILIES

A PUBLICATION OF EPISCOPAL COMMUNITY SERVICES



Letter From Our Program Director

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God bless, and have a great day on purpose.

Christian Holland
Director, ECS Out of School Time Programs

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A Trusted Neighbor

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As a matter of fact, her son was the first student to be enrolled, and today, her grandson and granddaughter are participants.

Originally from Puerto Rico, Ms. Janet moved to Feltonville 30 years ago and has worked for the Philadelphia School District for 24. After her day working as a teacher's assistant, she heads back to her neighborhood to assist the five and six year olds at OST.

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From living in the neighborhood, Ms. Janet often runs into participants and their families. “I go to the park and the kids call to me when they see me. They will point me out and say, “She helps me out with homework, mom!”

“I know a lot of the parents from outside [of the program] ... and they'll ask me about it. Sometimes, they're single moms and need help when at work. I'll tell them it's a good program for the kids. [It] helps a lot of kids and their parents. The kids learn a lot when in the program ... they learn everything they learn in school.”



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After talking to Ms. Janet, it quickly becomes clear that to her neighbors, she's much more than an OST employee — she's a trusted friend. “I'll see a lot of kids in the street, and I'll tell the parents, ‘Look, [they] can be in the program from 9 to 5. I stay with the kids until their parents come.’ They know they're safe. We will always be watching them, they're in good hands.”

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“There's a whole lot of things to do here. There's lacrosse club, basketball club, dance club, football club ... and we do all those things. I'm the best defense in football!” he exclaimed.

Noah has been enrolled in both the afterschool and summer programs since kindergarten, and it's the highlight of his day. “We get out [of school] at 3 o'clock, wait for our teacher, and go upstairs to eat a snack. At 4, we go to a classroom and do homework, and at 5, we have some sort of activity.”

“What I like ... is that they try to encourage us to do it ... learn how to do it on our own. They want us to try first, and if we can't, then they'll help us,”

Unlike some of his peers, Noah doesn't mind homework because of the help provided by OST staff. “My teacher gives us double-page [homework]. Front and back, and then front and back! Two pages! But it educates your brain more, [which] helps you get a good reputation.”

NOAH

and Quod etus excepudae vendita tempor sero beaquamendi debitatem

Noah's favorite subject is science and he is quick to bring up his favorite sci-fi movies like Star Wars and Jurassic World. “We learn about dinosaurs, ancient artifacts, and stuff like that.” In a field trip organized by OST, participants visited The Franklin Institute and “it was fantastic,” he recalled.

He wasn't always a fan of art projects, but the program has changed his opinion. “What I like ... is that they try to encourage us to do it ... learn how to do it on our own. They want us to try first, and if we can't, then they'll help us,” he said.

Like most kids his age, Noah especially enjoys summer at OST. “Summer, man, I can't even tell you about summer ... summer is awesome! Last summer, we had this thing called a Fun Friday. We had bouncy houses, free ice cream, slides, a pool!”

As a fifth grader, this is Noah's last year in elementary school. Next year, he'll move over up to the middle school building which he's nervous about. But he is excited to be reunited with some older OST friends that will be familiar faces in the halls come sixth grade.

“What I like about the program is that they have a program here and at [the middle school]. Because when we graduate from fifth grade, we can go back there and sign up. I love this place. I don't want to leave it,” he said.

Expanding Our Reach

In the fall of 2015, ECS opened its OST program to two neighboring schools located in Delaware County, Pennsylvania — Park Lane and Colwyn Elementary Schools.

These afterschool cohorts come as a result of The Darby Mission, a joint partnership between ECS and the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania. After hearing the concerns voiced by our neighbors in Darby, we are proud to help meet the academic and socio-economic needs of youth and families in this community. OST Darby and OST Colwyn were launched with the private support of dedicated donors, Jean Evans and Elizabeth L. Useem, and generous parishes, Church of the Redeemer in Bryn

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Helping Families Thrive Together

Long after classes are dismissed and the last school bell rings, roaring laughter and cheering can be heard from the Multipurpose Room at Feltonville Intermediate School.

TV's aren't playing in the background and no smartphones or tablets are in sight. Practically unheard of these days, families are sitting around the table, enjoying dinner together, and learning about what's going on at their child's school and afterschool program.

Once a month, ECS Out of School Time (OST) hosts these Family Nights, a component that, no matter how much the curriculum may change, will always be included. It provides parents the opportunity to stay connected, hear important announcements from principals and OST staff, celebrate their child's accolades, and participate in a STEAM activity similar to those done in the afterschool classrooms.

Recognized as a top provider in the city, OST offers a safe and nurturing environment where participants are empowered to do, and be, their best. A typical afternoon or summer day is jam-packed with different clubs, illuminating activities, and nutritious snacks or meals – blended together to support children's development and academic success.



Divided into two groups, OST serves elementary (pre-K through fifth grade) and middle-school (sixth through eighth grade) students with age-appropriate activities, focus on project-based learning, and the core strategies of effective youth programming focus on academic achievement; the arts; civic engagement and leadership; employability; life skills; mentoring; skill development; and sports and recreation.

Each day, the groups begin with an hour designated to completing their daytime homework assignments. Assistance is provided by OST staff and volunteers, and one-on-one tutoring is available for those who may need the extra help. Afterwards, the fun begins.

For an elementary student participating in science club, the activity may be making a vinegar volcano or homemade ice cream, while for a middle-schooler, building and racing actual Lego® robots or learning computer coding. Elementary recreation includes games that develop physical agility and teamwork, like kickball. The older youth are introduced to sports like lacrosse or fencing. The purpose of these clubs is to expose youth to potential passions they may not otherwise discover.

OST may appear to be a program exclusively benefiting youth, but at its core, OST brings families together and serves as a resource to the community.

Though Feltonville is a diverse, vibrant, and close-knit neighborhood, it's not without its problems. Poverty and unemployment rates are high, and for some families in the community, times are tough. OST not only saves parents the cost of year-round child care services, it also provides them with peace of mind knowing that their son or daughter is receiving homework help, learning new skills, and being exposed

to cultural activities that they, themselves, never got the chance to see or do as children. School and art supplies, t-shirts, and field trip expenses are included – ensuring that just because they may not be able to afford it, no parent is turned away from getting the very best for their child. ECS also leverages private funds to financially support families with vital needs such as utility and mortgage assistance, home repairs, and eviction and foreclosure prevention.

Former participants often keep in touch with OST staff through their high school years and beyond – though the halls seem much smaller than they remember. Some return as interns or volunteers, or as high school seniors needing to complete community service hours required to graduate. Others later return with families of their own. They revisit the school grounds after a long day of work to pick up their child, now enrolled in the program. They reconnect with the place where they grew up – where they were cared for, encouraged, and loved. This time, the gift is being passed down to their child.

CONTACT US

For more information or ways to get involved, contact Alicia Cooper, community engagement and events coordinator, at 215.351.1466 or aliciac@ecsphilly.org.

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