

Gospel-Centered After-School Programs as a Family Preservation Strategy

Working Upstream

To work upstream means to address the causes of family vulnerability before they lead to crisis or separation. Rather than responding only when children enter orphanages or child protection systems, upstream efforts strengthen families at the root through presence, prevention, and discipleship. This approach is both practical and biblical: it reflects God's heart for families and His design for communities to care for one another. By investing early, spiritually, relationally, and economically, we not only prevent harm but also cultivate the conditions where families can flourish in Christ.

Community Centers as a Tool for Family Preservation

Community-led after-school programs put this upstream vision into practice. They create safe, consistent spaces where children are known, loved, and invested in, and where parents are supported in their role as caregivers. Anchored in pillars like spiritual formation, academic reinforcement, and family strengthening, these centers build trust through long-term relationships with local teachers and staff. While the work requires patience, adaptability, and collaboration, the results are transformative: children gain faith and skills, families grow more resilient, and whole communities are strengthened against the pressures that drive separation.

Key Components of Working Upstream: ACROSS

Working upstream means reaching **ACROSS** to children, families, and communities with lasting impact.

1. **A – Accessible:** You have to be in the communities where you serve, not at a distance.
2. **C – Collaboration:** Families thrive when programs connect with churches, schools, and child protection.
3. **R – Relational / Local Ownership & Trust:** Empowering local leaders, staff, and parents to lead solutions.
4. **O – Ongoing (Longevity & Commitment):** Transformation requires a long-term vision and faithful presence.
5. **S – Spiritual (Gospel-Centeredness):** Distinctiveness comes from every effort pointing back to the Gospel.
6. **S – Supportive (Holistic Care):** Meeting the whole picture of needs — spiritual, educational, relational, economic.
7. **Other:** _____

Discussion Prompts

Step 1: Where Are You?

- ☐ Already running programs
- ☐ Exploring possibilities
- ☐ Looking for partners
- ☐ Shifting from crisis care to prevention

Notes: _____

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Step 2: How Are You Approaching It?

- What strategies have you tried?
- What challenges have you faced?
- What does collaboration with child protection agencies, churches, schools or local organizations look like?

Notes: _____

Step 3: Context + Distinctiveness

How does the character of your community shape what upstream looks like for you?

What makes your approach distinctively Christian in practice, not just in words?

What are the specific needs in your community that are within your ability to address?

- ☐ Medical care or health education
- ☐ Nutrition and food support
- ☐ Academic tutoring or literacy
- ☐ Technology and STEM education
- ☐ Safe spaces for children after school
- ☐ Parenting support and discipleship
- ☐ Marriage and family counseling
- ☐ Job training or economic empowerment
- ☐ Spiritual formation and discipleship
- ☐ Mentorship and life skills training
- ☐ Emotional/mental health support
- ☐ Community connection and fellowship

Notes: _____

Step 4: Looking Ahead

- If you could strengthen one upstream area in your ministry over the next year, what would it be?
- What is one thing in your ministry that you could share with others to help them work upstream serving families?

Notes: _____

