



Ashley Walker, 36, Dallas (child care)

At first, when they're too young for after school, when they're not in school, like right now, I have my one-year-old in Early Head Start. And I have a four-year-old in Head Start. So all my kids went to Head Start program before they started school. And once they started school, then the after-school programs is what, you know, helped me with my kids.

I even had tough choices at the time in choosing an after-school program because I'm on a fixed income and I can't really afford it. I may have to be late on a bill because I have to pay for an after-school program that I need so I can go to work, or it might just be something that my kids have to do without or me personally. So it's a struggle for parents that are on fixed income and poverty communities.

Especially in the community where I'm from, after-school programs provide so much more than people even know, besides just a safe place or a space. You know, a lot of after-school programs provide hot meals or meals period. Some of the kids get out of school and don't eat any more until the next day. So it's just a lot.

Even counseling and mentoring, you know, how kids connect with people and open up. You have kids that certain people look at as bad kids or troubled kids. They don't really open up to people, but they come to the after-school program and they feel comfortable with this person and they're just like a totally different kid, and I see this every day.

Another reason why I feel it's important is because it helps the parents. It's like a team. It helps the parents that are trying to do something with themselves, trying to better themselves, trying to further their education or further their career. It feels good to know that you have a backbone or a team or something that you can call on or lean on with your children. Because everybody needs some help.

Like they say, "It takes a village to raise a child."