

## **CREATING COMMUNITIES OF CONNECTION THROUGH ROCK CLIMBING**

Why is it that some of our youth breeze through the challenges of adolescence and avoid negative risk-taking, while others struggle and engage in a variety of health-compromising behaviors?

This question has inspired hundreds of research studies resulting in a variety of findings. As research results are compared, one common theme that emerges is the importance of connection and strong bonds with prosocial institutions such as family, schools and religious organizations. Simply put, kids who are connected to these important resources engage in fewer negative risk-taking behaviors.

As a youth-serving agency, your challenge is to discover healthy after-school and vacation-time "connecting points" for children. Best-practice and promising-practice research points to the importance of positive alternative activities such as sports, music, dance and theater as positive influences that matter and reduce risk. Unfortunately, many times this traditional "menu" of after-school activities is not attractive to "hard-to-connect" students. Experts agree that roughly 50% of America's youth are not involved in the current offering of extracurricular programs at their respective schools.

How then do we successfully reach this population? A good starting point might be to ask these youth what activities they would find interesting and would get involved in. As adults, we sometimes miss this most important step! It is significant to note that some of the most successful youth development programs across the United States are those that are student-driven! Simply put, kids are more likely to get involved in activities that they have had some input into choosing!

One exciting student-initiated activity emerging at a growing number of K-12 campuses is indoor wall climbing. Interestingly, educators across the United States agree that this activity has uniform appeal to traditionally unaffiliated youth of both sexes, and offers unique opportunities for physical, mental, emotional and social development. Think about the possible applications in your setting. Possibilities include, but are not limited to:

- Schools
  - Before- and after-school child care
  - Special education classes
  - Climbing club
  - Alternative to suspension settings
  - Leadership training opportunities
  - Rewards and incentives programs
- Community Education programming
- Park and Recreation programming
- Camps

Everlast Climbing™ is proud to be a part of this exciting "connecting point" and are committed to providing unparalleled guidance and support to school and youth development staff in the planning for and implementation of safe and rewarding climbing programs.