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After-school closings to leave kids on outside



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By [Catherine Candisky](#)

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

When the board of the Boys and Girls Club of Marion County decided recently to close half of its after-school sites, the executive director's first call was to juvenile court judges.

"They may not be the first to be impacted, but the judges will see it down the road," said executive director Carol Dimoff.

"When kids are unsupervised in those critical hours from 3 to 6 p. m., a lot of mischief happens. Right now, Marion is rampant with all the things that go along with high poverty the drugs and the drug dealers, violence," she said. "When the police start locking the kids up, they'll end up in court."

Faced with a gaping budget hole, the Boys and Girls Club of Marion County recently announced that it had no choice but to close three of its six after-school sites Dec. 1.

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to maintain services for the 1,200 children now served - most elementary-school age. They must come up with about \$200,000, or many of the children will have to find something else to do after school.

The decision came three months after lawmakers adopted a two-year budget that wiped out the \$2 million a year the state had been providing to boys and girls clubs across Ohio.

For the one in Marion, that meant the loss of about half of its \$269,000 annual budget.

Dimoff already has reduced staff hours and wages to \$8 an hour, a \$1 pay cut. Now, she says, she has no choice but to cut services.

After-school programs in Marion and across the state provide children with help with homework, activities and sports, and a snack or meal.

Kayla Griffin, a sophomore at South High School in Columbus, said she spends afternoons at the Boys and Girls Club in Franklinton to stay out of trouble.

And trouble abounds outside

"People pressure people to smoke or skip classes or drink, and they call you names if you don't," she said.

Kayla said her mother doesn't let her hang outside because there are a lot of shootings in her neighborhood.

Rebecca Asmo, director of development for the Columbus club, said the organization lost \$70,000 in state aid, roughly 7 percent of its budget, which forced it to reduce hours at its two location serving more than 200 students.

In Marion, Dimoff worries about the stresses on her employees and the families they serve in a county that had Ohio's largest jump in poverty last year. Currently, one in five residents live in poverty, many after losing jobs or being forced to work fewer hours and earn less. That's left some unable to pay their rent or mortgage and cover basic needs.

Most of the children participating in the after-school program are from low-income families and qualify for the free and reduced-price lunch program. "A lot of kids get a snack with us at the end of the day and don't eat again until they get to school the next morning," Dimoff said.

"I don't want to be that one thing that sends families over the edge."

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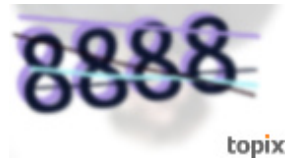
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