

Edition 11 – 3

Fall 2009

# Research Précis

## Best Practices: Safe and Drug-free Schools and Communities

Creating a better tomorrow...

### Title: Al's Pals: Kids Making Healthy Choices

#### Overview:

*Al's Pals* is a resiliency-based, early childhood prevention curriculum and teacher training program designed to help children gain the skills to properly express feelings, relate to others, accept differences, use self-control, resolve conflicts peacefully, cope, and make safe and healthy choices regarding drug use, violence, and disruptive behavior.

*Target:* Children ages 3-8 and their teachers

*Extent/Duration of Program:* The program consists of 46 10-15 minute lessons that are delivered twice a week over approximately 23 weeks. A nine-lesson booster curriculum is available for children grades 2-3 who have completed initial lessons.

#### Program Costs:

- The curriculum kit and puppet house cost \$595, and each set of 14 letters costs \$40.
- Parents receive two-day training on risk factors and shielding, social and emotional development, and establishing a supporting and caring environment. Teachers and administrators receive two-day training on how to create an environment of caring, cooperation, respect, responsibility, and healthy decision-making. Training costs vary.

#### For further information, or to order:

Susan R. Geller, President  
Wingspan, LLC  
4196-A Innslake Drive  
Glen Allen, VA 23060

Phone (information): 804-967-9002  
Fax: 804-967-9003

E-mail: [sgeller@wingspanworks.com](mailto:sgeller@wingspanworks.com)

Web site: <http://www.wingspanworks.com>

*Principles/Approaches/Components:* *Al's Pals* is based on resiliency research and the premise that by addressing social-emotional and life skills in young children, intervening at the time when they are beginning to form behaviors and attitudes, and fostering positive parent-child relationships and supportive home environments will reduce negative behaviors and substance abuse in later years. At the heart of the program is an original hand puppet named Al. Al and his pals Ty and Keisha are used to engage students through a wide range of teaching tools including scripted puppet-led discussions, guided creative play, original songs, posters, color photographs, message pads, and books. The program addresses four domains: individual (life/social skills training, including classroom curricula designed to address alcohol, tobacco, and drug-related behavior and use, and social skills education); family (parent education); peer (classroom/peer activities designed to develop expression, communication, positive relationships, and independent thinking); and school (life skills training with role-play, including changes in teaching approaches, and parent involvement). Student skills development focuses on expressing feelings appropriately, using kind words, caring about others, using self-control, thinking independently, accepting differences, making friends, solving problems peacefully, coping, making safe and healthy choices, and understanding that tobacco, alcohol, and illegal drugs are not for children. The parent education curriculum uses a strengths-based approach

to help parents guide their children's resilient development. Trained parent educators use 13 experiential teaching modules with parent groups that address a broad range of parenting skills such as feelings, listening, meaningful involvement, brainstorming, high expectations, calming down, problem solving, and creativity.

*Evidence-based Effectiveness:* Since 1994, over 20 studies measuring program effectiveness in developing positive social behaviors and preventing antisocial/aggressive behaviors have been conducted in preschools, elementary schools, and child care centers. Findings have indicated reductions in negative attitudes and behaviors (use of physical or verbal aggression and/or social withdrawal). Children who have participated have also been 2-5 times more likely to improve their use of positive social behaviors and 1.5 to 4 times more likely to improve their use of positive classroom coping skills (talking with a friend or asking for help) than children who do not participate. Furthermore, control group children who did not participate were 2-6 times more likely to increase their use of antisocial and aggressive behaviors than children who participated in the program. Generally, findings indicate that the program strengthens children's social and life skills, prevents increased aggressive/antisocial behavior that might otherwise occur, helps children differentiate between safe and harmful substances and situations, and helps children manage their own behavior, freeing teachers to do more teaching.

### **Safe and Drug-free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) connections:**

A.i - Activities that address the consequences of violence and the illegal use of drugs.

A.ii - Activities that promote a sense of individual responsibility.

A.iv - Activities that teach students to recognize social and peer pressure to use drugs illegally and the skills for resisting illegal drug use.

E.viii - Conflict resolution programs, including peer mediation programs that educate and train peer mediators and a designated faculty supervisor, and youth anti-crime and anti-drug councils and activities.

E.xi - Programs that encourage students to seek advice from, and to confide in, a trusted adult regarding concerns about violence and illegal drug use.

### **National Standards connections:**

*Kindergarten through Grade 2 (Program also targets preschool)*

Health Education Standard 1 – Students will comprehend concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention to enhance health.

Health Education Standard 4 – Students will demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks.

Health Education Standard 7 – Students will demonstrate the ability to practice health-enhancing behaviors and avoid or reduce health risks.

*National Health Education Standards, Second Edition: Achieving Excellence. American Cancer Society, 2007.*

Counseling: Personal and Social Development Standard A: Students will acquire the knowledge, attitudes and interpersonal skills to help them understand and respect self and others.

Counseling: Personal and Social Development Standard C: Students will understand safety and survival skills.

*ASCA National Standards for Students. American School Counselor Association, 2004.*

### **Recognition and additional reports:**

The following organizations/institutions have recognized *AI's Pals*. The organizations are in alphabetical order and the recognition status is in parentheses.

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (Effective Program)

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (Exemplary Program)  
SAMHSA (Model Program)  
U.S. Department of Education's expert panel on Safe, Disciplined and Drug-Free Schools  
(Promising Program)

**GENERAL NOTES:** The intent of the above synthesis and correlations is to assist teachers and school administrators dedicated to using best practices to reduce violence and substance abuse among students. To our knowledge, the information was current upon publication. However, details pertaining to status of program recognition, research and findings, costs, and contact information are subject to change.

Correlations to the Safe and Drug-free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) federally approved activities and to national education standards have been limited in depth ("standard" level only) and breadth (number of standards and subjects) due to the encompassing nature of many programs that typically qualify as model or exemplary. The correlations listed should not be viewed as exhaustive.

Designed Instruction's effective SDFS program research series was funded by the United States Department of Education. For information on other effective programs for promoting safe and drug-free schools and communities, visit [www.designedinstruction.com/learningleads/effective-sdfs-programs.html](http://www.designedinstruction.com/learningleads/effective-sdfs-programs.html)

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