



Some of us from NIOST celebrating Lights on Afterschool, October 2019

WELCOME

At the beginning of September, NIOST welcomed a new group of 16 Afterschool Matters Fellows to our campus for a two-day retreat filled with reflection, thoughtful writing, and inquiry-focused discussion. A sentence one of the fellows wrote has stuck with me: “Relevant OST programming never loses sight of its role as an entity where youth and their families are connected to the best promises of a civil and caring society.”

Yes, OST practitioners and researchers want to see ourselves as relevant! We value our role as caretakers of children and youth, but we also strive for relevance as we support healthy development, social and emotional wellness, and academic achievement. These aspirations are our contribution to a civil and caring society.

As this issue of *Afterschool Matters* goes to print, the field is celebrating the 20th anniversary of Lights On Afterschool. Launched in October 2000 by the Afterschool Alliance, Lights On Afterschool is the only nationwide event celebrating the role of afterschool programs in the lives of children, families, and communities. We salute the Afterschool Alliance and look forward to the next 20 years of celebrating the quality learning and growing experiences that OST programs provide.

This issue explores some of the most important underpinnings of high-quality OST experiences: intentional staff practices focused on building relationships, co-creation of youth-driven programming, an asset-based approach to service. We also continue to explore the benefits of applying a creative youth development framework in OST. I especially hope you will read, enjoy, and reread the two Voices from the Field papers, which capture the magic and hope of OST programs.

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