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Afterschool Matters is a national, peer-reviewed journal dedicated to promoting professionalism, scholarship, and consciousness in the field of afterschool education. Published by the National Institute on Out-of-School Time with legacy support from the Robert Browne Foundation, the journal serves those involved in developing and running programs for youth during the out-of-school hours, in addition to those engaged in research and shaping policy. For information on *Afterschool Matters* and the Afterschool Matters Initiative, contact Georgia Hall
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WELCOME

Parents, educators, policymakers, and the media express a lot of worry about what young people have lost during the pandemic. The concerns are real: Many students have struggled academically or simply dropped out of online schooling. Levels of depression and anxiety among youth, already higher than ever before, have climbed in response to the isolation, grief, and worry we have all experienced.

I don't want to minimize these losses. But I do want to point out that young people, and the professionals who work with them, have gained in ways we could not have imagined.

In March 2020, schools, teachers, and students pivoted in a matter of days from in-person to fully remote learning. There were some hiccups and some major gaps. But eventually most teachers, students, and parents mastered technology they had never experienced before. More importantly, they learned how to teach and how to learn in a new environment.

OST programs followed suit. Unlike schools, most programs had the luxury of taking time, before they relaunched, to figure out what to do online and how to do it. What followed was a burst of energy, creativity, and resilience that we could not have experienced in a less challenging year.

Many young people found a new voice in online environments. Nearly all OST providers can tell the story of one or more participants who are more expressive in online chat than they ever were in person. Some youth discovered new skills, often combining technology with artistic or academic learning in creative ways. Some found comfort in independent work; others benefited from more focused exchanges and deeper relationships with adult mentors.

Yes, moving through the pandemic has been stressful for all concerned. Yet program leaders, frontline staff, and young people have shown remarkable resilience. They have been formed new avenues of communication while working virtually. They have mastered new "spaces" where meaningful learning takes place. They have figured out how to share singing, dancing, theatre, cooking, and gardening without leaving their homes.

As the field steps forward this summer and fall to fill in for what has been lost, we should also celebrate what we and the young people we serve have gained. As we return to in-person programming, let's avoid the impulse to "go back to the way we were." What parts of what we learned in this hard, hard year are worth keeping?



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