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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

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WELCOME

During the overpowering winter of 2015 in New England, I left my home one evening during the tail end of a snowstorm. My son had suddenly developed an ear infection, so I was on my way to the local drugstore, which had, remarkably, remained open. The streets had closed much earlier in the day.

Trudging through the soft snow piled onto what had once been a sidewalk, I passed no other walkers, no vehicles, not even a snowplow. When I left the store with my son's prescription, I headed back the way I had come. Nothing had changed—except that I saw my own footprints in the still, silent snow, letting me know that I had been there before.

Recently I participated in the launch of the second year of the newly structured Afterschool Matters Fellowship, an intensive professional development opportunity for out-of-school time (OST) professionals. Begun by the Robert Bowne Foundation as a set of local projects, the fellowship went national under the auspices of the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) in 2015. Our partner continues to be the National Writing Project, and the Robert Bowne Foundation continues to fund the fellowship through a generous legacy grant.

The fellowship engages OST practitioners in facilitated inquiry into their own practices and programs. The goals are to improve the quality of the fellows' programs and to develop resources that can have an impact on the broader field.

At the writing retreat that launched this year's fellowship, I was excited to imagine the products and resources our fellows will bring to the OST field. Their areas of concentration include personalized OST learning experiences, statewide professional development programs, youth participatory research, participant engagement in OST programs, youth worker engagement, social and emotional learning, and professional development strategies.

As I needed my footprints to let me know that I had walked through a mile of snow, so OST professionals need to think every day about what we leave behind. How do we know that we have been at that program, interacted with those youth, spent time training or coaching those staff? What evidence shows that our work has helped to guide youth toward healthy and productive lives? How can we make a lasting impact that goes beyond our own practice and programs? Participants in the Afterschool Matters Fellowship are answering those questions, in part, by producing artifacts: journal articles, slide decks, blogs, webinars.

The authors in this issue of *Afterschool Matters* are leaving footprints. They share strategies for making a lasting impact on the field: by validating instruments that measure program quality, by creating infrastructure to support learning in specialized areas such as STEM, by training OST staff in professional learning communities, and by developing school-afterschool partnerships that can foster shared vision. To kick it all off, the opening essay by an Afterschool Matters Fellow points out that even crayons can remind us of our sustained focus on quality OST experiences for all children and youth.



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