

WYLDLIFE

A Recipe for Success

During the first 60 years of Young Life's history, our major emphasis was reaching high school kids with the good news of Jesus Christ. However, at an all staff conference in January of 2000, President Denny Rydberg made the following proclamation: "From now on, Young Life will be equally committed to reaching middle school kids as it is high school kids." This meant it was time to retool and take Young Life's tried and tested principles to reach a radically different audience. Through trial and error we have found a Recipe for Success we'd like to share with you!

A key ingredient we have found is that parents and adults like you are essential to a healthy and lasting WyldLife ministry. Why?

1. Younger adolescents still depend on their parents for transportation and permission to participate in activities — they don't decide, their parents do!
2. Parents are still very "hands on" with their younger adolescents, and therefore network with other adults as to what is healthy and harmful. The testimony of a few convinced parents goes a long way to build credibility in an organization.
3. Parents are stable forces in the community and give the ministry longevity, whereas the leaders may come and go from year to year.

How to use this booklet:

This booklet is designed to give you the information you'll need to partner with your local staff to launch a WyldLife ministry in your community. The introduction gives an overview of why we do WyldLife, and then each of the four tabbed sections spells out in more detail the ingredients you'll need to accomplish your goal.

- Each section starts with the recipe that lays out the objectives for the topic.
- A shopping list following each section suggests action steps you and your Parent Support Team can take to move your plan forward.
- Finally, there is a glossary at the end that defines any of the "Young Life" terms you may not understand.

Build a lasting ministry

As you look at the four ingredients for success with WyldLife on this page, you'll see that, with the right team involved, things can come together fairly quickly. Our aim is to create lasting ministries that reproduce fruit for years to come. Therefore, it is important that we ensure the proper ingredients have been gathered. The following tabbed sections outline those ingredients and offer some thoughts on how you can move the effort forward in your area.

Recipe #1 – Building a Parent Support Team:

The ministry, or club as we call it, should be owned by a team of adults who take it upon themselves to pray for the school, network in the community to promote WyldLife and provide logistical support for the leadership team. In addition, they let the volunteer leaders know they are appreciated. This team has a long-term commitment to this ministry being in their community, so even when staff and leaders move on, the base of support remains intact.

Recipe #2 – Engaging the Community:

The more people who know about WyldLife, the better off we are. Therefore, use the resources at your disposal to spread the word in the community about what you are doing. Let them know how they can partner with you.

Recipe #3 – Recruiting the Right Team of Leaders:

The leadership team should include at least one or two leaders with a long-term vision for their involvement. That's why deploying parents as leaders can give great consistency and sustainability to a club. There is a unique pool of potential leaders at our disposal for WyldLife: parents, high school Campaigner kids, young adults, teachers and college students. The best teams reflect a mix of these various groups.

Recipe #4 – Planning an Event to Kick Things Off:

This is where all the ingredients come together: an event to show kids and parents what WyldLife is all about. This section shows you how you can help the new leaders and staff get things off the ground with a bang!

WHY WYLDLIFE?

Five Strategic Reasons to Start WyldLife

- #1:** Middle school kids are open to the Gospel, and they respond to Christ with great eagerness.

- #2:** WyldLife ministry can be a uniquely powerful place to disciple high school Campaigners and train future leaders.

- #3:** WyldLife increases community impact by expanding the volunteer leadership pool. There are a number of people available and willing to work with middle schoolers who would not sign on to a high school team.

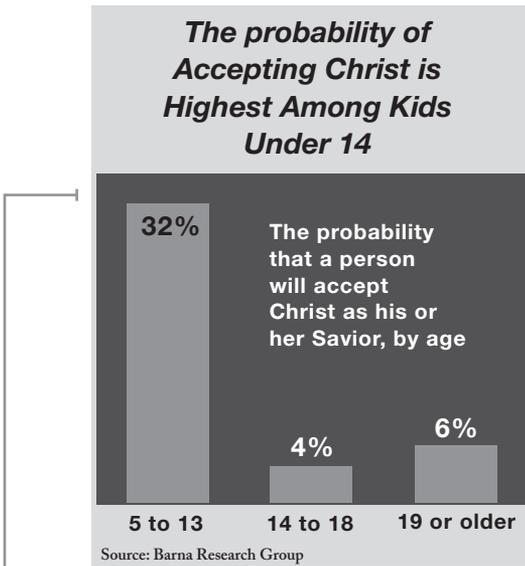
- #4:** There is enormous potential for parent and community involvement. Because of this, it can be argued that WyldLife is a wise first choice for beginning new areas.

- #5:** WyldLife is a win/win — the overall health of an area is enhanced by WyldLife. Middle schools with solid ministry improve the ministry potential at the high schools they feed.

Frequently Asked Questions about WyldLife

Question #1:

“Aren’t middle school kids too young developmentally to responsibly process the Gospel? I’m not interested in just baby-sitting kids — I want to see fruit!” Young Life has historically targeted high school kids because they were found to be the most open and responsive to the Gospel. However, according to a broad survey conducted by the Barna Research Group in 1999, the age of greatest receptivity and response has fallen to the middle school years. These kids are not only open, but **ready** to receive the Gospel!



The data shows that if a person does not accept Jesus Christ as his or her Savior before the age of 14, the likelihood of ever doing so decreases dramatically. In addition, 86 percent of Americans, who at some point in life profess a faith in Jesus Christ, make that decision prior to their 15th birthday, with age 13 being the year of most decisions.

Question #2:

“Won’t kids get bored or burnt-out on Young Life with a potential for seven years of involvement?” Yes — if we ran the same program all six or seven years! But we don’t. We design a program that best meets kids’ developmental needs during the various phases of their adolescent years. WyldLife should look and feel very different from high school Young Life. In addition, we serve kids better when we creatively think of new offerings as they progress through the ministry. In fact, working with kids for seven years instead of four actually improves the quality of our relationships with them. A practical way to keep kids from getting bored with Young Life is to offer new roles and “rites of passage” for each year of involvement. See what you can come up with!

Question #3:

“Our area lacks the leaders and adult support necessary to start or sustain WyldLife.” God does not operate with a “scarcity” mentality — nor should we. There are more than enough resources at God’s disposal to accomplish His work. In fact, many area directors who have echoed this sentiment when they started WyldLife have pleasantly discovered that WyldLife actually opened the door for resources that didn’t exist for their high school ministry. With little exception, areas with WyldLife raise proportionately more money than they did before they started working with middle school kids thanks to overwhelming parental support. As for leaders, sometimes parents and adults who don’t have the passion or time to work with high school kids feel differently when it comes to middle school kids. College freshmen make great WyldLife leaders and even senior leaders, positions that would not be offered to them in a high school setting. And, well-trained high school upper-classmen make excellent WyldLife leaders. In leading, they often acquire a vision for ministry that engages them the rest of their lives.

Question #4:

“We are only in half the high schools in our area and we’re already overwhelmed. How can we think about starting an entirely new ministry?” Thoughts of doubling the ministry potential knock the wind out of even the healthiest of area directors and committees. But wait — let’s remind ourselves what an area director is really responsible for. They are not responsible for starting and running all the ministries in an area. If this were true, no area would ever have more than two or three clubs. Area directors should not exclusively be the “doers” of the ministry, but rather the “resource brokers” in the community who recruit and train leaders to reach kids. That’s why the mission needs concerned adults like you to help us out! And, of course, you can always consider hiring a staff associate, intern or mission staff to direct your area’s WyldLife program if that is preferred to a volunteer-only team. There is no one right answer for every community.

The only failure in trying to reach kids is not trying something new because of the fear of failing. We must keep our entrepreneurial spirit alive. Let’s put that principle to good use as we focus on inventing creative ways to reach early adolescents, rather than dwelling upon the potential obstacles we might encounter along the way.

Recipe #1: Building a Parent Support Team

Necessary Ingredients:



- ❑ A willingness to pray for and promote WyldLife in the community, for the sake of seeing amazing fruit in adolescents' lives
- ❑ A commitment to organize and rally around this cause for a specific period of time
- ❑ A supportive relationship with the local area director or Young Life staff person

The first step to creating great WyldLife in your community is to work with your area director to build a Parent Support Team. Since you are reading this booklet, you are probably already considering an opportunity like this. Let's take a look at what a WyldLife Parent Support Team can look like.

Profile of a Parent Support Team

Imagine you are blessed with a thriving WyldLife ministry in your community with many of the following characteristics:

- Packed meetings with lots of new kids attending each week
- All events digitally photographed for special viewing with parents
- Regular announcements about WyldLife made at PTA, church and other civic association meetings
- Food delivered at the end of club for casual relationship-building with kids and leaders
- Parents upstairs praying during club
- Cars greeted by parents and leaders when they pull up, and new parents given information so they feel comfortable dropping off their kids
- Monthly postcards mailed to parents and kids reminding them of the dates, themes and locations of upcoming events
- Club cards plugged into the area database following each meeting so families stay well informed
- The club room is picked up, vacuumed and thank-you notes written
- WyldLife parents serving as banquet table hosts and area committee representatives
- All camps well chaperoned

Every one of these functions can be performed by members of the *WyldLife Parent Support Team*. Think how great it would be to free up your local staff and leaders to do contact work, train leaders, plan and execute club, take kids to camps and follow up with those ready to run deeper. When parents joyfully take on most of the other tasks that accompany what happens with kids, it is a win/win for everyone — especially for the WyldLife kids we serve. Here is what one volunteer team leader from Arizona wrote:

“I started a Parent Support Team for my WyldLife club three years ago. We were averaging 100+ kids and it was too much for my leaders and me to handle alone. I sent out a letter and called parents who I knew would want to help support club and I enlisted around 30 of them to do a variety of things from buying supplies for club to sponsoring kids for camp to actually doing “security” at club. Having a Parent Support Team for our club has created a financial backing for our team and for our club, it has created a liaison between our school faculty and our leaders and it frees leaders up during club to be with kids. I would encourage every club to build a parental support team.”

Bill Hybels, author of *The Volunteer Revolution*, has unleashed an army of more than 11,000 volunteers in his church in South Barrington, Ill. He asserts that volunteers “pray more, pay more and stay more” than paid staff. That’s why we need you on the team!

Overcoming Attrition

The biggest problem in WyldLife is that too many new ministries don’t last. Insider studies have shown that one of the primary reasons WyldLife ministries close is because no adults in the community feel ownership of that particular ministry. What a tragedy. It is critically important that adults be given ownership and a significant stake in this work. When properly built, a WyldLife Parent Support Team outlasts most staff and volunteer leader transitions, and sustains a healthy ministry.

What Should a Parent Support Team Look Like?

As a mission, we would like to see a Parent Support Team built around every WyldLife ministry. What should they look like? There is no one right answer — they should be structured to best serve your needs.

One team last year was formed to get a new club started. Fifteen moms attended the first meeting as it was scheduled on a weekday over lunch. Each signed up to be on one of four different teams — club food, mailings, club houses or prayer. They met again in September following the first club to reassess their strategy. At that meeting they decided they would not meet monthly because they were too busy, but would just communicate by e-mail. The group coordinator agreed to monitor all tasks via the Internet and communicate with the volunteer team leader (a dad). They found a club house for every club, handled the logistics for every special event, food was brought in at the end of each meeting and a postcard was mailed out to more than 200 families every month with maps to club. And, people prayed. Club thrived. What a gift!

What about Finances?

Another role of the Parent Support Team surrounding WyldLife, in cooperation with the local staff and committee, is to ensure that the necessary funding is in place, both to launch and to sustain this ministry long term. So long as the right steps are taken, and the team is proactive from the start, WyldLife tends to generate more income per kid than any other arm of Young Life's mission — so be encouraged, this should not be a difficult task.

Budgeting for a healthy launch – There are certain costs needed to run a club whether it is led by volunteers or has a staff person directly involved with it. We refer to these as “program costs,” and they need to be budgeted monthly to allow for a solid, age-appropriate program. Four common program costs are:

- **Club expenses** – Costs incurred to run skits, props, tarps to protect the floor, occasional space rental for special events, etc.
- **Assist leaders by paying for special events** – When WyldLife heads to the bowling alley, goes to play Laser Tag or takes off for a day of skiing, it is nice if the volunteer leaders (especially the high school kids) don't have to pay to participate with the kids they lead. The Parent Support Team should rally the community to raise a budget for these expenses.
- **Postage** – Communication with parents, as well as kids, is critical with WyldLife. Therefore, it is important to mail out postcard reminders before every event, or at least once a month.

- **Campership** – Young Life has always operated with the philosophy that no kid should ever be denied the chance to go to camp due to a shortage of funds. Therefore, generous folks in the community would, ideally, start a camp scholarship (or campership) fund that is made available to kids who show the greatest need, often on a matching basis.

Budgeting for long-term health – Your WyldLife club is part of an area that is supervised and led by a Young Life staff person. This staff person is responsible for training and supervising the volunteer leaders in your WyldLife club, as well as brokering the resources in the community to begin ministries at every middle and high school in the area. Therefore, each ministry (or club) needs to contribute appropriately to the overall budget of the area.

The Parent Support Team should participate in area fundraisers as table hosts or inviters, with the goal to rally the community around Young Life as a whole. Young Life's goal is to offer our ministry free of charge to families. That means those of us who believe in this work must give generously to support it.

Some Meaningful Roles for the Parent Support Team:

Note: Not all these roles are essential for WyldLife to exist and flourish; they are merely nice to have in place. Don't wait to get started until every one of these roles is filled. People will get on board as they see a program that is attractive. We suggest assessing the most important needs with your team and getting started with those.

1. Prayer warriors recruit other adults to pray for the ministry. This may be done during club or via a regular e-mail list to the various members of the prayer subcommittee.
2. Club greeters greet kids and other parents as they come into club, hand out WyldLife brochures and answer any questions parents may have.
3. Communications team members make the flyers and/or postcards that are mailed out to families reminding them of upcoming WyldLife events. You should also work with the team leader to mail a schedule out at the beginning of each semester. A nice touch

is to print these on magnets for their refrigerators.

- 4.** Administrators keep track of camp sign-ups, make sure new club cards are entered in the database, help print labels for postcard mailings and assist with those mailings as called upon by the communications team.
- 5.** As planners, adults often bring the gift of organization to a young team. You help high school leaders develop a ministry plan for the semester that includes communication, marketing, follow up and a healthy rhythm of contact work and program. This is especially needed from those of you with past Young Life experience.
- 6.** WyldLife “lobbyists” contact school administrators and introduce themselves, thanking the school for their cooperation and openness to WyldLife.
- 7.** Ambassadors to churches build relationships with community churches. The more churches who understand our mission the better off we are!
- 8.** The transportation team gets kids to events who may have difficulty attending otherwise. Simply having a “rides coordinator” parents can call is a great resource.
- 9.** Photographers are designated each week to take pictures at events and keep a photo scrapbook of the year. This can be shown to the kids at the end of each semester and to parents at a parents’ night, banquet or other fundraiser.
- 10.** Caterers supply snacks for clubs.
- 11.** Assistant cabin leaders assist our younger leaders by offering a mature presence on our trips. Young Life requires that an adult be present or responsible for every cabin at camp.
- 12.** The supplies crew gets things together for club and assists in the creation of a club box. This should contain the essential items the team might need at every club like: towels, tarps, paper towels, trash bags, shaving cream, pie tins, carpet cleaner and sponge, camp flyers, push pins, old T-shirts, shower caps, a sheet, duct tape, paper and markers, club cards, pens, a bag of clothespins for

an impromptu mixer, WyldLife parent brochures and a frisbee or basketball for milling outside.

- 13.** Clean-up crew members help with clean-up after club, which frees leaders to build deeper relationships with kids.
- 14.** Community promotions folks recruit table hosts and attendees for the banquet, and invite other families to check out WyldLife.
- 15.** Club leadership is right for those who want to be at club and invest their lives in the kids as a leader. There is no age at which we become ineffective in this role so long as kids feel like we genuinely enjoy being with them. You might decide to lead a Campaigner small group or do contact work by having kids over to your house and being involved in the lives of your children's friends.
- 16.** Area committee is an essential role for a few members of the Parent Support Team. Some members of your team may be great candidates to interface with the area committee and take on a larger vision for Young Life as a whole.

Of course, there needs to be a WyldLife Parent Support Team coordinator who stays in contact with the team leader and networks with the various members serving in the roles described. This ensures everything is moving forward in a coordinated fashion. This person should also make sure that all adults who help with or host events are **thanked** with a note, phone call or pre-printed card.

SHOPPING LIST

Building a Parent Support Team

- Work with area director on a timeline for forming a Parent Support Team and getting WyldLife going
- Come up with list of people to invite
- Set date and plan a meeting to gather potential members
- Create list of jobs and subcommittees for people to join
- Appoint a WyldLife Parent Support Team coordinator with whom the team leader and area staff can communicate

Recipe #2: Engaging the Community

Necessary Ingredients:



- The solid foundation of a Parent Support Team
- A list of other parents who may be able to play a role in WyldLife
- A compelling case to prove to parents that WyldLife is a safe, fun and nurturing environment for their kids
- An event that draws parents, kids and community members together

The adult community responsible for early adolescents rightly feels protective of this age group. This is why many parents often respond with skepticism, or at least a list of questions when presented with something new. Therefore, it behooves us to gather and inform as many people as possible prior to any meetings with kids. Parents, school administrators, teachers, church pastors and other youth workers all should be informed advocates when it comes to WyldLife.

Rallying the Community

The parents of kids not already a part of your Parent Support Team should be a central focus in your communication. Early adolescents go nowhere without their parents' approval and transport. You and your local staff do contact work with parents — and it is just as important as leaders doing contact work with kids when beginning a new WyldLife ministry.

Plan some kind of parents' night to introduce your community to the WyldLife vision. There are two main approaches to a parents' night: invite parents and community members to attend alone, or invite parents and their kids to attend together. The latter requires more work since it needs to be programmatically adapted to work with both kids and adults, but it may have a greater impact. Think through with your local Young Life staff which is the best fit for your community.

Here are a few simple goals for this event:

- 1.** To educate the community (teachers/administrators, pastors and parents) about WyldLife and to announce the new school/community you plan to begin working with.
- 2.** To recruit a core group of kids as the foundation for the future club.
- 3.** To recruit members for the WyldLife Parent Support Team; and eventually, the area committee.
- 4.** To recruit potential adult leaders or “Team Moms and Dads.”
- 5.** To inform and demonstrate that WyldLife is something worth being involved in and bringing kids to.

Finally, here are some suggestions for inviting parents to this informational event:

- 1.** Have committee, your team and friends make a list of all the people they know with middle school kids. Then, have them call the people on their list and invite them to attend the meeting with them.

2. Invite key faculty members and administrators at the school to attend.
3. Notify local church pastors and youth pastors of the event and ask them to announce it in their bulletins.
4. Request that a flyer be handed out at the next PTA meeting inviting all the parents to attend.
5. Invite kids you've met through contact work and their families.
6. If there are high school Young Life clubs in the area, invite the high school kids and have them bring their younger siblings. Or send an invitation to those parents if the high school kids are not necessarily "invited" to attend the meeting.
7. Purchase address labels from a mailing house or online service of all parents of middle schoolers in the zip codes of your targeted school district. This enables everyone to hear about WyldLife and even helps the "buzz" of WyldLife spread through the community. Be prepared to answer some negative questions with this approach, but sometimes the risk is worth it. Your staff person can download a sample flyer to use from our staff Web site.

Now, here are a few suggestions for what you might do at the meeting, particularly if you are including kids and their parents:

1. Do a mixer or family scavenger hunt as people come in to avoid the awkwardness of kids and parents sitting in a room together with no direction.
2. Work with your local staff to share a vision for other adults to grab hold of. Try: "How would you like to help build something from the ground up that will significantly impact your friends, your children and this community?" What about "something that will make a lasting difference for years to come"?
3. Consider showing one the WyldLife videos geared toward parents.
4. You may want to separate the kids and adults for a time, but if not, run a few games so parents see the kids having fun, and the kids

get a taste of what is to come.

5. Discuss what WyldLife looks like and the principles and philosophy behind it.
6. Give people a role to play in the ministry. Tell kids what you need from them (help promoting events, planning, ownership in club, houses to host meetings). Tell parents what you need from them (transportation, hospitality, networking in the community, prayer, finances, leaders).

Finally, set a date for your club kickoff or next informational meeting.

Be sure to keep these parents connected and meet the new ones who come along as your ministry grows. Communicate with this audience by trying things like:

- Sending a letter with a “What is WyldLife?” brochure to the parents of any new kids who attend a club or other event.
- Periodically inviting parents to come inside when dropping their kids off at club. While the kids begin an activity in one room, a leader and/or committee member explains why and what we do in another. You can also enlist their involvement in a variety of possible roles.
- Sending out a calendar of events periodically so parents know exactly what, when and where WyldLife is happening.
- Inviting parents and their “tweens” to weekend and summer camp information gatherings. Parents need to hear all the details from you, not their child. Then invite mom and dad to the slide show after camp is over.
- Inviting key parents to committee meetings and asking them to consider joining.
- Making sure a few leaders and parents greet parents dropping off and picking up their kids for various events. Keep doing contact work with parents, too.

SHOPPING LIST

Engaging the Community

- Write, brainstorm and solicit names of people to invite to introductory meeting
- Decide who each person will invite
- Plan out the night, including program, refreshments and any videos or testimonials you might use to show what we do

Recipe #3: Recruiting the Right Team of Leaders

Necessary Ingredients:



- The solid foundation of a Parent Support Team
- A staff person ready to train new recruits
- High school-age Campaigners and other potential leaders

Add to your taste:



- A few parents willing to serve as Team Mom or Dad
and/or
- A teacher or other adult to serve as a team leader

The best WyldLife teams across the mission are those with a diverse mix of leaders: high school Campaigners, young adults or college students, teachers and some moms and dads all serving together. Let's take a look at each of those types of leaders. As we do, be thinking of the resources in your area to lead the WyldLife ministry.

High School Campaigners

This is the largest group of leaders around the mission.

For early adolescents, high school kids are their heroes and role models. They look up to them simply because they appear “cool” and are only a stone’s throw from where they sit right now. In just a couple years, these middle schoolers will be driving, going to parties, playing varsity sports and all the things they see their high school idols doing now. So a middle school kid looks up to most any high school kid, especially one who notices them.

In every high school there is a clearly defined social ladder, if not for the entire school, at least for each major group within a school. Campaigner kids who have reached the upper rungs of their respective social ladder probably are the “key kids” for building a strong high school ministry. These aren’t necessarily the best choices for WyldLife leaders. They flourish giving away their faith each day to their own friends, and they only have so much time.

However there is another tier of people in our high schools, Campaigners and youth groups. These are kids who have met Christ, yearn to grow and serve the Lord, but are not necessarily in the upper rungs of their social ladder. They have already invited their close friends to club and will not likely bring anyone else. After a while they may even feel guilty showing up at club without anyone new. These kids are prime candidates to be WyldLife leaders. Here’s why ...

- Middle schoolers don’t know who is on which rung of the high school social ladder, so any older teen is a potential hero to them.
- By giving them ministry, these Campaigners have a chance to learn their spiritual gifts and build self-confidence as they see their lives making a difference to others.
- The high school club will not be much affected by their commitment of a few hours a week to the WyldLife ministry.
- Quite often, these kids move on to college and choose to continue in Young Life leadership because it meant so much to them.

Coordinate with your local staff and the leaders of the high school Young Life team to find these kids. If there is no high school ministry in your area yet, try a few local youth groups where you know and trust the leadership. If they have a vision for outreach, consider training them and turning them loose on a middle school.

WyldLife Team Moms and Dads

One unique quality of middle schoolers is they don't necessarily mind when parents are involved in their programs. Due to this, the position of WyldLife Team Mom or Dad may work well as one ingredient of the "recipe for success." Parents already know the other parents and key adults in the community for networking, whereas a young leader moving into a new community starts from scratch.

This role can vary depending on how much ministry you want to bite off. You may want to simply show up at club, love kids and help the volunteers as needed. You end up functioning as a parent of many, and a source of wisdom and stability for an otherwise "green around the edges" team. Or, your team may lack a qualified team leader, in which case, you could step into this role. The specific responsibilities for team leader might include:

- **Shepherding the team** – a staff person will work with you on a training strategy for the other leaders. In addition, you will want to monitor the overall emotional and spiritual health of your team to be sure they balance their priorities well and grow in their relationship with Christ.
- **Planning** – with the guidance and resources available, and input from the rest of the leadership team, develop a ministry plan for the year. Specific outlines for theme clubs, big events and discipleship gatherings are essential for a healthy program.
- **Prayer** – develop and disseminate a thorough prayer strategy for your school community. The rest of the Parent Support Team will help you out.

For those with even more time to devote, there is one more role to consider: area WyldLife coordinator. Here, you would be asked to expand the aforementioned role beyond just one middle school, and take on

a vision for enabling WyldLife throughout the area. Your tasks would include recruiting other team leaders you could train for each ministry God is raising up. In a sense, you would function as a WyldLife area director, under the direction of a full-time staff person. If desired, you could even raise money for this position, which we call mission staff.

Teachers

Teachers and other school personnel are one of the great untapped resources in the middle school world. Many have said how frustrating it is to be in school all day, build relationships with kids in the classroom and not have an opportunity to share their faith. As a parent or involved adult, you already know some of the believing teachers in your community. Ask them to be a part of your team and impact kids beyond the classroom. Kids at this age are excited to see their teachers break “out of character” and be involved in their lives. Plus, teachers are great promoters in the school, with the administration, and in the community at-large.

Recent High School Graduates

Brainstorm with your area director or staff person who has graduated from high school in the last year or so and may want to lead WyldLife. Often these folks are too young to jump into ministry with people just a year or two younger than them. Or, they may not want to revisit the school they just left on graduation day. Working as an energized member of the WyldLife team may be just the right fit for them.

SHOPPING LIST

Recruiting the Right Team of Leaders

"Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

-Matthew 9:37-38

- Pray that the Lord would raise up the right folks
- Brainstorm who could be a part of the team
- Ask area staff what sort of help they need with recruitment and training of new leaders

Recipe #4: Planning an Event to Kick Things Off

Necessary Ingredients:



- The solid foundation of a Parent Support Team
- A team of volunteers ready to reach out to middle school kids
- Parents who are open to send their kids to WyldLife

Now that you've got the ingredients in place it is time to serve the meal. There are many ways to kick off a great WyldLife ministry, and your local staff and volunteers will get creative with the best option for your ministry. Here are a few tips for the future of your WyldLife work that you can share with your team. Dream big!

Four Proven Ways to Jump-Start a New WyldLife Ministry

While contact work with parents and kids is essential for building a viable ministry, there are some additional vehicles at your disposal to speed up the process of starting a new club. While it can easily take most of a year to start a high school club, WyldLife clubs may be launched in a matter of weeks. This is one reason why many new areas are beginning with WyldLife first. In just over a year, two clubs can be started — first, a WyldLife club, then a high school club the following September when some of the WyldLife kids become freshmen in high school.

Here are four field-tested ideas you might consider with the rest of the team. Imagine how you can help whatever you choose become a reality.

Hold a parents' information night – We detailed this one quite a bit earlier. Use the model where kids and parents meet together, and let that be your “first club.” Don't forget to have the plan for your next event ready to go.

“Bring your younger sibling night” – If there is a high school club the proposed middle school feeds, ask if one of the WyldLife leaders can give a two-minute pitch for WyldLife at a club meeting. Say something like, “How many of you have younger siblings at _____ Middle School? How many of you normally ask your middle school brother or sister to go out with you on the weekend? Just as I thought, no one. What do you think it would do for them if you invited them to come out with you just one time? That's what I want to ask you to do. This Saturday, we are holding our first WyldLife club and we want all of you to bring your younger brother or sister with you just this once. You will model to them how to act in club by laughing hard at the skits and paying close attention when the speaker delivers their message. We will follow up with them and you'll never need to do anything else — who's in?” You may even offer them fast food or coffee gift cards for showing up. You can start club with 50 or more kids just from this one strategy!

Create contact work – In some school districts, access to middle schoolers is more difficult and they have less extracurricular events

open to the public. Therefore, traditional contact work becomes a greater challenge. Overcome this obstacle by creating your own contact. Rather than having leaders join kids where they are, plan an event that draws kids to you. Things like ultimate frisbee or a paintball tournament, battle-of-the-bands competition, talent show, bowling night, laser tag, mountain climb, video scavenger hunt, amusement park trip or ski day are just a few suggestions. Once contact has been made, leaders follow up and build upon the relationships. Some areas have had success befriending soccer and little league coaches who promote or attend WyldLife clubs. Find out how you can help with one of these events.

Send a group to camp - Think of the advantages: kids see the best of Young Life; they're immersed in music, humor, relationships with their leaders and, of course, the message. Then you can start club in September and kids are already with you. When you launch a club with camp, we begin with a bunch of kids we barely know, and come home with some whose lives are permanently changed, and some great friends ready to build on the experience.

Selling Camp to Middle Schoolers

Selling camp is nothing new for us in Young Life. The principles that effectively attract high school kids to camp also work with middle schoolers. However, with this younger age group, there is one more key dimension to include — selling the parents.

Since our WyldLife kids don't make many decisions independent of their parents, it is critical that we not only sell the kids on the value of a camp experience, but that we do an equally thorough job selling their parents. A kid seeing a camp video or a great run-on at club might be sold on camp. But few of those images will make it home for mom or dad to digest. The same goes for any written flyers or information: we can't assume anything handed to a middle school kid at club will ever make it into their parents' hands. So, here are some suggestions for selling camp to the folks who will ultimately decide whether a kid goes to camp or stays home:

1. Help host a camp information night for any and all parents who

will come. You may want kids and parents to come together. Show the adults a WyldLife DVD or camp video and discuss your upcoming camp plans. Answer questions and give them an application form to fill out for their son or daughter. Parents don't like surprises, so let them know the payment and drop out schedule. This makes them partners with you throughout the process.

2. Mail a camp flyer and cover letter to the parents of every club card on file. You may want to have a Parent Support Team member or volunteer leader follow up with a phone call. Write a personal note on the cover letter to the kid stating your desire for them to be on the trip with you.
3. Middle school kids worry even more about “who else is going” than high schoolers. One way to ensure the right people all go, and to take the burden of working out these interrelationships off your leaders' backs, is to **ask kids to sign up for camp as a cabin**. Simply tell them how many beds are in a room then have some of the kids who are natural leaders take the initiative to recruit a cabin of their friends to go together. During this process, you could help a leader host a coffee with the parents of this small group, show them the video and assure them camp is an invaluable experience for their kids. Then, they sign up right there en masse.

A Healthy Rhythm for WyldLife

Now that your ministry is off the ground, you will want to get into a rhythm for healthy functioning. The following describes a general flow of events leading to and following up a WyldLife club that meets every other week, which is the average across the mission. This can be adapted and improved upon to meet your area's needs.

- 30 days before club** – The location is secured; whether a house, teen center or, if need be, a church. There is some wisdom in trying to use a consistent location, at least for two events in a row, if not longer. This way parents learn where you are meeting and don't get confused. If the location is a home, confirm that the parents will be present.

14 days before club – A Parent Support Team member is assigned to bring in food for the end of club. Others are assigned to be greeters as parents arrive to drop off their kids, and again when they come to pick them up. They give assurance and help answer questions about Young Life and WyldLife.

14 days before club – Flyers or postcards advertising the next club should be made and labels printed.

12 days before club – Flyers or postcards mailed out so parents and kids have them about 10 days before club. These are merely reminders, as typically a semester calendar is mailed out with dates of events at the beginning of each semester. Some put this on a refrigerator magnet. A Young Life “mSite” (Web site) with date information is also helpful — talk to your staff person for more information.

8-12 days before club – The team leader delegates all tasks for club to the volunteer leaders working with kids so they can prepare them with excellence. Usually the talks are assigned weeks in advance.

8-12 days before club – The volunteer leaders are reminded to do contact work with kids between the meetings. They may need to divide up the names to be sure each kid is contacted with some regularity.

7 days before club – In some areas, kids struggle to attend WyldLife due to transportation challenges. Their parents just aren’t available to drive them. If this is the case, it is important for members of the Parent Support Team to recruit parents who can assist by driving kids to club. These folks, and their routes, should be confirmed about a week before each club.

3-4 days before club – Some of the key kids are given small quantities of maps or flyers to hand out to their friends.

2-3 days before club – Team leader checks in with other volunteer leaders to confirm they are on top of their club responsibilities. Whoever is giving the talk goes through their outline in detail with the team leader. The team is also reminded of the need to call their lists of kids to remind them about club and tell them they are

looking forward to seeing them there. Challenge them to bring a friend if it feels right.

2-3 days before club – The prayer subcommittee is told where and when club is meeting. They can either pray at home during club, or some groups meet where club is being held and pray in a separate room throughout the meeting.

2-3 days before club – Some kids targeted to help with skits are called so they recruit their friends to come see them.

Club Day – Volunteer leaders arrive for training, set up and prayer well ahead of the kids. Parent Support Team greeters arrive 30 minutes before club to hand out WyldLife parent brochures, assist with club cards if asked and greet parents. Food is dropped off for after club.

Day after club – New club cards are entered into the database by a Parent Support Team member. A letter of welcome is mailed to those families.

Day after club – All new kids get a phone call from one of the volunteer leaders who met them saying they were glad they came, and they look forward to getting to know them better.

2-3 days after club – Leaders are asked to tell the team leader when they will be doing contact work that week so they can coordinate.

SHOPPING LIST

Planning an Event to Kick Things Off

- Work with staff and leaders to pick the right kick-off event
- Rally the Parent Support Team to provide any needs for upcoming events
- Get the word out to the community that you are starting WyldLife
- Work on a follow-up plan and club timeline as your ministry and influence in the community grow

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Need more help getting WyldLife started in your community? Curious about what other resources are out there? Ask your local staff person and find out what they have available. There are lots of categorized resources available online at staff.younglife.org — to reach them just type “**go WyldLife**” in the search feature. Talk to your area director if you don’t have a user name and password.

Also, consider ordering WyldLife printed and video materials from the same Web site. Type “**go shopping**” in the search feature, and click on the WyldLife section where you’ll find everything you need.

WYLDLIFE GLOSSARY

WyldLife: “Young Life” is the name of our organization, and it’s also what we call our outreach to high school-age kids. We have named our middle school ministry “WyldLife” to differentiate between the two age groups and their varying developmental stages.

Club: During club, kids laugh, occasionally sing, get involved in skits, play games and hang out with their friends and leaders. Activities are designed for groups so kids don’t feel singled out. The combination of friendships and fun provides an effective platform for leaders to talk about God and His relevance to our lives today during a short message at the end of club.

Campaigners: This is the term for our follow-up ministry in Young Life. In WyldLife, we have found that same sex small groups meeting with a leader generally work best.

Contact Work: In WyldLife, leaders reach out to kids and build relationships with them, wherever they may be. Sometimes we even create that place for them to hang out and get to know their leaders. Contact work is about building relationships and earning the trust and friendship of teenagers.

Committee: An effective Young Life committee is the lifeline of the local Young Life area. Young Life begins in new areas because of adults who care about kids and share Young Life’s commitment to reaching every kid. A committee’s purpose is to share responsibility for making a positive difference in kids’ lives with the local staff, and to support the work financially. At least one member of your WyldLife Parent Support Team should be represented here.

Parent Support Team: This group of parents promotes and provides for the WyldLife ministry at a school. They take it upon themselves to care for the staff and leadership team and have a long-term commitment to the ministry so even when staff and leaders move on, the base of support in the community remains intact.

Volunteer Leader: WyldLife is not a facility-based ministry. Leaders of all types and ages, including parents, teachers, high school Campaigners, college students and other adults go where teenagers are — hangouts and athletic events — to spend time with them and build unconditional friendships with them. Thousands of volunteer leaders around the world help organize Young Life and WyldLife clubs, lead small group discussions and attend camps.

PERSONAL NOTES:



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