

**How to Make
It Work
for YOU**

SONday'SCOOL™



How to Make It Work for YOU

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SONday'SCOOL
A World of Difference

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SONday'SCOOL is Sunday School, but it's not. For one thing, it may not be on Sunday. And it should be as little like school as possible—at least, school in the traditional sense of “Sit down, be quiet, and listen.” SONday'SCOOL is active . . . it's alive . . . it's COOL! A How-To Manual is available for each of the following new SONday'SCOOL models. Contact: 1 (800) YOU-CARE (968-2273) or www.hopeshare.org



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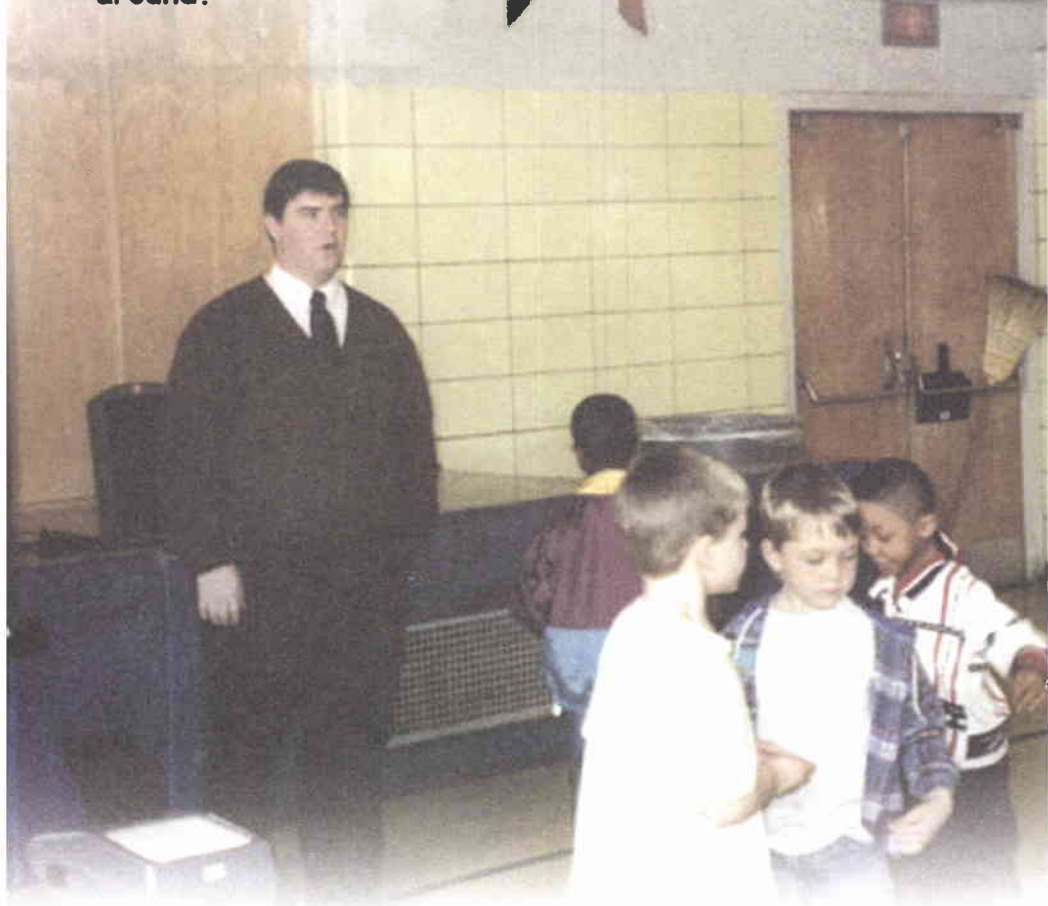
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What's It All About?

 The goal of **SONshine Club** is to provide a high-energy Sunday School program to urban children—primarily to unchurched children. This is not a tool to bring children into the church as much as it is to bring church to the children in the community. We currently have nearly 1200 children attending SONshine Clubs each week. We could never host that many children in our church building!

SONshine Club is an hour-long program that includes singing, games, a "Power Word" lesson (more on this later), Bible teaching, and memory verses. It began as an outdoor program conducted in neighborhood housing projects every Saturday morning during the summer months. It was geared toward elementary school age children and modeled after Bill Wilson's Sidewalk Sunday School, part of Metro Ministries in New York City. After our second summer, we moved the program into a local elementary school.

Our goal is to build the Kingdom of God. **SONshine Club** will provide ample opportunity for the church to form relationships with children and their families—and, eventually, to invite families to be part of the congregation. However, the primary purpose is to bring church to the children, not the other way around.



What's So New About That?

For a Salvation Army church to be involved in ministry to children in the open air is nothing new. What may be new is the motivation, the underlying purpose of the ministry—to bring church to the children rather than using the ministry as a "hook" to bring the children to church.

What's really new about **SONshine Club** is being able to bring the Gospel and Christian education into public school settings. Technically, **SONshine Club** is an "after-school-hours" activity. The children are dismissed at the close of the school day straight into our program.

Our goal was to eventually have a Christian program of evangelism and education in every public school in our city—Springfield, Ohio, population 65,000. Currently, there are **SONshine Clubs** in all of the elementary schools (thirteen of them), S.A.L.T. (Serving And Leading Together) programs in two of the five middle schools, and Young Life in three of the five area high schools.

How Did It All Start?

It took us six months of planning and preparing to launch **SONshine Club** outdoors. Most of that time was spent training volunteers from other churches for urban children's ministry.

SONshine Club began in the parking lot of one of our city's low-income housing projects, which was identified as having the highest incidence of violent crime. A group of volunteers, between two and ten of them, went door to door every Friday afternoon with flyers about the next day's **SONshine Club** meeting. The volunteers would also take time to sweep broken glass off the area we planned to use.

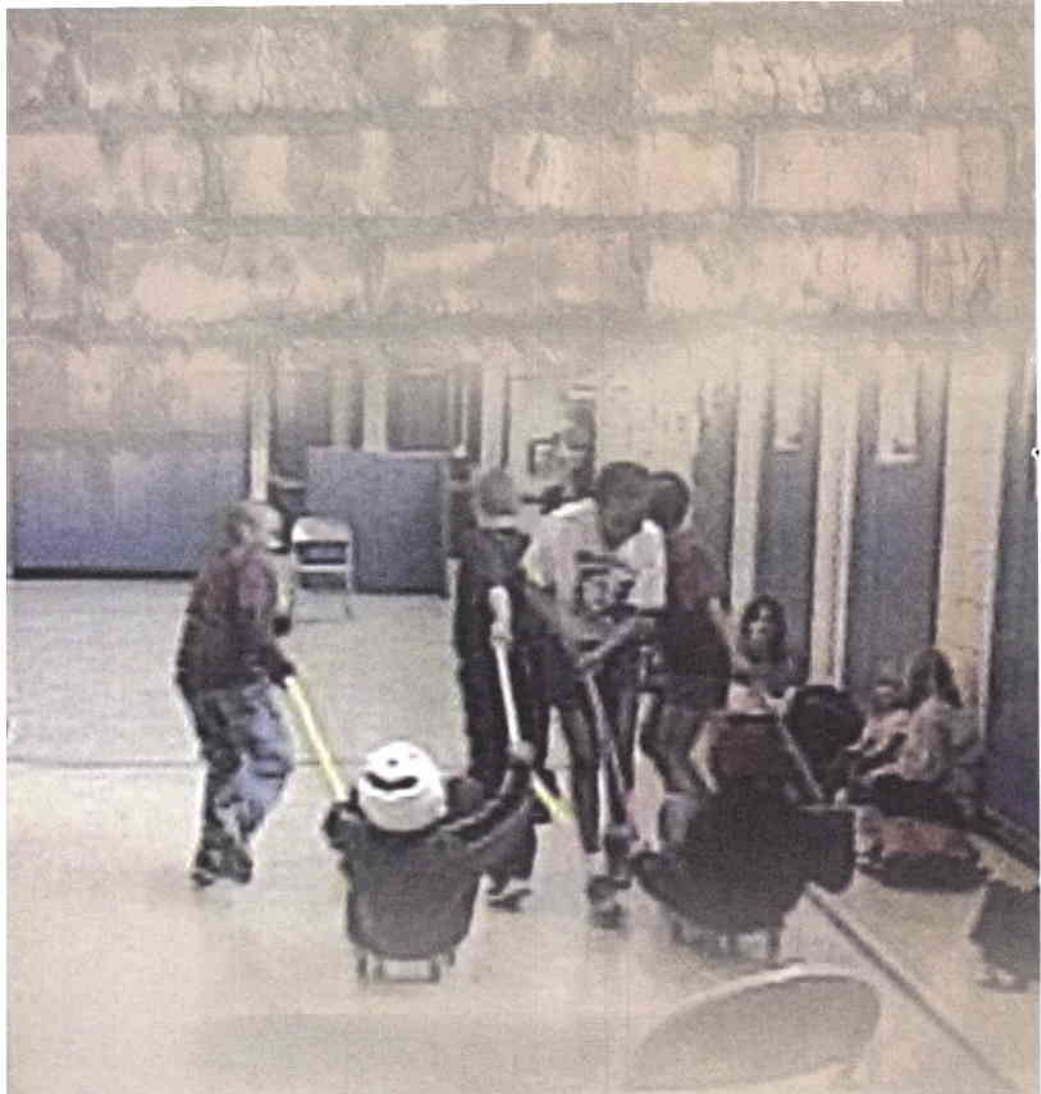
Our team would arrive every Saturday morning (rain or shine) at 10:00 a.m. to set up the trailer and sweep the parking lot again of broken bottles. We quickly secured a donation of carpet sample squares for the children to sit on in the parking lot. As the children heard the music playing over the speakers, they would begin to filter out of their houses and we would run the program from 10:30-11:30.

How Do We Get into the Schools?

It was actually the principal of the elementary school in the area of the housing project who approached us with the request to bring our program into the school at the end of summer. I would suggest choosing the elementary school closest to the church as a place to begin.

Getting into the public elementary schools will depend on relationships that have already been built with the school superintendent and with individual principals. Because we had consistently sent prayer cards to these folks, letting them know that we were praying for them on a regular basis, the door was open when we contacted each one about this ministry.

Some people were concerned about the issue of "separation of church and state," and that we might be hearing from the ACLU. After all, we were bringing a Christian program into public schools! However, President Clinton had signed into law the Freedom of Access Act, giving all religious organizations the right to develop after-school activities in the schools. Then, in 2001, the Supreme Court ruled that if other groups with a "viewpoint" are allowed to use school buildings after hours, religious groups must also be allowed to do so.



We were able to provide a *General Liability Insurance Certificate* to protect the program. This helped to allay some of the concerns people had about safety issues.

What Does the Schedule Look Like?

The best place in any elementary school to conduct the program is the gym. This kind of space is ideal for the games that are always part of the schedule. On nice days we take the children out to the school playground for the first 10 minutes of **SONshine Club** to allow them to burn off energy after sitting in school all day. We usually take them out for another 10 minutes before the Bible lesson. If the children have ample play time, that helps them pay attention during the Power Word and Bible lessons. Playground time takes the place of indoor game time on days with good weather.

As the children arrive, music is playing. The kids place their belongings along the wall of the gym and sit in rows according to grade.

A sample program appears on the following page. We use lesson themes such as the fruits of the spirit, the armor of God, Old Testament heroes, and so on. The memory verse slips (which we print 10 to a page) can be used to carry special announcements as needed.

SAMPLE PROGRAM

- ♥ Call the club to order by yelling "What time is it?!" The kids yell at the top of their voices "SONshine Club!!!"
- ♥ Cover the TWO RULES:
 1. Stay in your seat.
 2. The whistle means quiet. (Absolute quiet!)
- ♥ Stand to say Pledge to American Flag, followed by pledge to Bible.
- ♥ Lead in prayer. Children repeat after leader. (Keep prayer simple!)
- ♥ Song #1. We always use "Step into the Sunshine!" (an old kids' praise song)
- ♥ Game #1
- ♥ Power Word rap song. (The kids love it when the leader can't rap!) The "Power Word" is the word for the day: a word such as truth, for example.
- ♥ Power Word lesson
- ♥ Song #2 (usually an upbeat kids' praise song with taped accompaniment)
- ♥ Game #2
- ♥ Bible lesson. (Never exceed five minutes! Always end with prayer, specifically applying the lesson.)
- ♥ Teach memory verse for next week
- ♥ Announcements. Distribute memory verses and snacks as children are seated quietly in rows. (One talking child keeps the entire row from getting their snack.)
- ♥ After dismissal, any child who knows previous week's memory verse tells leader for an additional snack.

What About Discipline?

In every one of our programs we divide the gym down the middle, with the girls always sitting in rows (by grades) on our right and the boys on the left. Having them sit in rows by grades helps with organization and control. We give out "penny candy" for "best behavior"—but it's to the entire row. If one child talks when quiet is called for or fools around, no one in the row gets the treat. There is a lot of power in peer pressure when it comes to earning treats!

If any child is being especially challenging with respect to behavior, we give the entire row one warning. The second time we have to speak to them, the entire row loses their snack for the day. This almost always prevents further behavior problems.

Fighting of any kind is not tolerated. For a first incident, both children are taken to the school office and the parents are called to come immediately to pick up their children. Each child is suspended from **SONshine Club** for two weeks. A second incident means the child is suspended from **SONshine Club** for the rest of the school year.

These rules are tough, but they are absolutely essential. You can almost be sure you will need to kick out a few students at the beginning of this program until the children know you mean to enforce the rules. More often than not, bending the rules to show grace and keep a child in **SONshine Club** is interpreted as weakness and leads to further problems. Sometimes you have to remove five or six children from a club in order to have a quality club for the other 70 children.

One major obstacle we faced early on was the fact that many children coming into **SONshine Club** were on "behavior control" medication (Prozac, Ritalin, etc.). The first school where we operated had 43 percent of the students on one of these medications! The medication was wearing off at the end of the school day, so these children were "bouncing off the walls" when they came to **SONshine Club**. They were used to getting another pill as soon as they arrived home from school. The solution involved arranging with the school nurse for an adjustment in the time the kids received their medication earlier in the day.

What Staff Will We Need?

We thought a major challenge was going to be not having enough volunteers during the time when **SONshine Club** operates. We found that two people can run the program for 120 children. In fact, there have been several occasions when we have had only one leader for an entire group of children without many problems. The key is to be well-organized, confident, and energetic. It's important to keep things moving! The most likely thing to bring on behavior problems is boredom.

It's ideal to have two leaders up front to keep transferring program leadership back and forth. This helps to hold the children's attention and keeps the program moving. For example:

- ♥ The first leader does the opening: Go over the **TWO RULES** (1. Stay in your seat, sitting cross-legged on the floor; 2. The whistle means quiet), conduct the pledges to the flag and the Bible, and lead the opening prayer.
- ♥ The second leader leads the opening song.
- ♥ The first leader introduces the first game.
- ♥ The second leader introduces and teaches the Power Word lesson.
- ♥ And so on.

Beyond this, the more "watchers" you have, the better it is for the club. A watcher's only job is to walk along the end of the rows and reward good behavior. The watchers don't watch the leaders or the program; they watch the children 100 percent of the time. They quickly pull a child who is causing a problem out of the row. The child is taken out of the gym for a warning. If necessary, the parents are called to pick the child up.

The watchers' job is critical—but anyone can do it. The watchers are often able to develop better relationships with the children than the leaders. In some cases where I've had to lead large **SONshine Club** programs (100+ children) by myself, I've pulled some fifth-grade students to use as watchers. They loved it!

What Training Is Required?

When we started, we used Bill Wilson's Metro Ministries training videos and our experience with open air children's ministry to train volunteers.



We learned that the best training is done on the job. The "trainee" starts as a watcher. All the person has to do is watch the children and reward good behavior with candy treats. Eventually that person will be ready to lead a game, song, or prayer—and, at some point, teach the Bible lesson.

What Is It Going to Cost?

Good sound and music is a **MUST** to ensure a successful **SONshine Club** program. We purchased our portable sound systems for around \$500 each and invested in wireless microphones—about \$350 each. (Quality microphones are a little more expensive, but help avoid a lot of needless headaches!) You can purchase a good portable stereo (be sure it has a CD player) for around \$100 to run through your sound system. There is an abundance of great Christian rap and rock music. Plan on spending around \$75 to purchase several good CD's.

We spend \$5 per school per week for treats that we give out throughout the program to the rows of children who are sitting quietly and on their best behavior. In addition, we purchase snacks to give every child at the end of **SONshine Club**. It's usually something like a Rice Krispies treat, a pack of peanut butter crackers, or whatever. We spend about \$10 per school per week for snacks.




What Are the Pitfalls to Avoid?

- ♥ Don't promote **SONshine Club** as a program of your church in the schools. If you do, you will have difficulty recruiting volunteers from other churches. Instead, promote this as a high-energy, community Sunday School program for the public schools. People will know who is primarily responsible for the program anyway. You won't need to advertise it.
- ♥ Don't try to recruit a bunch of these children to come to your church. Remember, the goal is to bring church to the children. If you are busily trying to recruit for your Sunday morning Sunday School, volunteers and school teachers will think your ambition is to proselytize and build your own church—that your primary concern is not the children's needs. In time, you will develop relationships with these children. Then opportunities may arise "one on one" to invite them to your church.
- ♥ Don't get "soft" on the rules. Accept the fact that you will most likely have to kick some kids out of **SONshine Club** for the year because of their behavior. If you go soft on the rules, you will have continual behavior problems. Initially, we had a very hard time thinking of kicking kids out.

After all, they needed this! We discovered that **SONshine Club** isn't for everyone. The kids have to want to be there.

- ♥ Never get so busy that you forget to consistently say "Thank you!" to the principal for allowing you to hold **SONshine Club**; to the gym teachers, who will often provide equipment for your games; and to your volunteers.
- ♥ NEVER cancel a **SONshine Club** meeting without at least a week's notice. Parents are counting on having their children stay after school in your care.
- ♥ Avoid trying to "save" the children every week. It is important to have "Decision Days" at least quarterly in **SONshine Club**, but this is like your regular Sunday School. We're giving these children biblical tools to help them live in a way that pleases God in a very ungodly environment.

What Have the Results Been So Far?

 he results from the first school were better than expected. Teachers responded with reports of children becoming less violent. The principal excitedly told other area principals.

It wasn't long before every principal in town was calling us. They all wanted us to bring the program to their schools. We used that leverage to require every teacher in each new school we started in to attend the first **SONshine Club** meeting in order to understand what it was about. It was almost comical to see the walls of the gym lined with all the teachers as we conducted the club meeting with the children. The teachers participated in singing Bible songs and helped to "set the example" during prayer time.

We've had overwhelmingly supportive response from the community, with financial donations to cover all **SONshine Club** expenses. From those Saturday mornings with 35 kids we've now grown to be in all 13 city elementary schools and 3 county elementary schools, with around 1200 children in attendance each week. We use the same program in every school every week. The format has stayed the same over the past five years.



Over those five years we have had thousands of children come to accept Christ through our **SONshine Club** ministry. Hundreds of children have become involved in area churches. Yes, we've had some **SONshine Club** kids become part of our church. But not every child will.

Because our focus has been on bringing church to the children—and not on bringing children into our church—we have had considerable success in recruiting adults from other churches who have a burden for children's ministry to volunteer their time for **SONshine Club**.

Where Does It Go From Here?

We have realized our vision for **SONshine Club**: to have an active club in every public elementary school in our city. We are working toward having a S.A.L.T. (Serving And Leading Together) Club in every middle school (three left to go), and Young Life in every high school (two to go). Then every one of our public schools will have an active Christian education program.

Our next major goal for **SONshine Club** is to provide a regular church home for all the unchurched children we have identified in our clubs—about 350 of them. We're looking to start a "Kids' Church" in our own building on Sunday afternoons.



We are also hoping to have enough volunteers to provide a "chaplain" to every elementary school, someone who would be available to any student in that school. The schools are very receptive to this idea; we just don't have the manpower yet.



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