

Winston-Salem organization helps children reach their full potential

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WINSTON-SALEM, NC -- The school day is over in Forsyth County, but the children gathered at this center in downtown Winston-Salem aren't home quite yet. Monday through Friday, they participate in a before and after school program.

According to Betty West, director of the Expanding Learning Services, it's a diverse group of students who may otherwise not get a chance to meet. Some have special needs and some have typical needs. "It was our mission and our goal to continue to strengthen our families," said West. "And what I saw was that families really do struggle with before and after school care, especially when they're looking for quality care." The program is part of Imprints Cares, an organization that partners with parents to close the achievement gap and help all children reach their full potential. And what happens at the 15 sites throughout the school district is a lot more than childcare.

"We have highly qualified teachers and professionals and they will work on homework, they'll provide learning activities, take them on field trips and it's just a really rich environment," said Nikki Byers, executive director of Imprints Cares. The Winston-Salem Foundation has been a longtime supporter of the organization and its mission.

"It is just the most beautiful immersion program you could possibly see, said West. "Research shows and those of us in education have always known, that immersion programs are best practices for all children."

Around 1000 children across Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools participate in the before and after school program.

Site director and teacher Audrey Campbell says socially, emotionally and cognitively, the children learn from each other and that every day is both an adventure and fulfilling. "I just fell in love. I have never wanted to do anything else," she said.