

## MANAGEMENT

### From Expelled to Excelled

A high school failure tells how he built youth development programs that go beyond academics.

The Last Dropout  
Bill Milliken  
Hay House  
241 pages. \$14.95

By Keith Hefner

*The Last Dropout*, written by the founder of Communities in Schools (CIS), is based on the author's 45 years of working with teens and creating youth programs. Bill Milliken's goal is to show that providing nonacademic services to teens — such as mentoring, health care and a safe haven — can increase their likelihood of school success. The fact that you're reading this newspaper means you probably already know that.

But there are still several very good reasons to read *The Last Dropout*.

One is Milliken's own story, which begins in the 1950s. He was the alienated black sheep in a well-off Pittsburgh family, spending more time in the pool hall than the classroom. The only reason he didn't drop out of high school, he says, is that he was kicked out first.

Thanks to an encounter with a Christian street outreach worker, he begins to find purpose in his life. Before long, he moves to Harlem and becomes a committed youth worker himself — an extraordinarily energetic and creative one.

Milliken's first job, in 1960, is old-fashioned street outreach: gaining trust and helping youth give up crime or break drug habits. He soon learns that youth can decide to stop stealing, but if they don't have a place to go where peers will reinforce their choice — and where adults provide job training or help getting a GED — the decision won't stick. Milliken opens a drop-in center in lower Manhattan. Then he starts a GED prep program. In the process, he discovers that it's more efficient to help kids stay in school than to retrieve them once they've dropped out. So he starts one of the nation's first officially sanctioned alternative high schools, which was a radical concept at the time. When he realizes that some students fail because they can't see the board or are distracted by a throbbing tooth, Milliken rounds up a few doctors.

#### Building Success

In this early part of his career, Milliken systematically runs up against most of the problems that poor youth face. For each problem, he creates a new intervention. For a while it feels like every time he plugs one hole, another leak springs up. Eventually, he realizes several things.

First, let the schools handle academics.

Second, unless students' pressing non-academic needs are met, they are unlikely to succeed in school. And, having tried and failed with piecemeal programming, Milliken realizes he needs a comprehensive approach. He identifies five nonacademic "basics": a one-on-one relationship with a caring adult; a safe place to learn and grow; a healthy start and a healthy future;

a marketable skill; and a chance to give back to peers and the community.

Finally, instead of making youths and their parents run all over town to get health care, mentoring and the like, those services should be provided at school, where the kids already are.

It's a winning formula. Today, CIS, which focuses on bringing nonacademic youth services into schools, has programs in more than 200 cities. That's the second reason to read this book. While Milliken's personal story is uplifting, the description of how he built CIS from a tiny local program to a nationwide network is a case study in nonprofit management.

For maximum benefit, I suggest reading *The Last Dropout* alongside *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*, the 36-page nonprofit sequel to the best-selling management book by Stanford Business School professor Jim Collins. Collins describes the principles of great nonprofit organizations. Milliken shows how to put them into practice.

For example, Collins describes five varieties of good leadership, including one, "Level 5," that is transformative. The distinctions between good and great leadership are subtle in Collins' description, but they become clear when you see how Milliken exemplifies the leader who Collins says "builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will." Similarly, Collins' description of great staffers as people who "simply cannot stop themselves from the almost neurotic need to improve" is brought to life in Milliken's description of several local CIS leaders.

This book contains many other gems of experience. Does it seem impossible that a small youth program could enlist the support of powerful local and national leaders? Or that adherents of only one political view would support this work? Read how Milliken recruited former presidents Jimmy Carter and George H.W. Bush and dozens of business leaders to the cause.

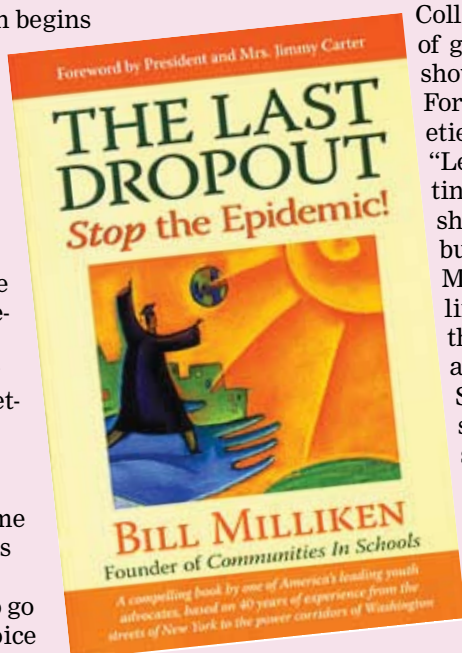
Have you been soured on "faith-based" social services by the George W. Bush administration's cronyism and support of employment discrimination? Milliken's deep Christian faith is probably the most important motivator in his work. But it is utterly inclusive.

Do you sometimes struggle to find the right words to describe your program in language that reflects the hope and optimism you feel, even when working with the most difficult youths or in the most challenging circumstances? Milliken has not met a problem that he cannot persuasively reframe as an opportunity.

You'll borrow freely from him, but as a Level 5 leader, he won't begrudge you in the least. He's not in it for himself, or to build an empire. He's in it because he knows that if children and youth can get comprehensive support for their nonacademic needs, their chances for success in school and life go up dramatically.

But you already knew that.

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By Cathi Dunn MacRae

## CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

### Empowering Youth: How to Encourage Young Leaders to Do Great Things

Kelly Curtis  
Search Institute Press  
154 pages. \$14.95

"Empowerment isn't a program, it's a way of thinking," declares Curtis, whose guide for youth workers and leaders of all ages demonstrates how to infuse youth involvement into all kinds of community organizations.

Chapters match the four empowerment assets within Search Institute's Framework of 40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents. The chapter, "When a Community Values Youth," cites a survey in which only 21 percent of adults are confident that youth could represent their communities or perform community service. Noting that minds are changed when people see teenagers lead with adults, the author presents six activities that prepare adults and youth to work together.

"Treating Youth as Valued Resources" presents youth-centered community projects. "Serving the Needs of Others" shows how service projects motivate young people. "Ensuring a Safe World for Young People" suggests ways for youths to become stakeholders in their own safety.

Inspiring examples of youth empowerment projects include a 13-year-old Nevada girl's booklets for foster children and a California youth group's creation of a teen center. With wise encouragement, valuable tips and 19 training activities, this handbook is a gold mine for youth workers and youth advocates. (800) 888-4741, [www.ipgbook.com](http://www.ipgbook.com).

## EMPLOYMENT/JOB TRAINING

### Project Reach Out: Building Effective Partnerships Between the Workforce System and Community Organizations

Seedco  
40 pages. Free download.

Based on its experience with integrating faith-based and community organizations into Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) and One-Stop Career Centers in New York and other cities, the nonprofit Seedco offers this free guide to help other WIBs and centers create their own partnerships. Community partners have helped with such services as reintegrating ex-offenders, job-readiness training, transportation and child