

Devin Mitchell, East End House, Cambridge OST Apprentice
Reflection for End of Year Celebration, June 9, 2026

Intro

I want to thank the Agenda for Children Out-of-School Time Staff for allowing me to speak today. I appreciate you all for coming and lending us your time and attention. Hopefully something you'll hear today will stick with you and become a part of your journey, whatever path you may be on.

My Why

I grew up in a single parent household with a very strong minded, loving, empowering, and trusting mother. She knew that she was preparing a young man for a world that wasn't going to have his best interest at heart and wouldn't give him more than a single chance to prove them right, where her son would need to make change in the minds and hearts of others. He would have all of the abilities to be someone you'd be happy to meet, hard to forget, honored to call a friend.

I didn't have a lot of strong and positive male role models in my life. Most, if not all of them, came from Out of School Time (OST) staff and sports coaches. I had someone near and dear to me pass away when I was young. I struggled for a long time, but I got a lot of advice that kept me going, like "Make him proud" and "He's looking down on you right now. What do you want him to see?", things like that. I got these messages from someone really influential for bits and pieces of my life as a young man. That stuck with me to this day. I don't believe he meant this to hit as hard as it did, but I've repeated this to myself hundreds of times this year alone. And I will die with these words at the forefront of my mind. For those who know me, I think you might know what I'm going to say. But the message is clear: "Be the man you needed when you were younger!" Be someone kids want to see, play with, and talk to and be someone they feel safe with. That's what that means to me!

What it means to be connected to a professional community like this

I believed for most of my life that I was a great leader, and I've grown to develop the tools to succeed there. However, I felt clearly that I lacked the polish, communication skills, and professionalism that I would need to succeed beyond a field, basketball court, or just on a personal level. Our OST meetings being run by some great older, professional, and like-minded black men, that I could see leading in their own ways while delivering their messages and teachings without sacrificing their personalities, was big for me. The AFCOST has shown a remarkable commitment to not only my development but to others around me, like their willingness to extend a helping hand and time and space to talk and think through problems or just being an ear or lending a shoulder.

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How AFCOST has supported me in my journey

Throughout my time working with the Agenda for Children and Out of School Time staff, I've become more versed and aware of all the possible situations and circumstances that face our youth today, thanks to the meetings with all of you.

Meeting Faye! She's an amazing occupational therapist. She taught us that neurodivergent students see the world differently, and their motivations and ideas are uniquely their own and that to truly understand why some students do anything you need to know their WHY their purpose for what they say and do and what keeps them going. Earlier this year she introduced some of us to the MOHO model. The Model of Human Occupation (MOHO) is a client-centered occupational therapy framework. It describes how humans are motivated by organizing and performing meaningful daily activities.

(STORY TIME) I have a student that is very near and dear to my heart, and most of the kids are, for better or worse, but my whole program really loves this student and we all feel like we know her really well, including myself. As we were wrapping up our MOHO model training, we were given a work sheet to identify some of these things with one child in mind, and I picked this student. They are someone I felt have a strong relationship with, and I would like to find out more about how I could support them. During our small group discussions, I was listening to the other people presenting the students they picked, and I realized I hadn't done as good of a job on my assessment as I thought I had. But when it was my turn, I shared what I had and, to my surprise, at the end everyone said "you did a great job," and someone mentioned that they could see how much I cared for this student, as I couldn't stop smiling as I was reading what I wrote. Then Faye split us up into 2 groups to deep dive into the WHY in our MOHO model worksheet, focused on my student in particular. The group I was placed in was strong, and to have the beautiful and amazing minds of Aubrey and Mia, shout out to you both, they quickly had me questioning how well I actually knew my student. This was NOT in a bad way, but in a personal conversation way. One of the questions that was brought up was "does this student have any friends?" And I got a little defensive. Definitely! Everyone at the program loves them—kids, adults, and all. Then Mia brilliantly pointed out that people liking you and having genuine friends you can have genuine conversations with are two different things. They need someone they could tell secrets to and know they will keep them safe, someone they can share thoughts and ideas with, someone they can tell about what's really going on at home and share dreams and ideas with, someone to share strong or potentially unsafe feelings or ideas with. I quickly realized I had no idea if they had that. As we had just gotten to a big point in the conversation, it was time to return to the bigger group. My group presented what we had talked about. Every time a part was shared, there was a "wow" or "omg" that came from the other group. The revelation that I knew so little about someone I cared so much for really made me grateful to be in a space where I had the kind of thinkers around that could challenge me and make me a better version of myself, not just for me or the student but for everyone I serve in the community.

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I've been able to stay in contact and see some of our OST staff and team outside of work. It has been big to know that these are people that care about the work and about the people doing the work. With that kind of support, how could you not be great?

Growing up and coming to after school and summer camps, I never thought this much work went into it! I thought my afterschool teacher just sat around waiting for us to get there. Even visiting school for events this past week, the kids were so mind-blown seeing their afterschool teachers talking to their school day teachers and seeing us at their performances and talent shows alongside their parents. I never would have thought as a kid that my afterschool teacher would be taking leadership courses, neurodivergent trainings, professional development, and even being at school themselves and having their own work to get through but taking time out of their lives to help me with work and teaching me to stay focused and helping me with my spelling and even working on my jump shot with me and things like that.

How AFCOST has helped me help my community

AFCOST has brought me into a community with the power and resources to truly make a difference, from the bottomless connections and reliable like-minded individuals to the new members that challenge our ways of thinking and push us to think beyond what we are used to doing. It is also a community that shares resources with me and my program and helps build with my community. I've had and still have current and former students that say "Thank you for being my teacher", "I wanna be like you when I grow up," and even say they love me when they leave. Words can truly be powerful, and actions can be even stronger sometimes. One of the most powerful things that come from these interactions with youth is how you make them feel.

Give Thanks

I obviously want to thank The Agenda for Children Out-of-School Time Staff for giving me this opportunity. To my team at East End House here supporting me, a special thanks to Marsé Romero, Jemima Spill, Jennifer Suarez, and Jessica Caminezuli. Of course, my beautiful mother here today, Stacey Mitchell, and lastly to the Lord for helping me every step of the way, Thank You!