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**Program Excellence Awards
Community Partnerships Category**

Joint Cypress-La Palma Teen Program

*City of La Palma / City of Cypress
California*



Introduction

THE JOINT CYPRESS – LA PALMA TEEN PROGRAM is a collaborative effort between the City of Cypress Recreation & Community Services Department and the La Palma Recreation & Community Services Department, “. . . focusing on youth development by providing positive adult role models, activities spotlighting health and well being, and interpersonal competence by implementing daily drop-in activities in the Teen Lounge, along with monthly special events for teens in 6th through 8th grades.” – Teen Outcomes Program Plan

The Challenge

ALTHOUGH LA PALMA had been operating an after school program for this age group since 2001, the joint venture began in September 2004. La Palma’s prior program was lackluster due to the distance from the middle school to the program site. Cypress offered a park with a suitable facility located on the cities’ border just south of that school, which had been suffering from a high frequency of teen-related offenses and other negative behavior. Hosting a joint teen program would provide positive activities and on-site staff that would discourage such behavior, while at the same time significantly improve program delivery with a considerable cost savings for both cities.

In addition, it is both cities’ goal to positively impact the lives of their youth. The Joint Teen Program also addresses important national, regional, and local trends, such as:

- The youth obesity epidemic and onslaught of early Type 2 diabetes – U.S. Surgeon General
- Youth stress leading to serious health and behavioral issues – American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry
- Teens’ lack of socialization and coping skills – Orange County Juvenile Retention Center
- A decreased interest in teens’ daily activities by parents/adults - Search Institute



(The Lounge is) a place where my family knows I’m safe and close to home. I also love the staff—they are so cool to talk to about lots of things . . .

*Georgina Hernandez,
Age 14*

Program Implementation

THE PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT, AND IMPLEMENTATION of the program is based on La Palma’s strategic planning review process, which has identified that a strong community and improved health and wellness are important attributes valued by its residents. In defining what “strong community” means, it was determined that youth development and youth safety and security are part of the foundation upon which a strong community is built. “Strong community” also addresses the physical and mental wellness of the community by improving fitness levels and promoting healthy nutritional habits, reducing stress, and developing positive assets in the youth.

To initiate the Joint Teen Program, the recreation staff from both cities drafted a Contract Services Agreement, in which both cities share the financial and program implementation burden equally, including staffing, equipment, supplies and maintenance. Each city’s budget reflects half of the cost of the program, approximately \$35,000 annually. La Palma’s cost savings from sharing the program with Cypress is about \$10,000 per year.

An Outcomes Program Plan has been developed for the Joint Teen Program, which is reviewed and updated annually by both departments’ staff. Within the plan, the program’s goal is to strengthen youth development by enhancing, supporting and growing assets in youth participants using the Search Institute’s Developmental Assets model. The Joint Teen Program has two components:

- The Lounge, which operates three days a week from after school to 5:30 p.m. and includes tutoring, fitness activities, classes, and nutrition awareness/education; and
- Special Events including bi-monthly dances, movie nights, murder-mystery nights, Super Bowl parties and an annual Battle of the Bands.

Measurable Outcomes

ALTHOUGH AFTER SCHOOL TEEN PROGRAMS are not unique to the park and recreation divisions, the emphasis on program design, development,



Because I’m home schooled, this is where I make friends and do my P.E. I am always able to talk to the staff about my personal problems, and everything I learned here is in the form of play. I’ve learned here that it is more important to exercise than stay inside and play video games. And some of my best friends are the staff.

—Gregory Lee, Age 12

delivery, and measurement in response to critical national, regional, and local issues is still fairly new. In order to address identified youth issues and trends, the joint staff of Cypress and La Palma developed the following outcomes, which were then associated with specific objectives:

Outcome #1 – Improved Health and General Wellness: Teens will participate in an outdoor physical activity at least once a day; staff will talk to the teens about health-related issues; teens will be given a chance to participate in “trendy” fitness classes; and local fast food restaurants will present informative discussions on making healthier food choices.



Outcome #2 – Develop and Enhance Interpersonal Competence: Staff will not allow any bullying and will teach teens different ways of approaching problems; teens will develop confidence through making more friends and improving in games; teens will feel that they are in a safe environment when at The Lounge.

Outcome #3 – Other Adult Relationships: Staff will take time to talk to each participant daily about their day at school; staff will interact as a mentor and role model to each teen participant; teens will develop trust in the staff and will demonstrate a willingness to participate in games; teens will develop a trust with our staff and feel comfortable in talking to them about their issues.

Both cities’ staff have been trained in measurement methods and processing techniques for the Teen Program’s youth. The Program Plan identifies a variety of ways in which documentation occurs relative to demonstrating the intended outcomes. The evaluative methods identified in the Program Plan are participant and parent surveys, staff observations, participant/parent testimonials, and police reports.



Staff observations have proven to be more reliable, due to the development of the Daily Activity Plan form. Space is provided on the form for staff journaling, as this example indicates: “While a few of the teens were playing basketball with me, one player was being selfish and not considering the rest of the team. After a while, the player that was being

selfish stopped receiving the ball as often. When he got frustrated and yelled at another player, I defended the person being yelled at. As soon as that happened, I felt a relationship begin, because he saw that I did care about him and we were not just playing for fun. After the game, he approached me and thanked me for helping him out.”

- Paul Albarian, Staff 2/3/05

An unexpected offshoot of the third outcome, staff developing viable relationships with the program participants, is also reflected in this staff observation, that of modeling leadership skills to the youth in the program and of leading by example.

As an added bonus, the City of Cypress Police Department has reported a dramatic drop in juvenile-related crime in Cypress-Arnold Park, directly attributed to the creation of the Joint Teen Program. They report that from September 2003 – August 2004 (the year before the joint program started), 214 total calls were made to the park location, of which 61 pertained to teens, such as graffiti, vandalism, and other juvenile disturbances. The year of the Teen Program’s inception, from September 2004 through August 2005, there were a total of 132 calls made, of which only 37 pertained to teen behavior and activities. This represents a 47% reduction in crime, and a 41% reduction in negative teen behavior - entirely attributed to the presence of the program in the park.



I come to the Lounge because I have nothing to do at my house. And they help you with your homework.

—Andrew Gonzalez, Age 12

● Lessons Learned

TO HAVE TWO INDEPENDENT COMMUNITIES enter into a formal agreement to collaborate on such a program is innovative. The fact that the Teen Program’s three outcomes support what is important to both communities as well as address the emerging trends affecting the communities and the nation has positively affected the lives of the teen participants.

Another innovative feature is that staff from both communities are engaged in the design of the annual Program Plan, as well as are trained in the effective and efficient delivery of services. This has resulted in ownership of the program by the staff directly involved in its

implementation. They have also developed a Daily Activity Plan, a form which emphasizes the connection between the outcomes being sought and the objectives to be achieved on a daily basis. Staff utilizes this form to plan supporting activities, to document outputs and achievements, and to journal “teachable moments,” incidents and breakthroughs that affect our youths’ lives. The Daily Activity Plan is ongoing documentation that the Cypress-La Palma Teen Program uses to facilitate the healthy physical, mental, emotional, and social growth of both communities’ middle school-aged youth.



A strong lesson learned involved one of the measurement methods utilized in the first year of service delivery during which staff administered pre- and post-program surveys to the after-school participants of the Joint Teen Program. This evaluative format proved to be unreliable, because this particular age group is uncooperative when it comes to doing something that isn’t “fun.” The resulting survey sample was too small to draw any useful conclusions from. Other methods, including staff observation and journaling, parent surveys, and participant testimonials have been more successful for determining program strengths and areas for improvement.

Conclusion

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT is a primary component of human development in both communities. The Joint Teen Program strengthens community by providing a safe and secure place for middle school youth to improve their fitness, general health and wellness; and to practice and perfect interpersonal relationships in order to be contributing members of our society. This is aligned with ICMA’s Code of Ethics principles, especially “. . . Affirm[ing] the dignity and worth of the services rendered by government and maintain[ing] a sense of social responsibility as a trusted public servant; . . . Recognize[ing] that the chief function of local government at all times is to serve the best interests of all the people; and . . . Emphasize[ing] friendly and courteous service to the public . . .”

The Joint Teen Program demonstrates the manner in which we create safety and security, develop youth, strengthen community, and enhance well being among the residents of both Cypress and La Palma.