

**Looking Forward -
Program Evaluation and Recommendations for
The Smith Hill Thursday Evening Youth Program
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Program Evaluation and Recommendations Thursday Evening Program

Summary

Since March 2008, members of the community have worked together to create a weekly program designed to provide a safe environment in which to address the various needs of disengaged, at-risk youth in Smith Hill, some of whom are members of the Laotian Pride (LP) gang. The Program has been primarily run out of the Selim Rogers Recreation Center or in Davis Park on Thursday evenings from 6-9 pm. The typical Thursday evening consists of activities, which include basketball, foosball, art projects and general socializing, and food provided by Providence College.

In terms of target population engagement, the number of consistent participants has been exceptional. There have been between 30-75 individuals in attendance weekly, with a steady increase since the program's inception. This attests to both the willingness of the target population to engage in positive activities and the great need that exists within the community for positive recreational options. Over the last month of the program, about 60% of the attendees are of Southeast Asian heritage.

A committed core of team members, who have essentially donated their time, and a few equally committed volunteers have been working directly with the youth on Thursday evenings. A larger group of key stakeholders has been involved in the program's oversight and long-term planning. The team consists of members of local non-profit organizations, schools and colleges, local political and law enforcement leaders, the local Recreation Center Director and a few neighborhood residents.

Though quantitatively difficult to measure the program's outcome success, program staff and volunteers agree that the engagement and communication by individuals in the target population with adult members of the team and Providence College student volunteers has greatly improved. Youth appear more comfortable with adults, communicate with each other more effectively, and there is evidence that potential problems traditionally tied to violent resolution are being addressed through "talking it out" instead.

Interviews with participants reveal a wide range of reactions to the program. Respondents to an informal interview reported that the main benefit of the program is having a safe place to be with their friends. One participant stated the evenings "keep a lot of us occupied and out of trouble." This sentiment was echoed by most respondents. Other common self-identified benefits were: having the chance to have fun, play some sports and receiving pizza. Responding to questions about whether the program has made a difference, one participant stated that the program helps "keep most kids off the street" and is "bringing the community together."

Thus far, the work of a few has gone a very long way.

Recommendations:

It is clear from all evidence that this is an effective program. Team members agree that it is critically important to maintain this program on a consistent, weekly schedule. Core members have managed to run the program weekly for the past eight months, with nine outright cancelations for various reasons. Issues surrounding limited program space, especially in the winter must be addressed in order to accommodate the program's growing participation. The Rec. Center and its Director, Karl Brown, have proven key partners. However, challenges with Rec. Center scheduling and staffing have led to problems with several last minute closing of the center. This consistency issue needs to be addressed for program stability. Other resources and options for space must be brought to bear on this problem as well.

The program has demonstrated great success in attracting and maintaining the participation of at-risk community youth. In fact, youth are now coming from all parts of Providence and not limited to the Smith Hill area. Recent events, highlighted by the theft of a backpack from the rec. center, have demonstrated that the success of the program demands a greater degree of support and consistency in order to insure a safe and productive environment for the youth. The past eight months basically dictates that organizationally the program must develop to keep pace with the program's success.

Three areas of greatest need are:

1. Programmatic – expanding the offerings, activities and clearly expressing program expectations, goals and procedures.
2. Space and Oversight –
 - a. The Rec. Center has been a steady partner, but staffing issues have proven a challenge to having the doors open consistently. It is imperative, considering the high number of people now involved, that the availability of program space is a constant. Last minute changes to the schedule must be decreased and other options for space must be sought.
 - b. Adult oversight – It is clear that more adult support is necessary on Thursday nights. Encouraging volunteers or exploring some paid positions are options to consider.
3. Funding – There is currently no formal budget and no funding. Establishment of a budget and fundraising are priorities.

This program has provided a clear indication of the need for greater recreational options for Providence youth.

Methodology

This report was developed along the lines of a Logic Model of Service Programs supplied by Providence College professor, Joe Cammarano.

Data and conclusions were drawn from interviews and direct input from team members as well as from program participants.

The Logic Model

Descriptions and Definitions

Inputs

- *Resources* - Staff, volunteers, money materials, space , technology, Program supporters
- *Target Population* – Who is receiving the program

Process

- Activities that use *resources* to achieve *outcomes* with *target population*

Outputs

- Measurements of services provided and completion of all services prescribed

Outcomes

- Demonstrated benefits to those receiving program

Impact

- Measurable changes occurring in organizations, communities, or systems as a result of service

The Logic Model Applied to Thursday Night Program

Inputs

- Resources
 - Staff –
 - ISPN Staff and Streetworkers
 - Rec. Center Staff
 - Volunteers –
 - Providence College staff and students
 - Neighborhood Residents

- Money -
 - Providence College has consistently provided pizza and refreshments. PC has also provided art supplies and an artist to organize some art activities. Smith Hill Community Development Corporation has bought pizza once.
 - The Recreation Center provided lifeguards during the summer evening program nights so the pool could remain open.
 - Space
 - Rec. Center – including the pool.
 - Davis Park
 - Technology –
 - Adult volunteers have used their own vehicles to transport youth.
 - Program Supporters – Rec. Center, ISPN, Smith Hill CDC, Providence College, Councilman Hassett, Rep. McCauley, Lt. Correira, Library branch staff, PPS staff and neighborhood residents
- Target Population
 - Originally directed towards at-risk Laotian youth and primarily Smith Hill residents. Over the course of the program, participation has increased beyond any specific demographic.

Process

- Activities
 - Every Thursday evening from roughly 6-9, there is a sponsored event at the Rec. Center or, when unavailable, Davis Park. Davis Park has presented challenges as the neighborhood police have indicated displeasure at the group's presence. Incidents of violence have been associated there in the past with the group.
 - On Thursdays – recreation activities like basketball and foosball, art lessons with artist from PC, conversations with debrief with ISPN trainers after incidents of neighborhood violence or conflict, summer swimming.
 - Outside of Thursday nights – movies at Providence Place funded by ISPN, attended SCLT Hoe Down with donation and transportation from ISPN, attended funeral
 - We have had conversations with youth about potential mural projects, mock interviews and resume writing, creating and caring for a community garden, dance lessons, healthy relationships/sex ed classes and movie nights but have yet to have the staff time or resources to follow through on any of these.

Outputs

- Measurements
 - All team members agree that consistency of scheduling is critical for success. Core team members have been successful in maintaining the weekly program, though this is a problem area due to limited options for space. The Rec. Center has proven an effective partner, but issues with consistency have persisted.
 - Engagement
 - Numbers – Using participation by the target group as an output reveals that the program has steadily grown and maintains the consistent participation of 50-75 of the target pop. This number, by any measure, is exceptional and has exceeded the expectations of the program team. It also underscores the great **need** that in the target population.

Outcomes

- Demonstrated benefits to target population.
 - “Active Engagement” – though quantitatively difficult to measure, program staff and volunteers agree that the engagement and communication by individuals in the target population with adult members of the team and Providence College student volunteers has greatly improved. Youth are reported to, at times, discuss their choices with team members, appear more comfortable with adults, communicate with each more effectively, and there is evidence that potential problems traditionally tied to violent resolution are being addressed through “talking it out” instead.
 - Interviews with participants reveal a wide range of reactions to the program. Respondents to an informal interview conducted by program volunteers reported that the main benefit of the program is having a safe place to be with their friends. One participant stated the evenings “keep a lot of us occupied and out of trouble.” This sentiment was echoed by most respondents. Other common self-identified benefits were: having the chance to have fun, play some sports and receiving pizza.

Impact

Group Members

- Potential – this program could bridge the “engagement” gap with regards to resources available to youth. In areas such, job training programs which addresses the larger issues of employment.

- Decrease in violence. ISPN methodology of conflict resolution has already had a discernable impact on group members.
- Provides an opportunity for youth to develop relationships with caring, supportive adults.
- Provides a hot meal.

Impact on neighborhood and City

- Decrease in violent crime and criminal activities.
- Decrease in quality of life behavior; ex. Graffiti, public drinking,
- Maximizes the usage of a city-owned building by the community, which is consistent with Major Cicilline's policy for school buildings and recreation centers.

APPENDIX

Weekly updates for Thursday Night Program

Thursday, October 30, 6-8PM

of youth present: 60-70

Summary of event: Very large turnout. Seems to be a mix of new youth from the Chad Brown neighborhood, as well as the usual youth from Smith Hill. Youth mainly played basketball and socialized, with a variety of small and large games taking place. The Fusball table was also used throughout the evening. Pizza was provided. At one point during the evening a youth's bookbag was stolen. After an altercation outside the Rec with some other youth, he was very upset and came back into the Rec to use the phone to call 911. A Streetworker then took him home. The police responded to the call and came to the Rec after the young man had left. Because the 911 call had been made from the Rec phone, the building had to be shut down (at approximately 8pm). Youth left the building, slightly confused as to why the night had ended early. Rec staff, ISPN staff and Keith Morton debriefed the situation once all of the youth had left. Streetworkers will follow-up on the incident to figure out who was involved and to gain back the stolen item. Karl will check with his supervisor about the procedure that needs to be followed because of the 911 call. It was agreed that adults need to be more strategic about how and where they are positioned throughout the building on Thursday nights, so as to monitor and limit youth coming in and out of the building. It was mentioned that youth should sign in when they arrive at the Rec so there is a record of who is in the building, but no conclusion was made. A discussion was also had between Heather and Karl, and then later with the whole group, about clarifying and enforcing the rules of the Rec, particularly around what age youth are allowed in the building on Thursday nights. It is not quite clear yet whether the rule is you need to be a teenager, or, you need to be in high school, in order to be at the Rec night. Further conversation is needed in order for all adults to help enforce.

Adult community partners present: 2 Rec Staff, 3 ISPN Staff, 5 ISPN Streetworkers, 1 Providence College professor, 3 Providence College students, 1 neighborhood resident

Thursday, October 23, 6-9PM

of youth present: approximately 70

Summary of event: Very large turnout again. Remains a mix of new youth from the neighborhood, as well as the regular youth. Youth mainly played basketball and socialized, with a variety of small and large games taking place. Pizza was provided and art supplies were also utilized throughout the evening. Permission slips were distributed to youth that wanted to attend Anita's wake/funeral with Institute staff on Friday, October 24th. (12 youth ended up attending the services on Friday with Tou and Heather.) Tou will be unable to attend/help staff Thursday nights until January because he is taking a class at RI College this semester.

Adult community partners present: 2 Rec Staff, 3 ISPN Staff, 4 ISPN Streetworkers, 2 Providence College professors, 4 Providence College students, 2 neighborhood residents

Thursday, October 16, 6-9PM

of youth present: 60-70

Summary of event: First formal night back at the Rec had the largest turnout ever. A lot of new kids from the neighborhood were in attendance, as well as the regular youth. Youth mainly played basketball and socialized, with a variety of small and large games taking place. Pizza was provided and art supplies were also utilized throughout the evening. Tou and Karl had some disagreements about the availability of the building, including timing and use on other days of the week. Heather, Keith Morton and Streetworker Manager, Ajay Benton, met with Karl and came to the agreement that the Rec is open no earlier than 6pm each Thursday, and that many misunderstandings arise from not having clear expectations of when and why the Rec closes. We will use the next meeting of community partners, being organized for November, to clarify these expectations, create common understanding (for days such as holidays, snow days, school vacation, etc.), and develop a strategy to gain more staff and support for the Rec. Ammala Douangsavanh from the Laos Community Center came to see the space and discuss potential options for offering traditional dance classes. There seems to be enough space in the small activity room and Ammala believes that starting out small, with a few youth, will work best. Heather and other adult staff will gauge the interest level of the youth, starting with the girls, and follow up with Ammala about scheduling.

Adult community partners present: 2 Rec Staff, 2 ISPN Staff, 4 ISPN Streetworkers, 2 Providence College professors, 2 Providence College students, 3 neighborhood residents, 1 Laos Community Center Staff

***Neighborhood youth was killed in a car accident early Friday morning. Anita was 18 years old and has a 3 year old son, Aiden. The wake and funeral will take place next Friday and Saturday, October 24 and 25 in Lowell, MA at New Temple 24 on Cambridge Street. A lot of youth are hurting and will want to attend the funeral, so transportation will need to be coordinated.

Thursday, October 9, 5-8PM

of youth present: 40-50

Summary of event: Streetworker Manager, Ajay Benton, confirmed with Karl on Wednesday that Rogers Rec will be closed this Thursday night due to Providence Schools being closed, a pre-scheduled evening meeting and a shortage of staff. Therefore, we held the Rec night at Davis Park again. Luckily the weather was warm. Lt. Jackvony was notified and police were present throughout the evening. Young people of all ages and from all different areas of Smith Hill were present. Youth mainly played basketball and hung out by the court and cars. Once it became dark, the basketball court

lights did not turn on. Organized football, baseball and cheerleading practices and games were also taking place in the park making it a lively evening. The other remaining park field lights went out promptly at 8PM, emptying the park. Karl has agreed that next week is his first week back to work and the Rec will be open and available on a weekly basis starting Thursday, October 16th.

Adult community partners present: 3 ISPN Staff, 7 ISPN Streetworkers, Providence College (2 professors and 3 students), 2 neighborhood residents, 2 police officers

Thursday, October 2, 6-9PM

of youth present: 40-50

Summary of event: On Wednesday, neighborhood resident, Mark Kravatz, happened to mention to the Councilman that the Rec had been closed for the past few weeks and the Councilman insisted upon it being open for us this week even though Karl is still out on sick leave. Large turnout for the first night back at the Rec (since August). Youth were very positive and happy to have a warm space to congregate. Mixed ages were in attendance (youth 1-25 years old). Youth mainly played basketball and socialized, with a variety of small and large games taking place. In small or individual conversations with adults present, some youth discussed issues at school, issues at home and health care problems, while other youth completed job training and food stamp applications. Providence College has generously committed to weekly pizza, indefinitely for now. There is some doubt as to whether or not the Rec will be available to us next Thursday (schools are closed that day – Oct.9).

Adult community partners present: 2 Rec Staff, 6 ISPN Staff, Providence College (1 professor and 3 students), 3 neighborhood residents, Councilman Terry Hassett

Thursday, May 29

{This session set the ground rules for rec. center participation and took place after the last general planning meeting.}

Karl started the evening verbally explaining the rules of the Rec. We then reiterated and wrote down those rules, asked the youth if they wanted to add anything else to the list, and then had everyone sign this list in agreement to it. The group then brainstormed the consequences for breaking these rules and wrote those down to be posted next to the rules. As youth trickled in throughout the rest of the evening, we explained the process and asked each person to sign their name in agreement. The rules and consequences decided upon are attached to this email. One of the youth has agreed to re-write these rules & consequences next week on nicer paper, with nicer handwriting so it can be posted each week.

We also brainstormed a list of things that youth would like to do or have available to them on Thursday nights. Throughout the rest of the evening, myself and a few others

continued to have conversations with youth in order to add to this list. The following is the list of needs that we all came up with:

- Movies & Popcorn
- Food in general: pizza, cake, noodles, drinks
- Art projects
- Jobs & job skills
- With food comes the need for: cups, plates, napkins, utensils, hot sauce
- Computers
- Basketball tournament (3-on-3 with referees)

Youth were responsive to setting rules, helping enforce them and to talking about some other things that can be done on Thursdays besides play basketball. The Institute, Rec, CDC, Providence College and Police Dept. were all present for part or all of the evening. It will be great to continue to have such support on future Thursdays!

{We picked up writing weekly updates in October}