

Rec Night Executive Summary

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The entire report, and much more background information about Rec Night, can be found at the following link:

<http://www.smithhillcdc.org/rec-night>

Rec Night is a collaborative, largely volunteer-run program designed to provide Smith Hill area youth, many of whom are gang-affiliated, with a safe, recreational environment one evening a week. The program began by targeting at-risk Laotian youth in Smith Hill, but has grown in scope and size over the past two years due to its great popularity. Rec Night seeks to encourage positive relationships with adults who can help the youth develop additional opportunities for personal and community growth.

Since March 2008, a committed core of team members and many equally committed volunteers have been working directly with the youth on Rec Night evenings. For the period covered in this report, the program's primary organizational partners were: *The Institute for the Study and Practice of Nonviolence (ISPN or Nonviolence Institute)*, *Providence College* and *Smith Hill Community Development Corporation* and the *Providence Department of Parks and Recreation*. A larger group of key stakeholders has also been involved in supporting this program at different levels. The team consists of members of local non-profit organizations, area schools, local political and law enforcement leaders, and neighborhood residents.

Descriptive data

The period of examination for this report is from approximately January 2009 through August 2009. During this span, the Rec Night program was held on Monday evenings from 6-9pm. In the summer it was held in Davis Park at the basketball court and during the school year it was held at the *Rogers Recreation Center*. The program was held 25 weeks during the 32 week cycle under current examination. Since the Recreation Center follows the school calendar, Monday holidays accounted for four of those missed weeks. The average attendance during this period was 65 youth and 11 adult volunteers, including on average two Recreation Department employees. *Providence College* provided food each week.

The activities engaged in during the Rec Night sessions included: ping pong, checkers, chess, foosball, basketball tournaments and break dancing. There was also a Rec Night logo design contest managed by one of the Providence College student volunteers. The winning logo was subsequently used for Rec Night T-shirts that produced in conjunction with the US Census Bureau's *US Census 2010* promotional efforts. An informal mathematics tutoring situation requested by one youth started during the summer and has continued to into 2010 attracting interest from a greater number of students. There was also a large and successful cookout to celebrate the last Recreation Center session before summer sponsored by the Recreation Department. Rec Night is a also valuable venue for engagement of program participants beyond the three-hour sessions, though progress in

this area has been inconsistent. Program administrators actively seek opportunities to introduce other groups and resources to Rec Night youth. See report of examples.

Evaluation

Youth Survey Data

As an integral part of this report, a random selection of 50 participants of the Rec Night program completed a Youth Survey that posed a range of questions designed to measure the impact of the program on their behavior, attitudes and feelings of connectedness to others and the broader neighborhood. The survey was created and administered by *Providence College* Professor Joe Camarillo. Table A illustrates the results of individual questions by percentage.

Table A - Rec Night Youth Survey Responses by Percentage

	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
I feel safer at the Rec Night program than I do on nights when it isn't available	86	13	38	49	9	4	
I enjoy the chance to play basketball on Rec Nights	94	6	62	32	4	2	
One of the reasons I come to Rec Night is for the pizza	35	65	13	22	47	18	
Going to Rec Night makes me feel more connected to neighborhood	86	13	36	50	11	2	
Police presence at Rec Night makes me feel safe	73	27	29	44	20	7	
The police who come to Rec Night probably have a better opinion of us than they did before	84	16	24	60	7	9	
I do not think the police need to be present at every Rec Night, but only when there is a good reason for it.	63	37	20	43	35	2	
I feel like I can talk to adults who are at Rec Night if I wanted to do so	85	15	40	45	13	2	
The presence of the Nonviolence Institute is something I like	93	6	37	56	4	2	
As a result of going to the program, I sometimes "think twice" before doing something I know is wrong	89	11	35	54	9	2	
Having Rec Night makes me feel like someone in the neighborhood cares about my friends and me	94	6	39	55	6	0	
I want a bigger variety of things to do at the recreation program	70	29	34	36	23	6	
It would be better if basketball games were more structured	87	14	40	47	7	7	
I think the program is better when there is a good mix of people from different parts of the neighborhood	87	12	30	57	6	6	
It would be nice to have something to eat other than pizza	73	27	43	30	23	4	

IV Conclusion:

Rec Night youth, adult volunteers, local law enforcement and neighborhood stakeholders all seem to be in agreement that the program is worthwhile. The results of the Youth Survey suggest that the Rec Night program is valued by the participants, has a positive impact on their behavior and increases their feelings of connectedness to positive role models and the community. The views expressed by program youth and adult participants are all consistent with the view that there is a great need for more resources available to the youth reached through the program. Rec Night attempts to address this “resource” gap for Smith Hill youth through a recreational event that is both preventative and interventionist in nature. As a constantly evolving program, there are also some concerns and issues that must be worked through in order to ensure the quality and safety of the program.

Program Goals

Short and Medium range goals:

- Scheduling
 - Continue to work with partners to address scheduling conflicts with Monday holidays and school vacation at the Rec Center.
 - Find other suitable neighborhood in-door locations for program expansion
- Continue to address the structure of the sessions in order to improve safety for all involved
 - Continue to define rules for participants and volunteers.
 - Implement and enforce rules for sign-in and backpacks
 - Continue to enforce Red Card/Yellow Card system in order to address behavioral issues during session
 - Implement volunteer roles and responsibilities
- Program Development
 - Continue bi-weekly planning meetings
 - Increase access to tutoring
 - Work on programming for females, especially at Davis Park
 - Add variety and opportunities during sessions
 - Develop a budget in order to seek funding for expansion of services

Long term Goals:

(Rooted in the Bureau of Criminal Justice’s Best Practices of Gang-Related Youth Programming cited earlier)

- Continue to develop collaborations with new partners and continue to deepen established partnerships

- Continue to pursue a “comprehensive” approach to the program that includes presenting opportunities for job training, civic involvement, homework help,
- Develop clear program goals and objectives of the program based on the needs of the youth and the community
- Improve program assessment capacity by exploring measurements of the program affect and by cultivating multiple sources of data collection

Current Work

At the time of this writing, Rec Night is experiencing a significant degree of careful attention. This is largely the result of the *Nonviolence Institute* adapting Rec Night as a pilot program in its youth services division. This designation provides the program with a legitimate organizational commitment for the first time. The former volunteer Rec Night coordinator now has a title associated directly with the program - Program Assistant with ISPN’s Youth Development and Rec Night now falls under the purview of its Youth Development Director.

Over the last three months, all the core team members have increased their commitment to Rec Night in the form of bi-weekly planning meetings at the *Smith Hill CDC*. In addition, recently the *Providence Department of Parks and Recreation* has agreed to be part of this core team and become full participants in the planning meeting.

This increased level of organizational support is a cause for great optimism as the program continues to evolve and grow in scale. However, the strength of the Rec Night program has always been and will continue to be the individual youth participants and adults volunteers, whether neighborhood residents, students or law enforcement officers, who contribute their time, expertise, and care to this unique and important community building initiative.