
Kid's Kamp in Indianapolis, Indiana¹

Presenter:

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Background

In 1993 Indy Parks and Recreation recognized a need to provide summer day camps for inner-city youth. The goal of the camps was to develop an affordable recreational opportunity for youth (ages 4-12), to provide structured programming, and services at a lower cost per day than was currently being charged. Four- to six-year-old youth and six- to 12-year-old youth were served separately to facilitate offering age appropriate activities.

Program Description

For summer 1994, Kids' Kamp was offered in 11 different communities, and efforts were made to improve the camp program through building partnerships and creating special events. The program's objectives were to:

- (1) Provide quality programming to serve the specific needs of individual communities.
- (2) Increase the number of volunteers who are more actively involved in camp programming.
- (3) Improve the marketing strategy.

This was accomplished through development of a brochure which was distributed at schools, neighborhood family centers, and door-to-door in selected areas. Door-to-door marketing was deemed essential to overcome people's tendency not to read mail-delivered brochures. After

consulting with local neighborhood associations and area churches about which areas to target, staff went door-to-door, talked to people about the camp, informed people about the pricing structure and available scholarships, and solicited volunteers. The usual target areas were the six blocks in all directions from a local Kids' Kamp site. In addition, a special television spot was also developed along with a Kids' Kamp coupon for parents who could not afford the basic cost of the camp and needed to have their children attend at a discount.

- (4) Keep the price of the camps affordable for inner city youth.

In 1993 the Kids' Kamp fee was \$1 per day with a ratio of 1 staff member to 20 campers. In 1994, the fee was raised to \$2 per day and the staff member-to-camper ratio was lowered to 1:12. Through the development of a work-relation program around the family centers, youth were able to earn money to pay for camp. Twenty-five percent of the campers were subsidized.

- (5) Add additional structure and value to the camps.

Theme weeks, sporting tournaments, and arts and crafts were added. Sporting events included softball tournaments, flag football and track and field meets. Examples of theme weeks are:

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- Week 1-Hip Hop Hooray
- Week 2-Let's Get Busy
- Week 3-Around the World in Five Days
- Week 4-Stars and Stripes
- Week 5-Express Yourself
- Week 6-Summer Olympic Fest
- Week 7-Love Our Earth
- Week 8-Championship Week

(6) Provide leadership training for staff.

Summer seasonal and full-time staff took part in a four-day camp training orientation. Training emphasized:

- (a)recreational site rules and policies dealing with unsupervised sites, staff in uniform, and the need to walk the grounds daily for hazards;
- (b)safety information, including how to handle injuries, administer medication, file accident reports, and undertake maintenance of the facilities. All staff were certified in CPR, learned how to handle situations involving blood, and how to administer medications; and
- (c)daily procedures including which sites were early drop-off points, opening and closing times for sites, weekly schedules for parents, and site staff meetings.

(7) Improve quality of management.

In order to hire better qualified staff and people who had an interest in recreation and youth, pay rates were increased from \$5 to \$6.50 per hour. Efforts also were made to recruit staff from local colleges and public school systems and to include individuals who had prior day camp experience.

(8) Build and expand collaborations with other youth-serving providers such as churches, local businesses, and local professional athletic teams.

Examples of partnerships that were established included: Sunshine Promotions which donated 800 Janet Jackson concert tickets in June 1994, Mayflower Bus Company which donated free transportation to the concert for the 800 youth; Indianapolis Indians (minor league baseball team) which gave away 10,000 free tickets; and St. Rita's Catholic Church and St. John the Baptist Church which together provided one meal for the campers at one site every day for the eight weeks.

Areas of Concern

The 1994 program was successful. However, its success created new challenges. More youth signed up for the camp than were originally anticipated. This created unacceptable ratios of campers to counselors and raised concerns among the parents about camper safety. These problems were addressed by hiring more staff. Due to the number of campers, transportation also became a major problem. Because the fleet of vans provided by Indy Parks was not sufficient, school buses had to be rented, and since funds were not available in the original budget, funding was provided by the Parks Foundation and other providers.

Program Outcomes

In 1994 Kids' Kamp participation increased from 13,000 to 42,000 camper days (approximately 700 children per week). At the same time revenue increased from \$14,000 to \$48,000. The program was able to provide a well-rounded, positive recreational and educational experience to the youth of Indianapolis. End of year surveys showed that 98% of the parents and children rated Indy Parks Kids' Kamp as excellent, with affordability and quality of programming considered to be the best benefits.

Future Directions

Specific goals for the program in the future include:

- Better staff training.
- Stronger partnerships with the Police Athletic League, Indianapolis Public Schools, and neighborhood groups.
- A stronger marketing campaign. The Kids' Kamp marketing campaign began the first week in January with reminder cards mailed out by March 1, and a Kamp brochure mailed out by April 1. A collaborative partnership with two major radio stations was established to promote the Kamp.
- Additional training for full-time staff through off-season seminars and workshops.