
KIDCO After-school and Summer Recreation Program in Tucson, Arizona¹

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Background

We know what causes gangs and juvenile crime and youth violence-poverty, broken families, poor or no role models, abuse, stress, hopelessness. We've provided all the ingredients-our 'Field of Nightmares.' We built it. They came. We shouldn't be surprised.

The Presidio of *San Agustin del Tuquison* was founded as an outpost of Spanish conquest in 1775. What is now Tucson, Arizona, recorded its first homicides less than seven years later. A citizen, a soldier, and eight Apaches died as a result of what could be called Tucson's first turf war.

Just over two centuries later the "Old Pueblo" was rocked by turf wars between street tribes with a capacity for senseless violence that would have confused both the Conquistadors and Apaches. And this time, sadly, it was kids killing kids.

Only 4% of the population of Pima County, Arizona, lives outside the greater metropolitan Tucson area. Between 1991 and 1992, Pima County Juvenile Court records indicated that murder or attempted murder by juveniles rose by 340%, aggravated assault was up 94%, robbery climbed 42%, and rape increased 100%. A local newspaper's youth survey showed 27% of teens

feared being a victim of violence at school. Though Tucson's economy was improving, 22% of families and 32% of children in the city were living under the poverty level. By January 1993 Tucson police had identified 72 distinct gangs operating in the city. They estimated that more than 100 gangs actually existed with 7,000 gang members and between 3,000 and 5,000 "wannabes." Approximately 10% of Pima County youth between the ages 5 and 17 were gang members or displaying gang leanings. As a result, Tucson Mayor George Miller declared his determination to make Tucson a "child friendly city."

In January 1993, NBC *Dateline* ran a segment about latchkey children that featured a Tucson single mother who was forced to leave her children home alone while she worked a minimum wage job. This unflattering national publicity, together with rising gang activity and youth violence, helped focus community interest on what city manager Michael F. Brown described as the generation of "least parented children in United States history."

KIDCO Program

KIDCO, an existing, free after-school and summer recreation program for elementary-school-age youth, was begun in 1989 and served fewer than

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600 participants. By 1992 the summer program served almost 1,500 children at 12 sites, running for eight weeks, five days a week, three hours a day. The after-school program, also at 12 sites, ran 24 weeks, four days a week and two and a half hours a day, and served 1,800 children. When city council and the residents of Tucson chose to support the mayor and make Tucson a child friendly city, one of the programs they selected for additional funding (\$500,000) was KIDCO. In summer 1993, KIDCO expanded to 29 sites for six hours a day, five days a week during its eight-week season, and served 2,300 children. Beginning that fall the program ran from school dismissal time until 6 p.m. at all locations on all school days.

The expansion continues. In 1994 KIDCO operated summer programs at 40 locations and the after-school program was organized at 27 sites during the fall semester. The summer program enrolled 4,000, the after-school program 2,500.

Objectives of the program are:

- (1) to provide a free program for children who have completed kindergarten through sixth grade;
- (2) to provide a safe, comfortable place for children, after school and in the summer;
- (3) to provide an opportunity for kids to express themselves through various art forms, sports, and special events;
- (4) to provide a place to practice physical fitness, experience healthy alternatives, and learn respect for the body;
- (5) to provide an environment to promote self-esteem, encourage listening and caring, learn stress release, and reinforce positive values;
- (6) to provide an opportunity to develop varied interests, to practice recreational skills, and to experience positive use of leisure time;
- (7) to encourage time for friendships;
- (8) to discourage drug and alcohol use and promote healthy life choices;
- (9) to provide an opportunity for college students, and other citizens in the part-time work force, to develop and enhance important work skills, get job experience, and earn a salary as employees of the program;
- (10) to provide an opportunity for teens to develop job skills and awareness of child development through a teen volunteer program;
- (11) to provide an opportunity for other agencies to offer their programs in conjunction with KIDCO; and
- (12) to expand days and hours of coverage, develop programming for kindergartners, and, where possible, provide an alternative to latchkey situations in the city of Tucson.

Key Players

Tucson Parks and Recreation Schools' Unit produces KIDCO in collaboration with the Arizona Commission on the Arts, Asarco, Children's Television Resource and Education Center, Girl Scouts of America, Heartsprings Inc., Metropolitan Tucson Family Resource and Wellness Centers, Our Town Family Center Inc., Pascua Yaqui Tribe, Pima County Interfaith Council, Primera Alta Consortium, Southern Arizona Ranchers, Tucson Cable TV Company, Tucson Fire Department, Tucson Police Department, Tucson Water Department, University of Arizona Department of Education, YMCA, and three of the city's school districts-Amphitheater, Sunnyside, and Tucson Unified.

Program Planning

In May 1992 Tucson's mayor and council held a joint study session with the Pima County Interfaith Council (PCIC) regarding PCIC's concerns about the city's services for children and youth. Areas of concern included children's needs for constructive recreational opportunities and skill building. It was recommended that free and low-cost after-school and summer recreation programs for youth be expanded.

KIDCO is usually located in neighborhood schools and is designed to offer varied recreational and leisure activities in a safe, comfortable environment. Children are offered a wide range of leisure time experiences -physical fitness; sports; arts; crafts; values, self-esteem building; self-respect, listening and caring skills; acceptable stress release; social skills; friendship; cooperation; and creative expression. Perhaps most important is that participants have fun.

No two KIDCO sites are identical. A typical school-year program begins at dismissal time with children checking in at the cafeteria or multipurpose room where the KIDCO program is located. Children are supervised by staff at all times. Children are normally gathered for a brief meeting for announcements, attendance, and a rules review. Groups are formed by age, ability, and shared interests for participation in preplanned activities which occur both indoors and outdoors. Groups are rotated every 30 to 45 minutes. The same activity may be offered to all groups but revised so that it is age or ability appropriate. The last half-hour of the day is normally a supervised, indoor clean-up and free-play time to facilitate parents coming to pick up the children.

Summer programming typically operates for six hours a day and may begin as early as 6 a.m. or as late as noon. Starting times reflect an effort to best

serve neighborhood and parent needs. The summer format is similar to the school-year program, employing age-appropriate rotations. Tucson's summer climate requires adjustments. Most outdoor activities occur early in the morning or late in the afternoon depending on weather conditions. Many schools offer additional space which allows for an increased range of indoor activities. Breakfast and lunch are provided free to needy children at qualified summer sites. The range of activities is at least as varied as during the school year.

KIDCO strives to adapt to community needs. In one instance, efforts to implement the program at a Native-American village failed until consultations with the village council resulted in tailoring the program to the site's unique cultural situation. Staff from the village were hired, trained, and encouraged to adapt the program to the location.

Another adaptation was "KIDCO in the Mall" which operated from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the El Con indoor shopping mall during the summer of 1994. An area once housing a decorative fountain was converted into a day camp for up to 60 children per day. Activities had to be modified and scaled to available facilities, but the program was both successful and popular.

Community interest and support has resulted in many special enhancements to the programs. Numerous partnerships, grants, training, and subprograms have been developed. The Arizona Commission on the Arts awarded an artist's residency to three sites. A cable TV corporation awarded a grant for participants to write and produce a video. Three school districts and one mall provide facilities at no cost. The Children's Television Resource and Education Center selected KIDCO to pilot their "Getting Along After School" program. Working with the YMCA, staff were trained to deliver the "On the Right Track" drug prevention program. An intramural sports program was implemented in conjunction with the school districts at two elementary schools. In cooperation with police and fire departments, many sites hold bike rodeos or participate in a citywide Safe Kid Bicycle event. Several behavioral health organizations provide training and staff counseling in behavioral modification techniques. When a \$1.6 million Department of Education grant was received by the school districts, \$135,000 was designated to enhance KIDCO at two sites.

Library-trained staff are provided with materials (including 150 books per site) so all children can participate in a summer reading program. School districts provide participants in low-income schools with free breakfast and/or lunch (Summer 1994-72,420 breakfasts and 132,840 lunches). Many

agencies visit sites as guest speakers or presenters. The Girl Scouts provide materials for their "T. J. the D. J." programs. The city water department trained staff and printed material for an environmental education program. At one site near campus, the University of Arizona offered a bilingual lab, taught by university graduate students. All these partnerships have enhanced KIDCO programming at no additional cost to the city of Tucson or to the families who participate.

Recreation versus Day Care

The program is planned to be recreation, not childcare. In reality, however, the type of programming offered probably is not very different, but the intention in emphasizing recreation is to establish a different philosophical approach. According to program organizers:

When you tell someone you provide childcare they usually think you're giving them the politically correct term for babysitting. Recreation, on the other hand, indicates you're doing more than just watching kids. We try to convey the idea that we're involving them in important and enriching character building activities that also happen to be fun.

Our staff know we're hiring them as something more than babysitters. The kids come expecting to do and learn things, not just hang out. Parents are shown they're not just leaving their children with babysitters, but in the hands of recreation personnel. When we have to discuss significant behavioral problems, the distinction between childcare and recreation occasionally buys us a parent's cooperation instead of blame.

Staffing

Each KIDCO site is staffed with a recreation assistant (site leader) and recreation workers at the ratio of one staff person to not more than 20 participants. A typical school-year site has one recreation assistant and two recreation workers serving 60 participants. An additional worker is added to handle a typical summer program site with 80 participants. These staff are noncivil service, part-time, seasonal workers. They are expected to be certified in CPR and first-aid. Paid staff are supplemented with teen volunteers provided through Tucson Parks and Recreation's Teen program where they are screened and monitored. Occasionally, other volunteers are provided through the city's Civics program.

Paid staff are selected for their experience and aptitude and are trained by civil service

administrators. Two expanded-program, year-round school sites are currently staffed with part-time civil service recreation assistants. The school's unit consists of a supervisor, six to eight coordinators who administer up to eight sites each, and the site staffs mentioned above.

Turnover at the site staff level is higher than desired because of the limited hours and wages available. KIDCO takes advantage of the young, but highly skilled work force available through students at the University of Arizona and Pima Community College, as well as parents reentering the work force and individuals recommended by schools and neighborhoods.

Site leaders are paid \$5.94 an hour and staff \$5.37. The wages are comparable with other local school-age care providers, but are below the level necessary to attract and retain committed professionals, so staff turnover is a significant problem. With staff costs the largest expense of the program, the current pay rates allow service to be extended to a larger segment of the community; however, the low salaries may adversely impact program quality. Tucson is firmly committed to the goals of the Wellesley College and the Dewitt Wallace Reader's Digest's *Making the Most of Out-of-School-Time (M.O.S.T.) Initiative* aimed at professionalizing school-age children's services. For example, site leader salaries have been raised at two of the year-round schools to civil service status at \$7.64 an hour with benefits.

Marketing

KIDCO, a free program, is understandably popular and receives much word-of-mouth advertising. Tucson Parks and Recreation produces a quarterly class and program guide which provides information on sites, registration procedures, activities, and numbers to call for further details. The guide is delivered via the Sunday *Arizona Daily Star* newspaper (circulation over 175,000) and is made available at all recreation sites, libraries, and other city offices. Fliers are distributed at each site in advance of registration. Site newsletters regularly advise parents of program information. Tucson newspapers provide reports on the availability of children's programs to their reading public. Local TV and radio stations occasionally feature KIDCO in their news coverage.

Cost to Participants

Fees are not charged to participants because program personnel believe that the absence of this revenue stream enables more resources to be leveraged from

other partners, thus permitting the program to do more for less. By not charging, a number of significant costs are curbed or eliminated. For example, since the city does not charge for KIDCO, the school districts are willing to contribute their facilities. Being free also leads to other contributed program enhancements, e.g., local behavioral health organizations help train staff and work to mediate health problems. Girl Scouts of America and 4-H, among others, offer no-cost programming at KIDCO sites. Private industries invite groups and conduct educational tours for no charge. Staff believe that many of these services would not be free if the program was not free to the community.

By not charging fees, the program is also able to eliminate the infrastructure necessary to collect fees. No personnel are needed to determine who pays what, calculate partial costs, or give refunds. Cash does not need to be handled at sites and bad check problems do not arise. The program administrator noted: "In our circumstances, we've decided the hidden costs of charging for services are just too expensive."

In addition, by not charging a fee, the program is not subject to childcare licensing standards-things like space requirements (so many square feet per child), and restroom locations. As a free program, KIDCO is able to use school facilities that are already deemed adequate for children's use.

Finally, KIDCO employees are not subjected to expensive background checks, health testing, or registering with an oversight agency. However, all staff who work with children are fingerprinted. While these savings may appear to avoid safeguards that protect the children, the interviewing and hiring process is designed to carefully screen applicants and the program is designed to prevent opportunities for staff to be alone with children. Additionally, workers are carefully monitored by site leaders and program coordinators.

Financing and Resource Acquisition

KIDCO is funded from city of Tucson revenues and is supplemented with grants from several agencies. The direct service cost of KIDCO sites has been calculated at \$25,000 for a school-year site and \$10,000 for a summer site. In 1995 Tucson plans to staff 28 school-year sites and 41 summer sites at a total program cost of \$1.1 million. KIDCO's summer cost per child per day is under \$4, while the after-school cost per child per day is less than \$3. The following is a partial breakdown of these costs:

Salaries:

Program Administration	\$181,000
Office/Warehouse Staff	25,000
Summer Site Staff	221,000
School-Year Site Staff	335,000
Additional Coverage for Year -round Schools	15,000
Staff Orientations (minimum)	19,000
Drivers	17,000
Specialists	8,000
Special Events	<u>11,000</u>
	\$832,000

Site Equipment and Supplies:

School Year	\$70,000
Summer	<u>72,000</u>
	\$142,000

Administrative Costs and Supplies \$126,000

Total \$1,100,000

Measurement of Program Outcome**Impact on Crime**

Early indications were positive. Youth crime declined 52% in the summer of 1993 compared to the summer of 1992. Unfortunately, that trend did not hold for the whole year. Overall, youth arrests rose 17% between 1992 and 1993. In 1994 youth arrests were up 14% from 1993, which is higher than the 11% increase which the city was averaging at the start of the decade.

Pima County's youth crime statistics are compiled for those ages 8-17. Most crimes are committed by youths at the higher end of this age group. For instance, in 1994 only 5% of arrests in Pima County were of children ages 8-11. While 77% were 14 or over. Thus, most juvenile crime is committed by youth who are older than the KIDCO target groups, which is first through sixth grade (ages 6-12).

Tucson Police Department records indicate arrests of children ages 5-13 rose from 1989 through 1993, but at a decreasing rate—8%, 6%, 4%, and 1%, then fell 2% in 1994. Five- through 13-year-old victims of crime increased dramatically, 30% between 1989 and 1990, but they have fallen every year since by 0.3%, 5%, 4%, and 0.5%. These trends do not neatly correspond to KIDCO's expansion, but they do relate to the period when the city was exhibiting growing awareness of this problem and beginning efforts, like KIDCO, to address it.

Survey Data

More than 400 survey forms were returned from parents and guardians of summer 1994 participants. When asked to rate the program's quality, 61% called it excellent, 32% said good, while 8% indicated it was average. When parents were asked what changes they would like to see in the program, the most common answer was more hours every day, more sites, more weeks, more field trips, and more meals at more sites.

Some questions were raised about inexperienced, intolerant or inattentive staff. On the other hand, staff also received unsolicited praise: "Staff did a super job" and "staff exceptional" were typical of these comments. Parents were almost universally supportive of the program as a whole.

"This program is the best a child could have...it keeps them active and away from trouble," one said. "A wonderful program," was repeated over and over again, and, we "hope it continues."

Access to Additional Funding

Another measure of the program's success is the amount of additional money and interest which it has generated. The Mayor and Council increased the cost of each round of golf by \$1 to benefit youth programs, adding another \$400,000 to Tucson Parks and Recreation's budget. The 1994-95 budget was increased an additional \$1,600,000 for youth programs. The city manager appointed a task force to consider solutions to youth problems. The Pima County Board of Supervisors approved \$1,900,000 for youth programs. The City of Tucson held a successful \$265 million bond election in May 1994 part of which was designated for recreation facilities.

The program has received national recognition. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) selected Tucson's KIDCO program as one of 20 for a comprehensive study that highlighted successful agencies and facilities addressing community social issues. Of KIDCO and Orange County Florida's "Rec and Roll," Tice and Tindall (1994) said: "These programs epitomize the innovative spirit of recreation and park services and their essential niche within the community." The National Park Service has awarded Tucson Parks and Recreation an Urban Parks and Recreation Renewal Grant to produce manuals which will allow other locations to reproduce KIDCO.

What are some of the things that KIDCO is doing differently from other agencies which offer summer and after-school programming? First, there is a strong partnership with Tucson's schools. In

nearly every instance, KIDCO operates in school facilities. Without them KIDCO either would not exist or would be very different in size and scope. Being in neighborhood schools means serving children in convenient and familiar locations. While programs are not offered in all of Tucson's schools, KIDCO has targeted the neighborhoods where poverty, crime, and other negative factors combine to put kids who live there most at-risk. Staff feel that if they were limited to city neighborhood and recreation centers, nothing approaching the same level of service and impact could be achieved. Initially, some principals were not thrilled at an outside agency using their schools, but the enthusiastic response of children, parents, and the community has converted nearly all into ardent supporters.

At a time when tax dollars are hard to come by and support for further government spending is down, Tucson has bucked the national trend for the good of its children and supported a program that works.

References

Tice, R. D. & Tindall, B. (1994). *Beyond fun and games: Emerging roles of public recreation*. Arlington, VA: National Recreation and Park Association.