
Youth Recreation Program Housing Sites in Boulder, Colorado¹

Presenter:

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Background

City of Boulder, Colorado, Public Housing has 485 units, with 67% of the households headed by a single female and 258 children between the ages of 5 and 18. Seventy-two percent of the residents are Caucasian, and 21% Hispanic. Boulder County has an additional 53 units^{85%} headed by a single female, 55% of the residents Caucasian, 40% Hispanic. These families have 91 children between the ages of 5 and 18.

In the fall of 1991 the Resident Representative Council of the Housing Authority of the city of Boulder conducted a resident needs assessment. The results identified youth issues as the area of greatest concern among residents. Of those who responded, 55% considered unsupervised children a major problem, while 30% cited drug use among teens as an additional problem needing to be addressed. Subsequent interviews with residents indicated a perception among the youth that they had nowhere to go and nothing to do. As a result, petty theft, vandalism, physical conflicts, smoking, and substance abuse were becoming increasingly prevalent.

These results prompted a collaborative effort between residents and staff of the city housing authority, Boulder County housing authority, and Boulder parks and recreation to develop a program that would provide positive recreation alternatives for youth. In 1992 a Youth Sports grant was received through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban

Development to create the Youth Recreation Program (YRP); a second grant was received in 1994.

Since an abundance of recreation resources are in the Boulder area, program designers decided to avoid “reinventing the wheel” by creating unnecessary and unproductive competition with existing programs. Thus, programming efforts focused on establishing partnerships between the two housing authorities and three different youth-serving organizations: Boulder Parks and Recreation, Boulder YMCA, and the Boulder Chapter of the Sierra Club/Inner City Outings program. Other partnerships and collaborations have subsequently been formed, providing public housing youth the opportunity to participate in a wide range of recreation pursuits.

Program

Goal

The overall goal of the Youth Recreation Program is to increase resistance to substance abuse and other negative behaviors among public housing authority youth living in the city and county. Program objectives are:

- (1) to develop a youth recreation program based on partnership and collaboration with existing recreation resources throughout the community, thus maximizing the beneficial impact on the youth while minimizing duplication of effort;
- (2) to offer programs that will address the various needs of the youth, including their physical, emotional, and interpersonal needs; and

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- (3) to expand the horizons and knowledge of the youth participants and their families.

Program Management and Supervision

The management and supervision roles of each of the major sponsoring agencies are as follows:

City of Boulder Housing Authority

- (a) To receive grant funds and serve as grant administrator.
- (b) To monitor program for adherence to funding conditions and restrictions. Liaison to grantor (HUD Regional Office, Rocky Mountain West).
- (c) To provide outreach assistance to city public housing sites.
- (d) To serve in an advisory capacity to YRP coordinator.

Boulder County Housing Authority

- (a) To provide outreach assistance to county public housing sites.
- (b) To serve in an advisory capacity to YRP coordinator.

Boulder Parks and Recreation

- (a) To oversee program planning and implementation process.
- (b) To house and supervise YRP coordinator position.
- (c) To coordinate billing procedures for program expenses.

Program Delivery

Delivery of recreation programs and services is accomplished through collaborative efforts between the Youth Recreation Program and many other agencies throughout the county. Currently the YRP has eight program areas that involve partnerships and collaborations with various individuals and community agencies:

- (a) *Park and Recreation Districts*-Three park and recreation districts are actively involved in offering youth programs: Boulder, Lafayette, and Louisville. Boulder and Louisville both give 50% discounts to YRP participants.
- (b) *Boulder YMCA*-The YMCA also offers a 50% discount for youth sports leagues and aquatics programs.
- (c) *Other Programs*-Many providers work with the YRP to offer more specialized programs, such as dance, theater, music instruction, and martial arts.

(d) *Summer Camps-Scholarships* to summer camp programs are offered through the YRP, and are often supplemented by the providers. Camp providers include park and recreation districts, YMCA camps, church camps, Salvation Army, Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts, and private camps.

(e) *Sierra Club/Inner City Outings*-Sierra Club volunteers plan and lead wilderness outings. Activities include cross-country skiing, camping, hiking, whitewater rafting, and canoeing. Outing equipment was purchased with YRP grant funds and is owned and maintained by the Sierra Club.

(f) *Mentor Program*-Partners in Prevention (PIP) is a program that was developed in collaboration with Boulder County Partners in order to provide adult mentors to the youth, most of whom live with single-parent mothers. The goal of PIP is the formation of 20 long-term adult/youth partnerships. Boulder County Partners matches YRP-referred youth with adult volunteers, and provides on-going counseling, training, recreation, and follow-up services in support of the participants.

(g) *Transportation Program* -----One of the drawbacks of utilizing existing programs is the need for transportation to and from activities. One approach utilized to address this issue is the provision of bus tokens to participants. Tokens are purchased from the Rural Transportation District which subsidizes 75% of the cost.

In addition, more than 30 youth have received bicycles donated by GO Boulder, the city's alternative transportation program. These bicycles were given away by random drawing, along with new helmets donated by LT Helmets. More recently, funds were received from the Boulder Police Department to purchase 20 brand-new mountain bikes from Morgul Bismark Bicycles which provided the bicycles at cost. Youth earned the bicycles by performing 20 hours of community service.

(h) *On-Site Activities Program*-This is a volunteer-led program at the housing sites. Volunteer teams of two per site, work with youth to plan, develop and implement on-site activities at regularly scheduled times. Examples include games, team sports, arts and crafts projects, and field trips.

Program Planning

Final program decisions are made during quarterly meetings of the Youth Recreation Program Advisory Council whose membership includes representatives from both city and county housing sites; staff representatives of both housing authorities and

Boulder Parks and Recreation; the YRP coordinator and her supervisor. The Council meets to review progress of the grant program, consider programming options, resolve issues related to program delivery and implementation, and set future program direction.

Karate is a good example of a program that YRP offers. Youth who want to get into martial arts have several options. The YRP coordinator explained:

They can take karate through the YMCA, or they can take it through parks and recreation. The kids that are very serious about it can go to a private martial arts studio. The studios have been very good about enrolling the kids and actually giving them free clothing. The kids move through the various levels of the program if they pass the requisite tests. And each time they have to go through the testing process, they come back to me, and I arrange to cover the costs. The program is really good for the kids who stick with it; they're really into it; and it's really turned their lives around.

One issue that has arisen when planning programs is whether to mainstream the housing authority youth when they participate in community programs, or to encourage the residents to take pride in who they are by having housing authority teams enter community leagues. At present this is a moot issue since the housing authority program does not have funding to staff the formation of its own team. The YRP coordinator stated:

There are advantages to mainstreaming in having residents get to know other kids and other types of people, and not feel like they're a special population. I had a mom call me in tears and say she could not tell the coach of a community team that her daughter was in public housing. So I had to find a way to pay for that without the coach knowing.

Liability

Another issue that arises is liability. Again, the program has formed collaborative arrangements to obtain the necessary coverage. In general, all of the activity providers must have their own insurance. For programs like outdoor adventure activities, the trip leaders are covered by the Sierra Club's insurance policies and the youth are covered by a supplemental policy. While rock climbing is not included, for other activities, the youth are covered from the time that they depart until the time they come back. The trip leaders are covered even if they transport the youth in their own vehicles.

Staffing

Currently only the recreation program coordinator is paid directly from the grant. The coordinator acts as a liaison between program providers, the two housing authorities, and public housing residents. The coordinator also monitors safety procedures, tracks program expenditures and participation numbers, performs process evaluations, recruits and trains volunteers, researches future funding sources, and documents the program's progress.

Although there is only one official staff person, there are several other key players within the program. The supervisor (a staff member of Boulder Parks and Recreation) of the coordinator provides general program oversight, as well as program support. The program administrator (a staff member of the Boulder Housing Authority) is responsible for fiscal management of the grant. Other support is received from secretarial, reception, and financial staff members. With the exception of the grant administrator, all staff support time is donated.

At present, training for volunteers is not organized; however, it needs to be. At present one of the volunteers has over 20 years experience and has been helping orient volunteers by providing information on how to deal with youth, and the types of activities and games they prefer. In the future the program staff hope to offer more comprehensive training on how to identify signs of abuse and neglect.

Outreach

Program outreach is accomplished in several ways. A YRP brochure, printed in both English and Spanish is distributed to all resident families and provides a general overview of program offerings. In addition, newsletters are mailed each quarter that describe upcoming events and activities. Meetings are held at least twice a year at each housing site to encourage youth to register for available programs and to distribute 20-punch passes to their local recreation centers. Individual flyers are developed for all special events and new programs.

Media coverage of the program has been fairly substantial. The program has been highlighted by a local radio station and was the subject of several articles in the local newspaper. In addition, a taped interview describing the program was frequently aired on the city's cable channel.

Financing and Resource Acquisition

The HUD grant requires that approximately 50% matching funds be provided from other sources. The matching amounts listed in the YRP budget represent in-kind contributions such as staff and volunteer time, subsidies for registration fees and transportation, workshop facilities, and office space and supplies.

The budget breakout is:

Grant Funds	\$124,748.00
Matching Contributions	<u>\$109,641.50</u>
Total Program Size	\$234,389.50

Measurement of Program Outcomes

The YRP has been able to reach over 60% of public housing youth at some level over its first two years. This includes participation in regular recreational programs, as well as wilderness outings, and use of the recreation centers. Participation numbers are tracked throughout the year and included in quarterly reports to HUD.

Anecdotal evidence of program success is gathered from interviews and written surveys of program participants and their families. Housing authority staff are also consulted to see if there are changes in the number of reports of vandalism and other on-site behavioral problems. Unsolicited comments from parents regarding the impact of the program on their children have also been received. Examples of such letters are shown in Exhibit 28A (page 260).

Evidence gathered so far indicates that incidents of problem behaviors on the sites are generally down. Parents comment that the opportunity for their children to participate in recreational activities provides a diversion from boredom, increases their self-esteem, and makes it easier for them to reject negative peer pressure. Residents are also more familiar with the recreation resources that are available to them and how to access those resources. Finally, participation in Sierra Club sponsored wilderness outings is helping youth and parents alike to develop an increasing appreciation for the outstanding natural resources of the Boulder area.

Exhibit 28A

Parent Letters

I just want to let you know how much I appreciate your program that is helping my kids get into sports and activities that I could not have been able to afford on my own. I see a big difference in my younger son-he is being consistent in going to his practices and games and his self-esteem has been boosted 100%! He has stayed out of trouble for the whole time he was in basketball!! It is very encouraging, and now he wants to join baseball, football, and so on. It is great. It is so good for him, he will probably keep the experience with him all his life! Please don't stop helping kids like mine because it does do a world of good.

I would like to thank you for helping my kids get into sports when I would never have been able to afford it myself. I am a single mom and the cost for sports is way more than what I could afford. But I want to tell you how it has helped my son James so much! I would have felt so bad if he had wanted to join all these sports and I couldn't get him in. It has improved his attitude 100%. He makes friends easier, does better in school, and all around feels better about himself. I can tell!! It's wonderful-first you helped us with basketball (I think) then with baseball and weight lifting. Now he's into football and wants to continue year round with all the sports. I am so proud of him and he has gained respect from other boys his age. Your program is invaluable (at least for us), and I hope you continue because for at least one child you helped, it is worth it. Thank you so much!