

Amber Alberta
Report #2
Camp Ace Summer 2010 Program

Personal Reflection-

During our Camp ACE summer program we were able to work with very low-income, at-risk youth and provide them with the some of the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in future employment and academic opportunities. My main goal for this summer was to help equip these youth with what they needed to exit the cycles of poverty and juvenile crime that is so apparent in this community. I am happy with the setup of our summer program because were able to provide this help to at-risk youth while simultaneously providing much needed educational help and therapeutic outlets through recreation to low-income elementary and middle school aged children, many of whom are struggling greatly in school. Through helping to provide this form of enrichment to the younger children, I saw a sense of empowerment in the youth workers and volunteers while they simultaneously learned very valuable job and life skills.

Activities-

According to TIME Magazine, during the summer months “high- income kids keep up the pace during the summer while lower-income kids plateau or lose ground” (Von Drehle, pg. 39, 2010) A study showed that high-income students raised their reading comprehension test scores by 46.6 points while low- income students’ reading comprehension scores, not only failed to increase, but decreased by 1.9 points. Many of the children in the community in which I work already struggle significantly in New Orleans public schools, many of which are classified as “failing schools.” These children come from extremely low-income families, creating a critical need to provide them with academic enrichment along with other forms of learning while they are out of school.

During our summer 2010 program at Camp ACE we were able to provide academic instruction to 35 elementary and middle school aged children. These young students, along with youth participants, also benefited from cultural enrichment and therapeutic recreation activities, such as swimming and other sports, visits to museums, parks and other outdoor activities. Without this program, most of these children and youth would not have been a part of any form of summer enrichment. Thanks to our ability to provide this enrichment program, these students now have more of a chance of returning to school on a more “even playing field” with their peers of other higher income groups.

Scholarships: The Importance of Free (Food)-

Thanks to the generous donation from the Sunshine Lady Foundation, all of the children, who come from very low-income families, were able to attend out summer program free of charge. This was critical because most of these families would not have been able to afford the enrollment fee. It also allowed us to serve far more children. In

addition every child and youth received free breakfast, snack and lunch every day. This was also imperative because this student demographic receives free and reduced lunch at school, meaning the summer months often create financial strain for these families who are used to having free meals for their children.

At-Risk Youth-

Although I taught a summer school class of First Grade students, my main role and focus with the Camp ACE Summer Program was with our youth workers and volunteers. I helped lead a group of five youth workers from the “Job One” program. I provided Job Training Workshops with youth workers (job readiness, work ethics, job skills, etc.) before our summer program began with the elementary and middle school children. I continued to lead these youth to influence positive work habits, which in turn led to a more constructive work environment in our program. The collaboration with the JOB One program was extremely helpful because it enabled the youth to receive a paycheck for assisting with the summer school and for taking part in job skills education. This was great because it equipped the youth with skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in the future, while also helping them financially.

In addition to the Job One youth, I was able to recruit several youth volunteers from the community. These youth assisted the summer school instructors and helped the adults to manage the behavior and safety of the younger students. The participation of the youth volunteers was helpful and important on multiple levels. The other staff members and I greatly benefited from their assistance and the youth were able to participate and help in a constructive way while learning important job and interpersonal skills and taking pride in their ability to help and act as adults. Efforts like this are especially important for this population of youth, many of whom spend their time out of school on the street, participating in destructive behavior when they are not presented with a more positive option. Many of these youth now possess the skills and knowledge necessary to find a paying job for next summer.

Sustainability, Future Plans-

The sustainability created as a result of these efforts is twofold. For one, youth workers and volunteers gained skills and knowledge that will help them succeed in the future. Also, the elementary and middle school aged children received the academic enrichment necessary for them to not fall behind their peers by the time they return to school in the fall. Secondly, the repairs that we were able to make to the Camp ACE education building have allowed for the reimplementation of critical educational services in this community, in which these efforts are very badly needed. Although funds are extremely limited for my work in this community, the use of this building alone will allow for the provision of very badly needed services in this area.

I recently organized a GED program, which I am running and teaching myself. The High School dropout rates in New Orleans are extremely high. In low-income communities such as the Seventh Ward, many people are still struggling to simply return home. If families are able to do so in these neighborhoods, they are often then presented

with an extreme dearth of resources, with hospitals, schools and other important services that have not re-opened, five years after Katrina. Students who drop out of high school and attempt to join a GED program are often put on very long waiting lists, because these types of programs are extremely limited in these communities. Without a job or a high school diploma, many of these youth turn to destructive and illegal activities, hence the extremely high rates of juvenile crime and incarceration in New Orleans. Although I currently do not have any funds to use for this program, I am going to begin teaching a GED class to at-risk youth in the 7th Ward and surrounding communities. I have also begun recruitment for this program with adults who wish to gain their GED and find better employment opportunities. In addition to providing GED instruction, preparation and one-on-one help, I am going to conduct job skills workshops to my program constituents in order to help prepare them for positive employment opportunities and financial stability. I am currently searching for funds for material costs, transportation and food and snacks for my students (food often serves as a strong incentive for low-income students to attend a program such as this).

It is due to the generous help from JJCF that I have been able to serve as a full-time volunteer with Camp ACE and put these programs, in a community in which they are so badly needed, into motion.

Works Cited:

Von Drehle, David. "The Case Against Summer Vacation." TIME Magazine. August 2, 2010: 36-42.