

## **PacifiCorp Foundation Learning Project Update**

The Acme organization received funding from the PacifiCorp Foundation in March to implement our Learning Project academic skills program in all areas of Acme through staff training and development of innovative program ideas. More specifically, we wanted to increase the number of kids using our Learning Center after school to do their homework, and to train our program staff to look for “teachable moments” in other areas of the program. The goal is to create a “Culture of Success” where kids feel positive about school and about learning in general.

The Education Coordinator came to our facility for a day of staff training in July. He provided many “real life” examples to show how his organization implemented Learning Project, which was very beneficial. Following that presentation, we began to hold staff meetings on a regular basis to discuss specific examples of “teachable moments” and to solve problems that created barriers to learning. We find that these staff meetings generate a lot of ideas to make learning fun for kids and keep our staff focused on learning activities.

During August, three of our senior program staff attended the annual Regional Youth Development Conference. These staff members had an opportunity to attend in-depth Learning Project training, and brought back lots of great ideas to share with others here. Prior to the start of the school year, we also purchased enough “Back Pocket Program Guides” for all staff members to have a copy. These guides provide on-the-spot ideas for staff to take advantage of opportunities to reinforce academic skills. Sample pages are attached to this report for your information.

During October, the Executive Director of the parent organization came to our facility to teach our staff about managing learning opportunities in the Games Room. We find our more motivated children are likely to use the Learning Center to do their homework after school; it is the kids who linger in the Games Room we really need to reach. In addition, we attended a regional mentoring conference sponsored by the Collaborative Project to learn about effective mentoring strategies, including real-life examples of what works and what doesn't. We are working with staff at the Community College to finalize a mentoring model and program for youth in our community.

As the result of Learning Project training, Games Room training, and regular brainstorming sessions, our staff has implemented many wonderful program ideas since we received the PacifiCorp Foundation support including:

Middle School Summer Camps ... in the past, all the summer camps offered were sport focused. This summer, we added Photography & Technology, Art & Culture, Science & The Outdoors, and Adventures to appeal to kids interested in other areas. These camps were popular and successful, and included great field trips. We look forward to building on our success for next year.

The Amazing Race ... at the start of the summer, staff planned this task-oriented activity to kids get familiar with the Youth Center.

Science Club ... as the result of a collaborative effort with our local community college, we have created a Science Club for kids in grades 5- 12 to encourage participation in the Regional Science Fair. College students, retired teachers, and the local Inventors Club will act as mentors for kids who want to develop a project for the Fair.

Spirit Week ... During Halloween Week, we had a theme and activities for each day of the week to help kids get to know the staff better.

Daily Tournaments and Activities . . . the most important change we have made at our facility is to add daily structured activities to create a learning environment. We have successfully incorporated academically-based activities in all areas, not just the Learning Center. We have chess and other game tournaments, trivia contests, fitness challenges, and even small games to get kids thinking and engaged.

In terms of quantifying our success, we can point to two areas. First, our attendance rates for Learning Hour have steadily increased since March. Power Hour is a one hour timeframe in the Learning Center when kids can only work on homework. They earn points for completing homework or other learning tasks during that time; the points can be redeemed for prizes in our Learning I-Jour Store. Participation in Learning 1-tour has increased from about 30% of kids at the facility after school in March to about 47% of members daily during November. We now have 140 kids signed up for Power Hour.

Second, we can look to the Statewide Assessment Scores to see overall score improvements for the kids in our community. Because approximately 70% of local elementary school kids have come to the facility after school at one time or another, we can extrapolate that most of the kids at our local schools have been exposed to Learning Project programs. If we compare assessment scores from 2001-02 to 2002-03 for those elementary school students, we see a 9% overall increase in reading scores and an 8% increase in math scores. Our collaborative efforts with the local schools and parents to identify kids who need help and provide academic support are paying dividends. More specifically, the \$5,000 in support provided by PacifiCorp Foundation can be accounted for as follows:

Payroll	\$2,992.88
8 months x 5% of Program Director (planning) = \$971.28	
\$7.60/hour x 4 hours x 14 staff (Ed. Coordinator visit) = \$425.60	
15 weeks x \$7.60/hour x 14 (staff training sessions) = \$1,596.00	
Travel	\$1,111.85
Lodging/Gas for Ed. Coordinator visit = \$81.85	
Registration for Youth Development Conference = \$780.00	
Food/gas for Youth Development Conference = \$250.00	
Supplies (Back Pocket Program Guides and Other Resources)	<u>\$ 71.25</u>
Total Expenses To Date	\$4,215.47

The remaining dollars in the grant are budgeted for additional staff training sessions; each staff training costs approximately \$110 in additional wages.

As we move forward, our collaborations with parents, teachers, and other social service agencies is becoming more constructive. We have teamed with two school districts and our local community college to apply for a 21 Century Learning Centers grant. This project will create an Advisory Committee consisting of representative from all partners to create a comprehensive after-school program. The Learning Centers will focus on tutoring by licensed teachers from the school districts, educational enrichment opportunities provided by our organization, and family support organized by the community college's Adult Learning Skills program.