

Best Practices Of The Rams Fitness Academy: What Worked For Us Can Work For You!

Be Prepared: It is very important to develop a structured schedule that is appropriate to the target population, as well as the camp's objectives. The Rams Fitness Academy used a scheduling format similar to that of the public schools. Parents reported that this helped their children's transition back to school. The scheduling was inclusive of promising strategies for engaging children in a variety of positive social, recreational and academic activities.

Use It or Lose It: The Educational Component was designed to help students work on those literacy skills (reading/math) that tend to decline during summer months, particularly for low income children. There are so many resources that are available to help in this area. Additional reports stated that the RFA offered many opportunities to complement and enhance the academic learning that takes place during their child's academic school term.

Location, Location, Location: The University setting proved to be a valuable component of the summer camp. In addition to the facilities, students gained exposure to a college setting and encompassed early connectivity to the value of higher education. College campuses have a rich variety of academic, cultural and recreational resources to expand a child's horizons.

An Apple a Day: The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is a must for programming for summer camps targeting low income children. In addition to providing two free meals, the program proved to be a valuable teaching tool to help children understand the importance of making better nutritional choices.

Safety First: This component is particularly important when planning summer programming that include physical activity. Considerations include not only emergency care and first-aid care, but also those preventative measures such as hydration and prevention of heat related injuries. Be knowledgeable about liability and confidentiality. Consult with risk management personnel.

Attitude is Everything: Motivation and incentives are key to attendance and retention. Strategic efforts to increase the children's and staffers' self-esteem and morale are very important to their growth and self-assurance. Incorporation of creative methods for appreciation of one's efforts will not only benefit everyone involved, but in turn create healthy environments for everyone.

Make A Splash: Minority children are at the most risk for drowning, thus summer camp programs should incorporate swim lessons when possible. Regardless of race, the underserved lack access to pools and swimming lessons. Many parents fear their children getting into pools due to their lack of knowledge about swimming and pool safety. Swimming provides positive health benefits and increases personal confidence.

It Takes A Village: Family involvement is critical to the success of summer camp programs and childhood obesity prevention programs. Research continues to confirm that when families are engaged outcomes for participants improve. A good communication plan is essential to sustaining family engagement.

Get on the Bus: Transportation presents a huge challenge for this particular target group. Transportation can affect all areas of your program's success including access, attendance, retention, and family involvement. Providing transportation can be an expensive and time consuming endeavor. Because transportation is a huge barrier to participation for low income youth, careful consideration must go into planning in this area.

Teamwork makes the Dreamwork: Staffing is Critical: Employ experienced and skilled instructors. Do not underestimate the impact of group leaders/counselors. Group leaders/counselors can be viewed as mentors. Mentors and young people develop their relationships as they participate together in social, cultural and recreational activities. Whatever the activity, mentoring provides guidance and support to vulnerable children/adolescents. College students make excellent mentors because they are close enough in age to the young people to establish strong relationships, yet mature enough to offer guidance. Screen out those who present themselves lacking of commitment and maturity to be effective.