



“Ready, Set, Swim” Program Makes a Splash in Desert Hot Springs

Intervention Summary

The “Ready, Set, Swim” program has been a fun and innovative way to combine physical activity, nutrition education, and water safety all in one. The abundance of pools in the Coachella Valley, along with countless child drownings and near drownings, prompted several local organizations to develop a program to address water safety in order to promote physical activity, which provided the children with lifelong water safety skills. With the help of the City of Palm Springs and the Desert Healthcare Foundation, funds were raised to implement the program. Palm Springs Unified School District, Desert Recreation District and the Boys and Girls Club provided essential components to the program like transportation, swim instructors and facilities to make this collective impact partnership function seamlessly.

The “Ready, Set, Swim” program is designed as an eight-day afterschool program, at the community wellness center and pool. Children attend two hours a day over the course of two weeks: one hour is focused on swimming skills and physical activity, while the second hour is focused on nutrition education. Student and adult nutrition education was presented by several NEOP-funded subcontractors. Over the two-week sessions, children and family members participated in a wealth of nutrition activities including Rethink Your Drink, Harvest of the Month, PowerPlay, MyPlate and the benefits of physical activity. Along with these nutrition lessons, taste testings of various fruits and vegetables were also provided for the children. Parents attended a Rethink Your Drink class, offered in English and Spanish, at the program graduation.

The “Ready, Set, Swim” program graduated a total of 471 children during its initial year. The success of the “Ready, Set, Swim” program caught the attention of the local media, and was featured by local news channels and newspapers. It was also nominated by the Riverside County Department of Public Health to be featured in a success story video, filmed by the Inland Desert TRC (UCSD).

The successes of the “Ready, Set, Swim” program are clearly evident, as the participating children and their parents would take any opportunity to share how their

child has become more active, selective about what they eat and drink, and confident in their swimming skills. The funding organizations embraced the program wholeheartedly and are excited about future expansion.

Description of Barriers Encountered and Identified or Proposed Solutions

The “Ready, Set, Swim” program faced a few barriers along the way. The first barrier was the coordination of the different entities involved - ensuring the school and parents were well-informed of the program opportunity and requirements for participation. The solution was to designate a program coordinator, hired by the Desert Recreation District, to organize and create a “parent packet” with all the program information and communicate with the schools. The program coordinator ensured all entities involved, including the parents of the participating children, received vital program information regarding transportation, schedules and contact information.

Another barrier faced by the program was the potential exclusion of students who were currently attending other afterschool programs. A special arrangement was made with the school district to allow a waiver for students who wanted to participate in the “Ready, Set, Swim” program, without risk of being dropped from their other afterschool programs.

Future Directions/Sustainable Success

The future plans for the “Ready, Set, Swim” program are very promising. Local organizations and the Palm Springs Unified School District have committed to support the program indefinitely, and are seeking potential partners and funding to expand the program to the other schools and community pools throughout the Coachella Valley. In addition to expanding the program throughout the Coachella Valley, future plans include water safety classes for parents from trained personnel such as emergency first responders and the Riverside County Injury Prevention Program.

Due to budgetary concerns, the City of Desert Hot Springs was not planning on opening the pool during the summer. After several calls from families in the swim program, the city was convinced to seek funding to keep the pool open during the summer. The public advocacy for maintaining public pool access was a tremendous success in gaining another physical activity facility in a low-income neighborhood with extreme summer temperatures. The “Ready, Set, Swim” program cemented the new pool’s permanent role in the community by increasing usage and demand within the first year.

Contact information about this Narrative

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