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“Tarpon Excelling Above Modern Society (T.E.A.M.S.),” May/June/July, Pinellas County, USA

The Project Aspirations:

My partner and I propose to create a summertime art, music, and athletics program allied with the Tarpon Springs Citizens Alliance for Progress. This program will be volunteer-run, free of cost and targeted toward low-income Pinellas county students ages 7-10 and 11-13, but open to others. These students will be recruited through the four Youth Programs in the Tarpon Springs area: Citizens Alliance for Progress (CAP), the Boys and Girls Club, Cops’n Kids, and the Tarpon Springs Recreation Department. By introducing several focused fields of creative and physical expression, many students will have their first opportunity to explore lifelong passions. Through this, the children have a chance to discover interests and talents that can serve as long-term motivators and incentives in pursuit of educational achievement, despite personal hardship and academic struggle. They will develop skills to be proud of, manifest a sense of ownership in the activities they pursue, and form strong, peace-driven bonds with the students and mentors around them. The idea of peace will be promoted through a series of daily “Team Building Talk” conversations, which will highlight and integrate the views of famous civic leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Mohamad Ali, Malala Yousafzai, and Tegna Laroupe, to illustrate how and why peace is important in our three branches of exploration.

Project Rationale:

Students don’t need to be thrilled by the academic process to be motivated in school. Usually, all it takes is a reason to come to school, hopefully a reason the students love! After analyzing data from students in grades nine through twelve for the 2011-12 school year throughout the state of Kansas, studies by Angela Lumpkin, Professor of Health, Sport and Exercise Sciences, and Rebecca Achen, doctoral candidate and graduate teaching assistant at KU, show that athletes had higher attendance, graduation rates, state assessment scores and lower dropout rates than non-athletes. Ultimately, it was concluded that this is because, like in Pinellas County, student athletes are required to maintain a passing 2.0 GPA to participate in sports and must be in attendance that academic day to attend practice or play in a game. This same concept of motivation can be applied to other outlet activities available in the school system. With art, students who don’t attend class miss one-on-one hands on learning opportunities and don’t get to create a work that truly represents a part of themselves. In music, each day missed is a failure to one’s peers, and a loss in experiencing the beauty and fulfillment of a successful group ensemble. By introducing students to these activities early on, children and parents have the opportunity to be guided into registration for similar, school-provided academic programs, which will continue to feed their enjoyment in athleticism and the arts into high school, and hopefully beyond. This resulting engagement in school will contribute to a lower dropout rate, higher attendance, and reduction in negative behavioral consequences for those underprivileged kids who participate, ultimately disrupting the cycle of systemic poverty, we believe.

The Infrastructure and Operations:

The Program will be held at either Tarpon Springs High School (TSHS) or TS Middle School on a lease waiver. There, all people under 18 will be eligible to receive free breakfast and lunch directly on campus through Summer Food Florida. Program participants will be transported in vans by partner organizations, such as CAP, the Boys and Girls Club, Cops’n Kids, and the Tarpon Springs Public Services Department Rec Center (estimating 25 kids per organization). Student mentors, volunteers, and staff will be drawn from the Tarpon Springs Leadership Conservatory for the Arts, along with all other previously mentioned partners. All wind instruments will be provided through the Director of Bands at TS

Middle School with a fee waiver. The Stomp clinic, all sports equipment and art project supplies will be purchased with the gift provided.

T.E.A.M.S will offer an exciting, multifaceted curriculum where, every day, students will have a well-rounded experience: participating in a select sport, musical experience, and an art project. The program will enroll approximately 100 students over a 4-week camp session. Each group of 6 participants will be matched with 1-2 high school volunteer mentors, from Tarpon Springs High School Leadership Conservatory for the Arts and various other programs, to guide students through their passion discovery process. There will be additional professional staff available in conjunction with North Pinellas Band Camp at TSHS looking to expand their beginning musician base. The daily programming will pair a variety of highly engaging activities with a mission of enjoyment, team building, and self-reflection. "Team Building Talk" sessions will be incorporated into each subject in the program curriculum, and will draw from and highlight a civic leader for that day/week. Pinellas County and Cops'n Kids staff will guide and coach sports activities including soccer, tag football, basketball, baseball, tennis, and track. The first 3 weeks will focus on 2 of the 6 sports at a time, and the 4th week, students will be playing one sport they choose by assisted survey and mentor advising. Musical experiences will include a STOMP clinic, dance, and beginning ensemble band. In addition, art projects will include each student receiving a disposable camera throughout their 4-week program. Their photos will contribute to a world map collage (a parting gift to all affiliated T.E.A.M.S volunteers, students, and sponsors) and a community enrichment mural. The program will operate Monday through Friday, with the second and fourth Friday being cultural field trip days to the Tampa Museum of Art and the Leepa-Rattner Museum of Art. Overall, this program will develop skills in key areas such as communication, teamwork, personal goal setting and accomplishment, mental and physical health/wellness, constructive self-expression, leadership, and sportsmanship.

The daily schedule for each week with rotating activities include:

- 8:00-9:00am: flexible arrival time, healthy breakfast for those who need it
- 9:00-9:45: small group icebreakers with physical warm up and preview of the day and introduction to Peace Model
- 9:45-10:45: music skill introduction session with Professional Instructors
- 10:45-11:00: Small group break for reflection on the music experience
- 11:00-11:30: Small group musical practice sessions with mentors
- 11:30-12:00: Large group ensemble session
- 12:00-1:00pm: lunch and journal writing
- 1:00-1:20: warm up sports skill session, in 6 person groups with volunteer supervision (ex. ball throwing)
- 1:20-1:30: water break and inclusive "Team building Talk" (ex. Full group communication)
- 1:30-2:30: sports play with combined groups of 12, with breaks to reinforce skill and team work components
- 2:30-3: Snack and Pickup

Sustainability Goals:

In order to sustain student growth over the long term and extend this opportunity to future students, all middle school participants will be encouraged to meet with their guidance counselor when returning to school to discuss joining related courses or activities tailored to their interests. All students continuing their after-school programs with our partners will have the opportunity to continue their growth, as all purchased equipment will remain in the custody of those organizations. In addition, select volunteers will be retained through an alliance with TSHS to continue to work with the partners to achieve their needed Bright Futures volunteer hours necessary to qualify for state-sponsored college scholarships. To provide for the following year, we will host a benefits concert as well as pursue grants and sponsorships to receive the estimated \$4,000 needed for field trips and large art projects. Director Leadership will transition through applications from undergraduate students living in the Pinellas County area for the upcoming summer, followed by interviews taking place that Winter Break.

Compassion is what will keep this program alive, and the bonds and progress accomplished through this program will perpetuate its mission into the future generation.