



AWARD-WINNING PROGRAMS WORK TO **Close the Achievement Gap**

The 2012 winners of the National Summer Learning Association's (NSLA) Excellence in Summer Learning Award span the United States—from the urban landscape of New York City, to the collegiate backdrop of a major state university, to a coastal county in Southern California. These programs' communities are diverse, yet they all share a common goal: to create summer learning experiences in an effort to accelerate academic achievement and promote healthy development for low-income youth.

Programs that go through the application process to be considered for the Excellence in Summer Learning Award are measured in quality against NSLA's Comprehensive Assessment of Summer Programs (CASP). The CASP is a research-based assessment tool designed to measure the quality of summer programs across a variety of domains. Winning programs demonstrate exemplary practices in overall programming, including supporting staff, schools, and other partners in fulfilling shared goals. This year, three programs stood out among more than 50 applicants for the award.



GO Project of New York City uses its urban environment to deepen academics and engagement through field trips in Manhattan. Youth ages 9 to 15 experience new sports with Ohio State University LiFE Sports in a non-competitive and encouraging environment while learning social competence. Fun in the Sun at the United Way of Santa Barbara County brings together community partners to give their youth a well-rounded summer learning experience, which includes a very successful and popular one-on-one mentorship program, the Lunch Bunch.

While these programs are diverse, they had key exemplary characteristics in common:

- The programs successfully bring together and work collaboratively with community partners in providing for low-income youth and their families.
- Communication takes place year-round with youth and their families, through multiple channels.
- Youth and families can receive support through counseling with professionals, parent-to-parent support groups, as well as workshops.
- All programs connect classroom learning with projects, field trips, and special events.

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“This year’s winning programs represent the diverse needs of youth and families that can be uniquely met through high-quality summer learning programs. With skilled and well-supported staff, these programs challenge young people academically, motivate them physically, and give them a safe space to develop socially and emotionally into leaders in their communities,” said NSLA senior director of program quality Sarah Pitcock.

GO PROJECT OF NEW YORK CITY



GO Project of New York City Takes a Holistic Approach

Lower Manhattan may be home of the Financial District, but its neighborhoods have some of the highest poverty and high school dropout rates in New York City. Seventy percent of public elementary school students live in poverty, and 50 percent perform below grade level.

GO Project of New York City, founded in 1968 by parents of the Grace Church School, seeks to address the challenges faced by underperforming students in Lower Manhattan during the earliest years of their academic careers.

The five-week GO Summer program serves nearly 500 young people from 30 public elementary schools across Lower Manhattan, while the GO School program ensures students stay on track academically every Saturday from October to April, and return for the summer. Approximately 53 percent of GO students have a special education classification, while 17 percent are English Language Learners.

In the summer of 2011, GO Project students gained an average of two months’ skills in reading and four months in math. Using Common Core standards to identify where students need to be according to grade level, program educators design a curriculum using a theme tied across all subject areas.

Small classes of 13 students focus on reading, writing, and math, while enrichment classes and field trips nurture each child’s creativity and interests. “What makes GO Project unique is our holistic approach,” says GO Project executive director Erica Ahdoot. “We take an individualized approach to programming, ensuring that academic needs are met through the active participation and support of parents and the schools, in order to meet each student where they are.”

GO Project understands the connection between academics and social and emotional growth. The organization delivers what staffers call a “social emotional learning curriculum,” which provides a common language for teachers to explore topics that are coming up in the lives of children in a developmentally appropriate way.

Students can also talk with a social worker as needed, and their families are supported through workshops, supportive counseling, and referrals to outside agencies. “It’s such a core focus of what we do,” says Ahdoot. “It creates a nice space for people to feel safe to explore things that are getting in the way of educational success”.



Students at GO start their day with Harambee—a morning pep rally which means “come together” in Swahili. Harambee provides GO’s students, teachers, families, volunteers, and staff members the opportunity to gather before the academic component of the day begins to build camaraderie.

Ohio State LiFE Sports Uses Sport to Teach Life Skills

Ohio State LiFE Sports, Learning in Fitness & Education (LiFE) is an innovative partnership between the Ohio State University (OSU) Department of Athletics and the College of Social Work. Using evidence-based sport and social skill instruction, LiFE Sports provides free transportation, free health physicals, two meals per day, and a college access and career day to local disadvantaged youth.

LiFE Sports was built on an outreach program, the National Youth Sport Program (NYSP), first implemented in 1968 at OSU, and supported by federal funding. In 2006, the NYSP funding ended, yet the OSU Department of Athletics and the College of Social Work have continued to support over 600 low-income Columbus youth every summer and throughout the year with LiFE Sports.



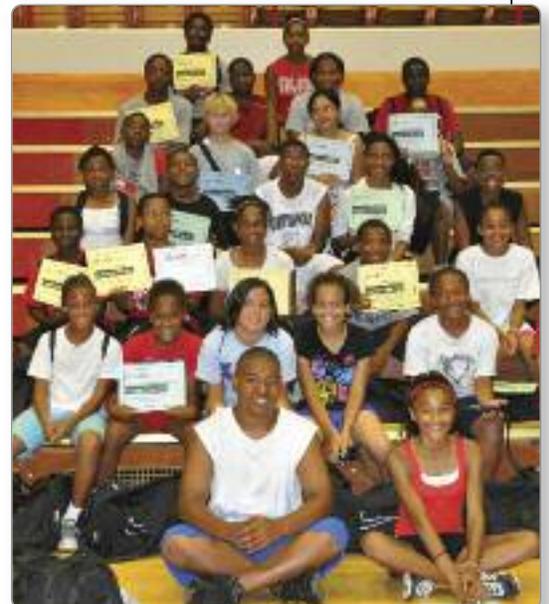
“LiFE Sports uses sport to engage with disadvantaged youth and to teach social competence and skills that they can use for the rest of their lives,” says education coordinator Rebecca Wade-Mdivanian. “Research shows that social skills are connected to higher academic achievement in youth. When they go back to the classroom each year, they use the skills they learned to interact with their peers, and hopefully have fewer behavioral issues in school.”

For four weeks in the summer and in sport clinics throughout the year, youth ages 9 to 15 are involved in sports such as basketball, lacrosse, baseball, soccer, swimming, and football. For many participants, this is the first time they have played a particular sport. LiFE Sports removes the competitiveness, and therefore the tendency for youth to compare themselves to peers, by focusing on individual improvement—every day a camper learns one new skill component from a sport.

Learning centers on four key areas: self-control, effort, teamwork, and social responsibility, with activities planned around each. Campers are then engaged in discussion and journaling around each activity to describe how it connects with one of the key focus areas.

When asked, 74 percent of LiFE Sports campers agreed with the statement, “My involvement in LiFE Sports has made me want to go to college.” Recently, a camper named Andre, who was a participant for four years, and involved in the Youth Leadership Camp for youth ages 16 to 18, became a full-time LiFE Sports camp counselor. Andre is also currently enrolled at a local college. “It was tremendous for young campers to see Andre move through the program and ultimately be hired on as staff,” said Mdivanian. “I’d like to see more of our campers come back to become staff at LiFE Sports or even a Buckeye.”

LiFE Sports campers participate in the LiFE Sports Olympics. Kids work together to develop a team name, banners, advertisements, posters, and family invitations. Parents and families attend the event to cheer on their children.



United Way of Santa Barbara County's Fun in the Sun Unites Community Partners for Local Youth

United Way of Santa Barbara County knows it takes a village, and that is what they have done with Fun in the Sun (FITS), a program that serves nearly 250 low-income children ages 7 to 18 for seven weeks each summer in collaboration with up to 70 community partners.

In his years of nonprofit work, President & CEO of United Way of Santa Barbara County Paul Didier has never seen so many organizations in a single community come together for its children. "Every community has strengths and assets to add in improving the life of a child and a family," says Didier. "It's something that is possible in any community, anywhere. Our partners give money, volunteers, resources, and time in order to participate in this community collaborative. FITS pulls these community strengths together in a research-based, organized way to comprehensively impact the children, their siblings, and their parents."

FITS emphasizes reading and writing, with afternoon enrichment that includes activities in science, technology, engineering, arts, and math (STEAM), as well as service learning, character, courtesy, and field trips throughout the summer. During the 2011 program, 82 percent of participants showed gains of 2.1 reading grade levels in reading comprehension, phonics, and vocabulary skills.

FITS uses a computerized reading tool out of several tools called Reading Plus, but stresses that a key component to students' reading success is having program leaders work with participants one-to-one—motivating and coaching them. "We also ensure that reading and writing is happening outside of structured times," says FITS coordinator Courtney Tarnow. "Our youth are encouraged to read at home, and they are writing in journals after field trips. It has to be done on a regular basis, and it has to be regimented."

FITS requires each participant to make a minimum three-year commitment. FITS partners with schools across four districts to ensure the program is reaching the children most in need. The collaboration between FITS and local educators is a key strategy for program success. "Principals and teachers recognize the impact that we are making. They often tell us that they can pick out exactly who the Fun in the Sun kids are at the beginning of the school year from their social and academic behavior changes," says Didier.

FITS families are supported with Parent Empowerment workshops, including financial literacy and positive discipline classes. Participants are not only given two meals a day while at the program, they are also sent home with bags of fresh produce and fruit for the weekends.

United Way of Santa Barbara County estimates that 3,000 youth and their families are still unserved in the community. When asked to give a five- to ten-year goal for the program, Didier says "it's to keep having the impact that we are now having, but on a much larger scale."



Fun in the Sun's Lunch Bunch program pairs youth with an adult mentor to spend an hour of their lunch time together. The program is a youth favorite that fosters positive adult-child interaction. Over 500 community volunteers are recruited each summer.

