

# Tips for Starting a *Kids Lead the Way* Program in Your Community

This tip sheet is designed to help you jump-start a *Kids Lead the Way* program in your own community to help kids eat well and stay active. It outlines the process Christine Tubbs used for creating the program and includes resources and tips she found useful. Christine has also offered to serve as a resource for anyone interested in developing a similar program in their own community. You can reach Christine via email at [tubbsc@partnershipplan.org](mailto:tubbsc@partnershipplan.org).

Keep in mind that this tip sheet is meant to be a starting point. Remember that every community has unique needs, strengths, and challenges.

## **WHAT IS KIDS LEAD THE WAY?**

Kids Lead the Way is a non-competitive, youth-led program, where students create once a week field days and activities during the summer months. The program matches high school and college-aged counselors with school-aged children to create fun field days with games and healthy snacks.

Kids are invited to come to sessions with their own games, and encouraged to bring the games they learn during the program back to their families and neighborhoods. It is an 8-week program. Kids attend one 90-minute session each week to play games and eat a healthy snack. In the first year there were four sessions each week across two sites, allowing 160 kids to participate.

## **HOW DID KIDS LEAD THE WAY COME ABOUT?**

Christine's idea, *Kids Lead the Way*, was the winner of the Minnesota Idea Open's first Challenge. Minnesotans were asked to submit ideas on how they could help people in their community eat smart and be active, to address the issue of obesity in Minnesota. After judges narrowed submissions down to three ideas, the public voted and the winner was given \$15,000 to fund their program.

Christine saw a growing need for a non-competitive, cooperative program in the Stillwater School District. Not all the kids in Christine's school district are star athletes. Some just want the opportunity to get together with other kids their age and be active outside during the summer. Seeing this need, she created the Kids Lead the Way project. Kids Lead the Way fills in the gap left by school gym classes and competitive sports, providing a supportive environment during the summertime for school-aged children to stay active.

## TIPS AND QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Christine and her team learned a lot in developing the *Kids Lead the Way* program and putting it into action for the first time this summer. The following are some of the tips and questions they recommend you consider for launching a similar program in your community.

**Believe that you can solve community problems.** The Kids Lead the Way project started with Christine believing that she could make a difference in her community. Christine first got the idea for Kids Lead the Way after learning parents in her district were shopping around for a packaged recess program. “Why do we have to buy one?” she thought, “can’t we just make one ourselves?”

**Listen to the needs of your community.** Many parents had been looking for non-competitive programs for their kids to participate in. When Kids Lead the Way was billed as such, demand was overwhelming and the program filled up fast.

**Don’t underestimate the amount of time it takes to get all the pieces together.** Start planning several months in advance, especially if you need to secure funding. Consider that most summer programs begin sign-ups between January and March. Christine estimates that if *Kids Lead the Way* had registration in place then the program could have had 300 kids participating.

**Strive to make your program as accessible as possible.** Christine wanted any kid to be able to participate in the program, so kept the registration fee at \$10. This fee requires a basic level of commitment from parents, while keeping the program financially viable for most families. The \$10 registration fee allowed one family to have all five of their children in the same summer program for the first time ever. Program costs in excess of what was covered by the registration fee were funded through the Minnesota Idea Open.

**Consider a mix of paid staff and volunteers to support the program.** A core group of paid staff was essential to the success of *Kids Lead the Way*. In choosing staff, keep in mind that it was challenging and time-consuming to manage the college-aged counselors that had little to no work experience. It took effort to empower them to take initiative and make the tough decisions that needed to be made (e.g. calling parents when there was bad behavior). For more detail on the staffing for *Kids Lead the Way*, please see page 4.

**Consider providing learning opportunities to people that are indirectly involved.** In the case of *Kids Lead the Way*, Christine learned that parents of participants could learn something from the program too. Each family was asked to bring a healthy snack one week of the program, but interpretation of what constituted “healthy” varied widely. Guidelines or examples would be helpful, and program-provided backup snacks came in handy.

**Select a site (or sites) that best serve your audience.** Think of what is convenient to the kids and parents that will participate in the program. Where do they spend a lot of time? What spaces would make parents feel comfortable? Think of partnerships you might be able to leverage to get access to space.

- The Partnership Plan's existing relationship with the Stillwater School District made the public schools a natural choice.
- Both an outside field and indoor gym were reserved for each session, so there would be a place for the program to be on rain days.
- If schools seem like the right choice for your program, try contacting the Community Education Department or Facilities Manager of the local school district.

**Consider partnerships that might provide access to costly resources.** For example, partners might be able to provide access to:

- An online registration system for parents to sign their kids up to the program and pay the registration fee.
- A payroll system to pay your staff.
- Pipelines to volunteers such as the National Honor Society or church groups.
- A fiscal agent (if you don't have nonprofit status) such as a community foundation.
- CPR and/or First Aid training (contact your local fire department or Red Cross for information).
- An attorney to help you develop a liability waiver.

## **KIDS LEAD THE WAY STAFFING**

A mix of paid staff and volunteers can be an effective way to successfully run your program. Provide adequate training to both staff and volunteers, so that all key players feel ready to take initiative and handle responsibilities.

### **Program Manager**

- Hires staff and recruits volunteers
- Forms and maintains organizational partnerships
- Handles finances
- Manages counselors/volunteers
- For *Kids Lead the Way*: Christine Tubbs, Executive Director of The Partnership Plan

### **Site Coordinator**

- Researches and purchases equipment
- Oversees daily activities of counselors/volunteers
- Handles behavioral issues
- For *Kids Lead the Way*: college student working on a degree in recreation with some nutrition background

### **Professional Coach/Trainer**

- Trains counselors on a variety of issues such as bullying, how to interact with parents, sexual misconduct, etc.
- Lays framework for how sessions are structured
- For *Kids Lead the Way*: Trainer with experience working as a counselor at Camp St. Croix. Check local camps to see if they can recommend individuals.

### **Counselors**

- Supervise kids during sessions
- Lead activities
- For *Kids Lead the Way*: College students (19 to 21-years-olds), Received 16 hours of training prior to sessions starting. Positions advertised through word-of-mouth and application on website

### **Volunteers**

- Provide additional support to paid counselors to maintain 1:6 adult/child ratio
- For *Kids Lead the Way*: National Honor Society students to help meet requirements for summer volunteer hours. Approached faculty advisor with applications

### **Kids (Participants)**

- For *Kids Lead the Way*: Age range 6/7-years-old (going into 1<sup>st</sup> grade) to 12-years-old (going into 7<sup>th</sup> grade) - mature enough to handle activities, without some of the interpersonal/behavioral issues that come with working with teens