

# Through the Eyes of Youth: Experience with Programs at the Crissy Field Center

## Executive Summary

Inspiring Young Emerging Leaders  
and Urban Trail Blazers



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EXPERIENCE WITH PROGRAMS  
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Project Summary**

The Crissy Field Center (CFC) operates a variety of year-round programs for youth and others in the community. They have ongoing programs, growing relationships with schools and local community groups, and the facility is a “welcome mat” for many people visiting/recreating in the park. This summary represents highlights of findings from a two phase study. Phase I included focus group interviews with 43 young people during the summer of 2006 including I-YEL (Inspiring Young Emerging Leaders) and the Urban Trail Blazer (UTB) participants. Another group consisted of alumni as past-participants in either I-YEL or both of the programs. Although not part of the original scope of work, an attempt was made to survey the parents following the summer program; an insufficient number of surveys were returned so no analyses took place. Phase II occurred in fall 2006 and consisted of a program-related document review and analysis of a sample of materials

In general, and a valuable component to this study, is the role of parks and outdoor education/recreation in promoting healthy lifestyles. The CFC provides space and access for youth and adults of all ages, abilities and income levels to increase their daily dose of physical activity. Programs offered for youth, for example, provide a variety of opportunities for young people to learn about proper nutrition, engage in active outdoor recreation, develop an appreciation of the natural environment, and establish new ways to balance their lives.

**Objectives:**

- ✓ To examine and discover the outreach influence of teen volunteers on their peers and GGNRA, as a whole, and understand the influences of experiences obtained at the Center.
- ✓ Conduct a brief literature review on the topics of urban youth, environmental education/environmental literacy, outdoor recreation, youth leadership/development and health (e.g., healthy lifestyles connection to park use). Purpose: Provide a brief overview of trends, issues, and outcomes measured that are aligned with the goals and objectives.
- ✓ Determine if, and how, youth experience any behavioral changes as a result of their participation and;
- ✓ Understand how the program affects youth academic and future career choices.



- ✓ Results of this evaluation study can give the Crissy Field Center (CFC) new ways of thinking and talking about what you do as part of program development, community education, and fundraising.
- ✓ The SFSU research team conducted 43 interviews with young girls and boys in the Urban Trailblazer (UTB) program, teenagers participating in I-YEL (Inspiring Young Emerging Leaders), and a convenience sample of I-YEL Alumni. The youth interviewed came from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds and ranged in age from 11 to 22 years old.
- ✓ Based on the overall interview process and document review procedure, a series of recommendations have been developed to guide efforts to enhance the program operations as well as examples for how to use this information for marketing the outcomes among key stakeholders.
- ✓ Ten (10) common themes emerged across all focus groups. Examples include:
  - o Connection: The CFC is a safe place to go; powerful and unique
  - o Impact: The program is a springboard to increasing self-confidence and clear transference to other aspects of life (e.g., school, family, peer relations).
  - o Personal/Social Growth: Deep enjoyment of learning new skills; elevated consciousness about abilities and relationships.
  - o Contribution to Environment: Greater comprehension of environmental impacts, knowledge gained about natural resource issues, experience with resource protection, and desire to educate others about learning.
  - o Healthy lifestyles: Increased awareness of proper nutrition habits, love of outdoor trips as fun and physically invigorating, spiritual/emotional connection to nature.
- ✓ Academics: (1) I-YEL students substantiated how new knowledge and experiences helped with school projects, group work in classes (e.g., science and history), teachers invite students to assist (e.g., recognition of advanced learning); (2) Results also show the I-YEL program created a social awareness for the Alumni, deep enough where several students are pursuing college degrees correlating with the ideas and values gained from I-YEL and strong enough to incorporate into their own value system; and (3) through increased self-esteem and confidence, students noted grades improved.
- ✓ Four key levels: The UTB and I-YEL programs appear to have four levels or spheres of influence that creates communities of support for strong, healthy youth:
  1. *Individual level* – Programs and activities contribute to increasing individual students’ knowledge and skills, self esteem and self confidence. Youth are clearly more empowered. Results indicate participants are more conscientious of eating habits, and are more physically active than normal.
  2. *Social network* – Participation in these programs creates stronger relationships among each other (as youth) with their family and friends, and with adult/mentors in the programs and in the community.
  3. *Community sphere* – The Center programs create new and broader opportunities for urban youth, and challenge the values and belief systems that often create adverse or detrimental experiences for youth (in their other surroundings).

4. *Institutional level* – The CFC employs strategies that focus on six core beliefs: Common Concern; Experimentation; Mutual Learning; Interdependence; Diversity; and Action (source: Crissy Field Way).

Note: Activities clearly build upon these beliefs and impact institutional and systemic practices and norms that show to positively affect urban youth.

- ✓ Multi-media: Digital Stories (UTB) and Video Productions (I-YEL) are highlights of the programs. Opportunities are numerous including results of task fulfillment, team cooperation for common goal, and pride in accomplishments.
- ✓ Influence of technology outside the Center: In general, beyond CFC programs, results show students still thrive on computer games and watching T.V.
- ✓ Leaders/Staff: Program coordinators and field staff are loved and highly respected by participants. The youth also recognize many/most of the staff are close in age and, believe this is why “they understand me”.
- ✓ Developmental Youth Outcomes: In our opinion, this is one of the most important documents we received from I-YEL based on perceptions of what I-YEL should be about. The UTB program should consider creating one as well.
- ✓ Healthy Lifestyles: All participants spend a certain amount of time in the outdoors through program involvement and receive physical exercise while working on productive tasks. All participants in this study (UTB and I-YEL) were taught proper nutrition and appeared to apply healthy nutritional concepts into their diets and expressed desire to change their daily habits.
- ✓ Natural Environment: Participants learned about basic and advanced environmental concepts such as value of recycling or negative human impacts in the national parks.
- ✓ Social Environment (Peer relations/Friendships): Youth were, for the most part, respectful to their fellow participants as they all became friends and most of them considered themselves “like brothers and sisters”. This trend is clear throughout all years of the programs’ existence. Findings suggest some participants improved their relationship with friends/family as well as educated others about the natural environment (e.g., increased awareness, social skill development, leadership skill building).
- ✓ Social responsibility: Participants learned that positive social skills affect their involvement in the program as well as in the community beyond the Center. Increased awareness of their social environment “broadened their horizon,” in general.
- ✓ “Spreading the word” ~ Advocating for the CFC and the Park: Evidence shows participants clearly promote the program in their schools, local community, with family and friends/peers as they believe in the holistic values and positive benefits of the Center.

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*(See copy of full report for results, findings, and recommendations)*