

EFFECTS OF RECREATION AND PARK DISTRICT ON HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND OTHER BENEFITS

According to the Recreation Trends study prepared by the California State Parks Planning Division¹, Health and wellness issues have become hot topics because of the increasing number of unfit Californians and the economic and health care drain. The obesity epidemic is costing California over \$2 billion a year in medical care, lost productivity and workers' compensation. Parks and recreation programs are excellent inducements to physical activity and help to encourage life-long fitness habits.

The following is a list of benefits of a recreation and park district on humans and human development. Many of the benefits listed in this section are described in greater detail within the Health and Social Benefits of Recreation Element of the California Outdoor Recreation Planning Program.²

See Appendix for sources on the effects and benefits of parks and recreation services information listed below.

1. Health Benefits of Recreation

PHYSICAL HEALTH BENEFITS

a. Reduces Obesity

- In California, over 26 percent of children are overweight, and in some school districts the percentage climbs to 40 to 50 percent.³ *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity 2001* (Health and Human Services, 2001) report connects obesity to the need for communities to provide adequate parks and recreation opportunities and recognizes the benefits of increased physical activity.

b. Diminishes Risk of Chronic Disease such as Heart Disease, Diabetes, Cancer, and Osteoporosis

- People who engage in regular physical activity benefit from reduced risk of premature death, reduced risk of coronary heart disease, hypertension, colon cancer, non-insulin dependent diabetes, improved maintenance of muscle strength, joint structure, and joint function; weight loss and favorable redistribution of body fat; improved physical functioning in persons suffering from poor health, and healthier cardiovascular, respiratory, and endocrine systems. (Sherer, 2003)
- Because of the lifetime external costs proven by economists that are associated with a sedentary lifestyle, prevention of a sedentary lifestyle is an important individual and societal issue and provides an economic rationale for health-promotion programs and active leisure lifestyles. (Iso-Ahola, et al., 2001)

¹ Recreation Trends Worth Talking About Laura Westrup, Planning Division, CA State Parks, June 2006

² The Health and Social Benefits of Recreation State of California Resources Agency, An Element of the California Outdoor Recreation Planning Program, 2005, California State Parks Planning Division

³ Ibid

- Exercise significantly reduces the chance for heart problems, according to 43 separate studies conducted by the Centers for Disease Control. Those who do not exercise are twice as likely to have coronary heart disease. (AHS, n.d.)
- The risk of Type II diabetes decreased progressively with increasing levels of physical activity, as found in a long term study of 5,159 men. (Wannamethee et al., 2000)
- A study of 121,701 nurses (aged 30-55) from 1976-1992 found that those who were more physically active in adulthood had a lower risk of breast cancer than those who were less physically active. The study also found that consistency of activity was more important than intensity. (Rockhill et al., 1999)
- Women, who exercised regularly in their 20's and had a healthy intake of calcium, decreased by 30% their risk of developing osteoporosis in their 70's. (Gorman, 2002, Jan. 21)

c. Boosts Immune System

- People who exercised for 20 minutes once a week were significantly less likely to call in sick than non-exercisers. Those who exercised twice a week missed even less work according to an Oklahoma State University study that tracked 79,000 people for a year. (Mooney et al., 2002)
- There was a 23% reduced risk of upper respiratory tract infections for people who were regularly active compared to those who were not, according to a study of 547 adults. (Nieman, 2001)

d. Increases Life Expectancy

- Proximity to public parks and tree-lined streets appeared to have the greatest impact on the length of the lives of study participants, even when taking into account factors known to affect longevity, such as gender, marital status, income and age. (American Planning Association, 2003)
- Children at high risk of obesity who live near parks and recreation areas are apt to participate in walking activities more often, researchers reported at the American Heart Association's Conference on Nutrition, Physical Activity and Metabolism. "...areas for physical activity can play an important role in combating the rise of obesity rates by making it easier to get daily exercise." "In future urban improvements, consideration must be given to parks, outdoor recreational areas and walking or cycling infrastructure in order to increase active living.", (ScienceDaily, Mar. 18, 2009)
- On average, every hour you spend exercising increases your life expectancy by two hours. People in a regular exercise program at age 75 have a lower death rate over the next few years than do similar groups of sedentary people. (ARC, 2000)

MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS

a. Reduces Depression

- Exercise leads to enhanced tranquility, and more relief of anxiety and depression, when it occurs in natural settings, like parks rather than along urban streets. (American Planning Association, 2003)
- Participating in recreation activities provides Californians with experiences they look forward to and enjoy. Recreation activities also reduce alienation, loneliness and isolation, all of which contribute to depression. Recreation provides a social atmosphere that draws people out of their houses and into community life. Depressed patients who were not medicated were less likely to relapse if they started exercising, compared to those who only took antidepressants. (Gorman, 2002, Jan. 21)
- Mentally recalling outdoor recreation activities increases positive moods which are linked to improved self-esteem, lowered depression and reduced suicide rates. (Tarrant et al., 1994)

b. Relieves Stress

- Participation in leisure activities provides resources that assist people either to resist the onset of stress reactions or cope with stress before stress has an impact on health. (Coleman and Iso-Ahola, 2001)
- Window views of nature have been shown to increase positive feelings, lower stress levels and improve the physical condition of both hospital patients and office employees. (Tarrant, 1996)

c. Improves Quality of Life, including Self-Esteem, Personal and Spiritual Growth, and Life Satisfaction

- Leisure activity participation emerged as the strongest contributor to the life satisfaction of older females. (Riddick and Stewart, 2001)
- When researching the link between green space and health, in a greener environment people report fewer health complaints, more often rate themselves as being in good health, and have better mental health. (Sherer, 2003)
- Increased importance on leisure goals enhanced the positive psychological well being for women who had become homemakers after having been employed, men who had experienced recent or long-term illnesses, and men who had married. Leisure can be both a cause and an effect of psychological well-being. (Iwasaki and Smale, 1998)
- The experience of leisure enhances and reflects the quality of life or well-being of both the individual and the society of which she or he is a part. (Freysinger, 2001)
- Improved mental engagement, increased self-awareness, and clarification of values- all gained through introspection, creative engagement and expression of spiritual renewal- are some of the scientifically documented outdoor recreation benefits that develop and enhance social systems. (Driver et al., 1991)

- Nine out of ten outdoor recreation participants express satisfaction with their personal health and fitness while the six out of ten who don't participate are unsatisfied with their personal health and fitness. (ARC, 2000)
- Close to half of those who participate in recreation several times a week say they are "completely satisfied with the quality of their lives," compared to just one quarter of non-participants. (ARC, 2000)

2. The Social Benefits of Recreation

STRENGTHENS COMMUNITIES

a. Reduces Crime

- Park like surroundings increase neighborhood safety by relieving mental fatigue and feelings of violence and aggression that can occur as an outcome of fatigue. (American Planning Association, 2003)
- Residents who live near outdoor greenery are more familiar with their nearby neighbors, socialize more with them, and expressed greater feelings of community and safety than did residents lacking nearby green spaces. (American Planning Association, 2003)
- Well maintained parks and recreation facilities help reduce crime in a community.⁴

b. Encourages Volunteerism

- Companionships and friendships developed and fostered through leisure participation and perceived availability of social support generated by leisure engagement help people cope with excessive life stress and thereby help maintain or improve health. (Coleman and Iso-Ahola, 2001)
- Adults who use parks, recreation and cultural facilities and participate in recreation programs are more willing to volunteer than those who do not use these services, according to a case study of 640 adults. (Busser & Norwalk, 2001)

c. Promotes Stewardship

- Participants' feelings of care and connectedness for the environment were higher while they were in the park and after they exited the wilderness than when they initially came to the wilderness according to a study of 62 groups in the Okefenokee Wilderness. (Borrie & Roggenbuck, 2001)

⁴ Ibid

- A clear linkage between environmentalists and avid participation in outdoor recreation is demonstrated by the Roper Starch Report. One out of every ten active Americans is also personally involved in and supportive of outdoor recreation. (ARC, 1999)

PROMOTES SOCIAL BONDS

a. Unites Families

- Families that recreate together tend to be closer and more cohesive, and have a greater chance of staying together. This is true with both parent-child relationships and married couples. By participating in activities together, family members elicit feelings of loyalty, trust, harmony, teamwork and goodwill.⁵
- Family togetherness received a high rating as a reason to participate in outdoor recreation. Nearly three in four Americans consider this an important reason to get active. (ARC, 1999)

b. Builds Cultural Diversity and Harmony

- Recreation promotes positive contact between different ethnic groups and opens communication in a non-threatening atmosphere. Recreation opportunities provide a means for social interaction that can help to break down the barriers of unfamiliarity, fear and isolation. During recreation and leisure time, people are less concerned with differences and more concerned with having fun.⁶

c. Supports Individuals with Disabilities

- Positive attitudes towards the disabled, increased tolerance and sensitivity were some of the confirmed benefits of participating in integrated outdoor experiences. (McAvoy, 2001)
- By participating in re-socialization activities, individuals with disabilities enhance their interpersonal skills, experience a revitalized interest in life events and activities and an increased concern for the quality of life for others. (Heintzman, 1997)
- Aerobic exercise training can significantly improve the mental capacity of individuals with spinal cord injuries while lowering their depression, increasing their self-satisfaction/image and independence, and reducing their suicidal tendencies. (PRFO, 1992)

d. Supports Seniors

- Recreation can enhance active living, helping limit the onset of disease and impairment normally associated with the aging process. Recreation activities that include physical activity help the aging population lead independent and satisfied lives helping them remain mobile, flexible and maintaining their cognitive abilities.⁷
- Benefits such as having fun, feeling less lonely, reduced depression, fewer doctor visits, less medications, decreased pain, having more energy, generally feeling better, sleeping

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

better at night, reduced medical costs, making friends, and having something to look forward to were identified through participant's personal testimonies of "Active Options", a fitness and recreation program for persons over 62 years of age. (Katzenmeyer, 1997)

- Recreation activities provide socialization opportunities and help keep seniors active in the community. Seniors who live alone are often cut off from the community mainstream, losing their purpose for being and retreating into their homes, thus increasing their health risks. It is generally accepted that the risk of depression increases with age. (Chodzko-Zajko, 1998) Seniors involved in recreation programs have reduced feelings of alienation and loneliness and increased intergenerational understanding.⁸

SUPPORTS YOUTH

a. Develops Youth

- Play is the foundation for children's healthy development. The benefits of outdoor play are maximized when developmentally appropriate equipment and materials provided. (Sawyers, 1994)
- Preschool students exposed to a structured intervention program of a physical education curriculum that included hopping, galloping, jumping, ball bouncing, striking, kicking, catching and throwing demonstrated significantly higher improvement in fundamental locomotion and object control skills than preschool students who were only allowed to have unstructured physical play with limited equipment. (Ishee, 2003)
- Level of participation in sports and physical activities is positively associated with psychological maturity and identity development for young women. Young men tend to feel they must "prove" themselves through sports, so it is important to structure recreation activities to allow them to feel the freedom to use sports and physical activity as an exploration of alternative leisure activities and identities. (Shaw, et al., 2001)
- Because high levels of television watching by adolescents are related to low levels of development (psychological maturity and identity development) suggests that recreation programs in general are beneficial. (Shaw, et al., 2001)
- Programs and services that allow youth to have input, involvement, and ownership lead to positive human growth. Environments that are nurturing where youth can have a sense of achievement and recognition as well as opportunities for creative expression, physical activity, and social interaction provides the best settings for them to achieve the five development competencies needed to be successful as adults. The five competencies are: 1. Health/physical, 2. Personal/social, 3. Cognitive/creative, 4. Vocational, 5. Citizenship. (Hudson, 1997)
- A significant relationship between high levels of physical activity and a higher ability to integrate into peer groups, easier contact with parents and friends, and a higher degree of life satisfaction were found in a year of 1,671 children aged 11, 13 and 15. (PRFO, 1992)

⁸ Ibid

b. Enhances Education

- Involvement in constructive, non-academic activities both at school and in the community facilitates continued school engagement and academic achievement as well as other aspects of positive development during adolescence and into the early adult years. (Eccles, et al., 2003)
- Brain research confirms that physical activity enhances the learning process in children. Recreational activities are powerful ways to refine children's social, decision-making, and problem solving skills. (Isenberg and Quisenberry, 2002)
- Nearly 8 out of 10 teens who engage in after-school activities are "A" or "B" students, but only half of teens not participating in after-school activities earn these high marks. Teens who do not engage in after school activities are 5 times more likely to be "D" students than those who do participate. (Ericson, 2001)

c. Deters Negative Behaviors, such as Drug and Alcohol Use, Early Sexual Activity and Crime

- Contact with nature resulted in significant improvement for children with attention disorders and teens with behavioral disorders. (American Planning Association, 2003)
- According to the YMCA commissioned *After School for America's Teens Survey* in January 2001, teens that are unsupervised during the after-school hours of 3 to 6 p.m. are more likely to engage in risky behaviors such as drug and alcohol abuse, sexual activity, cigarette smoking, and carrying and using weapons, than are youth who are supervised or involved in structured activities during those hours.
- Students who participate in one to four hours per week of extracurricular activities are 49% less likely to use drugs and 37% less likely to become teen parents than students who do not participate, according to a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services study. (HHS, 2002)
- Adolescents and young adults who watched television for more than 7 hours a week had an increased likelihood (up to 200 percent) of committing an aggressive act in later years, according to a continuing study that began in 1975 and followed 707 families for 17 years. (Kolata, 2002)
- Fifty-seven percent of all violent crimes by juveniles occur on school days and 19 percent in the 4 hours between 3 p.m. and 7 p.m., based on the FBI's National Incident-Based Reporting System data. (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999)
- After-school recreational programs are a logical and inexpensive way to address crime. Communities with active recreation programs have seen local reductions in crime. One California district was able to keep 231,405 youths busy on evenings and weekends by using a court grant of only \$13,000 (CPRS, 1996). No method has been established to measure how much crime is caused by a lack of supervision and recreation

opportunities, but there is evidence that crime frequently drops when supervision and recreation opportunities are improved.⁹

2. The Economic Benefits of Recreation and the Conejo Recreation & Park District

- The U.S. Forest Service calculated that over a 50-year lifetime one tree generates \$31,250 worth of oxygen, provides \$62,000 worth of air pollution control, recycles \$37,500 worth of water, and controls \$31,250 worth of soil erosion.¹⁰
- There is a positive relationship between park proximity and residential property value when parks/open space are well maintained and secure, including in low income urban areas and at the edges of urban areas.
- Parks can revive demand for space in neighboring office buildings, and commercial asking rents, residential sale prices and assessed values for properties are positively affected when near a well-improved park.
- Overall quality of life and livability, including recreation opportunities, are important factors in the decision by businesses on location—if people want to live in a place, companies, stores, hotels, homes and apartments will follow.
- Parks can serve as a city's signature attractions, prime marketing tools to attract tourists, conventions and businesses, helping to shape city identity and give residents pride of place.
- Organized events held in public parks—art festivals, athletic events, food festivals, musical and theatrical events—often bring substantial positive economic impacts to their communities, filling hotel rooms and restaurants and bringing customers to local stores.¹¹
- School Districts receive economic value from contribution of City resources in partnerships for facility development and programming for students and the general public.
- “The Conejo Recreation and Park District is an economic engine of Ventura County. It fuels output, tax revenue, and job creation, both through its direct budgetary expenditures, and indirectly through affiliated organizations that use its facilities, visitors who are brought to the area for activities, and volunteers who freely donate their creative energy to community causes.”¹²

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ “Why America Needs More City Parks and Open Space.” By Sherer, Paul M. *The Trust for Public Land White Paper*. 2003.

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Damooei PhD., CRPD, *An Economic Engine of Ventura County*, (2010) p 6

- "Investments in the Conejo Recreation and Park District have an impressive return comparable with or greater than many business investments that create jobs, add to the regional output, or generate tax incomes. . . ." ¹³
- "CRPD creates hundreds of jobs, contributes tens of millions of dollars to the economy, has a positive role in the development of youth, and is a place of hope and joy for senior citizens." ¹⁴
- "For every dollar spent by [CRPD], some \$2.07 were added to the regional and some \$2.74 to the state gross regional products. The total number of paid jobs (full time plus full-time-equivalent) was about 161 in the institution upon conclusion of 2009. Total jobs created in Ventura County through the various activities and contributions of CRPD reached 784 in the County and 933 within the state of California." ¹⁵

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¹³ Ibid, p 10

¹⁴ Ibid, p 48

¹⁵ Ibid, p 59

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