



LHS-28

Summer program for homeless children

When families in the state of Massachusetts transitional housing assistance program were placed in hotels and motels along a local highway, the only places for the children of these families to play were their hotel rooms or the hotel parking lots. The city of Peabody (48,000) and town of Danvers (25,000) decided to offer these children a fun, enriching, and safe recreational experience.

Implementation notes

Leadership/staffing The program was developed by the recreation directors of Danvers and Peabody. Four young teachers served as camp counselors.

Timeline Peabody developed the initial version of the program, which served a small number of children, in 2002. When more families in the state program moved into hotels along Route 1 in Peabody and Danvers in 2003, the two communities teamed up to offer an eight-week program to all of the children living in the hotels. The program was offered again in 2004, but was stopped after about four weeks when the state program moved the families into other types of housing.

Budget/funding Peabody's initial program was funded with a \$20,000 grant from the state department of transitional assistance. The joint program cost \$35,000 a year; these funds came from local organizations and businesses. Local organizations also provided meals and snacks.

Program description The two communities worked together to raise the money for the program, which was designed to be similar to the other summer playground programs offered in Danvers and Peabody. Every day for eight weeks, up to 50 children aged 5–12 years were taken by school bus from the hotels to an elementary school in Peabody that had a large outdoor playground and an indoor gym. Activities included indoor and outdoor games,

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arts and crafts, small- and large-group activities, and team sports. The program provided each child with a nutritious breakfast and lunch as well as mid-morning and mid-afternoon snacks. The program operated Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. The children also participated in one or two field trips every week to such places as the beach, a roller-skating rink, museums, minor league baseball games, and the zoo. Special guests were invited to lead activities; for example, a woman taught the children how to make decorated gimp necklaces.

Results The number of children participating in the program varied from day to day, as some families were placed in permanent housing and others moved into the hotels. The children were eager to participate in all of the activities and felt comfortable and safe in the program. Many did not know how to play games on the playground, but they learned how to play together without arguing.