

Collins Street Neighborhood Council

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www.unitycdc.org/CollinsSthome.html

Digital Arts Media Center Pilot After-School Program

PURPOSE PROGRAM:

The Collins Street Neighborhood Council/CSNC believes it is time that community leaders acknowledge the fact that there has been a historical lack of youth-oriented recreational opportunities and proactive activities in the Collins Street area. To this date, absolutely no type of structured activities exist in Joliet's 4th District for young people to participate in during the summer that are fun, educational or can serve as an alternative to the gang activity that plagues our neighborhoods. To provide such needed activities is what we intend to do because we know this is a critical component for reducing crime trends and statistics in our neighborhoods and for keeping true to our mission.

All community leaders—and any adult who has ever loved a child—recognizes that a top priority is keeping our children safe from harm. While successful businesses continue to flourish on Collins Street, we ask ourselves if our children's futures look just as bright. With this in mind, the Collins Street Neighborhood Council recognizes the need for quality and affordable social and recreational programs for children and youth who are home afterschool and during the summer months with a lot of idle time on their hands. Children in this area are often left with very limited supervision while parents work or are away from the home. Idle time after school and especially during summer creates an influx of gang recruitment and drug sales.

Joliet crime statistics and common knowledge uphold the fact that gangs have been and continue to be a major problem in our neighborhoods, compromising everyone's safety. Even during genuine attempts to avoid these troubles, youth are often caught in a cross fire of guns, drugs and senseless tragedies. This is what makes the need for alternative activities absolutely necessary if we are to limit their exposure to a dangerous, life-threatening environment.

Collins Street Neighborhood Council wishes to provide a centrally-located youth center where children and teenagers can reach it within a reasonable walking distance and want to be there. "Build it and they will come" is a famous movie line that applies to what we envision as a safe haven so kids will flock to— if given the choice.

Activities

1. Overall Goal: With the help of various volunteers from all walks of life, youths will gain a better understanding of themselves and the world around them, foster positive relationships with their peers and adults alike, and recognize that they have the power to overcome obstacles and to get what they want out of life.

Objectives: For all youth in attendance, we will:

- (a) Provide a safe and positive environment;
- (b) Create positive alternatives to gang involvement and drug activity by enabling youth to discover and showcase their God-given talents and natural abilities;
- (c) Assist youth to identify and set obtainable goals for their future and empower them to reach these goals through a mentorship program; and,
- (d) Infuse a strong sense of character, poise, and civic engagement that will lay the foundation for these young individuals to take pride in themselves and their surroundings.

2. Ways to meet Goals: First and foremost, our program will take a multicultural, artistic, and creative approach to preventing gang involvement and drug activity. Without a doubt, program activities will vary and reflect the interests of today's youth. Recreational and educational opportunities as well as exploration of four important topics—faith, family, friends and the future—will be at the heart of the program.

Recreation in and around the building would promote healthy living and controlled, friendly competition in the sport of the kids' choice for them to grow in their understanding and enjoyment of the sport. Kids will engage in a world of audio/visual, studio and sound art technology. Creative drama, dance and role playing will develop a healthy sense of self-expression in a proactive setting.

Clergy, college and business volunteers will facilitate vibrant break-out sessions that instill hope and promote morals and positive goal-setting for youth. Representatives from government agencies, police departments and clergy alike would act as mentors by addressing the youth in groups or by working with them on a one-on-one basis. These interactions will focus on conflict resolution, positive self-esteem, and encourage each participant to identify his or her life goals and to start going in the right direction for accomplishing those goals.

Program participant would be accountable to a contract they will sign, agreeing to follow the rules of the program. At the conclusion of the program, a ceremony will be held to acknowledge the progress participants made and the goals they have achieved. Our goal is to serve at least 45 youth the first year with a minimum of 1 adult volunteer for every seven youth involved.

Enrollment criteria would include: 9-17 years of age, low-income family status based on free/reduced school lunch criteria or TANF/LIHEAP eligibility, and/or IDPA medical card eligibility. All participants will reside in Joliet with priority given to youth living in Joliet's 4th District.

Lastly, it should be noted that this program would be an unduplicated service in the City of Joliet and, specifically, in the city's 4th District.

3. To be administered by: Collins Street Neighborhood Council and its designated volunteers.

4. Time Frame: Sept 2012 – July 2013

Community Benefit:

Undoubtedly, the community as a whole will benefit because youth will get a better grasp of life without gangs, guns and drugs, thus safety from these evils will increase. The community will further benefit because as we continue to spread the word about our program, parents will know where to turn when they need for their children to interact socially in a proactive setting and without having to drive across town to do it or be expected to spend money they don't have. Notably, all services we provide to the community will be free of charge because all activities, goods and services will be received and carried out on a voluntary or in-kind basis.

EVALUATION

The way to truly evaluate and measure the program's effectiveness will be to compare "before and after" statistics of the child's school attendance, grades and disciplinary problems; their church attendance; college enrollment; and, above all else, the increase or drop of crime statistics in specific neighborhoods.

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