

Academy Optimist Club of Colorado Springs – 25008

Introduction:

All Optimist Clubs seek to meet the needs of the communities they serve. We especially are looking to help the youth in our community to become the best they can be! We have several programs that have been developed to help meet the needs of kid that we have observed when talking with teachers, parents, and community members. I will outline four of these that have been extremely successful.

Project 1

State testing and the Standards that teachers are working to achieve with students have involved reading and writing. The first program that we have developed is the Bringing Up Grades program. We work with third graders in several schools to reward students who put forth much effort in reading. Beginning in Sept. and going through May, we ask teachers to choose the student from their classroom each month who has put forth the most effort and achieved the most progress. The schools usually have 3 to 4 classrooms and we award 3 to 4 students special recognition. We have made up shirts that have a “ladybug” and the words – “Member of the B.U.G. Club”. We give a framed certificate, the shirt, and a book purchased at our local Kohls Dept. Store. (This book is also a contribution as the \$5 goes all to a charity for kids.) One of our members has created a Ladybug costume and each time one of our members wears it during the presentation. We do it in individual classrooms or as a large 3rd grade group. At year’s end, we have a pizza party for the members of the “B.U.G. Club”.

We have seen improvement in student motivation to read and therefore, an increase in testing scores (10%). Teachers are thrilled with the program and students eagerly await the arrival of “Dot”, our ladybug, and her entourage! Students are encouraging each other and the atmosphere is positive!

The cost is paper for the certificates, \$1 for the frame, \$6 for the shirt, and \$5 for the book. For \$12 per student it is a bargain in returns and producing Optimists in reading! We also provide the pizza at a cost of about \$30.

Project 2

The second project is a take-off on the Essay contest. We approach elementary teachers (classroom and Gifted and Talented) to have an essay contest for their 3rd-5th grade writers. These students show a propensity for writing and love to do it! This is also an important part of the State testing scenario. The students write on the same topic as our OI contestants do, but we limit the words to 400-500. We help teachers when they ask for our help to discuss what a contest is all about and what requirements mean when you enter a contest. If necessary, some of our teachers have asked us to work with individual students to critique and edit their work in progress. We enlist the aid of 3 judges and it is judged as the regular contest is. (Judges may be members of the club.) We invite the winners to our meeting and we have certificates and medals (purchased at a local awards shop with no OI insignias, but bronze, silver, and gold.)

Students who love to write are excited about this contest. We honor all students who enter with a certificate (we make our own as this is not an “official” part of the OI Essay Contest) in a folder. We have heard from teachers that this contest has honored students who have not received honors before and has motivated them to continue writing.

The cost is paper for the certificates, \$1 for the frames for the top three winners, medals, which we paid \$24 for all three, and the meal at our Optimist Club meeting. Parents and teachers were invited and we paid for the teachers. This is done in the Spring, and usually the kids are honored at our late April meeting or the 1st meeting in May. The cost per student is \$9 times 3 students. The meal is our option.

We ask winning students to read their essays, and if they are uncomfortable doing this, one of our Optimists will partner with him/her and read it for them. Students who write often are too shy to speak! It builds the relationship with community members who help!

Project 3

Liberty Day is the study of our country's Founding Documents. In Colorado, 5th graders study the founding of our country. With so much in the curriculum, not a lot of time is spent on the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. The Liberty Day organization has materials to help students look closely at these documents and offer questions to help in what is important to know. We focus on the Constitution and find teachers who are excited to help students who are interested in learning more. We ask students to self-select and be willing to meet at least 4 times after school for an hour to study the Constitution. Some of our interested members co-teach with the teacher(s) involved. A close and comfortable relationship develops. At the end of those 4 sessions, the Optimists have set up a chance for the students to go to a university/college to quiz the students on campus. We have built relationships with Community Relations people, Deans, Campus student organizations, and anyone else who can assist us in making inroads for a few hours one day. We use parent drivers who attend the day with us, Optimists, and teachers to transport the students to and from the college. We always have the Principal's backing and therefore students are able to miss a morning or afternoon school time.

This program, as we do it, incurs more cost. Each student has a Liberty Day Kid's shirt (red, white, and blue) that identifies who they are (\$10); a tote bag with a flag on it (\$5); 20 copies of the Constitution with the questions (\$1 per book), and stickers that say, "You were quizzed by a Liberty Day Kid". This \$35-\$40 cost has been split by co-partnering with the local Sertoma Club, who believes in this idea, but doesn't have the time or membership to be involved in a "hands-on" way. Many times the university will treat the students to lunch at the cafeteria and this is always a highlight. Sometimes we help by financing the parent and teacher

chaperones. We do this once a year for each of two schools who are involved – Fall and Spring.

This is such an exciting experience for students, that it is now asked about at the beginning of 5th grade by most students. Students come back throughout middle and high school to tell us that it was the highlight of elementary school. They appreciate and learn about history; they share their knowledge; they learn quizzing/interviewing skills; and they are exposed (many for the 1st time) to a college/university campus. We often hear, “Wow, that was awesome! Maybe I could go to college someday!” We have planted a seed! We see growth and excitement in 5th graders that their teachers have never experienced!

Project 4

Writing continues to be a key for student success. We have a Pen Pal Program with 5th graders in a local elementary school. We provide composition books to students, they write an entry to one of our Optimist members, and we write back. This occurs every 2 weeks. No last names are used, no personal information is revealed, but we develop a relationship with a student that allows them to practice writing and to receive writing. We work to model good writing so that they can experience it.

The cost is \$1 for the book at the local Dollar Store, and the manpower to take the books, pick them up and distribute to Optimist members who are involved, collect them again, and take them back to the school.

We see progress in writing and relationships through writing being built! We start in Sept. and finish in May!

The Projects that I have explained in this “White Paper” have expanded Optimist member involvement; made a crucial difference in the success of our young people; and been a lot of fun!! For more information, contact Donna Priester at donnapriester@hotmail.com or call 719-590-1217 and she will forward your questions or information to a Chair for the Project.