

PARTY-on!: Project #: 07-18

Polk County Conservation

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PARTY-on (Playful Active Recreation Targeted for You) is a three part program to get teens excited about and active in the outdoors using Global Positioning System (GPS) technology, service learning and outdoor skills programming. PARTY-on is a continuation of a REAP-CEP grant PARTY.

PARTY-on program partners with the Chrysalis Foundation's after-school programs for middle school students in the Des Moines metro area. Throughout the school year, a PCC naturalist instructs the students in three different outdoor experiences. During the first class, students learn how to use a GPS and about Geocaching. This program took place on the school grounds and incorporated environmental issues. The second program took students to a local park to perform a service learning project, such as, planting trees, removing invasive species or collecting prairie grass seed. During the third program, students learned and participated in an outdoor skill, such as, fishing, canoeing or snowshoeing.

This has been a very successful and positive program for getting youth active in the outdoors.

Comments from PARTY-on middle school participants:

Comments from the GPS classes: I learned how to navigate and use a GPS; The geocaching thing was awesome; It must connect with a satellite; You can find treasures; Totally rocked!

Comments regarding service learning projects: It's good volunteering for our community and our world so it can be a better place; I learned how to harvest seeds and about plants; Parks are beautiful don't litter; I learned how to plant a tree and put a worm on a hook

Comments from the outdoor skills classes: I learned how to keep a canoe from tipping; I learned how to cast a fishing pole; I learned how to put a worm on a hook; I learned you have to be patient for the fish to come; I gained the courage to touch a worm; I discovered there is a lot of littering going on; I caught two fish and got to hang out with my friends.

As a result of these programs:

- 62% increased their knowledge of what a GPS is and how to use it for geocaching.
- 57% indicated they plan to share this new learned knowledge with friends and family.
- 45 % indicated they are more likely to visit a new park and try the outdoor skill.

Project review: The PARTY-on grant went as planned. The PCC naturalist built a great rapport with the after school instructors and students. The students were asked when we would be coming back and programming with them again. In the future, we would begin the program scheduling at the beginning of the school year not in the middle of the year. The timing of this grant made for difficult scheduling and working with a different group of instructors and students in the spring and fall.

Outputs:

- 600 students learned about and participated in geocaching, a service learning project and an outdoor skill
- Taught a minimum of three environmental concepts to the middle school students during the classes.

- Students were given examples of a variety of ways to get out and enjoy the outdoors.
- PARTY-on program was presented to naturalists and other professional at NAI Region V conference in Rochester MN.

Outcomes:

- 62% of the students indicated they are more knowledgeable about geocaching following the GPS program. A few written responses included:
 - You can find treasures. It is easier to use than I thought
 - Geocaches equals outdoor fun.
- 53% increase in student's knowledge of the multiple uses of a GPS unit. A few written responses included:
 - It can do routes and directions
 - You can go online and download spots
 - Cool technology, learned how to use it
- 57% of the students indicated they would share their outdoor experience with family and friends.
- 55 of the 100 students evaluated shared their outdoor experience with over 335 family and friends. Several students shared it with other formal youth groups.
- Students had a 42% increase in knowledge of Iowa environmental issues. A few of the EE issues listed, included:
 - Honeysuckle is an invasive species
 - Pollution and litter, including, water pollution, soil erosion
 - Trees need space to grow (savannahs and habitat loss)
- 81% of the students responded they would be willing to help with future service learning projects: A few written responses included:
 - Yes, Because I had a great time and want to do it again
 - It was fun. I loved being outside with my friends
 - Yes, because it was fun giving back to the community
 - Yes, for the fresh air and the way we were helping the environment

Concerns/ Evaluation Data:

- None

Marketing tools:

- Most effective marketing tool was our success with the initial PARTY REAP-CEP grant and using that as a reference point when meeting with the instructors to plan the PARTY-on programs.
- Meeting with the instructors at an all-staff meeting and going over the Party-on program.
- Word of mouth marketing from one teacher to another



Photo #1: Geocaching at Hoyt Middle School

Photo #2: Winter Survival/Savanna Hike with South East Polk Middle School Girls Club

Photo #3: Service Learning cutting out Invasive species (Honeysuckle) with Harding Middle School Girl's Group