

Red Shield youth programs make a difference

by Ron McKinney, Envoy –

The Salvation Army, one of the nation's largest and most respected human service organizations, has been serving the needs of youth in the United States for more than 120 years, and is highly regarded by the public, the government and other agencies for its holistic approach to meeting those needs.

The Salvation Army Red Shield Corps Community Center programs are the frontline programs for providing the tools our young people need to not only survive, but also become successful, contributing citizens in our inner cities today.

We currently have 26 Red Shield type programs in operation in this territory, with programs in all 10 divisions. Some of the major cities where they are located are Denver, Los Angeles, Anaheim, San Diego, Modesto, Phoenix, Seattle, Spokane, Portland and Sacramento. They are situated in neighborhoods where they can make the biggest impact in the war against gang activities, school dropouts, drug usage, and domestic violence.

Serving our communities

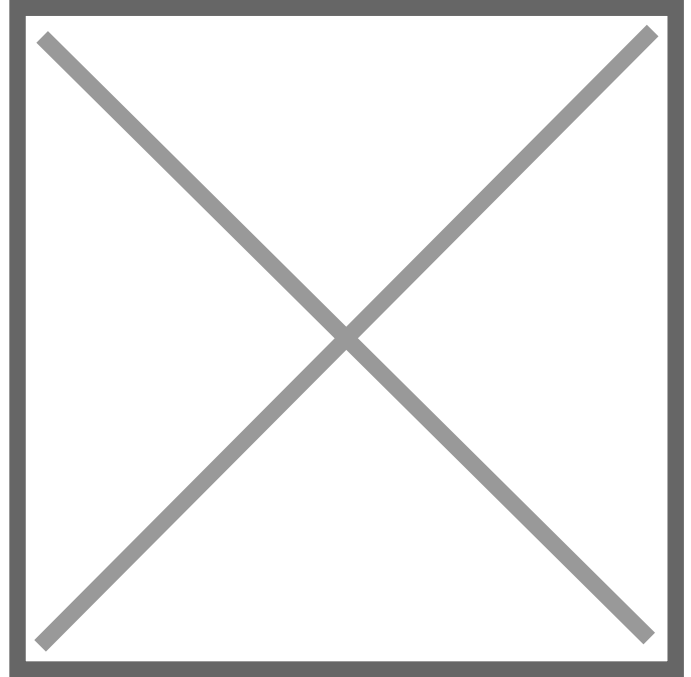
The mission statement of our Red Shield programs is to serve the residents of the communities and outlying areas of the centers by providing a safe and secure environment for activities, meetings and programs; by strengthening family relationships and roles; and meeting the social, recreational, educational and spiritual needs of the communities we represent.

As the corps officer of the Denver Red Shield Corps Community Center, I see first hand the impact that our programs have on the children and young adults who live in our community. We serve the residents of five Northeast Denver communities, which represent the highest dropout rate, unwed pregnancies, and percentage of single parent families in the state of Colorado.

Cutting edge programs

The Denver Red Shield programs are cutting edge programs, which incorporate educational and recreational activities with life-skill training that enable our young people to succeed in being better people physically, spiritually, and educationally. Currently we have an active membership of more than 1,200.

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Our after-school program has a daily attendance of 75 to 80 children in grades K through 8. More than 50 attend a tutoring program and phonics intervention program, which provides valuable assistance to young students. Summer day camp averages 80 per day and we send 80 children or more to our sleep-a-way camp at High Peak Camp in Estes Park, Colo., each summer.

An innovative F.U.T.U.R.E. program (For You The Real Economics) teaches our junior and senior high school students the impact of good credit and banking habits as well as financial planning.

Single mothers with teenage boys find support in the "Boys to Men" program, which deals with issues of concern to single moms.

Teens with educational problems take part in the "Wiz-Kid" counseling program, which provides one-on-one tutoring. We have one of the best "computer lab" programs in the state with volunteer teachers. These two programs have helped tremendously in our fight to keep kids in school.

A domestic violence and anger management counseling program is available for single parents.

Sports activities make a difference

Our Colorado Starlight drill and drum team is one of the best in the state of Colorado and has more than 100 member. They perform in at least five major parades and events a year. Recently, they had the honor of leading the Martin Luther King, Jr., parade in Denver.

Organized sports teams are popular, and include; four football teams for youth ages 6 through 14 (our 13-14 year old team won the National Pigskin Classic tournament); four basketball teams including 7th through 11th grade; Tang Soo Do (Karate) program with more than 60 active members (boys and girls); a boxing program that has just sent its first boxer to the Western Olympic Boxing Trials; and five active basketball leagues weekly for 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th grade boys and girls. We also, with the support of the NFL Alumni, send 144 children to our football camp in Estes Park each year prior to the start of football season.

Our goal at the Denver Red Shield is to provide the training and resources that will promote a positive, caring environment to youth by providing homework assistance, character building activities, and physical development resulting in respect for oneself and the community.

Between 250 to 300 youth participate in the programs each day. All of our recreational programs are coordinated with our educational programs and we have a base of more than 60 qualified volunteers who make it all happen. Our relationship with the National Football League Alumni is the magnet that draws many of our troubled youth to us for assistance.

Throughout the Western Territory, The Salvation Army Red Shield programs generate more than a million contacts with young people per year and boast a membership of more than 191,000 children.

How does the Red Shield program help kids? By being there for them!

It has been said, “ The youth are the future of our country.” I believe our Salvation Army Red Shield programs provide a future for our youth.