

After-school Services Shed Light on Kids' Needs

By Julia Park

Alameda joined cities across the country to celebrate an event called Lights on Afterschool, Oct. 14. The event, which emphasized the need for after school programs, featured a bus tour of several Alameda sites where teens congregate or kids are cared for after school.

The Alameda Collaborative for Children, Youth and Families (ACCYF) hosted the event, the second time the city has participated in the national celebration.

The Lights On Afterschool program is designed "to show the value and importance of a safe place for kids to go after school," according to Audrey Lord-Hausman, administrative coordinator for ACCYF.

Alameda has more than 20 agencies that provide activities to approximately 1,000 children and teens a week. Stops on the bus tours included Girls Inc., the Teen Underground/McCullum Youth Court, Woodstock Child Development Center, Home Project/Home Sweet Home, the R.I.S.E. program at Chipman Middle School and the Alameda Point Collaborative. The tour ended at the Xanthos Tri-High Garden Project at Encinal High School.

This year's program targeted the Alameda business community, and several business leaders were invited to participate in the bus tour. "We wanted to bring home to the business community that an employee

who knows that (his or her) child is in a safe environment for the after-school hours is going to be much more productive," said Lord-Hausman. "Their comfort level is greater than an employee who is worrying" about a latchkey child.

The bus tours took several business and community leaders to the various sites of after-school programs around the Island. Girls, Inc. of the Island City operates seven before- and after-care centers around Alameda, with sites at Earhart, Paden, Franklin, Otis, Lum, Bay Farm and Edison schools, as well as the Myers Center on Santa Clara Avenue. Some 240 boys and girls are cared for daily in the school sites, with another 50 girls between the ages of 6 and 18 participating in activities at the Myers Center. At the Bay Farm site, children greeted their visitors with refreshments and handmade tissue-paper leis. Students do homework, then participate in outdoor activities like games and sports, and indoor activities like art projects.

At the Home Sweet Home preschool and HOME Project at Alameda Point, director Jane Sperling showed off the programs for teens, which included an ongoing fitness challenge, a sound engineering studio for recording music, and a preschool where teen boys and girls learn about young childhood development and education as they help care for preschoolers. The teens did calisthenics and a yoga workout in one room, while in another area, pre-



Photo by Julia Park

Leader Ann Chang helps with an art project as Nate Putnam, 9, joins in at Bay Farm Elementary School's Girls Inc. after-school program.

school director Nick Challed discussed his program with enthusiasm.

At Chipman Middle School, visitors were greeted with a precision performance by the Cougar Cadet Corps, with drums, flags and rifle routines. At the RISE ("Reaching Integrated Success in Education") program at Chipman, students do an hour and a half of homework and follow that with enrichment activities. RISE students put on a talent show for visitors, with dances, songs and Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" on the recorder. Middle-school students also pair with younger pupils from the Woodstock Elementary School program as reading buddies.

Event co-chairs Mayor Beverly Johnson, AUSD School Board Trustee Barbara Guenther and Alameda County Supervisor Alice Lai-Bitker were on hand at the reception afterward.

"It was great to share our experience about what each of the pro-

grams are doing," said Doug Biggs, community resources director at the Alameda Point Collaborative, who helped coordinate the event. "We appreciate the community leaders who came out to visit the programs; it made the children who presented information about our program feel special."

Statistics show that students who participate in after-school programs show increased academic achievement, an improvement in attendance with fewer tardies and that youth-related crime decreases in areas with programs, according to Lord-Hausman.

She counts this year's event as a success, with the goal of increasing participation in next year's Lights On Afterschool celebration. "We began to plant the seeds," Lord-Hausman said.

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