



Parks After Dark

Evaluation Brief | May 2024

INTRODUCTION

Parks After Dark (PAD) is a Los Angeles County initiative led by the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), in partnership with other County departments and community-based organizations. PAD has been operating since 2010 in Los Angeles County areas with high levels of violence, obesity, and economic hardship. Parks serve as a community hub, connecting attendees to unique programming and health and social services to improve their well-being.

DPR introduced two new goals and two new strategic priorities in 2023, including a focus on positive youth development, targeted senior engagement, inclusion of community members in program design, and community-driven safety approaches.

PAD Goals

- 1** Decrease community violence and **INCREASE SAFETY**
- 2** Facilitate **CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION** in park communities and countywide
- 3** Increase **SOCIAL COHESION AND FAMILY AND COMMUNITY WELL-BEING**
- 4** Increase access to **FREE RECREATIONAL PROGRAMMING, AND HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES** that reflect the interests and needs of communities served
- 5** Increase physical activity and **DECREASE CHRONIC DISEASE RISK**
- 6** Contribute to **POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**
- 7** Promote **SENIOR CONNECTEDNESS**



PARTICIPANTS

PAD was hosted at **34 DPR parks** between June and August 2023, offering programming on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights for eight weeks.

An estimated

405,000+

visits made by participants during the 2023 PAD summer season, up from **137,000** in 2022



87%

of all PAD participants attended with children



51% live outside a PAD ZIP code



49% live within a PAD ZIP code

PAD Park



Participants frequently walk to PAD from the surrounding neighborhood

Participant demographics

63%

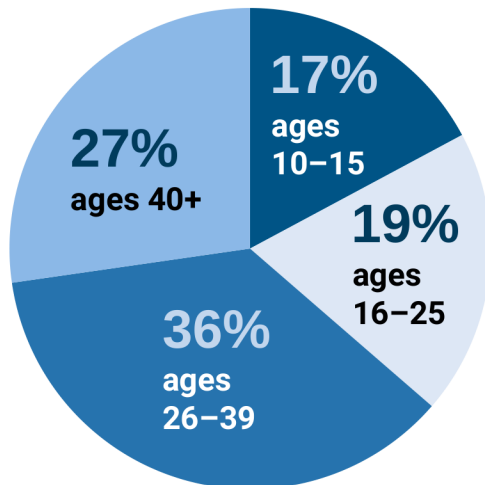
female

61%

Hispanic/
Latinx

17%

Black or
African American



PARTICIPANT PERSPECTIVES



97%

would attend
PAD again

97%

would recommend
PAD to others

96%

believed PAD
is important
for their
community

96%

believed the
variety of activities
to be of interest to
their community



"The program is such a great way to meet the community where they are at. And I think it's been advantageous for our department and others to leverage the PAD programming to reach people in the communities where it's implemented, which are often the communities that have the greatest need across different areas."

**– Key informant
Department of Public Health**

Top activities:



30%
movie nights



17%
concerts



18%
sports clinics
and games

PAD partners include:

- Los Angeles County
 - Department of Mental Health
 - Department of Public Health (DPH)
 - Office of Violence Prevention
 - Safe Passage Interventionists
 - Sheriff's Department
 - Department of Probation
 - Department of Workforce Investment
 - Other County Departments
- Community Organizations (500+)
- Local/Community/Small Businesses and Vendors (200+)



SPOTLIGHT: PAD PARK STAFF

As emphasized in key informant interviews, PAD park staff are seen as critical to the success of PAD. Staff are dedicated to serving their community through PAD, tailoring events to meet attendees' needs. Park staff are seen as a facilitator to feelings of safety at PAD and often work to build trust and rapport with regular PAD attendees. PAD partners described park staff as having a "whatever it takes mindset" when it comes to PAD; staff often step out of their traditionally assigned roles to contribute.



OUTCOMES

INCREASED FEELINGS OF SAFETY

93%



of participants felt safe attending PAD

93%



agreed that deputy sheriffs positively engaged with community members at PAD

Estimated reduction in crime

74

Part I crimes avoided between 2010 and 2023 (serious and violent crimes; e.g., theft, robbery)

43

Part II crimes avoided between 2010 and 2023 (nonviolent crimes; e.g., vandalism)

\$10.472 million

estimated savings in criminal justice costs from Part I crimes avoided between 2010–2023



Contributors to feelings of safety:

- Sheriff deputies and intervention worker presence
- Park staff
- Positive atmosphere
- Park environment (e.g., facilities, lighting)



SPOTLIGHT: COMMUNITY INTERVENTION WORKERS AND THE SAFE PASSAGES INITIATIVE (SOUTH AGENCY)

The Safe Passages Initiative, funded by DPH's Office of Violence Prevention, contracts with community-based organizations to hire gang interventionists who ensure youth, teens, and families can get to and from PAD parks safely and can enjoy PAD and other park programming.

Interventionists work to engage gang-impacted youth in PAD, provide crisis intervention services at the parks as needed, and work in partnership with park staff, law enforcement, and communities to monitor and ensure safety. Recognizing that not all communities are comfortable with the presence of deputy sheriffs, intervention workers can help to facilitate feelings of safety. Intervention workers often have a deep understanding of community dynamics and events and work collaboratively with PAD staff to anticipate any potential safety concerns.

IMPROVED SOCIAL COHESION

More than

9 in 10

participants agreed PAD...

- Increased chances to spend quality time with family (**96%**)
- Provides a sense of belonging within community (**96%**)
- Helps to get to know neighbors better (**94%**)

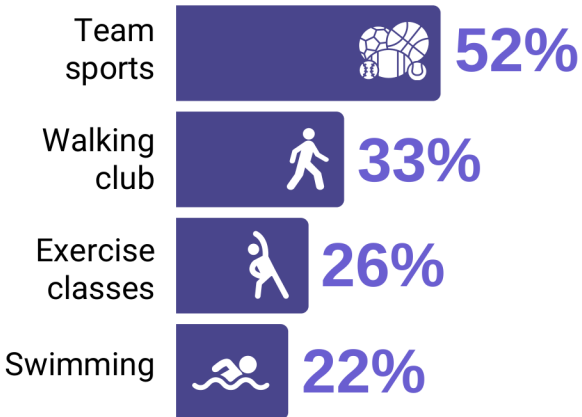


REDUCED BURDEN OF DISEASE

More than

7 in 10 (72%)

participated in physical activity during PAD



"I love what you guys do for the community and accept everybody individually and equally. It is good that everyone has a good time together as a family."

— Participant
Carver Park



Estimated reduction in disease burden

2
premature
deaths avoided

20
fewer years
of disability

Decline of
20
years of life lost

\$2.974 million
estimated savings
in the reduction in
disease burden



SPOTLIGHT: YOUTH AT WORK PROGRAM

The Youth at Work program offers individuals 14–24 years old with paid work experience and soft skills training. DPR has served as a host site for the program and from July 2022–June 2023, over 370 youth worker placements occurred across the 34 PAD parks. Since the program's inception, over 100 youth have obtained part-time employment with DPR.



"We've had a lot of people actually write into our department just saying how much this has saved their teenager from going in the wrong direction, or parents even talking about how they didn't have finances to take their kids on vacation for the summer ... PAD was the place that they took their kids for all the fun over the summer."

**— Key informant
Department of Parks and Recreation**

Select recommendations based on 2023 PAD evaluation findings include:

- 1** Promote safety at PAD parks through continued engagement of deputy sheriffs and expanded involvement of community intervention workers.
- 2** Expand physical activity offerings to appeal to a variety of age groups and interests, in order to maximize the impact on chronic disease.
- 3** Ensure staffing support for PAD by strategically planning in advance and exploring opportunities for youth employment and community volunteers.
- 4** Continue tailoring of programs to meet unique PAD park community needs.

SPOTLIGHT: SPRING AND WINTER PROGRAMMING

In 2022, PAD introduced one-day spring and winter PAD events, which were themed around holidays and offered a variety of activities for all ages. These events have been well received by attendees and have expanded PAD's reach.



PAD partners include:

**PARKS
AFTER
DARK**

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS & RECREATION



Parks After Dark

Evaluation Brief | May 2024

Nadereh Pourat, Leigh Ann Haley, Brenna O'Masta, Cynthia Garcia, Weihao Zhou

For more information about Parks After Dark, please contact:

Freddy Zavaleta

Parks After Dark (PAD) coordinator
fzavaleta@parks.lacounty.gov

Alicia Rodarte

Parks After Dark (PAD) coordinator
arodarte@parks.lacounty.gov

Patricia Lieu

Data scientist
plieu@parks.lacounty.gov

County of Los Angeles | Department of Parks and Recreation
<https://parks.lacounty.gov>

Information in this brief is based on PAD participant surveys (de-duplicated, n = 25,413) and estimates of attendance by PAD parks. Surveys were completed by some PAD attendees over the age of 9.

UCLA Center for Health Policy Research

10960 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 1550
Los Angeles, California 90024
Phone: 310-794-0909
Fax: 310-794-2686
Email: chpr@ucla.edu
healthpolicy.ucla.edu

The UCLA Center for Health Policy Research is part of the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health.

The analyses, interpretations, conclusions, and views expressed in this evaluation are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, the Regents of the University of California, or collaborating organizations or funders.

Copyright © 2024 by the Regents of the University of California. All Rights Reserved.

Editor-in-Chief: Ninez A. Ponce, PhD, MPP



Read this publication online