

A Complete Aquatics Program at Granite High School

They may not look very graceful as they enter the water and even sometimes not when they swim, but the enthusiasm you feel is catching. They face numerous problems ranging from finances, language and even from a swim coach who hides equipment from them – even racing lanes.

Many have said over the years that a Swim Team at Granite is just not possible. Ruth Yorke just does not believe that. Working as a substitute teacher at Granite Park Junior High School she became very much aware of all the problems that her students were facing. They needed something to allow them to experience some success in their life. She started working with local PTA groups to get the word out that there was a Complete Aquatics Program available.

A large number of students come from homes where Spanish is the first language and there just is not a lot of available funds for these families to spend on activity programs for their children. Ruth has encouraged these youth to get involved. Some of them have fee waivers which allow them to “pay” their way others have only been able to come now and then. But the Granite District does not gain any financial income from Fee Waivers and this becomes a problem when most programs decisions are made based on financial considerations.

Two boys were I met able to come to come up with the money to come to Open Plunge time in the summer. They really wanted to take lessons and to get involved in the team but their families just could not afford it so they just went “looking for something to do.” Hopefully they found something constructive to do.

In a 2 week trial program 20 youth came every day, but only 8 of them could afford to come back. Some of these youth would really like to get involved in the swim team in the High School, but are too embarrassed to admit that they don't swim very well yet. A Complete Aquatics Program sponsored by the Community Education Program is ideal for them because it is managed as a part of the Swimming Lesson program.

There is no real way to measure the success which has been achieved already except perhaps to look at the faces of these who are involved. They learn to work hard and to take responsibility by acting as team captains on a rotating basis. They learn to care about each other. One young man said that the best part of the meet was when a friend of his was finally able to make enough progress to beat him at his best stroke. One young girl said: “I tried my very best and that's plenty good enough.”

During one of the swim meets a grandfather came to help be a timer because his granddaughter had begged and pleaded since her parents were both working

and could not come. In the middle of the meet he said: "I have never done anything significant in my entire life until now. This is so important to my granddaughter."

Being involved in the Swim Club program gives the youth role models in the coaching staff and the older youth. It gives them something to be proud of. When asked if she were an athlete one young lady said: "Yeah! I'm a swimmer." Another young man was just working as hard as he could to finish the race even after everyone else was out of the pool. As he completed his last length of the pool everyone in the building was standing on the edge of the pool cheering him on. He just didn't give up and his attitude is a good example of the whole group thanks in large part to their coach.

50% of the youth involved speak mainly Spanish at home. This has made a difference for them as well as their parents and has provided a way to get out into the community and learn to speak English better. One young swimmer and her mother spoke no English at all in the beginning and now they both can understand the basic and are beginning to communicate.

There are so many unmet needs in this community. They need basic water safety programs and basic knowledge of how to keep family members safe around water. There are many youth who aspire to get involved in athletics but end up doing damage to ankles, knees and hips as a result of running on concrete or up and down steps when they should be involved in a really energetic and youth oriented water aerobics program.

There are many problems which need to be overcome to continue with the progress which has already begun:

- The staff is always being told that they must cut back hours until they have income, but without staff there is no way to generate income.
- There are families who need to be involved but they are being forced to make a choice as to which child can be involved because of finances.
- There is a constant turf war between the High School Swim Coach and the Community Education Staff.
 - The Lane Lines were hidden for most of the Summer
 - When the Lane Lines were brought back the tools to install them were hidden
 - One solution proposed is to purchase duplicate equipment, one set for the school, one set for Community Education. (That seems rather foolish and a waste of money.)
 - It is all right for the School staff to use equipment purchased by Community Education but a real fuss is made if anyone from Community Education touches anything purchased by the school.

When asked how they feel about the program parents made the following comments:

- I think the program is great. My children have really found a sport that they love.
- Both of my boys have really show improvement and have gained a great joy for swimming. They have learned what it means to be a part of a team and to work together.
- It is a good opportunity and good exercise and seems even to be helping them get their school work done.
- My daughter has been in several different programs, but this one has been the most impressive. She has made such great progress in such a short period of time. She has learned a lot about sportsmanship, competition, working as a team, being healthy and taking care of her body as well as self discipline.
- My 3 children have been able to be in the swim program because we have fee waivers. It has been an outstanding program and one that could really benefit out community. My children have made great progress and have learned greater self-confidence; that hard work pays off; good sportsmanship; and the importance of healthy living as well as appreciating the personal satisfaction that comes from trying your best.
- I feel very good because they are doing exercise instead watching TV. They progress in the school. They feel better.
- I feel so good, because my son could not swim and now he can. His self-esteem is so much higher now. When he started he don't know nothing. He learned disciplina, companerismo, seguridad autoestima.
- Estamos muy contentos. A prendio muchas cosas nuevas en este tiempo, como estilos de natacion, a tirarse de cabeza. Pattricio mejori su autoestima, mejori su estado fisico, antes de entrar al programa queria nacer deporte pero a veces sentia que no era lo suficientemente beueno, pero desde que empezo natacion ya no se siente asi.

In order to operate the program needs:

- Funding to hire staff for teaching and coaching before there is income to support them.
- Better cooperation between the School and Community Education
- Better support from Community Education

Having a pool without a vigorous program is like having a library with any bookshelves or books. Hiring a Swim Coach without specific swimming technical abilities and experience in competitive swimming as well as the art and science of coaching swimming is like hiring a Spanish teacher who doesn't speak Spanish. Having a pool which is not able to provide Lifeguard and Swimming Instructor training is like driving a car without seatbelts. Not providing and pushing water aerobic conditioning to young athletes and potential athletes rather than pushing them to pound the pavement or stadium stairs is tantamount to condemning youth in their old age to suffer from painful arthritis and makes joint injuries more likely to occur in later sport activities.

Every dime spent in keeping this program active and growing will save dollars later on since these youth will be much less likely to be attracted to anti-social behavior, gangs and drugs.