

Florida Cities of Excellence Awards

City Spirit Award – City of Orlando for the Parramore Kidz Zone (PKZ) Program

The City of Orlando's Parramore Kidz Zone is a unique, new program designed to extend education and opportunity to some of the most at-risk youth in our community.

Orlando's Parramore Kidz Zone (PKZ) was launched in 2006 by Mayor Buddy Dyer, as part of a comprehensive effort called Pathways for Parramore, to revitalize Orlando's historic Parramore neighborhood. Unlike community redevelopment initiatives across the country, Pathways for Parramore focuses not only upon the problems of crime, poverty and housing, but also uniquely addresses the *risks that children face* growing up in this high-risk neighborhood.

More than 2,000 children call Parramore home. There is more child poverty in Parramore than any other neighborhood in Orlando, and the children who live there face high rates of juvenile crime and teen pregnancy.

When it comes to conditions that influence child well-being, no other Orlando community exhibits greater need than Parramore. 73% of the children live in poverty and 84% in single-parent households. 47% of Parramore adults do not have a high school diploma or a GED, and the neighborhood's median household income is \$13,613, is less than half the \$35,732 earned by Orlando households. The neighborhood suffers social disintegration, evidenced by large areas overrun by drug dealers and weapons, significant numbers of parenting adults with drug and alcohol problems and the existence of opposing gangs. The neighborhood's zip code has the

City's highest rate of reported child neglect, a juvenile arrest rate 2½ times that of Orlando, and a teen birth rate nearly 6 times the rate of the surrounding county. Jones High School, serving Parramore teens, has a 47% graduation rate.

PKZ aims to “move the needle” on these indicators of child well-being in Parramore, by strategically enhancing the neighborhood’s positive youth infrastructure, connecting more than 2,000 in-need children to research-proven programs, organizing residents to “take back” their streets, evaluating results and leveraging significant private, civic and philanthropic support, including a signature annual fundraising event – CityKidz! Buddy’s Benefit for Children – organized by the Mayor.

A key piece of PKZ’s strategy is to invest in grassroots, door-to-door outreach with special efforts to build supportive relationships with neighborhood families and youth. Full-time outreach teams, comprised of individuals with backgrounds that enable them to identify with the residents, meet with families and youth finding out their needs, linking them with programs and organizing them to take back their neighborhood. In addition, resources have been invested in neighborhood events and other creative marketing strategies that have positively branded the program among residents and youth. The project has also established a youth advisory council – Teenz of Parramore (TOP) – who market the program to neighborhood teens and ensure that programs are youth inspired and youth-relevant.

From the program’s inception, collaboration has played an integral role in shaping PKZ. Rather than creating our own programs and possibly duplicating existing services, PKZ links children to

existing programs offered by community partners by removing barriers such as cost, paperwork, trust, transportation and by enhancing services bringing new organizations and their programs to the Parramore neighborhood. In cases where programs are not available, PKZ leverages its existing partnerships to create new programs.

PKZ has benefited significantly from public and private support including a three year, \$500,000 grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation; grants from numerous locally-based charitable foundations; corporate contributions from major Orlando businesses including Walt Disney World, Universal Orlando, AT&T, the NBA's Orlando Magic, and Bank of America; proceeds of Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer's CityKids! Buddy's Benefit for Children; in-kind cash support from City general revenues; and State funding that allowed us to establish a special childcare subsidy pool for Parramore children.

In total, the project has leveraged over \$2 million in grants and contributions to cover operations during the first three years. Contributions are directed to a donor-advised fund at the Community Foundation of Central Florida that manages all project finances under an agreement approved by the Orlando City Council in 2006. A committee comprised of business leaders, appointed by Mayor Dyer, oversees the distribution of project funds held by the Community Foundation. This unique funding structure has greatly enhanced the City's ability to leverage public private philanthropic dollars in support of this City led and inspired program.

PKZ is now halfway through its second year and the outreach has already enrolled more than 1,100 children in the project. The following represents a sampling of accomplishments:

- More than 740 enrollments in summer programs, including academic enrichment, athletics, technology, life-skills, reading camps and visual arts
- During the fall of 2007, the project logged 431 enrollments in after-school and weekend programs
- A special childcare subsidy fund was established for the neighborhood to eliminate the childcare waiting list, move more children into quality early learning environments, and allow parents to get jobs or return to school. Presently, 93 children are provided full time childcare.
- A full time mentor coordinator was hired.
- Provided more than 300 families with emergency economic assistance and helped them enroll in assistance programs.
- Created a digital media program for teenagers.
- Opened 7 “Homework Roomz” where children receive free tutoring, school supplies and access to computers.
- Initiated parent-infant-toddler labs.
- A mobile medical van offers neighborhood teens free check-ups and treatments, mental health counseling; lab services; testing for pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS; vision screening; nutritional counseling; dental care and more.

While PKZ has been able to connect 1 in every 2 children with education and opportunity, there are still other children who can benefit from the program. In the years ahead, PKZ will look to connect every single child with the program’s unique brand of outreach.

We do not expect to solve all the Parramore neighborhood's challenges in a short time, but we hope to develop a model for propelling this neighborhood – and others like it – on a path toward becoming a healthy place for children to live and play.