

Leading Edge | PROGRAM REVIEW 2016

THE OPPORTUNITY

Completing its fifth year in Summer 2016, Leading Edge is Leadership Pikes Peak's comprehensive community leadership program developed specifically for high school teens.

We believe civic engagement isn't something you do when you turn 40 or retire. It is something young people can start right now, if they know what is going on and how to affect it. Helping teens know and understand our community is the challenge. Giving them the skills, connections, and real-life experience is the fun part.

THE PROGRAM

Leading Edge provides rising high school juniors and seniors with leadership skills and with the knowledge and connections to empower them to get involved and make a difference in their community. The program goals and objectives are as follows:

ENRICH the lives of teens in our community by exposing them to various sectors in which leadership is found in our community and giving them the understanding of how specific organizations and leaders work to make our community better.

ENGAGE teens in our community in powerful discussions about the current issues of our community and engage them in practical applications of leadership skills and practices.

EMPOWER teens in our community through first hand, interactive activities that build confidence, make community connections, and help them be leaders and the voices of teen perspective in our community.

CONNECT teens with a network of leaders and organizations in the community as well as students from across the Colorado Springs area.

The Leading Edge program starts with a full week of "boot camp" at the start of the summer. This frontloads the educational curriculum and provides a shared formative experience to help the teens tackle the more challenging part of the program, small group projects to assist local nonprofits. The remaining curriculum takes place on a biweekly basis throughout the summer. The curriculum is designed to familiarize the students with key leadership concepts and offer opportunities for immediate practice and first hand community education. On their own time, the teens work on group projects, requested by local nonprofits and voted on by the teens, which allows them to practice teamwork, project management, and creative thinking, as well as community stewardship. The 2016 Leading Edge class completed five projects including:

- Conducting a series of interviews and surveys to research the effects that pet waste has on our environment and water systems. These teens, working with Colorado Springs Utilities, created informational brochures and fliers to encourage pet owners to clean up after their pets.

THE CURRICULUM

Civic Topics Covered

Homelessness and Hunger
Public Safety
Arts and Culture
Environment and Conservation
Local History
Olympic Influence
Local Government
Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Leadership Topics Covered

Personality Assessments
Emotional Intelligence
Team Building
Being a Change Agent
Trust Building
Decision Making
Group Dynamics
Communication
Conflict Resolution
Project Management
Diversity Training
Public Speaking

- Assisting Colorado Springs Teen Court in updating their teen volunteer training manual to be more relevant to current teens. This group also photographed and uploaded an online gallery of defendant art work.

THE PARTICIPANTS

Twenty-nine high school juniors and seniors from twenty-two different high schools (including public, charter and private schools) graduated from the 2016 program. Most were recommended for the program by teachers, counselors, and LPP alumni; all had to apply for the program and explain why they wanted to participate. Beyond this they had little in common; it was a very diverse group in terms of race, sex, gender identification, geographic location, and family income. More than 70% received full or partial scholarships to cover the \$400 tuition fee. The actual program costs LPP closer to \$1,000 per student. It is only with the financial support of the City of Colorado Springs, El Paso County, Colorado Springs School District 11, Pikes Peak Women's Auxiliary League and the PeyBack Foundation that we are able to provide this program in a way that is not cost prohibitive for our students.

RESULTS

We are excited to share our program evaluation data with you. We did a pre and post-program survey with the students to gauge their knowledge, skills, and abilities on a wide range of community and leadership topics. The growth was amazing for most indicators. A few examples include:

- Before the program, 54% of the teens agreed with the following statement: I have a thorough understanding of how our major community systems operate (e.g. local government, education, business and economy, human services, etc.). After the program, 100% of the teens agreed.
- Before the program, 53% of the teens agreed with the following statement: I understand what it means to be a community trustee/community leader. After the program, 100% of the teens agreed.

In addition to pre/post program information, we evaluated all nine sessions individually for specific curriculum, speaker, and location feedback. Unquestionably, we had many powerful moments. Some of the favorites of the students included hearing slam poetry from the Pikes Peak Poet Laureate, Susan Peiffer and getting to put out a (pretend) fire at the Colorado Springs Fire Department training facility.

We heard from the teens that the program had made a significant difference in their outlook on life; we heard terms like "life changing" mentioned frequently, and (in the case of their group presentations) saw the evidence, as one teenager after another told stories (with self-confidence which would have stunned us three months earlier) of the participant is now involved in the community in a tangible way. We are encouraged by the results and look forward to incorporating what we have learned this year to operate an even better and larger program next summer.

WHAT'S NEXT

We are excited to make some changes to the program this year, specifically in our recruitment process. In order to ensure we are getting students that will get those most impact from the program, we are incorporating interviews and teachers endorsements into the application process. We don't look for the "best of the best" students, but the ones that have the most potential for growth and we believe these changes will help us to better identify those students.

We would like to thank all those who contributed to the program, financially and through time and energy. Your impact on our youth has been profound and we look forward to working with you in the future.

**Leadership Pikes Peak's mission is to build a thriving community through leadership and service.
Engage. Enrich. Empower. Connect.**