

Chinook Observer

Kids club grows

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Older students in the after-school program enjoy the opportunity to socialize with their friends in an area that is dedicated to reading, relaxing and conversation.



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NAME, left, and NAME played while helping to set up the gym for an assembly. Every few weeks, the students stage a 'showcase', where they demonstrate skills they've learned in the after school program.



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NAME, left, played ping pong with friends on Friday, Dec 8.



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Students at the Boys and Girls Club prepared to give a self-defense demonstration by reciting the “Students’ Creed.”



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Staff members at Boy and Girls Club provide a huge range of activities for students, including art projects, board games, enrichment classes and sports. Here, NAME, center, shows off his contribution to a holiday coloring contest.

PENINSULA — Kid performers cartwheeled into the room as the Boys and Girls Club staff herded roughly 50 students into the gym to showcase what they had learned during the semester. The group was nearly twice as large as it would have been a year ago, despite some students being out on vacation.

Attendance grew from last year's roughly 30 students a day to more than 70 students, said Hannah Williams, program coordinator for the Boys and Girls Club of the Long Beach Peninsula.

“This growth has been amazing to watch,” Williams said. “But it’s important to know, we’re not making money off membership, that’s not what we want or are meant for.”

The organization relies on fundraising. The club has nearly reached their annual fundraising goal of \$40,000, she said. As of Dec. 22, they were \$3,000 from their goal for this year’s campaign, which ends Dec. 31.

The club's Chief Executive Officer Allie Friese said the fundraiser is expected to bring in roughly a third of the club's funding, which survives on donations and state grants.

Friese said while parents or guardians are asked to pay \$25 a year for their child's membership, many students attend on a scholarship. She estimated the club made just \$2,000 off membership payments during 2015 so far.

"We have a policy that every child can afford to come," Friese said.

Finding a focus

Friese and Williams' office reflects a world that's wrapped in kid culture. One corner acts as storage for toys. To the right of a pile of crafts and glue is a jar of cow eyes, which the crew intends to dissect in the new year when a biologist is available.

Friese said their role in kids' lives is somewhere between the environment of school and home.

"We get to focus on the kids' social and emotional aspects," she said. "We look for ways to increase their confidence and understanding of the people around them."

Friese said she became the director last year during a transitional period that left her scrambling. Many of the club's staff were heading to new jobs. And though the club formed in 2008, Friese said it was struggling to gain attention on the Peninsula.

First on the staff's list of priorities was to increase attendance.

Williams said this fall the club organized a bus to run kids from Ocean Park to the Ilwaco site after school. The first week, they had two Ocean Park students — now they have 15. After the program is done, a bus delivers kids back to Long Beach and Ocean Park.

"We started looking at what the parents needed from us to be able to work with their kids," Williams said. "That's something we'll need to keep in mind as we move ahead."

Kids pick their niche

Williams said they also prioritized creating structure for their students. The first hour of the day is spent working on homework. Then, the kids get to pick a hobby.

Every six weeks the program offers a different set of classes. The options reflect the Peninsula's community, since many are volunteer-led such as Zumba, choir and martial arts.

At the end of the six-week period, the students get to showcase what they've learned.

On Dec. 18, 12-year-old Zoey Parks approached the gym's outlined stage in a red dress with a velvet top and a sequin skirt. The club's space was formerly part of Ilwaco High School. The gym was quiet as she began to sing Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer and was joined by the rest of the choir.

"Kids find a niche, and this is the time they can share it with each other," Friese said.

Since the club reached their 2015 goals, the staff has begun to create new expectations. Friese said along with focusing on staff training, they'll look for more ways to expand.

"The dream is one day having our own space," she said. "We're going to keep exploring for ways to bring in more students, and we can only fit so many here."