

COMMUNITY PARTNER



Red Shield Family Residence at Salvation Army is a safe and welcoming emergency housing program offering the services needed to empower residents to strive towards self-sufficiency. All family configurations, such as single parents with children of various ages, are accepted. Programs offered at the site include intensive case management, parenting courses, and after-school and summer enrichment programs. The Red Shield Family Residence is located in the Fairmount neighborhood of North Philadelphia, next to the Fairmount stop on the SEPTA Broad Street Line.

TEAM'S EXPERIENCE

The goal of the project was to instruct the youth about various health topics, such as cardiovascular health, mental health, and oral health through a series of presentations and hands-on activities. In addition to this project, the youth were provided a space to explore their creativity and manage their stress through art and exercise. By allowing a safe environment for self-expression, the children improved their communication skills and formed trusting relationships with one another. This summer enrichment program highlighted important health topics while also serving as an outlet for the youth experiencing challenging times.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

Homelessness affects people both nationally and globally. During the 2019-2020 school year, almost 8,000 youth in Philadelphia were identified as being homeless and this number is massively undercounted. Youth experiencing homelessness are at a higher risk of dealing with mental health issues, violence, and family housing insecurity. However, thanks to non-profit organizations, such as the Salvation Army, Philadelphia has the lowest number of individuals experiencing homelessness on the streets per capita of any of the largest cities in the US. The community and city officials can continue to support this endeavor by helping bring down housing costs and becoming involved in outreach programs, as well as advocating for those experiencing homelessness and connecting them with needed resources.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS/ CHALLENGES/ JOYS

- Students learned about the heart and cardiovascular health by viewing a powerpoint provided by us and creating a "heart house," which represented the major anatomical structures of the heart
- Students were taught about stress management and the impact of emotions and enjoyed creating their own "calming jars" which consisted of glue, glitter, food coloring, and colorful beads
- With the encouragement of self-expression, the students spent many of their days painting, dancing, rapping, and playing outside
- The children had fun outside the shelter through field trips to the local art museum, roller skating rink, and the pool
- We enjoyed connecting with the children and allowing them to feel safe and comfortable being themselves and voicing their thoughts and feelings.
- Finding the balance between serving as an authoritative figure and someone they could fully trust made it difficult at times to address certain behavior issues and rules they needed to follow during the enrichment programs.



Valerie Gomez: "My time at the Red Shield Family Shelter has been a memorable experience and taught me countless lessons that helped me connect with the Philadelphia community. Before this experience, I had never been inside of a shelter. Now, I will have a better understanding of families that I may encounter that are experiencing homelessness and how the process looks like for being placed in a shelter, which is far more difficult and frustrating than I could ever imagine. I understand more about the struggles the kids face at the shelter and how as a physician I can help to address some of the barriers they face."

REFLECTIONS

Mirelle Rojano: "Working this summer at the Red Shield Family Residence site was very eye-opening and impactful in ways that I did not expect. What was most meaningful to me was getting to know the students on a personal level. Learning about how different circumstances shaped their development and outlook on life, pushed me to become a better listener and constantly encouraged me to change the ways I approached difficult situations. Whenever I would find myself discouraged that I couldn't do more to help, I would remind myself that at least for this particular child, for this particular family, I was in some way making a difference. My experience with Red Shield will help me become the thoughtful, informed, and empathetic family physician that I strive to become."