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The Wisconsin Center for School, Youth and Citizen Preparedness's "Responding to Emergencies and Disasters with Youth" Initiatives

SUMMARY

The Wisconsin Center for School, Youth and Citizen Preparedness's "Responding to Emergencies and Disasters with Youth" (READY) camps provide middle and high school students with training and basic skills to fulfill their own needs as well as the needs of their homes, schools, and community during and after an emergency.

BACKGROUND

The Center for School, Youth and Citizen Preparedness (Center) received a grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration in 2002 to coordinate a train-the-trainer model called Basic Emergency Life Saving Skills in Schools (BELSS). Through BELSS, Center staff taught school teachers, administrators, and childcare workers in Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota, basic emergency preparedness and response skills. Once trained, those teachers instructed their students what they had learned.

The Center is a non-profit organization that focuses on preparing Wisconsin youth for emergencies.

Wisconsin Governor Jim Doyle decided in 2004 to expand the KidsFirst program, a comprehensive strategic plan to invest in Wisconsin children. He directed the state's Office of Justice Assistance (OJA) to develop youth emergency preparedness programs. The OJA asked the Center to expand and modify its BELSS program from a train-the-trainer model to a program that trains youth directly. The OJA awarded a homeland security grant to the Center to work with OJA, Wisconsin Citizen Corps, the Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs (DMA) and the University of Wisconsin La Crosse to create the READY program along with local and statewide public and private emergency preparedness organizations.

The OJA is Wisconsin's State Administering Agency for federal justice and homeland security grant funds. OJA develops statewide strategies, determines funding priorities, and advises the governor on public safety and domestic preparedness policy.

GOAL

The READY program trains students to respond to emergency and disaster situations at their homes and schools. The program empowers youth with personal responsibility and encourages them to lead community prevention efforts. It also increases youth interest in health and public safety careers, and encourages team building.

DESCRIPTION

The Center and its partners created a five-day program that prepares students to assist in emergency situations and to recognize key elements of preparedness. Trained instructors

and counselors educate student participants from throughout the state. The program was launched with the first READY camp during the summer of 2005. Since then, the Center has held four 5-day camps each summer, preparing over 792 Wisconsin youth for emergencies and disaster situations. The READY initiative has continually evolved and expanded since its inception to meet changing educational, developmental, and cognitive needs. Other jurisdictions and states have also used the READY camps concept as a model to begin similar initiatives.

Curriculum

The READY program curriculum combines classroom instruction with activities based on the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) curriculum that allow students to test and hone the skills they have learned. The curriculum also includes a leadership development course, team building activities, career orientation, and prevention of school violence through the Ribbon of Promise Campaign. Other areas of educational development include the Wisconsin Poison Center, Project ADAM school automatic external defibrillation (AED) program, and Keeping Everyone You Know Safe motor vehicle safety program.

Classroom Instruction

Instructors conduct classes in seven areas that teach students how to handle an emergency: emergency preparedness, School Emergency Response Team (SERT) organization, fire safety, emergency medical operations, light search and rescue, terrorism, and the emotional effects of emergency situations. Within these topics, participants learn about the National Incident Management System and the Incident Command System. The curriculum has been enhanced to include specific threats the students might face in their schools, including hazard identification and vulnerability assessments, drug control, terrorism prevention, anti-bullying, and violence prevention. Lessons are consistent with the Standards of Health Education and No Child Left Behind Act.

SERT programs train students and school administrators to assist responders in emergency situations.

Applying Skills

Students participate in a variety of activities that test and hone the skills they have learned during the week. All students receive American Red Cross (ARC) certification in first-aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, AED, and emergency medical skills. Students participate in a "hazard hunt" that teaches them what hazards to look for when they return to school. Camp participants also apply their skills by conducting small-scale disaster exercises, fire hose races, and "READY Relays", which test how quickly each team can treat an "injured" mannequin appropriately and transport it to the finish line.

The READY program encourages participants to continue applying their new skills even after completing the course. Each group of students receives a small stipend of \$200 to develop a service learning project, based on relevant local issues, which will help each team promote safety and preparedness in their community. Instructors encourage students and advisors to involve local fire departments and emergency management agencies in developing and implementing these projects. Some examples include working with local special weapons and tactics response teams to conduct hostage and terrorist training exercises, contributing to county disaster drills, offering first-aid treatment at sporting events, teaching younger students emergency preparedness skills, testing and installing smoke



alarms in homes of the elderly, and offering community emergency preparedness education through displays, booths, and handout materials.

Leadership Development Course

The Wisconsin Air and Army National Guard developed a leadership development course for the READY camp to encourage students to work as a team, face challenges, create a plan, practice the incident command system, and overcome obstacles. Instructors assign students an emergency or disaster scenario, such as a tornado hitting the area, and ask the students to organize response operations. Students must work as a team to appoint an incident commander, create a plan, and transfer first-aid supplies to the injured. Scenarios are then debriefed to include lessons learned within the exercise that would further prepare them for emergency situations and overcome all obstacles of life, such as making good choices and decisions when faced with peer pressure and substance abuse.

Career Orientation

The READY program includes a career orientation day that introduces students to emergency management careers. Counselors take the students to the military base, a local hospital trauma center, and local emergency management agencies, including a dispatch center, state emergency operations center, law enforcement agency, fire service department, and emergency medical services (EMS) department. Personnel from each location discuss with the students duties and responsibilities of their occupations and education and skills required to perform their jobs.



READY Camp Staff

Center staff, instructors, and counselors work together to plan and administer the READY camps. Two staff members from the Center work full-time to coordinate READY camp sessions and perform administrative duties, such as marketing and registering students. Representatives from READY partnering organizations, such as OJA and DMA, along with education, emergency management, fire, police, EMS, and hospital service agencies assist the Center in planning and implementing the camps.

Each READY camp session includes the services of six instructors and twelve college student counselors. The Center recruits experienced educators in the areas of law enforcement, health, fire service, and emergency management to serve as READY camp instructors. The OJA and Wisconsin Emergency Management ensure that all instructors receive CERT certification and complete a criminal history background check. The Center also employs ARC instructor-certified college students who work with camp participants throughout the week to facilitate activities and training, meet the unique needs of READY Campers, and alert the READY Camp staff and instructors of issues that may occur.

Participants

READY camps attract a culturally, geographically, and socio-economically diverse group of students from throughout the state. READY camps are currently free for all Wisconsin students between the ages of 13 and 18. Few participants have prior training or experience in emergency preparedness and response. The program has grown from 25 students in the first camp to more than 400 in the summer of 2007. Typically, approximately 100 students

attend each 5-day camp session. Students can register through their schools or youth or community groups.

Facilities

The Wisconsin OJA and Air and Army National Guard allow the READY program to use the classrooms and training facilities at the Regional Emergency All-Climate Training Center and Volk Field Air National Guard Base (Volk Field ANGB), located in central Wisconsin. Students and instructors stay at a local hotel during the week, where some of the education occurs along with activities to engage the students in the evening hours.



Volk Field ANGB is home to Volk Field Combat Readiness Training Center, the 128th Air Control Squadron and the Wisconsin National Guard Museum.

Program Results and Evolution

The Center uses feedback from READY camp participants to continually update and improve the program. The Center distributes pre- and post-camp surveys that measure participants' progress and help the Center improve the agenda according to students' needs. According to the survey results, students' skill levels and attitudes towards emergency preparedness improve significantly after completing the READY training program. In addition to the information that the Center garners from its pre- and post-camp surveys, many students have offered the Center unsolicited feedback on how to make the experience better for future READY camp participants. Individual Safe and Drug Free School programs have also evaluated the pre- and post-READY camp surveys and the results indicate significant increases in learning, preparedness, and attitudes. There have been many examples of situations where students have demonstrated the use of skills and behavior changes after attending a READY camp.

READY Classes

The Center developed a classroom component for middle and high schools in 2006 to supplement the summer camps. READY classes utilize the same concepts and curriculum as the camps, but take only two or three days. The Center conducts READY classes at Wisconsin schools, youth organizations, or emergency management offices that request them. Since implementation, over 1,200 Wisconsin students have been trained by READY classes.

Model for Other Jurisdictions

A number of other states, including Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Florida, and Virginia, are using the READY initiative as a model to implement similar programs in their own jurisdictions. In addition, several groups of students who completed READY training became active in their community's emergency preparedness and response efforts. For example, the Chippewa Falls School District in rural northern Wisconsin uses READY alumni as their school emergency response team, providing first-aid at school sporting events and helping teach other students about emergency preparedness. Members of the Sauk Prairie READY team in south-central Wisconsin have been asked to become adjunct members of their local ambulance service after collaborating with them to conduct emergency preparedness education for younger students. The Wings Academy READY Team responded to an actual emergency situation when a propane company's building exploded near their school. They applied their skills, leading adults and others to a safe meeting place and calmed their fears when electricity and other resources were not available for a period of time, until emergency response organizations could assist them.

REQUIREMENTS

Keys to Success

Subject Matter Expertise

The READY program ensures that students learn the most current and effective emergency response methods by including certified emergency preparedness, law enforcement, EMS, and health professionals as instructors. Those involved in current best practice educational strategies also contribute to the development of activities and methods that have proven to be effective in learning.

Comprehensive Training

The READY program prepares students holistically in a variety of topics to ensure that they have sufficient knowledge to offer substantive assistance in an emergency. The educational experience also provides life-long learning skills that will assist not only in their school experience, but also through higher education and as a productive member of society.

Responder Participation

Responders who participate in the program, whether as instructors or career orientation counselors, offer READY camp participants insights on what responders do, and help them decide if they are interested in similar careers.

Resources

READY camps and classes are free for participants. The OJA funds the READY program through a homeland security grant. Wisconsin Citizen Corps and the Department of Transportation have also contributed grants to develop and implement the READY initiatives. Corporate sponsors such as Charter Communications, Wal-Mart, Culvers, Pizza Hut, business owners, local foundations, and charities have provided additional funding and in-kind services.

Training

Instructors and students do not require additional training to participate in the READY program. Instructors use the training they have previously received through their professions or CERT to teach the students.

Links

Citizen Corps

<http://www.citizencorps.gov/>.

Keeping Everyone You Know Safe

<http://www.k-e-y-s.com/>.

Project ADAM

<http://www.projectadam.com>.

The Center for School, Youth and Citizen Preparedness

<http://www.citizenpreparedness.org/>.

Volk Field Air National Guard Base

<http://www.volkfield.ang.af.mil/www.volkfield.ang.af.mil/index.html>.

Wisconsin Office of Justice Assistance

<http://oja.state.wi.us/>.

Wisconsin Poison Center

<http://www.wisconsinpoison.org/>.

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