

Evolving Role of Parks in Supporting Community Wellbeing

California Park & Recreation Society Conference
February 2024





Parks and the Pandemic



Photos: NBCLA / CNN



Question

In what ways has the role of your department changed in the last few years?



Overview

National trends on urban parks, health, and wellbeing





A National Mental Health Crisis

“...loneliness and isolation increase the risk for individuals to develop mental health challenges in their lives, and lacking connection can increase the risk for premature death to levels comparable to smoking daily.”

- US Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy



Increases in Mental Health Challenges

Opioid-involved overdose deaths quadrupled between 2010 - 2021

- National Institute on Drug Abuse

Over past twenty years, suicide rates in the U.S. increased by 35%

- US Center for Disease Control and Prevention



40%
of Americans suffer
from anxiety or
depression.⁷



Vibrant Green Space is a Key Part of the Solution

“To strengthen social infrastructure, communities must design environments that promote connection, establish and scale community connection programs, and invest in institutions that bring people together.”

- US Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy



Access to Green Space Works!

20 MINUTES

in a park **improved the concentration of children with attention deficits** to a level comparable to those without attention deficits.⁹



COMMUNITY BENEFITS

Greening of vacant urban land has been shown to decrease crime.¹⁰



People who live near parks and green spaces are

44%

LESS LIKELY

to have a **diagnosed anxiety disorder.**⁸



Increasing Needs, Limited Resources, New Opportunities



Photos: Houston Parks Board / Visit Philadelphia



1) Programming for Well-Being



Photo: WHYY

2) Inclusive Programming through Arts & Culture



Photo: The Trail Conservancy



3) Providing New Approaches to Youth Programming



Graphic: Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board





4) Workforce Opportunities



Photos: Friends of Anacostia Park / Landforce



5) Safe and Playful Streets



Photos: Los Angeles Department of Transportation / Alliance for Paseo Park



6) Connections to Nature



Photo: The Wilderness Society

7) Parks and Food



Our Mission

Veggielution connects people from diverse backgrounds through food and farming to build community in East San José.

Photos: Veggielution

8) Partnerships with Medical Institutions



Photos: Texas Medical Center

CITY PARKS
ALLIANCE 

 **Greater
& Greener**

June 21-25, 2024

Seattle, WA

greatergreener.org

Photos: Visit Seattle





Photo: Mill River Park



Thank You

cityparksalliance.org

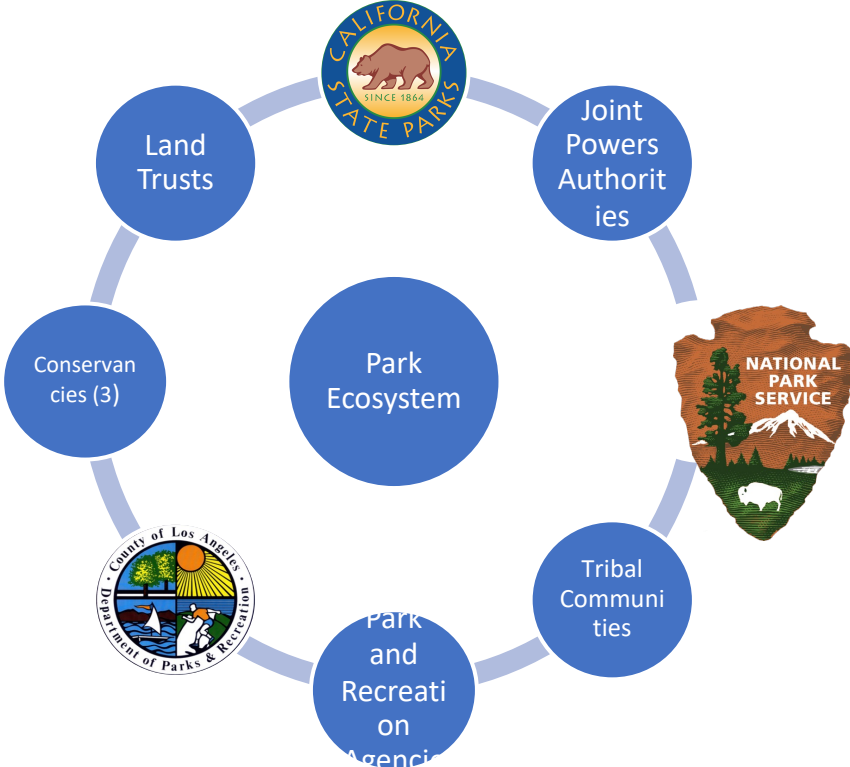


Evolving Role of Parks Supporting Community Wellbeing

Norma García-González, Director
County of Los Angeles Department Parks and Recreation
Regional Park and Open Space District

Park Systems in Los Angeles County

Over 100+ Park Agencies









Los Angeles County Parks Overview

 **73,214**
Acres of Parkland

 **182**
DPR Parks

 **5**
DPR HQ Offices

PARKS

- | | |
|--|--|
|  9 Regional Parks |  15 Wildlife Sanctuaries |
|  19 Community Regional Parks |  10 Nature Centers |
|  20 Community Parks |  20 Golf Courses |
|  38 Neighborhood Parks |  5 Senior Centers |
|  20 Pocket Parks/Park Nodes |  4 Gardens and Arboreta |
|  9 Natural Areas |  2 Performance Venues |
|  1 Historic Park | |

PARK AMENITIES

- | | |
|---|--|
|  14 Lakes <small>(3 Boating And Recreation/Swimming Lakes)</small> | |
|  475 Sports Amenities | |
|  36 Swimming Pools | |
|  1 Boxing Arena | |
|  23 Splash Pads | |
|  13 Skate Parks | |
|  60 Community Centers | |

TRAILS AND EQUESTRIAN PROGRAM

- | | |
|---|---|
|  233 Miles of Trails |  4 Equestrians Centers |
|  15 Staging Areas |  6 Equestrians Parks |

Statistics on child well-being in California and Los Angeles County

| Indicator | LA County* | California* |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Child Population Ages 0-17 | 2,174,428 | 8,947,160 |
| Percentage of Children Living below the Federal Poverty Threshold | 19.5% | 16.8% |
| Percentage of Children Living in Food Insecure Households | 15.5% | 13.5% |
| Average Monthly Enrollment in MediCal Among Youth Ages 0-20 | 53.6% | 48.7% |
| Percentage of 5 th Graders who are Overweight or Obese | 8.6 (rate per 1,000) | 6.8 (rate per 1,000) |
| Percentage of Students in the Graduating Class Receiving a High School Diploma | 82.4% | 83.6% |

*Data from 2021/2022

Children's mental health



- Based on survey of 1,200 California middle school students between April 2020 and March 2021
 - 63% of students reported having an emotional meltdown
 - 43% had panic or anxiety attack
 - 19% described having suicidal thoughts

Care First Training





OFFICE OF VIOLENCE PREVENTION & PARKS AND RECREATION

Trauma Informed Care Symposium

Training Objectives:

- Develop shared definitions and common language related to trauma & resiliency
- Understand trauma, its impacts, and the OK Zone
- Define Trauma Informed Care and learn best practices for being Trauma Responsive
- Learn calming practices, compassion fatigue, and the value of self-care

| Time | Agenda |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 8:00 am - 9:20am | Welcome & Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet your presenters • Group agreements • Pre-survey |
| 9:20 am - 10:30 am | Part 1: Trauma 101 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining Trauma & Toxic Stress • Types of Trauma • Neurobiology of Trauma • Recognizing Trauma |
| 10 MINUTE BREAK (10:30 - 10:40 am) | |
| 10:40 am - 12:00 pm | Part 2: Trauma Informed Care <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus group feedback • Trauma informed interventions |
| LUNCH (12:00 pm - 12:45 pm) | |
| 12:45 pm - 1:45pm | Part 2: Trauma Informed Care (cont.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Four K's • Trauma Responsive Language |
| 10 MINUTE BREAK (1:45 pm - 1:55 pm) | |
| 1:55 pm - 2:45 pm | Part 3: Healing & Resiliency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vicarious Trauma & Compassion Fatigue • Calming practices • Self-care planning |
| 2:45 pm - 3pm | Closing |

Date
June 9, 2023
9am-3pm

[Click HERE to join.](#)

Contacts at OVP

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Before attending the training, please complete the pre survey by clicking [here](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/7B6C7761) or visiting: [surveymonkey.com/r/7B6C7761](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/7B6C7761).



- Trauma informed training is provided to all LA County Parks recreation staff as part of their professional development
- Trauma Informed Care is also a lens for developing programming



LA County Parks
programming
supports child
and community
well-being

- Our Spot Teen Centers
- Parks After Dark
- Youth at Work
- Mental Health Programming – Month of May



- Our Spot Teen Center program has included Care First training for staff since its inception
 - Staff receive around 40 hours of professional development per year
- Trainings provide foundations, frameworks, theories, and practice around
 - positive youth development
 - social emotional learning
 - restorative justice practices
 - trauma informed care



Program

| | | |
|---|----------------------------------|--|
| 13-14 Average Participant Age | 85% Recommend Our SPOT | Free Program Available Monday to Friday Open 3-7 pm |
|---|----------------------------------|--|

Benefits

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Supervised Safe Space | Social Emotional Growth | Friendships | Homework Support | Community Service Options | Mentorship |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Connection to Caring Adult | Variety of Activities | Dedicated Hangout Space | Daily Snacks or Meals | Socialization/Skill Building | Free Wi-Fi |

Outcomes

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| 92% Feel Safe at Our SPOT | 92% Feel Happier Since Attending | 76% Have Positive Self Image | 93% Are Comfortable Talking to Staff | |
| 75% Feel Energized | 73% Feel Sense of Purpose | 80% Feel Optimistic | 75% Have Role Models | 80% Have Supportive Friends |

Parks After Dark

OUTCOMES

Improved social cohesion

94%

of attendees agreed PAD increased chances to spend quality time with family

93%

agreed PAD provides a sense of belonging within community

91%

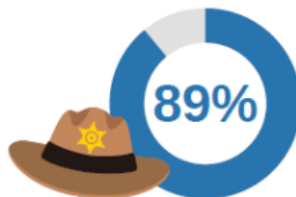
agreed PAD helps to get to know neighbors better



Reduced crime



of attendees felt safe at PAD



agreed that Deputy Sheriffs positively engaged with community members at PAD

115

Part I crimes avoided between 2010 and 2022 (serious and violent crimes; e.g., homicide)

74

Part II crimes avoided between 2010 and 2022 (nonviolent crimes; e.g., petty theft)

PAD Reach



38% live outside area



62% live in zipcode of PAD park



PAD Park

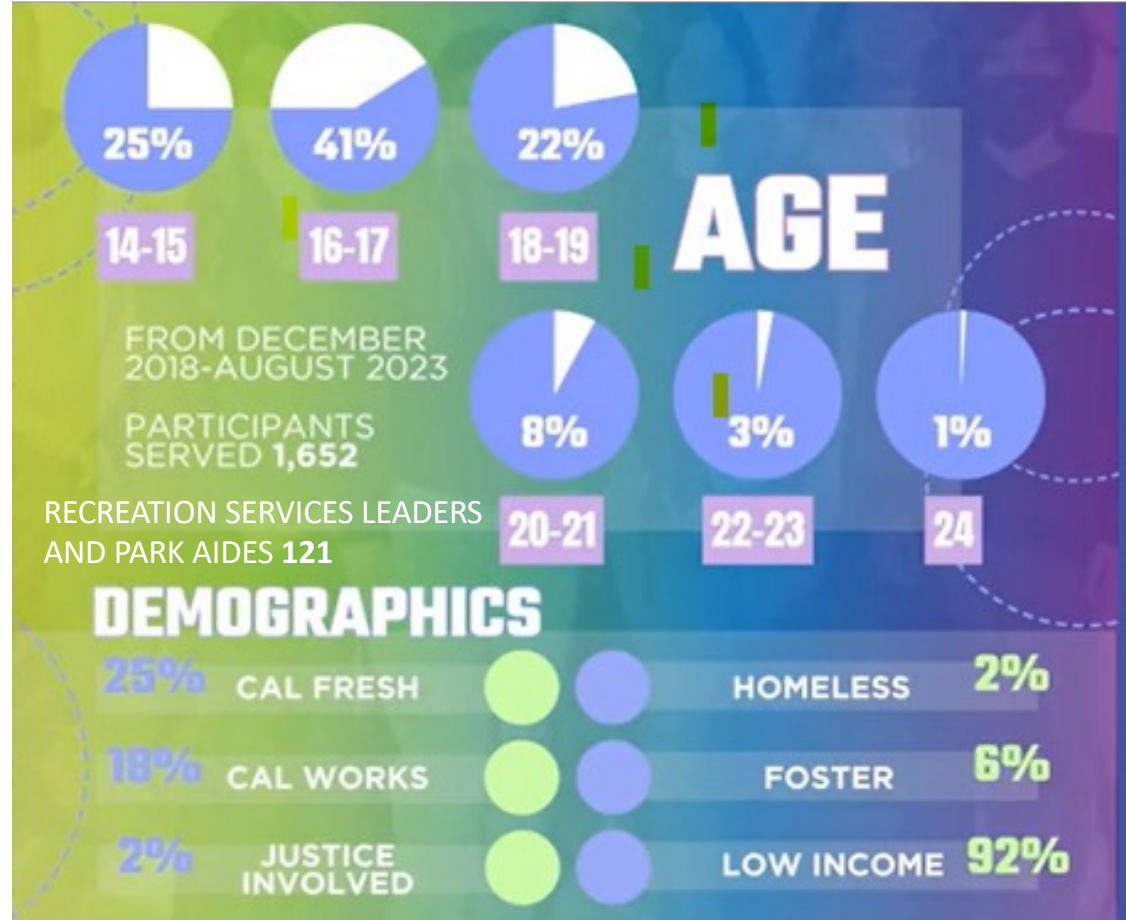


Youth@Work

- **\$3.75M** in participant wages
- **\$1.71M** in Recreation Services Leaders Aides wages
- **241,722 Hours** of work

REQUIREMENTS

- **YOUTH AGES 14 -24**
- **WORK PERMIT (17 Y/O OR YOUNGER)**
- **RIGHT TO WORK DOCUMENTS**
- **LA COUNTY RESIDENT**
- **MUST MEET ADDITIONAL ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS.**





Parks Programs for Mental Health Awareness Month

- **Parks at Sunset** programming in the month of May include recreation activity to promote mental health wellness
 - Events promote self-care, connection, physical wellbeing and community
 - Events are family friendly, free, or low cost
- Programming is done in partnership with Department of Mental Health

LA County Parks New Safety Ordinance

- LA County Parks New Safety Ordinance Approved by Board of Supervisors December 2023
- Safety ordinance grants authority to the Director and/or designees to exclude a person from the park for a set period
 - Warning is required before issuing a removal or exclusion order unless the behavior or conduct involves certain type of conduct, such as dangerous or threatening behavior
 - Exclusion may cover one park or multiple locations

| Exclusion Period for Non-Serious Offenses | |
|---|------------------|
| Prior Offense | Exclusion Period |
| First | 30 days |
| Second | 90 days |
| Third + | 180 days |

| Exclusion Period for Serious Offenses* | |
|--|-------------------------|
| Prior Offense | Longer Exclusion Period |
| First | 60 days |
| Second | 120 days |
| Third + | 270 days |
| * Felonies; property damage of \$1,000 or more; dangerous or threatening behavior. | |

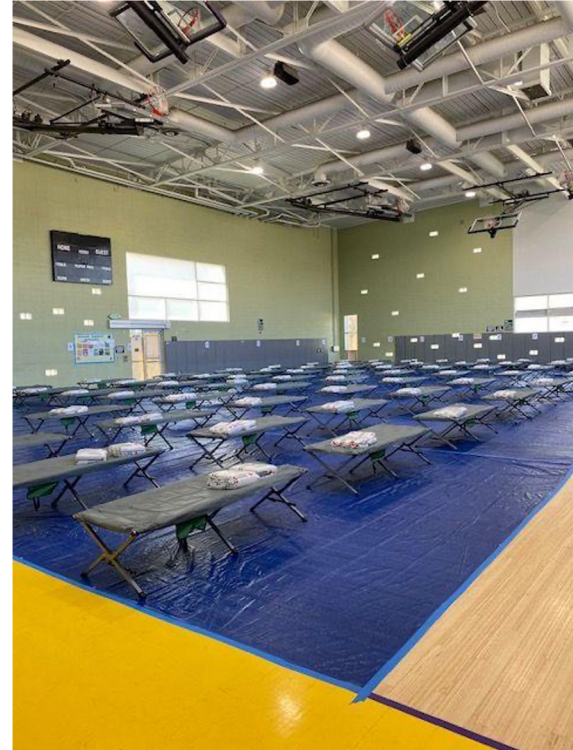


City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks Emergency Management Program



PARKS make sense for Public Welfare and Sheltering roles:

- Open Spaces
- Familiar Community Gathering Locations
- Trust from the Community:
 - Expertise in working with the public
 - Community knows the staff
- Existing Infrastructure



Los Angeles **City** Administrative Code



“The Public Welfare and Shelter Division shall be under and subject to the control of the Department of Recreation and Parks of the City of Los Angeles. The Chief of this division shall be the General Manager of the Department. The chief shall be responsible for arranging, directing and coordinating sheltering services for persons rendered homeless as a result of a local emergency.”

Established 2015



Emergencies and Threats

Natural and Man-Made Threats

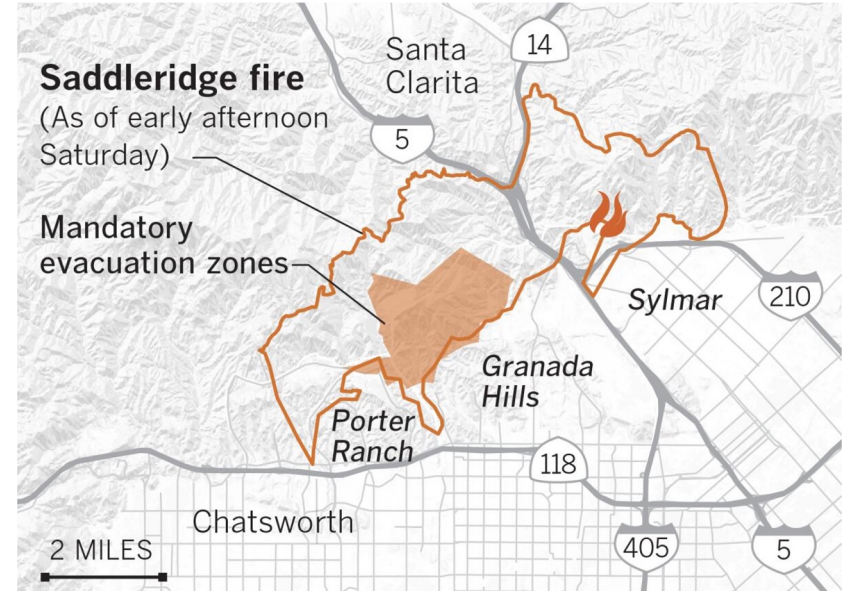


Emergencies

Creek and Skirball Fire - 2017



Saddleridge Fire - 2019



Sources: Cal Fire, LAFD, OpenStreetMap



Other Types of Activations

- **Cooling and Warming Centers**
- **Augmented Winter Shelters**
- **Local Assistance Centers**
- **Large Animal Shelters**
- **Coordinating Emergencies**
 - LAUSD Teachers Strike
 - One-day Strike Action
 - Homeless Response
- **Local Emergencies - Evacuation and Shelter Activations including Showers**
 - LA Marathon (annually)
 - Hurricane Hilary
 - San Fernando Valley RV Encampment
 - 27th Street Fireworks Explosion
 - La Tuna Canyon Road
 - Hobart Fire
 - Compton Ave. Barricaded Suspect
 - Mulholland Dr. Erosion Support



COVID



- Emergency Childcare for First Responders
- 24 Shelters for PEH
- 220 Mobile Trailer for PEH
- COVID Medical Points of Distribution (M-POD)
Testing and Vaccination
- Alternative Learning Sites for LAUSD Students
- Developing COVID protocols with our partners
at LA County Public Health



Emerging - Emergencies and Threats

Asylum Seekers



How we prepare our employees:

JOB ROLE



VS



How we prepare our employees:

- New Employee Training
- Shelter Management
- Resilient Responder Training
- First Aid, CPR and AED Training
- Emergency Preparedness Fair
- Regular Drills and Exercises
- Annual Refreshers
- ERAT (Emergency Response Action Team)
- Tailgate Safety Meetings
- Continuous Professional Development (workshops and seminars)



DEPARTMENT OPERATION CENTER



Parks and Emergency Management

Break the mold! Let's prepare our parks now, even if it's unfamiliar territory

Be the leader in disaster preparedness for our parks.

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June 21-25, 2024

Seattle, WA

greatergreener.org

Photos: Visit Seattle

