



PARKS AFTER DARK

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES DEPARTMENT OF PARKS & RECREATION

Evaluation Brief 2018 - 2019





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What is Parks After Dark?

Parks After Dark (PAD) is a County of Los Angeles initiative that is led by the Department of Parks and Recreation, in partnership with the Board of Supervisors, Chief Executive Office, Department of Mental Health (DMH), Department of Public Health (DPH), Probation Department, Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), Workforce Development, Aging and Community Services (WDACS), the Sheriff's Department, and several other community partners.

PAD programs are implemented in communities with high levels of violence, obesity, and economic hardship. PAD goals include:

- 1) increasing access to free recreational programming and health and social services;
- 2) facilitating cross-sector collaboration;
- 3) decreasing community violence and increasing perceptions of safety;
- 4) increasing physical activity and decreasing chronic disease risk;
- 5) increasing social cohesion and wellbeing in these communities; and,
- 6) off-setting healthcare and justice system costs.

PAD activities include a variety of free recreational programs and health and social services, in County parks throughout the unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County. PAD originally started in three parks in 2010 and grew to 33 participating parks in 2018. During the 2018-2019 year, PAD began piloting Winter and Spring programming as well. This evaluation brief describes the results of PAD activities during Summer 2018 (June - August) and the first year of piloted Winter programming (December 2018 - January 2019).

Participating Parks

72%

of zip codes in LA County served by PAD

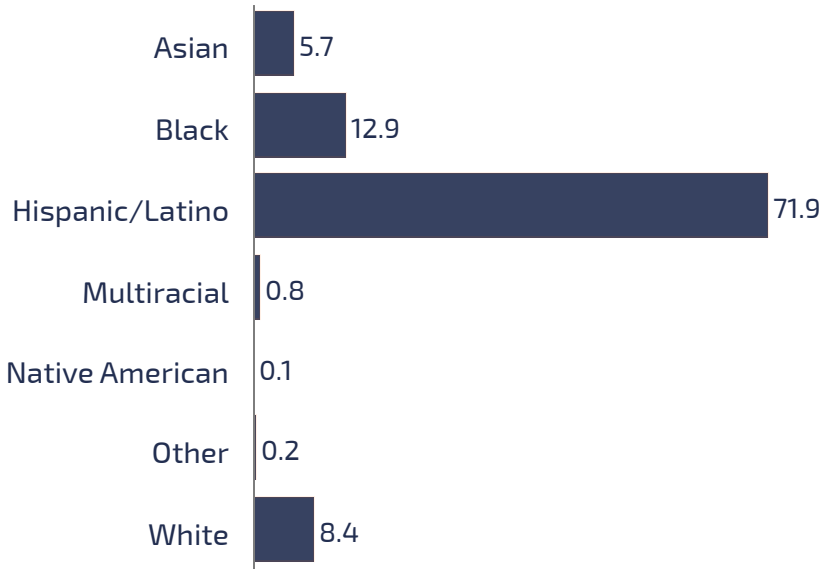
(Blue areas represent zip codes in which PAD participants reside)

(Red dots represent PAD parks)

- Adventure Park
- Allen J. Martin Park
- Amelia Mayberry Park
- Amigo Park
- Athens Park
- Bassett Park
- Belvedere Community Regional Park
- Charter Oak Park
- City Terrace Park
- Col. Leon H. Washington Park
- East Rancho Dominguez Park
- El Cariso Community Regional Park
- Eugene A. Obregon Park
- Franklin D. Roosevelt Park
- George Lane Park
- George Washington Carver Park
- Helen Keller Park
- Jackie Robinson Park
- Jesse Owens Community Regional Park
- Loma Alta Park
- Mary M. Bethune Park
- Mona Park
- Pamela County Park
- Rimgrove Park
- Ruben Salazar Park
- San Angelo Park
- Saybrook Park
- Sorensen Park
- Stephen Sorensen Park
- Ted Watkins Memorial Park
- Val Verde Community Regional Park
- Valleydale Park
- William Steinmetz Park

Who is PAD Reaching?

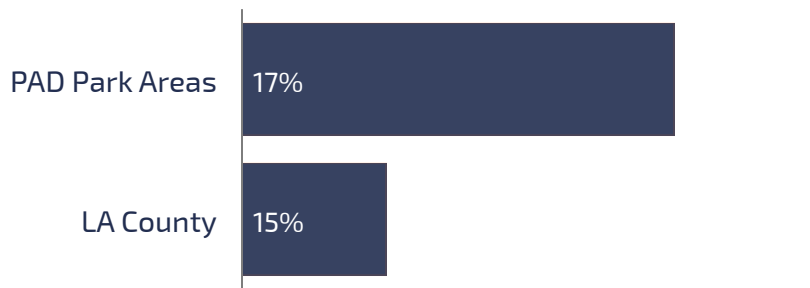
Racial and ethnic makeup of PAD communities (%)



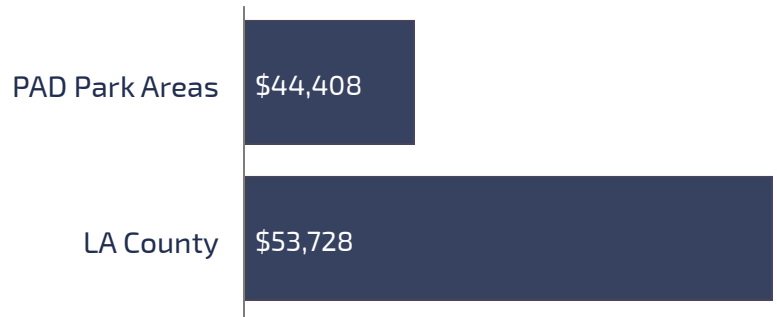
1,367

Youth volunteers
(Summer 2018 & Winter 2018-2019)

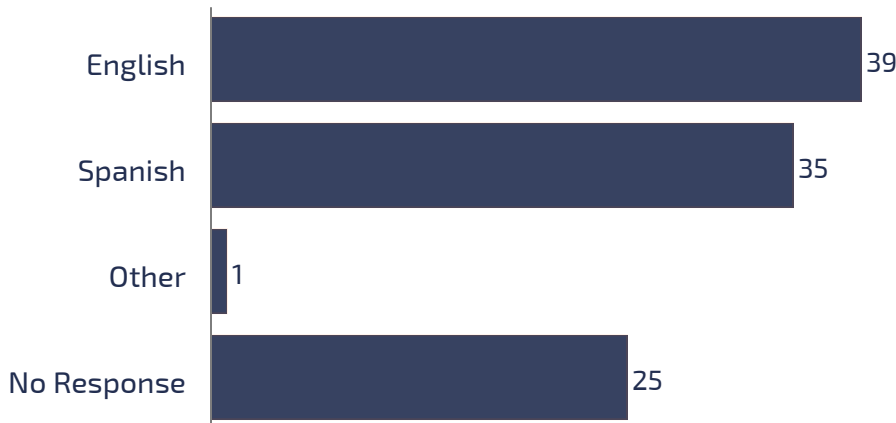
Poverty Rate (Age 25+)



Median Household Income



Main language used at home (% of participant survey respondents)



214

Youth Employees
(Summer 2018)

Goal | Increase access to free recreational programming and health and social services

65,000
Winter 2018-2019



321,000
Summer 2018

"[PAD] creates space for families to come and be together to enjoy each other... It really takes down all the roadblocks ... by creating an accessible place that brings programs that they may not have otherwise even thought of participating in, whether it's a yoga class, or a cooking class, or sports activity."

- Park Staff

4,000

Summer and Winter programming hours provided

82%

of respondents would recommend PAD to a friend

Goal | Facilitate cross-sector collaboration

32%

Governmental Organizations



68%

Non-Governmental Organizations

"I feel like we're that 'heartbeat' for the community when it pertains to them coming to the park, just for general services, and just all the collaborations we build with our Los Angeles County agencies and nonprofits, and also those grassroots community-based groups.."

- PAD Partner

More than **10,000** visits to resource fairs during Summer 2018

314 resource fair participants on average per park

96% of partners surveyed reported PAD was an effective venue for outreach and services

87% of partners surveyed reported PAD made it easier to reach their key population

Goal

Decrease community violence and increase the perception of safety

75.4

Estimated reduction of Part I crimes* across all PAD park communities, since PAD began in 2010

*Part I crimes are serious property and violent crimes that include homicide, aggravated assault, rape, larceny-theft, robbery, grand theft auto, burglary, and arson.



"So we go where we're dispatched. Ninety percent of the time it's where something bad has happened or is going to happen. But with the Parks After Dark program, we're there prior to anything happening."

- Deputy Sheriff

Of surveyed participants...

85%

reported living in a close-knit or unified neighborhood

89%

felt PAD improves relationships with Deputy Sheriffs

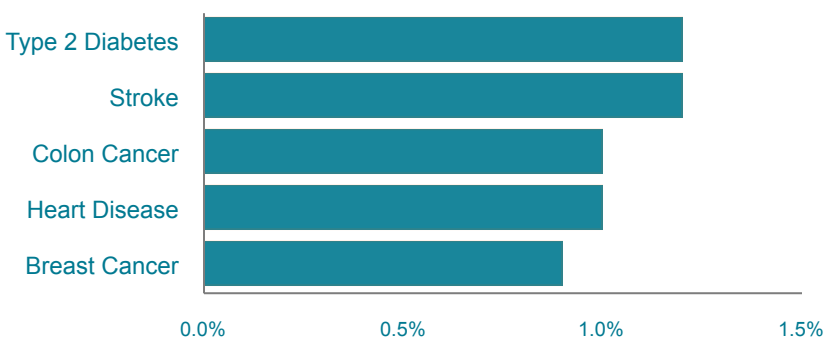
89%

felt safe or very safe attending PAD

Goal

Increase physical activity and decrease chronic disease risk

Estimated rate of reduction of the prevalence of disease among PAD participants, since 2010



"So, now they have a free concert in the park where they can dance and the whole family is kind of moving around together...and can take a free yoga class and do some mindfulness. Introducing those things have really changed how some of our families move around. It kind of transforms their lifestyle."

- Park Staff

Of surveyed participants...

79% participated in team sports, walking clubs, and exercise classes

61% planned to exercise at PAD once a week or more

38% indicated they exercise for 30 minutes or more, 4 days per week or more



Goal | Increase social cohesion and community wellbeing

Key Informants' top impacts of PAD on community wellbeing



● Community Connection	30%
● Strengthen Family	23%
● Relationships with Law Enforcement	20%
● Health	15%
● Fits Needs	12%

"A lot of people don't want to go down to a DPSS office to go sign up for benefits, but it's a little more welcoming to go to a park...and so then it's kind of just an easier way to get to people and connect them with the services that they need, but maybe don't want to ask for."

- PAD Partner

Of surveyed participants...

89% indicated PAD makes it easier to get services they need

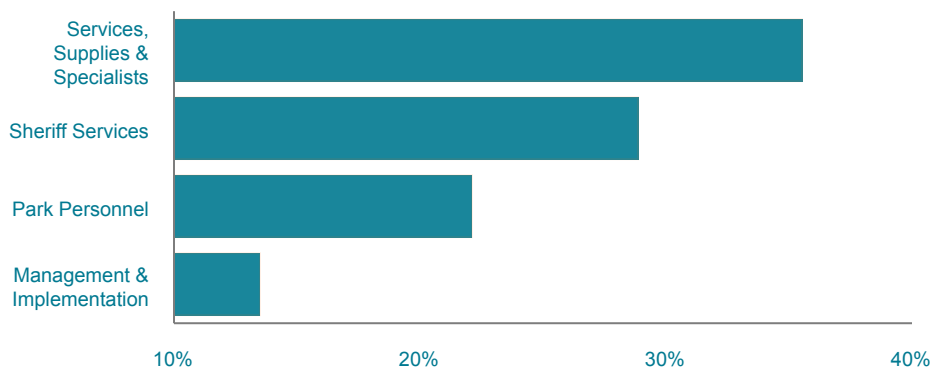
89% felt that in a crisis, they have others to talk to

91% indicated PAD helps them to get to know their neighbors better

90% indicated PAD makes it easier to spend quality time with their family

Goal | Achieve Cost Savings

How were PAD resources allocated?



"[PAD is] deepening the work that we're doing...in all of these sectors...mental health, workforce development, probation, prevention, intervention, and public health and safety and social cohesion."

- PAD Coordinator

\$1.8 Million

Estimated Cumulative Cost Savings Associated with Reduction in Part I Crime in PAD Park Areas, 2018

\$1.6 Million

Estimated costs avoided due to disease risk reduction associated with Summer PAD Activities, 2018

Of key informants interviewed...

24% noted sustainability of funding as a key concern for PAD

21% noted sufficient staff as a key funding concern for PAD

Increase access to free recreational programming and health and social services

PAD reached a diverse group of community members in the majority of zip codes across the county providing a wide range of free services. Continued strategic outreach and relationship building with PAD partners and community agencies surrounding the parks are needed to increase awareness of PAD as an ideal venue for outreach. Engaging community members as ambassadors for PAD and leveraging local coalitions to create grassroots marketing strategies can also increase participation among a more diverse group of community members.

Key informants pointed to the effectiveness of programs that are tailored to the community surrounding a PAD park, such as supplementing economic needs or respecting cultural norms. Continued efforts to curate programming that leverages the unique character and needs of the communities surrounding each PAD park may also serve to increase participation and enthusiasm for the program.

Facilitate cross-sector collaboration

Results suggest that PAD fostered cross-sector collaboration resulting in a variety of positive impacts. Key informants suggest PAD could further provide partners with opportunities to leverage more partnerships with government agencies and community-based organizations and conduct community outreach. For example, PAD partners could identify meaningful opportunities to partner with youth who are or were previously involved in the juvenile justice system to better integrate these populations into PAD programming, employment, and volunteer opportunities in ways that build upon their unique strengths and address unmet needs.

Decrease community violence and increase the perception of safety

Evidence of decreases in crime since PAD began suggests that PAD efforts to provide active park programming at key points in the year have been effective for discouraging violent activity, and expansions of such activities may have commensurate impacts on crime. Particularly the focused Community Safety Programs including Parks Are Safe Zones and the Trauma Prevention Initiative gang intervention pilot, and past partnership with GRYD intervention show promise for defining parks as non-violent and family-oriented spaces, and outreaching to high-risk individuals and families. Such interventions should be further implemented and evaluated in a more focused way.

Deputy Sheriff engagement of community members during PAD has provided added benefit to public safety by building community trust, through informal interactions and participation in community programs. For example, Deputies can assist in passing out items to community members and participate in community programs when able. Resources and protocols should be identified to increase opportunities for Deputies to engage communities during PAD, including aligning existing community initiatives led by the Sheriff's Department.

Increase physical activity and decrease chronic disease risk

PAD provided opportunities for participants in communities with high obesity prevalence to be physically active and has demonstrated impacts on chronic disease. PAD programming that involves physical exercise could promote or serve as an on-ramp to a healthier lifestyle. Programming could more intentionally introduce participants to new and engaging exercise opportunities or community partners that provide activities or events that extend throughout the year. For example, Park Rx, which connects local clinics to structured physical activity at parks and other sites, could extend the reach and impact of PAD. By expanding PAD to include Winter and Spring programming, Parks and Recreation is taking a positive step forward to expand physical activity opportunities and explore stronger linkages between PAD and other physical activity programs that take place at the parks.

Increase social cohesion and community wellbeing

Results indicated that PAD positively impacted community wellbeing through community connection, family strengthening, and building positive relationships with law enforcement. The evidence further indicates that PAD could work to make programs and services introduced to participants during PAD more routine or permanent throughout the year. Key informants remarked about the benefits of providing opportunities for neighbors to have more frequent and routine face-to-face interactions, and substantial research supports the real physical and mental health benefits of community connections. Partnerships with local community organizations, leaders, and community coalitions could help further cement PAD as a hub to promote community wellbeing.

Achieve Cost Savings

Results demonstrate the impact PAD has had on reduced costs to the healthcare and criminal justice systems and suggest the potential for additional cost savings in other sectors. Evidence suggests longer-term funding streams should be secured. Inefficiencies of the program appear due to the year-to-year nature of planning and implementation. It may be beneficial to seek one or a few funding agencies that can make longer-term financial commitments. The ability to plan and build the program into the future could have myriad benefits. Specifically, more staff could be dedicated to the program to increase the capacity of PAD to plan and advance and build relationships with partners and each park community, rather than limiting planning due to the uncertainty of funding. Community employment and volunteer programs could be sustained through partnerships with several agencies who could provide valuable experience to participants while increasing the capacity of the program to connect with and support the community.

Partners & Acknowledgements

The analyses, interpretations, conclusions, and views expressed in this policy brief are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the Regents of the University of California, or collaborating organizations or funders.

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Parks After Dark Partners





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How can I learn more?

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