



University of Southern California

USC Troy Camp

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## **USC Troy Camp**

### *A Commitment to Friendship*

#### Mission and Purpose

USC Troy Camp is a youth development organization that seeks to enrich the lives of children by broadening their horizons through long-term mentoring relationships. A non-profit organization at the University of Southern California, Troy Camp connects USC undergraduates with children in the local community. Our programming is offered at no cost to each child. Troy Camp has served over 11,000 children in South Los Angeles since its founding in 1948.

Troy Camp begins with our weeklong summer camp in Idyllwild, CA. The 180 children who attend camp are third to fifth grade students from 18 partner schools. These students are considered “at-risk” for low educational achievement, drug use, and gang activity. The camp experience allows the children to create connections with new mentors who can help them develop the self-efficacy and resilience necessary to realize their full potential. The mentoring relationship between the counselors and campers continues after camp. Counselors reunite with the children in a series of monthly Kids Events. Kids Events offer fun, guided exploration in a safe setting, enhancing the trust between children and their counselors established at camp. Troy Camp also hosts weekly programs called SMASH (Student Mentoring and After School Help) and SP (Specialized Programming). During SMASH, counselors help students complete homework and provide one-on-one tutoring. SP provides enriching activities that the schools do not have budgeted resources to support.

Troy Camp’s mentoring programs continue in the middle and high school levels. Children who participated in Troy Camp’s elementary school programming can apply for LIT at the end of their 6th grade year. The LIT (Leaders in Training) program is bi-weekly workshops that create experiential learning opportunities. These activities focus on leadership development, personal and emotional growth, and academic achievement. LIT students also receive weekly one-on-one tutoring from a Troy Camp counselor. The high school program, TC Leads, further develops our students’ leadership skills and academic success. This program instills confidence in students while providing them with the resources needed to apply to college. Ten high school students in the TC Leads program are chosen to return to the weeklong summer camp as Junior Counselors (JCs) to be leaders and mentors to the current campers. The following academic year, each JC is paired with a Troy Camp counselor who provides one-on-one academic support and mentorship.

#### Organizational Structure

USC students entirely operate Troy Camp. Headed by two Co-Executive Directors, the executive board is comprised of fifteen undergraduate students. Executive board positions include the directors for each of our programs (Camp, Yearlong, School Programming, LIT, and TC Leads) as well as finance, fundraising, and public relations positions. To oversee our diverse operations, the executive board meets weekly. We also hold general membership meetings. Troy Camp has 140 committed members that make our programs possible. We also have a small board of advisors, however, the board has no final say in how the money and programs are managed. Troy Camp is very much a student-run philanthropy.

## Motivation for Promoting Philanthropy

Troy Camp counselors have a genuine passion to open new doors for these underserved children. Counselors reflect on their childhood and the opportunities they were given by attending USC. In return, they want to ensure other children are provided similar experiences. We believe that every child is deserving of equal opportunity and must be taught that higher education is attainable. A proper education teaches good values and skills, leading to better opportunities and careers as well as creating a more cohesive, understanding community. Academics not only educate the brain, but also the mind. Students must be excited and motivated to learn. A better tomorrow and a more cohesive community start with providing stronger support for children.

Specifically to the Troy Camp mission, our motivation for serving the kids is centered on knowing the importance of a long-term caring adult relationship, expanding the knowledge of college, and the camp experience. Caring adults need not be immediate family members. In their book *Overcoming the Odds: High Risk Children from Birth to Adulthood*, Werner and Smith (1992) indicate that caring adults outside of the immediate family can help facilitate successful transitions into adulthood by accepting and supporting the child. According to the *South Los Angeles Health Equity Scorecard*, in South Los Angeles, 64% of schools are understaffed and 37% of households are overcrowded (Park, Watson, & Galloway-Gilliam, 2008). As a result, children in this area often lack the caring adult relationships. Troy Camp establishes long-term relationships between USC undergraduates and youth in South Los Angeles by creating a safe environment where children can be without fear of physical or emotional harm. Our programs begin during the elementary years and continue through high school to ensure that youth have the long-term support and guidance necessary to make the best decisions for their future.

Expanding knowledge of college is another motivation. For some of our campers, non-familial college students may be a child's only exposure to higher education. As a result, forming long-lasting relationships with college students allows children to view college as an attainable goal rather than an abstract concept. Troy Camp creates programs specifically designed to widen children's views about college and to help them apply. Thirdly, research indicates that camp experiences lead to increased hope (Kirschman, Roberts, Shadlow, & Pelley, 2010) and improved grades (Hanes, Rife, and Laguna, 2005) for at-risk youth. A revitalized mentality serves as a refreshing contrast to urban Los Angeles. In this new atmosphere, children are more likely to partake in positive risk-taking and self-expression. They participate in teamwork-oriented activities throughout the day with no technological distractions or mental barriers. Children develop and strengthen both their interpersonal and intra-personal skills, including anger management and personal responsibility.

## Strategy and Activities

### *Recruitment and Campus Visibility*

Troy Camp has a dominant presence on the USC campus. Most students support Troy Camp, as it is USC's oldest student-run philanthropy. At the start of the school year, Troy Camp is promoted to attract new counselors. We have undergone a rebranding process to improve how others perceive and communicate our brand. Consistently receiving around 450 counselor applications each year, Troy Camp is already widely respected.

### *Pass the Can and Fundraising Support*

Any USC student may support Troy Camp through our fundraiser Pass the Can. At halftime during a USC football game, volunteers pass empty milk jugs throughout the stadium to collect donations. Pass the Can raises around \$25,000 each year. We recruit 450 student volunteers to make this endeavor possible. Each volunteer receives a free t-shirt, which students proudly wear throughout the year. Some student groups also hold fundraisers for us. Troy Camp works with the Greek community at its annual Songfest to raise funds. Gamma Phi Beta and Delta Gamma sororities and Kappa Sigma fraternity provide sponsorship to Troy Camp. Moreover, Troy Camp is the beneficiary philanthropy for the Annenberg Communication Student Association.

### *Partnerships with other Student Organizations*

USC students are given the opportunity to interact directly with the Troy Camp kids. The strength of our programming relies on other student organizations. Various student clubs provide fun and educational activities for kids in our program to explore and develop their interests. For example, theater troupes, dance teams and science clubs have put on workshops for our campers during Kids Events, LIT, and TC Leads. The hope is by interacting with the kids face-to-face, students are inspired to go out and further serve the community, realizing the impact and satisfaction from working with deserving children in such an underserved community.

### Results

Each level of our programming works to instill the attitudes and behaviors that would be most beneficial to the children at that point in their development. At the elementary level, these attitudes and behaviors are self-confidence, independence, academic motivation, and behavior at home. At the middle school level these are self-confidence, leadership skills, academic motivation, and goal setting abilities. We also track students' grades at both the elementary and middle school levels. To assess students' changes in these areas, we administer surveys three times throughout the year for each program: at the start of the program, halfway through the program, and at the end of the program. We are currently in the process of implementing similar survey measures to track the impact of TC Leads, our newest program. At present, we track the percentage of high school seniors who graduate high school and progress to higher education.

The results of our data collection are as follows. Of the elementary school students surveyed, 100% displayed improved behavior at home and 99.1% showed improvement in their self-confidence, independence, academic motivation, and grades. At the middle school level, 100% of students surveyed improved their leadership skills and their goal setting abilities, 97.3% increased their self-confidence and academic motivation, and 91.9% improved their grades. Our measures indicate that 100% of our high school seniors graduate from high school and 87% proceed to higher education.

Troy Camp not only impacts the students we serve, but the USC counselors too. Our optimistic culture motivates counselors to provide all they can for the children. Working with them on a weekly basis, counselors are inspired to serve the community in other capacities. After graduation, many Troy Camp alumni have gone into the service sector, with a noticeable number entering Teach For America. It is not uncommon for counselors to remain in touch with their campers after graduation. Counselors are always excited to hear about their campers' successes.

## Budget

Troy Camp operates on a roughly \$170,000 annual budget. The budget is broken up in the following chart.

<b>Expense</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Camp	\$93,525
Elementary School Program (Kids Events)	\$30,860
Middle School Program (LIT)	\$4,200
High School Program (TC Leads)	\$3,200
After School Programs (SMASH and SP)	\$2,000
Fundraising Expenses*	\$23,000
Administrative Expenses**	\$5,500
Counselor Training	\$9,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$171,285</b>

\*The \$23,000 is responsible for \$85,000 in revenue

\*\*To clarify, no counselors are paid

## Sustainability Plan

The commitment students have to Troy Camp is undeniable. Lack of involvement is never a concern. Counselors willingly volunteer their time. The executive board is a mix of upper- and lower-classmen. There is continuity between leadership teams, as the Co-Executive Directors must previously serve on the executive board to be elected. Building strong partnerships throughout the university (for instance, the fundraiser Pass the Can has been held since the 1970s), Troy Camp is well established and will continue to engage USC students.

In terms of sustaining our funding, Troy Camp is fairly well endowed. The fundraisers Pass the Can, Songfest, and a gala bring in around \$70,000 a year. Minor fundraisers hosted by other student organizations bring in additional sources of funding. Our grants committee brings in more revenue, with most notably \$53,000 from the Good Neighbors grant. Furthermore, each counselor is expected to raise enough money to take one kid to camp (\$260). This initiative averages \$20,000 each year. Looking ahead, we anticipate an increase cost for camp. The Troy Camp budget has doubled in the past 10 years. Our largest expense is camp. It is also the only non-negotiable expense as the weeklong camp is the foundation of Troy Camp programming. We have been at the same campsite at Idyllwild Pines for over 30 years. Most use Idyllwild for weekend retreats. The weekday portion of Troy Camp is money they usually do not get. As such, our business is appealing and we could negotiate for lower rates and signed a three-year contract. The contract is up at the end of this year and we anticipate a 20-25% increase costs. To combat this increase, we requested additional funding from grant applications, such as the Generous U.

## Lessons Learned

Troy Camp has brought such joy to campers and counselors alike; however, we have learned the importance in balancing this fun energy with organizational structure. Specifically, we aim to improve on tracking progress and transitioning to increase our effectiveness. The past two years we have increased our data collection. We are still perfecting the survey we send to the kids and their parents. Once we finalize a system that works well for Troy Camp, we can share our methodology with other organizations.

Transitioning leadership is also essential to student clubs. Counselors can commit only up to four years, whereas Troy Camp has been going strong since 1948. New ideas and programs are rendered useless unless they are handed down to future leaders. Counselors pass on advice to the underclassmen, but this word-of-mouth approach does not suffice. Our executive board has improved its method of transitioning the sequential boards. Each new board member receives either organized computer files or pamphlets on how to handle their position. This allows us to take on projects that require over a year.

Above all, Troy Camp can teach other organizations that inspiring others to take action is essential. Troy Camp's success is attributed to its dedicated members. We have established a culture where students willingly volunteer. Our organization does not function without this positive, collaborative environment. To other student clubs, *believe* in your mission. Maintain a positive attitude and always remind yourself what you are working towards. Then with record keeping and clear protocols and guidelines, an organization can grow and inspire others to do the same. Teamwork makes the dream work.