

PAL

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happen," says Williams. "That's what I am here for— to give these kids opportunities."

A former arena football player, Williams' can-do attitude and infectious positive leadership have helped bring teens into the center for evening basketball and socialization.

POIC gang outreach worker, Robert Blake brings teens off the streets into the center and connects them to other crucial resources.

"Working with Jay and being in the PAL building has been great," Blake told *The Skanner News* in February. "It's electric when you walk through these doors. It's positive, and that feeling is contagious."

Rockwood and its surrounding neighborhoods are home to an influx of poor families; some gentrified out of the inner North and Northeast. Unemployment, and especially youth unemployment, is sky-high.

Blake points out that high-crime, high-poverty neighborhoods are the perfect recruiting ground for gangs. Children whose families are struggling to pay the rent and put food on the table simply don't have warm, comfortable dens where they can snack on milk and cookies while they finish their homework, watch television or play video games.

PAL is what gang prevention and intervention look like at the grass roots level. Without PAL, Blake says, many more teens would be hanging around on street corners or jumping rides on the MAX, just to have a place to be and something to do.

"Some of these kids won't eat anything all day, except what they get to eat at PAL," Blake says.

By the time youth enter the club, he estimates, about 15 percent already see them-

selves as part of a gang.

PAL is short for Police Activities League, a national youth organization with local affiliates. Contrary to widespread belief, PAL is a nonprofit, not part of the police bureau. Police officers visit the club, mentor

**'We have 185 kids who believe in everything we do, because they have a voice in everything we do'**  
— Jay Williams, PAL

youth and teach sports at its signature summer camps. PAL's board of directors includes high-ranking police officers and representatives from the FBI, the ATF as well as from Comcast, Safeway and Standard Insurance.

To supplement the limited funds it gets

**POIC offered PAL \$20,000 to help with renovations. But without the rest of the funds secured to complete the work by POIC's September deadline, PAL couldn't accept**

from the City of Portland, Multnomah County, and the national office, PAL has to raise funds.

The youth organization has a big footprint in the Portland-metro region, with youth football and basketball leagues, spring break and summer camps, and a four-week

signature multi-sports camp at Portland State University. It also runs a Westside Youth Center on Allen Boulevard in Beaverton.

The contrast between the Beaverton and East Portland centers is startling. The Beaverton Center is a state-of-the-art facility with a good Internet connection and computers courtesy of partnerships with NIKE, Intel and IBM.

The Eastside Center is in desperate need of renovation. Leased to PAL by the City of Gresham for the nominal sum of \$1 a year, it has a leaking roof, a peeling floor (rumored to contain asbestos), and other structural problems. Unlike the Beaverton center, its Internet connection and its three donated computers are unreliable. The teen room doesn't have Internet at the moment.

PAL has plenty of rules that keep everyone safe. No gang attire. Be respectful to one another. Take turns in the games room. In February, staff told *The Skanner* that PAL's two unwritten rules that may define its mission best:

No kid is ever turned away. No kid leaves hungry.

That first pledge is holding up this summer.

"One of the things PAL prides itself on is that we don't turn kids away," says Ten Eyck.

The second now looks less secure.

"On Friday nights we buy at least 30 boxes of pizza and they are gone within 15 minutes," Williams said several weeks ago. "We buy birthday cakes and we have barbecues. So if you don't get to have a birthday at home, you get to have one at PAL."

But last week snacks and pizza were off the menu. The center just doesn't have the money to buy them.



Isaiah (L) and Alex, both already parents, are regulars at the PAL center. Both are featured in our video about PAL on *The Skanner News* YouTube channel

Patricia Day Ten Eyck, came to Greater Portland PAL as executive director 18 months ago. As executive director for the local Habitat for Humanity she won an award for expanding the nonprofit's funding base. At PAL she had plenty of catch up to do.

"This last year has been about dealing with the infrastructure of the organization," she said.

"Now I think we are in a very good place. The staff we have now is just awesome and dedicated and enthusiastic. They really care about the kids."

Now Ten Eyck is working to build financial support for the programs, and raise money to repair the East Portland Youth Center. The long-term goal is to raise upwards of \$150,000 for renovations, she says. In the short term, replacing the roof is the first priority. PAL has secured funding to do just that through a City of Gresham federal community development block grant.

Ten Eyck hopes that the work won't force the center to close.

"We were really reluctant to close down

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