

Portland Parks Takes Fun Where the Kids Are

Mobile Program's 19 sites this year are mostly in East County.

"A lot of our programs take place in parks, and this is the second year where we have ventured out into apartments," he says.

The idea is to take quality activities to the children along with trained child specialists who are committed to their work.

"A lot of our employees are teachers that are off duty from the schools during the school year," Milkes says. "We have quite a few folks who are new Portlanders – we like to put folks in the sites where the children will feel very culturally welcome with the recreation leaders providing them with activities."

This mix of cultures comes together in the universal need to send the kids out to play.

"There is unfortunately what we call a play gap, a gap in terms of where there is access in terms of recreational opportunity for children, in comparison to what really we believe they should have," Milkes says.

The larger Summer Playgrounds Program itself, dating back 107 years, operates at 46 sites, 21 of which run free kids' lunch programs. There's also Movies in the Park, the Washington Park Summer Festival, free Open Play Swim, Concerts in the Park, and more. See the complete schedule, including free children's

Vietnamese, Nepali, Spanish, Russian, Burmese, Chinese and English.

The Mobile Parks Program is also growing by leaps and bounds every year, with nearly 4,000 kids participating in 2012.

The effort reaches so many kids because the family-focused events are put together with the help of

"With the assistance of members of the East Portland Parks Coalition, which is made up of many volunteers from different neighborhood associations in the outer east, we started in January trying to figure out which parks had the greatest need for the program," Milkes said.

But the key ingredient besides community participation is funding.

The wider Summer Playgrounds Project does provide some of the Mobile Playground funding, but Milkes says much of the growth in East County this year is from the East Portland Action Plan and Multnomah County – which he says stepped in to fund a third of the mobile playground program specifically for East County.

Citywide demographics show that's where the majority of kids live and where most of the growth in families is taking place.

Milkes says one of his most important goals is to make sure there is equity among all the different cultural backgrounds of the kids involved in the summer



Staff at the Portland Parks and Recreation Mobile Playground Program are trained in child development.

Overall, Parks officials count a quarter million kids participating in the Summer Parks Program

lunch dates and times, go to www.portlandparks.org.

The issue of free lunches for the children is a key part of why the Summer Parks Program is so important – some 100,000 kids' lunches were served last summer alone, and this year is on track to reach at least that number.

Overall, Parks officials count a quarter million kids participating in the Summer Parks Program, with informational brochures printed in eight languages: Somali, community members who attend meetings starting each January.

"The important thing to me is that we get it right for the children – the right locations at the right times – and that's a bit of a challenge," Milkes said. "That's exactly where we need the community input."

In fact, concerned people should start thinking now about what their community needs are, and consider getting involved next winter to help get those needs met.

programs.

"That there's a program for everybody and there's access for everyone – getting through those barriers is a real challenge," he says.

Find out more online at www.portlandparks.org.



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