



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®  
FOR HEALTHY LIVING  
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

# MEETING THE MOMENT

THE YMCA OF SAN DIEGO COUNTY'S  
RESPONSE TO CONTINUING CARE FOR  
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES DURING THE  
COVID-19 PANDEMIC

2020-2021 SUMMER & SCHOOL YEAR



## OUR CHALLENGE

On March 16, 2020, school districts in San Diego County responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by suspending all in-person classes and moving to distance learning. Just three days later, California Governor Gavin Newsom announced a statewide stay-at-home order, asking residents to limit recreation and traveling to work unless their work fell into the categories deemed essential in an Executive Order.

These decisions, made within a matter of days, upended daily life. Working families, many of whom were in essential sectors responding to the early days of the pandemic, suddenly had to find care for their children who would normally be in school. Many other parents lost their jobs. These circumstances, stressful and frightening for so many, had an outsized impact on the nearly 50% of San Diego families who already struggled to make ends meet financially before the pandemic.<sup>1</sup>



With schools closed, families lost access to the care that supports children while parents earn wages that keep families strong. Parents who lacked access to viable care options faced the possibility of having to quit their jobs and jeopardize their economic stability in the name of caring for their children.



Distance learning, though well-intentioned and necessary, presented challenges. Parents found themselves taking on both employee and teacher roles as families adjusted to working from home and distance learning. More than 60,000 San Diego County students lack an appropriate device for school and some Districts note that up to 40% of their students lack Internet access. This translates to academic setbacks of seven months for the average student, and as much as 10 months for Black students and nine months for Latinx students.<sup>2</sup>



School closures also separated children from valuable opportunities to develop academically and socially. Young brains thrive on connecting with others – an experience that is difficult to recreate through a computer screen – and being surrounded by supportive adults like teachers and peers builds the brain architecture children need to thrive into adulthood. Instead, the isolation of quarantine and lack of interaction with other children increased the likelihood that children would experience depression and anxiety.<sup>3</sup>



As the virus itself disproportionately impacted underserved families and communities of color, its related consequences, like school closures and job instability, laid bare the inequities of our society. While school access was restricted in the interest of public health, San Diego's vulnerable families needed a trusted, accessible, and safe place to survive this public health crisis.

<sup>1</sup> Center on Policy Initiatives. "Making Ends Meet." Retrieved from: <https://cpisandiego.org/2017/03/22/making-ends-meet/>

<sup>2</sup> San Diego for Every Child. "Beyond the Hotspot." Retrieved from: <https://www.sandiegoforeverychild.org/beyond-the-hotspot/>

<sup>3</sup> Loades, Maria Elizabeth et al. "Rapid Systematic Review: The Impact of Social Isolation and Loneliness on the Mental Health of Children and Adolescents in the Context of COVID-19." *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* vol. 59,11 (2020): 1218-1239.e3. doi:10.1016/j.jaac.2020.05.009

## OUR RESPONSE

For nearly 140 years, the YMCA of San Diego County has mobilized resources to serve our community's most pressing needs, making us the oldest and largest youth serving organization in the county. With this distinction, we have the honor of being one of the few organizations that provides the necessary support system for families - in times of crisis or not - throughout the county.

During a school year overshadowed by the COVID-19 crisis, our Child and Youth Development (CYD) department opened its preschool, afterschool, and hybrid enrichment programs to the community, offering much-needed early care and education, school-age care, distance learning, and extracurricular activities.

The majority of parents in the program turned to the YMCA because they needed to continue working onsite in essential sectors or needed options for their children while working from home. Understanding that every family has different needs and schedules, our sessions gave parents the ability to choose full- or half-day programs, allowing parents to select the care arrangement that best fit their work schedules for minimal disruption. Parents who dropped their children off at a branch for day camp had the security of knowing their children were:



**SAFE:** our programs were some of the first child and youth-serving programs that opened in person and operated under stringent health protocols. Our COVID-19 protocols combined our expertise in branch operations with State and County public health regulations to set the precedent for onsite safety. We continued our practice of providing care with staff who have passed background checks, and have received training on child abuse prevention, first aid and CPR, concussion protocols, and trauma-informed care.



**SUPERVISED:** we allowed parents to focus on the demands of their jobs by caring for their children in a safe, supervised environment while schools were closed.

We put equity at the heart of our programs, working with principals to prioritize services for families that have been historically underserved (such as those experiencing homelessness, resource families involved in the foster care system, and others demonstrating a significant need) to maintain their ability to earn a reliable source of income and provide a supportive environment for their child(ren).



**DEVELOPING:** our CYD programs empower all youth to reach their full potential by providing access to nurturing environments, enriching academic experiences, and support systems that reduce barriers and strengthen cognitive, physical and social-emotional development.



**NURTURED:** we provided the social-emotional learning opportunities, emotional support from staff and peers, and vital connections that foster emotional well-being during widespread uncertainty.

## OUR IMPACT

### KEEPING FAMILIES STRONG

The uncertainty that the COVID-19 pandemic brought was a persistent source of stress for families and the collective trauma of this experience will linger with families for years. Fortunately, the right combination of nurturing activities and supportive connections can mitigate the effects of this trauma and our programs align with developmental science to do just that. We center our CYD programming around the factors that keep families strong to prevent or mitigate adverse experiences.<sup>4</sup> We intentionally weave the five factors of the Strengthening Families Framework into our programs to increase the health and well-being of San Diego's children and families: parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete support in times of need, and social and emotional competence of children.

The YMCA of San Diego County considers itself an extension of the family unit, and parents can rely on us to provide the emotional support and social connection necessary to build resilience and manage the pressures of day-to-day life. Our ability to provide concrete resources, like child care or food for families keeps them strong and reduces stress when things feel overwhelming. More than just a place for children to stay during the workday, our programs are run by expert staff who have the child development knowledge necessary to respond to a child's unique needs and foster the critical emotional and interpersonal skills so children can grow in spirit, mind, and body.

**17,487**  
students served

Full-day ACA-accredited day camps at 13 locations during summer 2020, and break camps at 10 branches

Virtual Day Camp

Licensed school-age Character Builders programs at 28 sites, with additional hours to help support the school districts' in-person hybrid model

5 preschool programs

11 new full-day Academic Enrichment Programs at YMCA branch facilities and on school campuses that were not already licensed, 10 new part-day recreational enrichment programs

Full Day Distance Learning Support Program throughout Chula Vista Elementary School District

Expanded Learning Programs powered by the Y provided online support to students in 42 programs, hybrid learning programs at 11 schools and in-person virtual learning support at 39 schools

Multiple YMCA facilities worked with County public health partners to enable access to testing and vaccinations to help keep staff, families, and children safe

**97%** of surveyed parents said their child experienced development of spirit, mind, or body.

**83%** of surveyed parents would recommend the program.

**79%** of surveyed parents were extremely satisfied with the safety and security of the program.

<sup>4</sup> Center for the Study of Social Policy. "About Strengthening Families™ and The Protective Factors Framework." Retrieved from: <https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/About-Strengthening-Families.pdf>

## SITE SPOTLIGHTS



### COPLEY-PRICE FAMILY YMCA

#### *Preschool & Infant Care*

The Copley-Price Family YMCA is one of few programs in San Diego County that offers infant/toddler care, and the ability to keep the program open met a critical community need. Preparing to re-open during the pandemic presented challenges, but donations and funding secured allowed the site to provide care that was at little- to no-cost for members and continue employing teachers. Relying on feedback from the community, the team was able to provide a program during the pandemic that would be a safe, nurturing, fun, and an educational environment. The early childhood education program at this site relieved the stress of working families with young children and provided a safe place for children to learn and grow while simultaneously supporting educators and employers.



### COPLEY-PRICE FAMILY YMCA, MISSION VALLEY FAMILY YMCA

#### *Pana Hap, Program Director*

Strong collaboration between San Diego Unified School District, funding partners, and the YMCA supported a much-needed resource for families and created a positive and memorable experience for students. School leadership helped recruit families and students, and philanthropic funding helped the YMCA operate a high-quality program and allowed students and families to access care at no cost. Offering programs on school campuses greatly enhanced participation and strengthened bonds between the YMCA and families in the community. Philanthropic support was critical for student engagement and ability to thrive in the virtual learning setting.



### SOUTH BAY FAMILY YMCA

#### *Licensed Child Care Team*

The South Bay Family YMCA program hosts a robust partnership with Chula Vista Elementary School District, supporting 26 sites and 850 students with full-time virtual Distance Learning Support Program (DLSP) learning support and enrichment. Families in the region encompass a range of circumstances that present unique needs, including military families, essential and front-line workers, students who are unsheltered, families who cannot afford care for multiple children, relatives raising non-biological children, and others who need additional assistance to successfully engage in virtual learning. Funding from the CARES ACT from the school district ensured families could access care, helping them maintain stability in a time of uncertainty and maintaining social, emotional, and academic support for students.

## **IN THEIR OWN WORDS...**

“There are not enough words to thank [Y staff] for helping my child to be at a safe & healthy place in order for me to work.”

**- Susana, Mother**

“My son absolutely loves camp and I just love when he comes home excited to show me all the crafts he made and explain the new games he learned. Its priceless to see him experience traditional moments of childhood in a safe environment. He also feels very cared for and seen at camp which I appreciate.”

**- Day Camp Parent**

**WWW.YMCASD.ORG**

**For more information, contact:**

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The YMCA of San Diego County is dedicated to improving the quality of human life and to helping all people realize their fullest potential as children of God through the development of the spirit, mind and body.