

Parks After Dark



EVALUATION BRIEF
AUGUST 2017

UCLA CENTER FOR
HEALTH POLICY RESEARCH



Parks After Dark (PAD) is a Los Angeles County (County) program that began in 2010 as the primary prevention strategy of the County's Gang Violence Reduction Initiative. It has since evolved into a key County strategy to promote health, safety, equity, and community well-being. Led by the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), PAD is a collaboration of multiple County departments as well as community agencies. PAD was designed to be implemented in communities with higher rates of violence, economic hardship, and obesity. On average, PAD communities have greater levels of need across these three areas than Los Angeles County as a whole.

PAD parks stay open late on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday evenings in the summer months to offer a variety of free activities for people of all ages. PAD provides recreational activities (e.g., sports clinics, exercise classes, and walking clubs), entertainment (concerts, movies, and talent shows), arts and educational programs (arts and crafts, computer classes, and cultural programs), teen clubs and activities, and health and social service resource fairs. Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) Deputy Sheriffs patrol the parks to ensure safety during PAD and participate in activities with community members. The PAD program began in three parks in 2010. In 2012, it expanded to six parks, and in 2015 to nine parks. In 2016, the program was being implemented in 21 parks throughout Los Angeles County.



The UCLA Center for Health Policy Research conducted an evaluation of the 2016 program. This brief summarizes evaluation analysis around each of the six goals of PAD.

PAD Communities: Challenges



HEALTH



Higher adult obesity rates in PAD park communities (35%) than the Los Angeles County average (26%) in 2014.

Higher childhood obesity rates in PAD park communities (30%) than the Los Angeles County average (24%) in 2010.

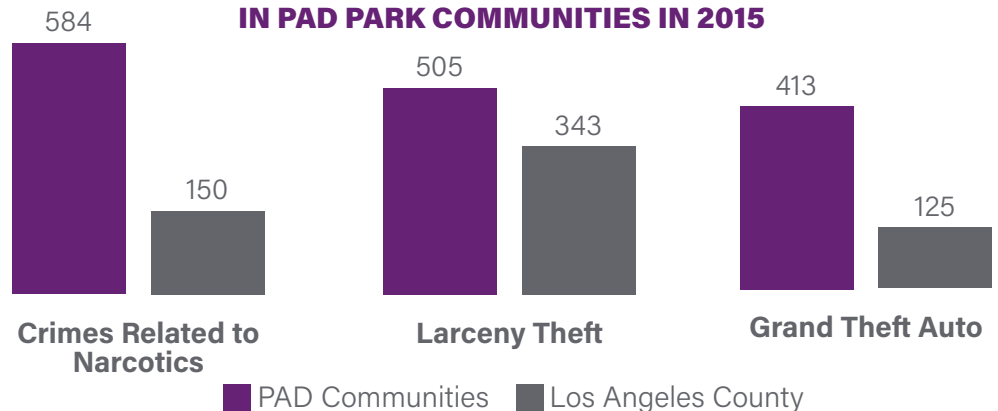
Higher mental health need in PAD park communities than the Los Angeles County average. 69% more individuals used mental health services (specialty outpatient) in PAD park communities (7,503 per 100,000) compared to the Los Angeles County average (4,448 per 100,000) in 2015.

CRIME AND SAFETY



Higher assault rates in PAD park communities (66.0 per 100,000) than in Los Angeles County overall (43.7 per 100,000) from 2005-2014. In 2015, the most common crimes in PAD park communities were related to narcotics, larceny theft, and grand theft auto. The rates of these crimes in PAD park communities (per 100,000) were greater than the average rate for Los Angeles County.

RATE (PER 100,000) OF MOST COMMON CRIMES IN PAD PARK COMMUNITIES IN 2015



Source: UCLA analysis of Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department and Los Angeles Police Department data, 2015

WELL-BEING



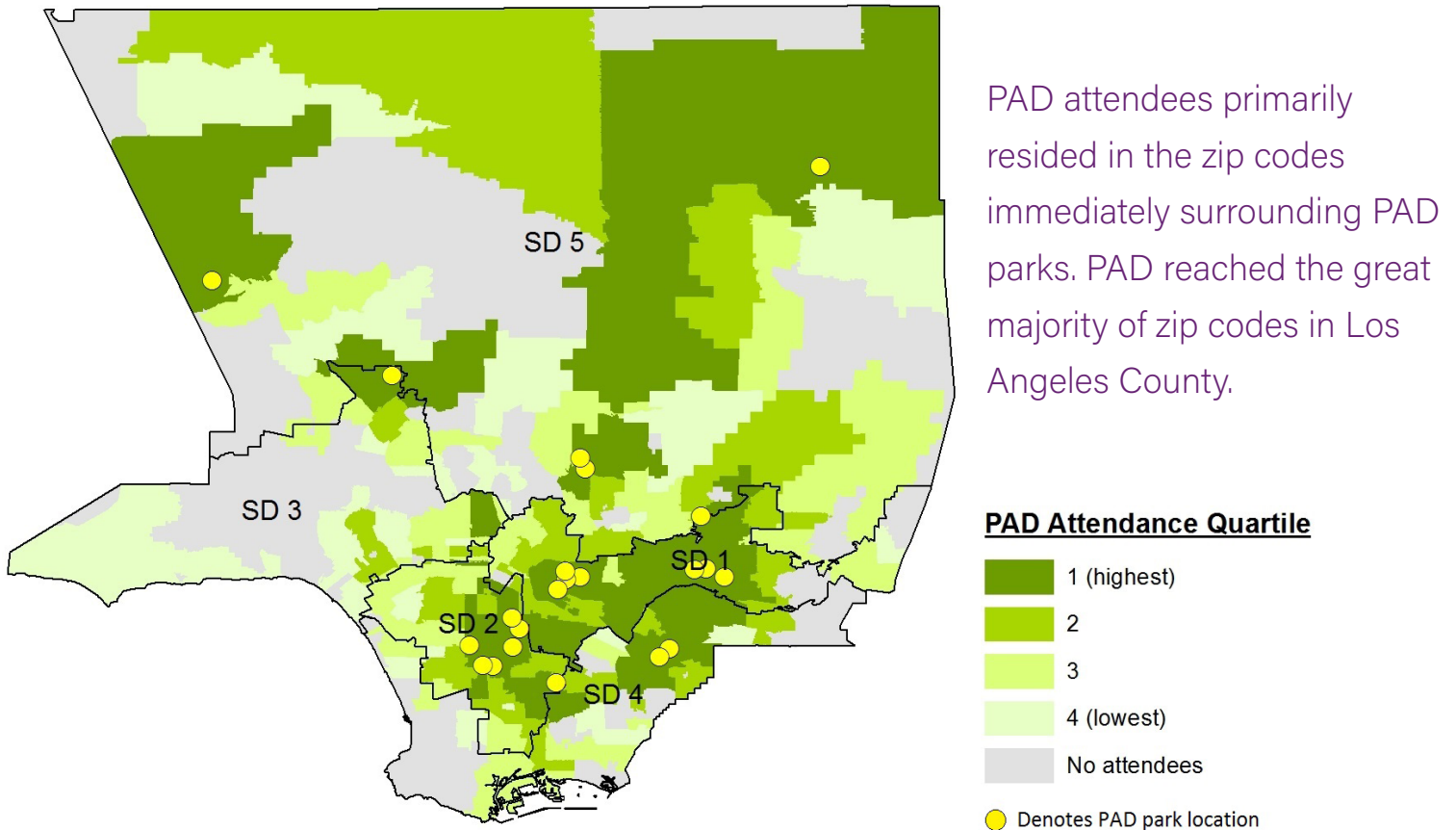
Twice as many Department of Child and Family Services substantiated referrals in PAD park communities (474 per 100,000) compared to Los Angeles County average (214 per 100,000) in 2015.

81% more probation youth served in PAD park communities (107 per 100,000) compared to Los Angeles County average (59 per 100,000) in 2016.

Higher economic hardship index in PAD park communities (59.5) than the Los Angeles County average (47.4) from 2005-2009. **PAGE 3**

GOAL 1

Increase access to **quality recreational programming** and **innovative services**



Notes: SD refers to supervisorial district. Yellow dots represent PAD park locations.



32% live outside area



68% live within a Parks After Dark zip code



Source: UCLA analysis of PAD participant survey, 2016

PAD achieved its goal of increasing access to free recreational programming to residents of PAD communities and many others living in greater Los Angeles County. PAD provided a mix of entertainment and cultural programming, recreation and physical activity, arts and educational programming, and health and social services that attracted families and youth. Participant and key informant feedback on various aspects of PAD was highly positive and emphasized the need for PAD programming in these low resource communities.



ESTIMATED VISITS IN 2016
178,000

FAVORITE ACTIVITIES AMONG PARTICIPANTS

27%

Arts and entertainment

9%

Physical activities

Movie nights, concerts, soccer, and swimming were the most frequently requested activities.

ESTIMATED PAD VOLUNTEERS

600

Nearly half were from Athens Park in South Los Angeles.

SATISFACTION

94%

of participants would attend PAD again and would recommend to a friend

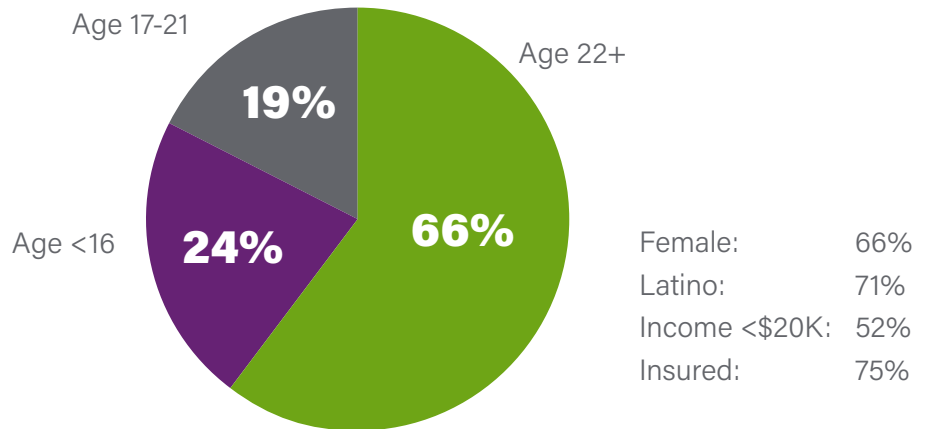
92%

of key informants said PAD should be expanded to more parks

“PAD is the most empowering cultural/artistic/educational event in the community to bring peace and understanding as neighbors across neighborhoods.”

—PAD participant, City Terrace Park

PARTICIPANT PROFILE



“We actually had a troubled female teen who was gang-affiliated volunteer and became a positive role model during the summer. The young lady’s mother was so happy seeing her daughter do something positive with herself.”

—Staff, Jesse Owens Park

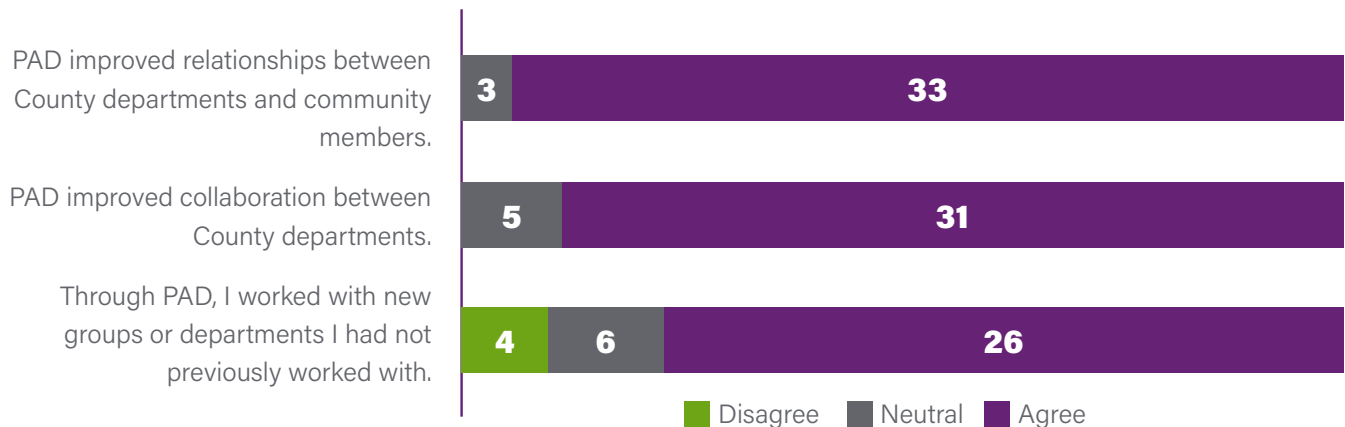
Source: UCLA analysis of PAD participant survey, 2016

GOAL 2

Increase collaboration among different stakeholders

PAD improved cross-sector collaboration among various Los Angeles County departments. Collaboration was highest among Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) staff and Deputy Sheriffs who worked closely during the daily operation of PAD. Community resource fairs at every PAD park provided an opportunity for health and social service programs to conduct outreach and enabled providers to better reach their target population. Service providers recognized value in the PAD resource fairs, with one provider noting that they were “innovative” ways to reach members of the public who would otherwise be intimidated to walk into an office. Probation staff also discussed how the park setting positively changes the dynamic of their interactions with the community: “When you are at the park, you are totally in the community’s environment.”

PERCEPTIONS OF IMPROVED COLLABORATION



Source: PAD key informant survey, 2016 (n=36)

“It allowed DPH to look at its work in a new way and encouraged collaboration with other sectors to address the multiple needs that face many of the same communities.”

—Key informant, Department of Public Health

GOAL 3

Decrease community violence and increase perceptions of safety

Overall findings indicated a dampening effect on crime relative to comparison parks. Crime rates did not decline in all PAD parks relative to crime comparison parks; this may have been the result of external factors unrelated to the PAD program. Both participants and key informants indicated that PAD positively impacted feelings of safety in the parks, even among those who did not feel safe in their community. This sense of safety was attributed to the presence of Deputies in the parks and to the large number of people attending PAD in a positive environment. Participants noted that seeing Deputy Sheriffs in the park made them feel safe.

95%

of participants agreed PAD improved the relationship of the community with Deputy Sheriffs



97%

of PAD attendees felt safe at PAD

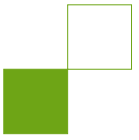


Source: UCLA analysis of PAD participant survey, 2016



“Without PAD, deputies would not get out of their patrol cars or communicate and interact with the kids or communities in the same manner.”

—Key informant, Sheriff’s Department

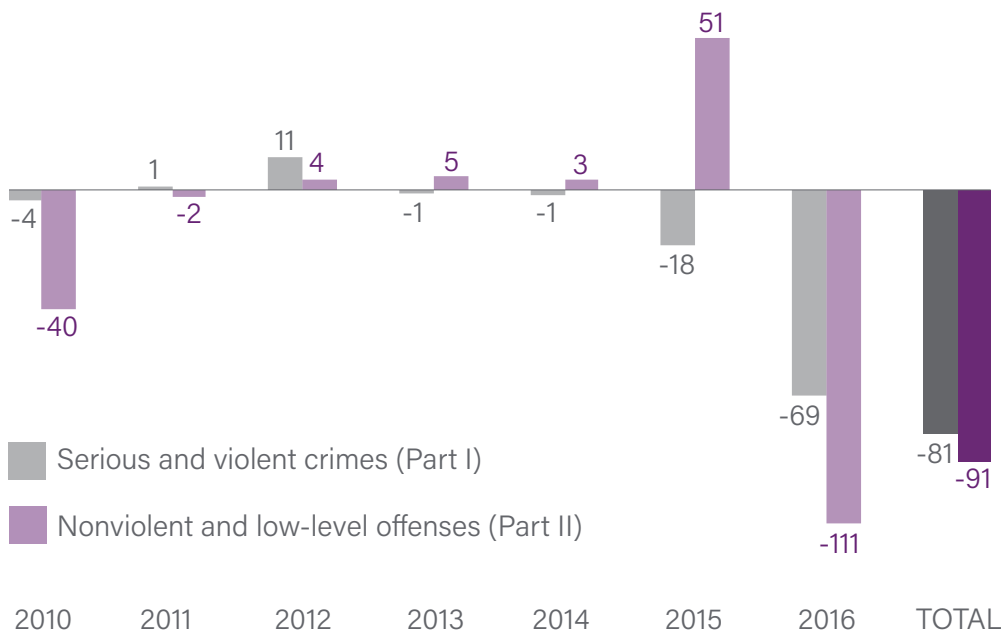


“People look out for each other here.”

—Roosevelt Park PAD Participant

Crime reduction:

UCLA estimated the cumulative change in number of Part I and Part II crimes (vs. comparison parks with similar characteristics) from 2010-2016.



Source: Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department and Los Angeles Police Department data, 2009-2016

Notes: Based on a difference-in-difference analysis with comparison to parks with similar characteristics.

Part I crimes are serious and violent crimes such as homicide, aggravated assault, and rape. Part II crimes include nonviolent and low-level offenses such as narcotics use and disorderly conduct.

**DURING PAD OPERATION
FROM 2010 TO 2016**



81

Serious and violent (Part I) crimes were avoided

+



91

Nonviolent and low-level offenses (Part II) were avoided

GOAL 4

Increase physical activity and decrease chronic disease risk

PAD increased physical activity by providing access to free sports and exercise classes in safe public spaces. Diverse programming and evening hours were important in reaching both youth and adult populations. If PAD-like activities were continued year-round, there would be an estimated reduction in disease and morbidity, according to an analysis of participant survey data.

83%

engaged in physical activity during PAD, including participants who indicated a sedentary lifestyle



Source: UCLA analysis of PAD participant survey, 2016

6



More years of life expectancy added (estimated)

6

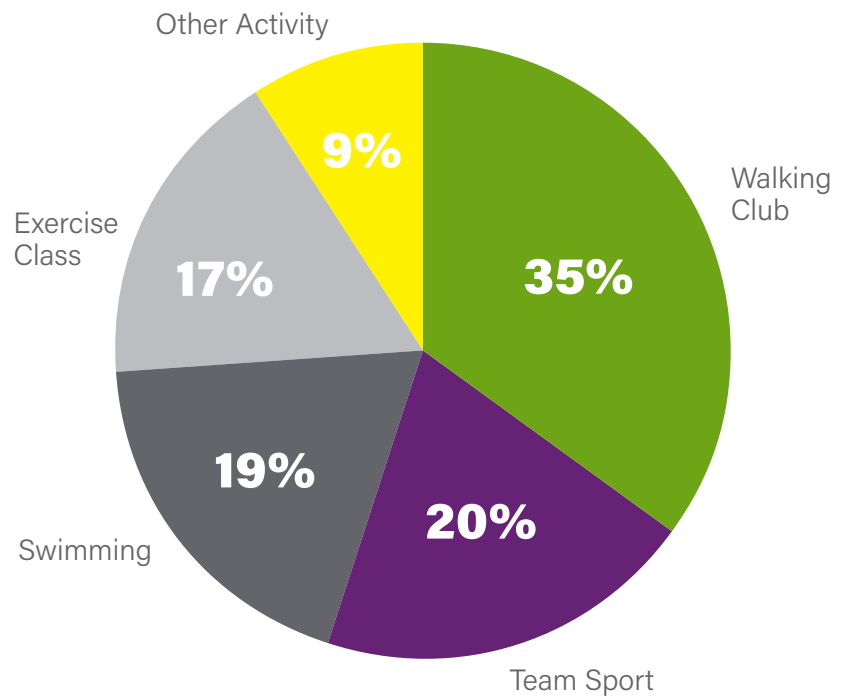


Fewer years of disability (estimated)



Source: UCLA analysis of the Integrated Transport and Health Impacts Model (ITHIM) and PAD participant survey, 2016

PARTICIPATION BY TYPE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AT PAD



Source: PAD participant survey, 2016

"I feel happy to come and exercise here."

—Participant, Roosevelt Park



“I am homeless, with two kids, and I was at your park last week when you guys had the movie, jumpers, and gave free food...I brought them back hoping this is not a one-time thing. This is a great thing you do for the community.”

—As reported by staff at Ted Watkins Memorial Park



GOAL 5

Improve social cohesion and community well-being

PAD contributed to social cohesion and community well-being by providing opportunities for families and neighbors to spend quality time together. PAD provided families with opportunities to participate in activities they could not otherwise afford, and the program helped to break down social isolation. Nearly all participants attended with youth or children under 18, and participants reported that PAD increased quality time with family members. Nearly all participants agreed that PAD improved relationships with neighbors, including those who indicated not living in a close-knit community.

88%

of all PAD participants attended with children

31%

were children ages 0-5

57%

were children ages 6-12

23%

were children ages 13-18



"I've never really seen a community pull together the way the adults, teens, and children did here at Jesse Owens Park during the Parks After Dark program."

—Staff, Jesse Owens Park

"We met so many families and neighbors we hadn't seen before. We realized the diversity in our neighborhood we had never experienced."

—PAD participant, Allen J. Martin Park

95%

agreed PAD improved relationships with neighbors



Source: UCLA analysis of PAD participant survey, 2016

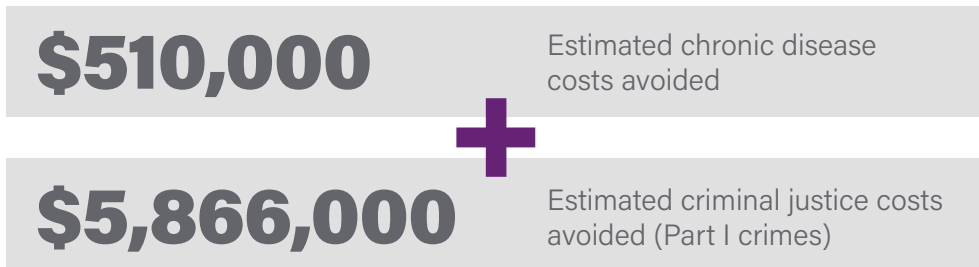


GOAL 6



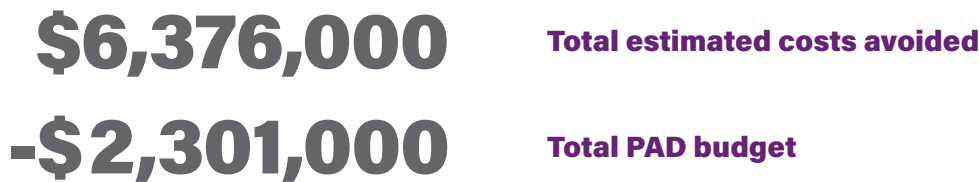
Cost savings

In 2016, potential cost savings associated with PAD included approximately \$510,000 in reduced health expenditures and \$5.866 million due to reductions in crime expenditures, compared to the \$2.301 million budget for PAD.



“The community now takes better care of the park as a result of PAD.”

—Key informant,
Department of Parks and Recreation



Note: Chronic disease estimates are based on ITHIM and assume participation in physical activity once a week, year-round, at PAD. Criminal justice costs are based on estimates of cost by Part I crime type, and reduction was estimated using Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department and Los Angeles Police Department data.



Evaluation recommendations

- **Engage a diverse group** of community members and local organizations in the PAD planning process and marketing activities.
- **Use the park as a hub** to link at-risk youth and families to needed services.
- **Develop innovative on-site services** through partnerships with County departments and external organizations to address PAD community needs related to health, economic, safety, and youth and family services.
- **Increase engagement of Deputy Sheriffs with the community** at PAD and throughout the year—for example, through more interaction with youth through organized activities and assignment of consistent deputies to build trust.
- **Provide more physical activity opportunities** during PAD, and link PAD participants to year-round physical activity to maximize impact on chronic disease.
- **Identify a sustainable funding source for PAD.**



Conclusions

PAD has made significant progress in meeting all of its goals. Collectively, the evaluation findings highlight the significant benefits of PAD and argue for continued implementation in existing PAD parks as well as in other parks with similar levels of need and crime. PAD provides a safe and welcoming space for community members of all ages to access free recreation and entertainment programs, health and social services resources, and physical activity opportunities, while building relationships within families, among neighbors, and with County departments and law enforcement. Most importantly, PAD has provided an opportunity for community engagement and ownership of parks.



“This was one of the best summers we have ever had. Thank you for everything!!
Can’t wait to see what next summer brings.”

—PAD participant, El Cariso Park

Participating parks

Joined PAD in 2010:

- Pamela Park
- Roosevelt Park
- Ted Watkins Memorial Park

Joined PAD in 2012:

- City Terrace Park
- Jesse Owens Park
- Loma Alta Park

Joined PAD in 2015:

- Bassett Park
- Salazar Park
- San Angelo Park

Joined PAD in 2016:

- Adventure Park
- Allen J. Martin Park
- Athens Park

- Belvedere Park
- Mary M. Bethune Park
- East Rancho Dominguez Park
- El Cariso Park
- Helen Keller Park
- Mayberry Park
- Eugene J. Obregon Park
- Stephen Sorensen Park
- Val Verde Park

Data sources

Data for the evaluation included the Department of Parks and Recreation survey of PAD participants, UCLA interviews with PAD key informants, and analyses of Los Angeles County crime data and other health, safety, and well-being indicators. Quotes and photos were provided by the Department of Parks and Recreation.

Acknowledgments

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