

Drop-In Recreation and Enrichment Program Guidelines

Overview

Columbia Association's Youth and Teen Center (YTC) is a multipurpose two-story facility where youth and teens can access a computer lab, watch movies, play Wii or Xbox on a large flatscreen TV, or enjoy billiard tables, air hockey, ping-pong and various board games in the recreation room. The upstairs features a mini-gym for basketball, volleyball and other games and activities, as well as a snack bar run by the entrepreneurial program.

History

Originally called the Youth Resource Center, the YTC was formed in the early 1980s in response to a request from the state Juvenile Services Administration (now the Department of Juvenile Justice) for recreational and educational programs for teens designed as prevention that promoted self-esteem, discouraged delinquency and substance abuse, provided information and referral services for teens, a job bank, and office space to allow probation counselors to meet with teen clients. This led to the "Drop-In" afterschool recreational program. The YTC served and continues to serve youth living in Howard County and Columbia.

Over the years, strong relationships have been built with various agencies and organizations such as the Howard County Police Department, Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks, Youth Development Coalition, Howard Community College, Oakland Mills Community Association, University of Maryland Extension (4H), Howard County Library, and the Howard County Public School System, to name a few. These collaborations have been instrumental in the success and overall ability to manage the recreational program.



Purpose of the program

The purpose of the YTC is to create a supervised, safe place to play, relax and socialize while providing a choice of services and programs designed to promote self-esteem and develop relevant life skills. The mission, to state it simply, is to enhance the quality of life of youth ages 9 to 18. Check the monthly activities calendar at ColumbiaAssociation.org/ytc for the special activity planned for each day.

Staff

The YTC has two full-time staff members — Rene Buckmon (general manager) and Safire Windley (program coordinator), as well as several part-time staff members. All YTC staff members are experienced in working with youth and teens, undergo a criminal background check, and are certified in CPR and first aid. Columbia Association also requires ongoing safety training and random drug screening for staff who transport children. Staff receive additional state-approved training on activity planning, ADA requirements, behavior management, child growth and development, and youth programs best practices.

Open house

Parents and participants are encouraged to attend the scheduled open house (usually held the last week in September) to meet the staff and YTC partners. This is also a great opportunity to learn about and sign up for enrichment clubs and activities.

Registration

Before a participant can attend the Drop-In program, they must submit a completed registration form, supplemental information form, and registration fee(s), and the parent and child must attend an orientation. The orientation with the parent and participant(s) is an opportunity to review the supplemental information form and address any special needs the participant may have in order for the child to succeed in our program. It also gives us an opportunity to ensure complete understanding and knowledge of the program services, rules, regulations and guidelines. Parents are responsible for scheduling the orientation prior to their child starting the program.

Although registration is accepted throughout the year, participants must renew their registration every year. The renewal period begins at the beginning of the school year's fall term.



Registration *(continued)*

Parents of registered participants will receive free registration for two parenting workshop offered in collaboration with Jacaranda Center for Family and Youth Development. Additional workshops are available for a fee. Dates and topics are available on our website at ColumbiaAssociation.org/ytc or on the YTC calendar, which is posted monthly. Participation in the parenting workshops is a requirement. Parents having difficulty meeting this requirement should have a conversation with the YTC program coordinator to address their issues.

Fees

Registration fee: \$80 for the first child and \$50 for each additional child in the same family due at the time the registration form is submitted, and annually thereafter. Additional fees for field trips, outings or excursions may be required for those who register.

Financial aid is available for qualified applicants. Please contact Rene Buckmon (the Youth and Teen Center's general manager) for additional information.

The Drop-In Recreation and Enrichment Program

The Drop-In program offers a wide variety of educational, enrichment and recreational opportunities that support positive peer interaction, hands-on learning opportunities, decision-making, and development of life skills. These activities not only engage youth but also allow them to make contributions to the community and provide opportunities needed to avoid crime and negative peer pressure.

The daily program incorporates an opportunity for participants to work on homework assignments with some assistance from YTC staff, as well as both structured and recreational activities. Structured activities, listed on a monthly calendar, are planned each day. Participation in these activities is encouraged but not required.

Active participation in at least one enrichment club is a requirement for all YTC participants. The choice of enrichment club is left to the participant. However, once they commit to a club they are expected to be present and engaged. Parents are asked to reiterate and help enforce the guidelines of the enrichment clubs to their child. Staff should always be contacted if a participant will be absent for an enrichment club; likewise, parents will be notified of any unusual absences or no-shows for enrichment clubs.



The Drop-In Recreation and Enrichment Program *(continued)*

The YTC programs are drop-in, not licensed child care, and therefore the expectation is that the participants are mature enough to handle a less-structured environment. While we provide a safe and supervised atmosphere, staff work in various rooms and therefore do not provide line-of-sight supervision at all times.

Children who are ill and did not attend school or who are suspended from school will not be permitted to attend the YTC. Youth who are not registered, including guests of registered participants, will not be permitted to attend the YTC Drop-In program or enrichment clubs.

Supper Club

Through collaborative efforts with the Maryland Food Bank, the Youth and Teen Center is a Supper and Summer Club meals program site, providing nutritious meals for registered participants after school and during the summer months. All participants who participate in the supper or summer club programs must abide by the guidelines set by the Maryland Food Bank.

Arrival and dismissal

Drop-In program participants must self-check themselves in at the front reception counter upon arrival. Youth may not engage in any activities without being properly checked in.

The YTC closes at 6pm during the school year and 7pm during the summer. Children who have been given permission to walk home must exit the building and go directly home or follow instructions given by their parents. Participants may not hang out in front of The Barn or the areas surrounding the building, including the village center, as loitering in the village center is prohibited.

Parents who have not given written permission for their children to walk home must arrive by closing time. A late fee of \$15 for every 15 minutes will be assessed for late arrivals and must be paid before the child can return to the YTC. No credits or adjustments for unused time will be given.

Program hours

School Year (September-June)
Monday-Friday, 2:30-6pm

*Summer (June-August)
Monday-Friday, 2-7pm

*Hours subject to change



Schools Closed days, holidays and half days

Field trips, outings and excursions may be offered (for an additional fee) on some days when Howard County public schools are scheduled to be closed. A minimum of 15 youth must register and pay for the activity to avoid cancellation. Fees are determined by the type of event/activity.

There will be no Drop-In program on days Columbia Association's Headquarters is closed (Labor Day, Thanksgiving and the Friday after Thanksgiving, Christmas, Martin Luther King Day, Memorial Day, 4th of July). The YTC will be closed during the Howard County Public School System's winter break and will have limited hours during spring break. No credits or adjustments for unused time will be given.

The YTC will open early when Howard County public schools have scheduled early closings.

Inclement weather policy

The YTC will be closed when Howard County schools are closed or dismiss classes early due to inclement weather or other emergencies. No credits or adjustments for unused time will be given.

Participants with special needs

Prior to registering any children with special needs, parents should discuss instructions for care in an emergency, special dietary needs, effective methods of interacting and other relevant information for a child diagnosed with a disability.

Discipline guidelines

The Youth and Teen Center program has a zero-tolerance policy for physical aggression and/or contact. Any pushing, fighting, horseplay, shoving or hitting is grounds for immediate suspension. Aggressive or abusive behavior by a participant toward a staff member or another participant is grounds for immediate suspension. Continuation of this type of behavior toward a staff member or another participant could result in permanent removal from the program.

Youth must respect and obey YTC staff, volunteers and program partners. Youth who use non-offensive language and appropriate behavior are permitted to participate in YTC programs. In cases where a behavior problem is of a harmful nature, the parent will be informed immediately. There are times when a participant may be asked to leave the premises. In this case, the participant must exit the building and walk home.



Discipline guidelines *(continued)*

Parental support will be elicited in developing a plan to help the child control/eliminate the harmful behavior. In cases of excessively harmful or aggressive behavior, a child may be suspended from the program for a specified period of time determined by the issuing staff. Inappropriate behavior that continues despite repeated interventions by parents and staff may result in permanent removal from YTC programs, activities and events.

The use or possession of tobacco, alcohol, illegal substances or drug paraphernalia while participating in YTC events and programs or while on YTC property and its vicinity is prohibited and is grounds for immediate suspension or permanent removal from the program.

No credits or adjustments for unused time will be given.

Non-custodial parents

In the absence of a court order, non-custodial parents have full access to their child or children. Non-custodial parents who fall within these parameters may elect to provide a list of emergency contacts for pickup of the child or children. Non-custodial parents with limited access to child or children must provide a copy of the court order and must provide a list of emergency contacts authorized for pickup on the court-ordered days.

Injury

The program staff will call you if your child sustains a serious injury requiring medical attention while participating in the program. You will also be contacted if your child sustains any kind of injury or bump to the head or injuries with excessive bleeding. Minor injuries (i.e., scrapes, bumps) will be communicated to parents upon arrival in the program. If medical treatment is required and a parent cannot be reached, a YTC staff member will accompany your child to Howard County General Hospital. It is important to know that the hospital will not treat the child without the permission of a parent. Please be sure we have current work, cell and home phone numbers. Also, please update these numbers as necessary.

Personal Items

YTC and Columbia Association staff are not responsible for cell phones, music players, game devices and other electronics, toys, money or other personal items your child may bring to the program. Weapons of any kind cannot be brought to the program at any time.

