

Needs Assessment: Investigating Parental
Involvement through a Variety of Lenses within the
Jackie Robinson Family YMCA Community

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Abstract:

There is a variety of scholarly research that focuses on parental involvement, ranging from the barriers that limit parental involvement, to the implementation of programs that aim to increase parental involvement. Nevertheless, a lot of research solely accentuates on individual strands and factors that link to parental involvement. This paper aims to provide complexity to these homogenous factors that have been consistently represented throughout academia, and investigate parental involvement within an entire community. This will allow us to rely on a collective voice to understand the idea of parental involvement, the issues connected to it, and ways to encourage and increase it. Because the Jackie Robinson Family YMCA (JRYMCA) is a bridge/support system to the Southeastern San Diego community and the schools, we plan to create and provide the YMCA with a needs assessment of the community that underlies common factors related to increasing parental involvement and the lack there of. In doing so, the JRYMCA can potentially create an effective parent training based program that will increase parental involvement in the home, at school and at the JRYMCA.

Introduction:

Why is it that children growing up in Southeastern San Diego must choose between survival and success every time they step outside their doors? Could it be because 52 registered gangs who shower violence down upon these sidewalks have invaded this community, or maybe it is because with every step the people of this community take, they hear the echoes of tagging, the selling of drugs and the automated police sirens racing through the streets? No matter what description you choose, these children are defined by these streets, destined to be no one and expected go nowhere, however lucky to exist tomorrow. These deficits overshadow the light of hope that still exists within the community, seen through parents who care about their children's future, children who strive for a better life, and community involvement that aims to fight against these injustices and provide their own access to opportunity. The JRYMCA is an example of this hope, as it "offers youth development, healthy living, social responsibility, and most importantly provides a safe and secure space" where fear and failure do not exist. While the JRYMCA remains an excellent resource for the community, parents must continue to claim their children's futures by getting involved, supporting them and directing their social and academic pathways. Unfortunately, the amount of parent involvement is not where the YMCA wants it to be and they would like to see more active parents, in order to lead these children towards academic success.

The JRYMCA's philosophy is, "Its for everybody! We build strong kids, strong families and strong communities." Our research question began to take shape through analyzing how the YMCA builds this foundation in such an underprivileged and impoverished community. We discovered that parents are at the center of the community and are at the heart of YMCA and its fundamentals, so we decided to explore the concept of parent involvement further, posing a research question and investigating it through a needs assessment within the Southeastern San Diego Community.

This research project seeks to gain a better understanding of parental involvement or the lack there of in a predominantly Latino, African American and low-income

community. In addition, it seeks to discover creative solutions to increase parental involvement at the JRYMCA, which can potentially have a domino effect within the school systems.

Research Question:

What factors influence and deter increased engagement of parents in the Jackie Robinson YMCA service area?

Understanding Parental Involvement

Different Ways Scholarly Academia examines parent involvement or the lack there of:

Much of the academic research on parental involvement has our common goal in mind, and that is to increase parent involvement; however, scholars go about addressing this problem or finding solutions in a variety of differentiating manners. Terrinieka Williams in “Identifying And Decreasing Barriers To Parent Involvement For Inner-City Parents” considers a different approach at looking at parent involvement in low-income areas. She focuses on the barriers that many low-income families have that prohibit them from being interactive or involved in their child’s life, while other authors such as Deniz Kan in “Parent Involvement Activities from a Parent’s Point of View, Marry Harris’ *“Preparing Teachers to Engage Parents* and S. Overstreet’s “Predicting Parental Involvement in Children’s Schooling within an Economically Disadvantaged African American sample” focuses solely on parent inclusion. Kan provides statistical data on parent involvement/inclusion in a variety of activities at a pre school, however, not really explaining the factors that contribute to the lack of parental involvement like Williams’ article; while Harris complicates the inclusion of parents by implementing parent involvement in teacher education curriculum. Teachers play a huge role in facilitating parent involvement and so incorporating strategies for them to increase parent involvement could potentially provide a better communicative relationship and force positive change. Similar to Kan, Overstreet examines the probability of parents being involved in their children’s academic lives, however Overstreet receives his data from the parents themselves.

William’s “Identifying And Decreasing Barriers To Parent Involvement For Inner-City Parents” only suggest outreaching to parents throughout schools, but researchers would like to see it implemented in outreach programs outside of school as well, which is what happens in the article “Reaching out to African American parents in an urban community: A community-university partnership,” S. Smalley does not just propose educational outreach as a means to increasing parenting involvement, but creates a case study about outreach to low-income families “describ[ing] the impact of parent leadership training (PLT) on these African American parents in an urban community” (2). Both Williams and Smalley address common barriers to parent involvement, but Smalley takes a step forward by utilizing a community based partnership and establishing a training program at the YMCA for parents to learn how to advocate and effectively make decisions for their children.

***This research paper aims to create a needs assessment that potentially create parent centered training programs similar to William’s article, in effort to incite**

creative solutions for increasing parent involvement.

What is Parent Involvement According to Scholarly Research?

In a research study conducted by Kathleen Cotton and Karen Reed Wikelund, different determinants of parent involvement were discovered. School conferences, fundraisings, classroom volunteers, fieldtrip chaperones, home educational enrichment, were of the many popular determinants.

Some commonalities in many research studies, some already mentioned above, consider this wide range of generalized involvement opportunities as determinants of parent involvement:

- ❖ Parents can discuss their ideas of parent involvement through a type of parent planner meeting and facilitate ways to make those ideas happen.
- ❖ Staff and Parent partnerships- Staff and parents can interact more, working together to come up with activities, events and other things that will benefit the children.
- ❖ Parents can participate in a variety of fundraising events.
- ❖ Parents can observe their children during their extracurricular activities.
- ❖ Parents can interact with children in extra curricular activities.
- ❖ Parents can chaperon events.
- ❖ Parents can take turns bringing snacks to events
- ❖ Parents can participate in a wide range of volunteer activities.
- ❖ Parents can share information with other parents about resources and involvement opportunities.
- ❖ Parents can participate in questionnaires.
- ❖ Parents can write a list of goals for their children
- ❖ Parents can provide a healthy breakfast every morning.
- ❖ Parents can help children with homework and projects

As scholars, we prefer a lot of parent involvement to center around interacting or being in the presence of one's children; but we do not want to limit the definition of involvement or prevent parents from involving themselves if they have their own ideas of what efficient parent involvement looks like, therefore in this research project, we leave it up to staff and parents in the JRYMCA area to provide their own perceptions of parent involvement.

JRYMCA Demographics

JACKIE ROBINSON FAMILY YMCA 2010 SERVICE AREA ETHNIC COMPOSITION BY ZIP CODE

2010 RACE BY ZIP CODE	91950	92102	92105	92113	92114	92136	92139	JRYMCA TOTALS		SAN DIEGO REGION	JRYMCA AREA
TOTAL	36,966	48,628	23,246	51,392	68,006	7,161	36,956	272,355		3,211,721	8.48%
Hispanic	21,744	33,243	10,021	40,239	23,831	1,093	12,540	142,711	52.40%	1,005,117	14.20%
Non-Hispanic	15,222	15,385	13,225	11,153	44,175	6,068	24,416	129,644	47.60%	2,206,604	5.88%
Asian	8,347	2,379	3,782	1,530	17,090	512	12,862	46,502	17.07%	310,323	14.99%
Black	1,720	5,674	3,899	6,783	16,807	1,136	4,344	40,363	14.82%	166,840	24.19%
White	3,039	5,273	3,634	1,228	3,949	4,154	3,422	24,699	9.07%	1,537,631	1.61%
Two or More Races	990	1,000	999	691	2,709	112	1,892	8,393	3.08%	103,812	8.08%
Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	837	654	513	506	2,433	35	1,250	6,228	2.29%	42,799	14.55%
Other	140	252	290	232	873	27	481	2,295	0.84%	28,503	8.05%
American Indian	149	153	108	183	314	92	165	1,164	0.43%	16,696	6.97%

General Methodology:

The Southeastern San Diego community needs assessment of parent involvement at the JRYMCA was carried out through surveys, individual interviews, and group interviews that took place at the YMCA site.

We planned and conducted these interviews and surveys over a course of a month. The participants consist of 213 persons who participated in the survey. There were 15 parents who participated in interviews, represented mostly by Latina and African American women in their early 30's and up. There was 1 African American male and 1 Latino male.

10 staff members participated in the interviews including front desk clerks, volunteers, athletic coaches, bus drivers, administrative staff, camp counselors, health/fitness staff and out reach counselors.

***We considered this approach after reading the article "Identifying and Increasing Barriers" which utilized a diversity of views including school personnel other than teachers, and a wide range of guardians, not just parents. This allowed for a more broadened perspective of the definition of parental involvement, and more perspectives on why it is lacking and how to encourage it.**

Protocols: The research begins with a specific taxonomy that identifies 4 dimensions that express details about parent involvement in this community: (1) Parent Perceptions (2) Staff perceptions (3) Parent Suggestions (4) Staff suggestions

Protocol Dimensions:

Student/Teacher Perceptions of Parent Involvement at the JRYMCA

This category addresses how parents perceive parent involvement at the JRYMCA, (specifically perceptions for why involvement is lacking)

Staff Perceptions of Parent Involvement at the JRYMCA

This category addresses how JRYMCA staff perceives parent involvement at the JRYMCA, (specifically perceptions for why involvement is lacking)

Parent Suggestions on how to increase Parent Involvement at the JRYMCA

This category addresses parent proposed and creative solutions to increase parent involvement at the JRYMCA.

Staff Suggestions on how to increase Parental Involvement at the YMCA:

This category addresses parent proposed and creative solutions to increase parent involvement at the JRYMCA.

Survey Questions

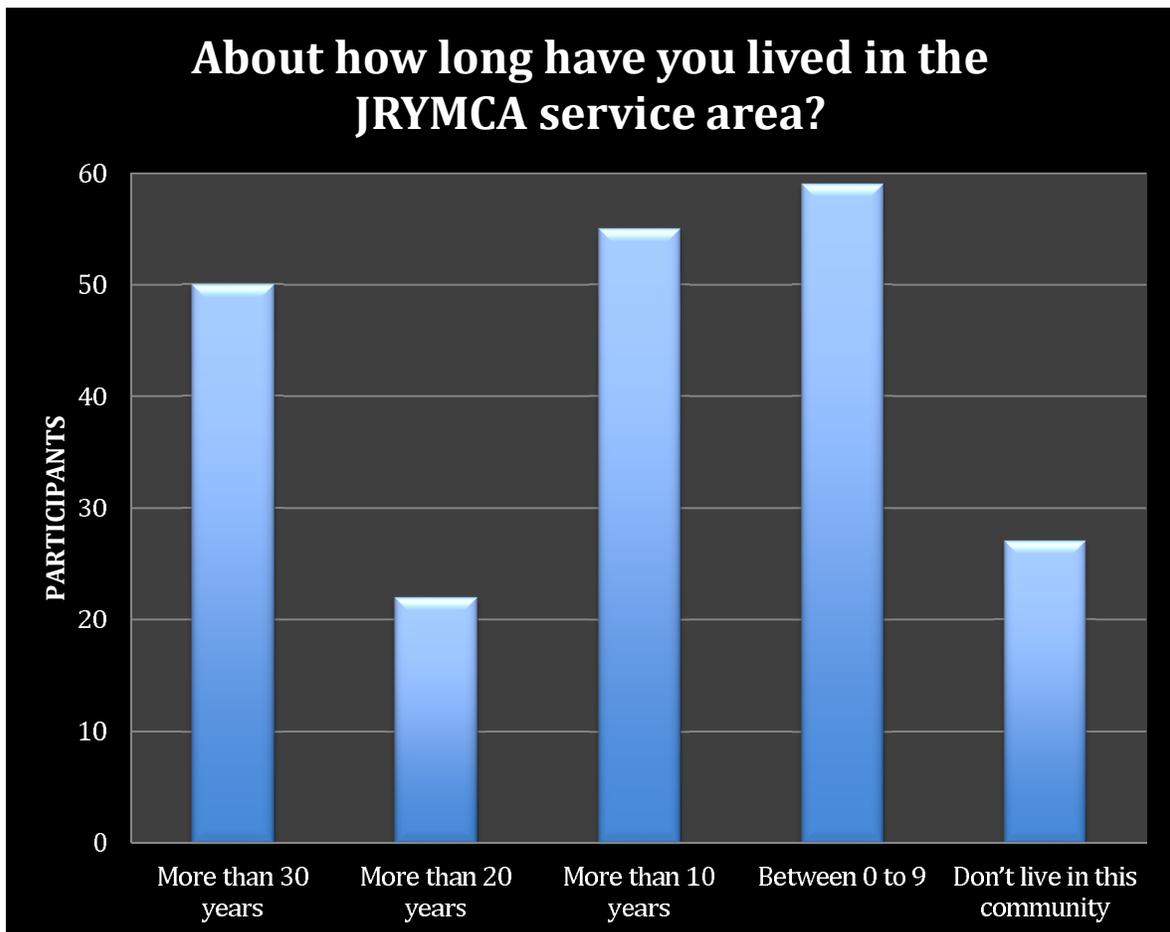
1. How many of your children currently participate in programs managed by the Jackie Robinson Family YMCA?
2. About how long have you lived in the JRYMCA service area?
3. How involved have you been in parent led efforts at your child's school?
4. What challenges do you face when it comes to being more involved in your child's school?
5. How confident are you in your ability to support your child's learning at home?
6. How often do you help your child engage in educational activities that are outside the home?
7. Would you like to participate in a 15-minute interview at the Jackie Robinson YMCA?
8. If yes, please leave your contact information and our UCSD McNair Scholars Dafne Melgar and Shannon Polee will schedule your in person interview.

Interview Questions:

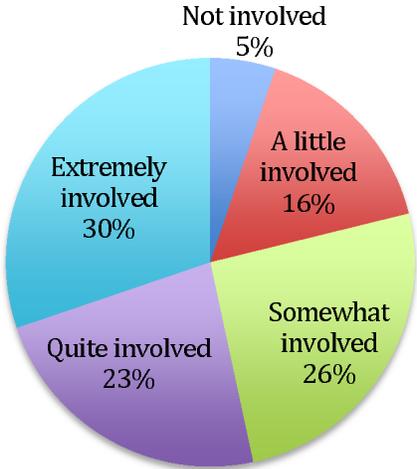
1. Do you have children at the YMCA?
2. What are their ages?
3. Do you feel that they YMCA is a good support system for them?

4. What programs are they participating in?
5. Do you feel that you are paying a reasonable price for them to participate in those programs?
6. What is your idea of parent involvement?
7. What are challenges that keep parents from getting more involved at the YMCA?
8. Would you like to see more parent involvement at the YMCA?
9. Do you feel welcomed at the YMCA?
10. How do you feel the YMCA should go about encouraging more parental involvement?
11. What do you dislike about the YMCA in relation to parents and children involvement?
12. How can the YMCA be improved?

Survey Results of Parent Perceptions

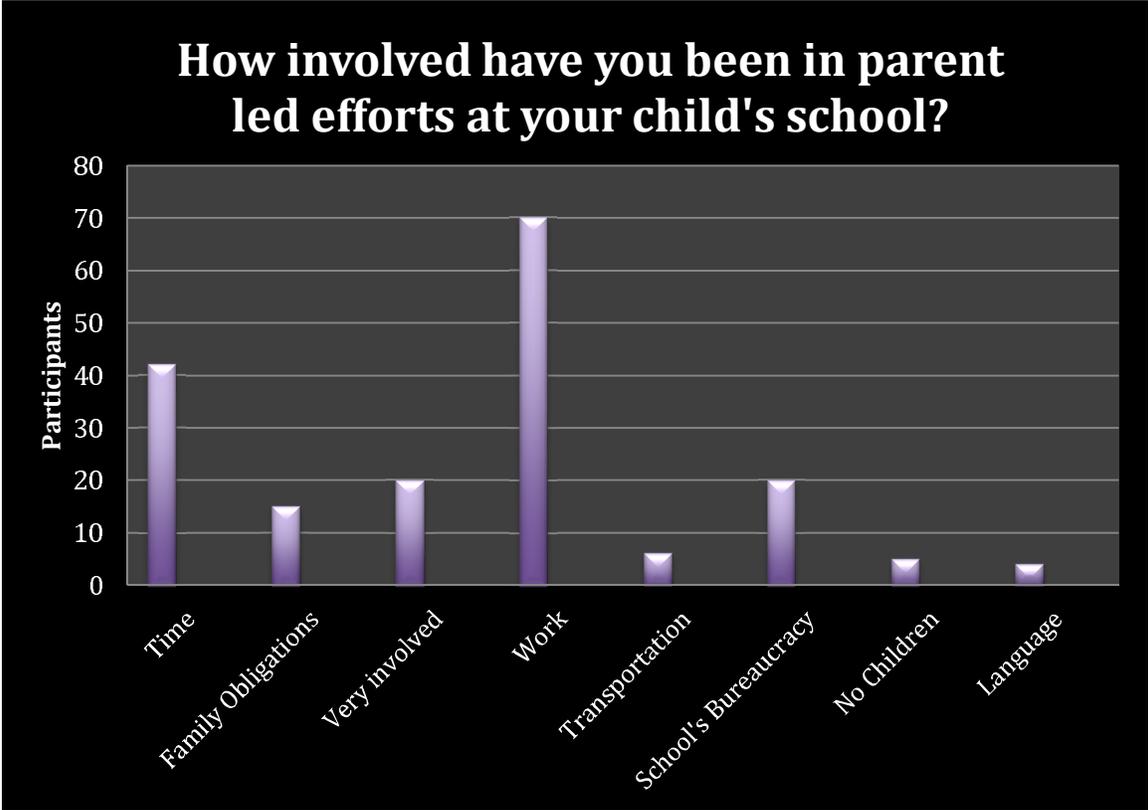


How involved have you been in parent led efforts at your child's school?



*Although, a large percentage of parents identified with the category extremely involved, only 3 of them described how. They described this involvement in the areas of sports, homeschool and Parent Teacher association.

How involved have you been in parent led efforts at your child's school?



Interview Results of Parent Perceptions
Findings: What is Deterring Parent Involvement?

- A. Parents do not know that their ideas matter
- B. Parents don't realize that their involvement is part of their child's growth
- C. Parents drop their kids off and do not stay because there are not many parent/family workshops and activities.
- D. Time poverty: Too many parents are busy working or committed to other things
- E. Parents are not aware of the information the YMCA has to offer
- F. Parents do not think that they have the skills or requirements necessary to facilitate workshops and events.
- G. Some feel afraid and unwelcome due to financial obligations.
- H. Generational cycle of Parents not being there
- I. Parents wish there was more organization and more funding at the JRYMCA
- J. Parents are afraid to reveal things about themselves such as immigrant status or details that would affect the volunteer background check.
- K. Parents argue that there are lack of resources and lack of referrals or that resources do exist, but not enough people in the community know about them
- L. Geography is an issue for some. Some people live on the wrong side of the zip-code, therefore get limited alerts and assistance
- M. Many parents do not qualify for a lot of financial assistance, even though they are living paycheck to paycheck.
- N. Surveys do not make a difference if no effective action comes as a result.

Interview Results of Staff Perceptions

- A. Parents exploit the security of the JRYMCA and turn it into a babysitting service.
- B. Everybody does not qualify for financial aid
- C. The YMCA is a non profit organization, therefore there is a limited amount of funds available
- D. There are too many roles and not enough staff: many of the staff are volunteers and are not all dedicated
- E. Big transition between elementary and middle school/high school, leaving a gap between 12-17 year olds. There are programs offered for those kids, so there are very few parents and children coming in that age range
- F. The staff does not consistently update parent/guardian contact information
- G. Has an outreach director, but no resource counselors to help students with scholarships and academic issues
- H. There is a sense of community culture v YMCA culture: Many families feel entitled and feels that the YMCA owes this something. They want more for less.
- I.

Common Concerning Factors between Parents and Staff

1. Time poverty
2. Lack of Financial Capital
3. Communication
4. Lacking opportunity to access resources provided at the YMCA

Interview Results of Parent and Staff Perceptions in Relation to Increasing Parent Involvement at the JRYMCA:

The following findings were produced within the category of **parent and staff suggestions:**

- A. Parent Liaison/Spokesperson so parents can know where to find information when they want it
- B. More family activities (find that activity page)
- C. Mandatory parent and child chaperoning events unless they can get parent volunteers who pass the background check
- D. Taking the opportunity to find out what parents are willing to do what
- E. Create activities that can reach a diverse range of people: * Community and culture need to be implemented throughout these activities
- F. Send Text alerts for busier parents
- G. Make Facebook events
- H. Put up a parent wall in the YMCA
- I. Create a family newsletter
- J. Advertise more free and easy activities such as dodge ball, father-son basketball day, mother and daughter tea party or jump rope contest.
- K. Parents can bring snacks
- L. Parents can exercise and walk around while their kids are practicing.
- M. Training Workshops- Tips and advice for parents to volunteer
- N. Informative parent workshops on health, sex, academics, etc.
- O. Try to find more funding opportunities

Conclusion: Significance of Research

Society often devalues the potentials of many underserved and low-income children, deeming them incapable of successfully learning. Many experience marginalization, stereotype vulnerability and are provided with inadequate resources, which aids to this unjust assumption. These factors, however, should in no way determine their potential. Instead of focusing on what children lack and what they need to be taught, we should always acknowledge that all children have the capacity to learn whatever they put their minds to. It is crucial to understand that all students deserve the opportunity to hone in on their intellectual potentials. In order to assess these opportunities, it is necessary for children to have a support system that believes in them, encourages them, and guide them towards social, moral and academic success; and this is what the JRYMCA does. However it is crucial that more parents start getting more involved in their child's life at the JRYMCA, in order to not only keep their children out of trouble and increase their chances at success, but to also to potentially create a domino effect throughout schools. Social collectivity and unity in the school can effectively be promoted through parent volunteering, student- teacher interaction, mentoring, after school programs, etc., where everyone is working towards the goal of improving the educational gap between underserved and privileged students, as they help to provide the tools necessary for academic success. While the JRYMCA is one component of this social collectivity, more

parents must step up and take their place as well. Children need to know that they matter, that they can be successful and that they can make a difference. We need parents' time, commitment and involvement at the JRYMCA because they are their child's role models and they have an incredible effect on their lives.

Potential Action Research

We hope this needs assessment can help to produce parent -training programs, educational out reach programs and an increased amount of parent/ family activity throughout the JRYMCA.

Potential Parent Training Program:

Staff workers can host workshops training and providing parents with the skills to be volunteers in many different areas of the YMCA. With this training, parents should no longer be afraid to accept roles due to their insufficiency in skills, which in turn can potentially increase more parent involvement.

Potential Educational Outreach Program:

This educational outreach program will focus specifically on literacy, mathematics, and technology (specifically pertaining to college preparation) workshops. This program will allow parents, staff, or outside volunteers who have experience or training in these specific fields to host workshops once or twice a months. Parents/Guardians will be attending these workshops, so that they can interact with one another and learn how to help one. This will provide more accessible resources for parents to help their children succeed academically and some of the techniques learn may potentially be able to be utilized in the home. This will create a support system that will release love, encouragement, motivation and guidance on to their children. Through these three strands, parents will also be provided with information on college access. At the end of the program, parents will be more equipped to help their children during their academic journey, through awareness and access. Students will no longer simply exist, but they will be thriving, thriving on the confidence necessary to believe in themselves and thriving on the support necessary to rise above adversity, further their education, and enter the road to success.

Potential Family Activities:

Creando con los padres/ Parent Planner Day: For this activity, we would like parents to come together and discuss activities they would like to see implemented throughout the program.

Cuentame un cuento/ Tell me a story (folk tales): For this activity, parents are going to be invited to share a folk tale to the group. If they do not know one, we are going to provide one. The purpose of this activity is to create a trust connection between children and adults, while at the same time children learn to develop language and how to be

active listeners. Parents can tell folktales about their culture and history to teach children about the importance of diversity and multiculturalism.

Cambiando los roles familiares/Changing Family Roles: Children will act as adults and adults as children. After changing family roles, they are going present a family conflict in front of the group, and how they can resolve it. The purpose of this activity is to listen, observe and understand how family members perceive conflicts and how they can be resolved.

Devolviendo a la comunidad/Give back to your community:

- Cultural potluck
- Building Community gardens
- Cleaning up graffiti and trash

Centro de innovación/ Innovation center: As students continue to progress in grade levels, they will begin to use Microsoft word more increasingly. Many parents have not had much typing or technological experience, so we would like to present a day where parents and their children learn some technological and typing skills.

Día de padre e hijo/ Father and son day: This day will most likely center around some type of sporting activity, such as basketball, baseball, soccer, etc.

Día de madre e hija/ Mother daughter day: This day will most likely center around activities like tea parties, jump rope contests, and amateur cotillions.

Campamento familiar/ Inner City Camp Out: Parents and children will camp out for one night, participating in activities such as making s'mores, telling campfire stories, going on scavenger hunts and many more activities.

Actividades para el día de la familia/ Family day activities: Families will come together and participate in the following activities on different days.

- Scavenger hunts
- Environment clean up
- Arts and crafts
- Shape up: wellness day
- Build something out of recycled objects
- Read a book together
- Make a memory book

Actividades para la noche de familia/ Family night activities

- Watching movies
- Playing board games
- Participating in karaoke night

Further Research Questions

Why aren't more father's present at the JRYMCA and how can we increase more father involvement?

How do the JRYMCA children feel about parent involvement?

How can the JRYMCA create more opportunities for funding?

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