



2014 Annual Report



Mission

To develop and deliver engaging, research-based academic, character, leadership, and career-focused programs aligned to state and national standards that guide and enable all students to achieve their full potential.



Vision: PreK–12

To provide engaging and relevant PreK–12 solutions that positively impact academic performance, social and emotional maturity, character development, and career education for all students.



Vision: Exploring

To provide positive and meaningful real-world career experiences and leadership development opportunities for all teenagers and young adults in their chosen field of interest.

Position Statement

Learning for Life programs are designed for all age groups from pre-kindergarten to those not yet age 21. Youth participation is open to any youth in the prescribed age group for that particular program. Adults are selected by the participating organization for involvement in the program. Color, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, disability, economic status, or citizenship are not criteria for participation by youth or adults.

Guiding Principles

Youth Focused

Professional

Customer Oriented

Quality Driven

Proactive

Fiscally Responsible

Innovative

Clear and Direct Communications



Dear Colleagues,

Learning for Life enjoyed a great 2014!

We saw new curriculum and Exploring programs organized on the local level. Nationally, we celebrated the national Law Enforcement Exploring and Fire/Emergency Services Exploring conferences held at Indiana University.

Our 2014 success is due to thousands of volunteers. We are blessed to have volunteers on a national, regional, area, council, district, and, especially, unit level. All focused on serving youth and delivering life-changing experiences.

We are pleased to present our Learning for Life 2014 annual report. This year's report is based on the excellent work of Dr. Richard Lerner as found in his groundbreaking book, *The Good Teen: Rescuing Adolescence from the Myths of the Storm and Stress Years*. In his work, he identified "a set of strengths that, if nurtured, would prepare teens for a successful transition into adulthood:

- **Competence:** the ability to act effectively in school, in social situations, and at work
- **Confidence:** an internal sense of overall self-worth and efficacy
- **Connection:** positive bonds with people and social institutions
- **Character:** respect for society and cultural rules; an inner moral compass
- **Caring:** a sense of sympathy and empathy for others and a commitment to social justice
- **Contribution:** the capacity of teenagers to participate effectively by caring for themselves, so as not to be a drain on others, and by giving of themselves at home, in the community, and in civic life"

Because our goal as a program is to assist in positive youth development, we feel Dr. Lerner's strategies provide an excellent vehicle to commemorate 2014.

This report offers examples of Learning for Life in action as testimonials to our contribution to positive youth development. On behalf of the Learning for Life board and national staff, we are proud to offer you our 2014 report.

Sincerely,

Dr. David Briscoe
Chairman, Learning for Life

Marty Walsh
National Director, Learning for Life

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Integrated Academic and Character Development Programs

Program Features

How the Learning for Life Curriculum-Based Program Works

Learning for Life features grade-specific, theme-oriented lesson plans to be used in the classroom to enhance and support the core curriculum for preK–high school. Lessons are designed to be conducted by the classroom teacher in conjunction with the core curriculum. The Learning for Life curriculum is research-based, and our content team has uniquely embedded character development traits into lessons that are aligned to core curriculum standards in all 50 states. This provides authentic practice of core curriculum topics and skills within critical character development and life skills lessons.

Learning for Life is an action–learning process and uses engaging teaching techniques such as role-playing, small-group discussions, reflective and moral dilemma exercises, online interactive lessons, and hands-on activities. The reflective portion of each lesson is the pivotal point at which youth have the opportunity to think about what they’ve learned and integrate the experience into real life.

Lessons are designed to reinforce academic, social, ethical, and character development skills in various areas, such as critical and creative thinking, conflict resolution, decision making, interpersonal relationships, practical life skills, self-esteem, writing and language arts, citizenship, and personal fitness.

Additional Program Features

Harassment, Bullying, and Cyber-Intimidation in Schools

This feature discusses definitions and the personal, social, and legal ramifications associated with sexual harassment, bullying, and cyber-intimidation. Videos address what we know about these troubling areas. Students will explore preventive strategies as well as how school staff can address these issues as they occur. A clear understanding of what constitutes harassment and the harmful effects of harassment on people and institutions is essential to providing a safe and inclusive school environment for all.

K–6 Substance Abuse Prevention

This program targets “entry” drugs (inhalants, alcohol, tobacco, prescription drugs, and marijuana). The program focuses on making good decisions and learning consequences of behavior. It is based on explaining how substances affect the body and practicing healthy habits. Lessons educate students about the consequences of substance abuse on self and others. This is done through language arts, science, and consumer awareness activities embedded within the lessons.

Champions™ Special Education

“Serving Youth with Special Needs”

The Learning for Life Champions™ program provides students who have mental disabilities with help in developing social/personal, life, and self-concept skills to help them achieve greater self-sufficiency.

The Champions™ Special Education program is organized into two major components:

- Champions™ Daily Living Skills program
- Champions™ Transition Program

The Champions™ Daily Living Skills Program

The Champions™ Daily Living Skills program includes lesson plans centered on a skill-oriented theme, with activities designed for class or individual use.

The Champions™ Transition Program (for high school—aged youth)

Learning for Life has developed a program called the Champions™ Transition Program to help school districts, teachers, and parents guide their special needs students through this transition process. The program includes fun and engaging activities and lessons to help teachers instruct students ages 16–21 in life skills needed to achieve self-sufficiency and success as an independent, productive member of society.

CONFIDENCE

Outdoor Challenge Days Offers Kids a Breath of Fresh Air

**By Emily Elliott, Marketing and Public Relations Director,
Crossroads of America Council**

More than 7,500 special needs and at-risk students from across central Indiana participate in archery, horseback riding, and obstacle courses—and more than 40 other activities—each year as part of Reaching for Tomorrow's Outdoor Challenge Days at Camp Belzer in Indianapolis, Indiana.

The event, which runs in mid-May, gives students who might not otherwise have the opportunity a chance to experience a day of summer camp. Outdoor Challenge Days began in 1991, drawing fewer than 100 students. It now draws up to 1,500 students a day during the weeklong event.

"Some of my fondest memories growing up were attending camp each summer. Crossroads of America Council believes every child should have the opportunity to experience a day of summer camp despite circumstance," said Patrick Sterrett, Scout executive of Crossroads of America Council. "This is a special opportunity for us to offer an exciting day for these students with the support of our community partners."

Fire departments, police departments, the Department of Natural Resources, and others are also represented with hands-on activities for the students. More than 450 volunteers make this event possible.

Outdoor Challenge Days is the final activity each year for the Reaching for Tomorrow program, a special collaboration between Crossroads of America Council, the Boy Scouts of America, and the Girl Scouts of Central Indiana. From September to May, a specially trained staff brings a character education and basic life skills program for children from low-income neighborhoods or with special needs to the classroom on a regular schedule. Teachers are enthusiastic about the benefits of Reaching for Tomorrow for their students; 85 percent of teachers reported improved behavior and achievement as a result of this outstanding program.



CHARACTER

15 Years of Character Education in Florida

Since 2000, Learning for Life offices within the state of Florida have received funding through the Florida Department of Education. The purpose of this funding is to enhance and improve student performance for at-risk, low-performing students and to reduce dropout rates by providing additional learning opportunities. This is accomplished through enhanced instruction, mentoring activities, training, mentor support, and addressing unmet needs at low-performing schools.

Over the past 15 years, it is estimated that local Florida councils have provided character education to more than 2 million students. During the 2014–2015 school year, Learning for Life will serve 134,563 participants in 266 schools. Local Learning for Life offices are in Orlando, Miami-Lakes, Tampa, Tallahassee, Jacksonville, Fort Myers, and West Palm Beach.

Local Council Highlights

Central Florida Office in Orlando: Learning to Lead Fifth-Grade Leadership Training and Team Building

Learning to Lead is a one-day leadership seminar hosted by the University of Central Florida. This is an exciting, interactive day filled with activities that teach students about leadership, time management, goal setting, and confidence building.



“Keep it up what you are doing; you never know when you will change someone’s life.”

—Participant in Learning to Lead Fifth-Grade Leadership Training and Team Building

North Florida Office in Jacksonville: Special Needs Camporee

All Exceptional Student Education participants and their family members are invited to the Learning for Life Special Needs Camporee, held every year in October. This gives students and their family members the opportunity to spend the day (and the night if they wish) at beautiful Camp Echockotee on the shores of Doctor’s Lake in Orange Park. The daytime activities include a carnival, arts and crafts, and lots of fun food. The evening events include a campfire program with a show by the Echockotee Indian dancers, s’mores, and tent camping. This event is free to all ESE youth and their family members due to the generosity of Centurion Auto Transport, Tom Nehl Trucks, and the Jacksonville business community.



Miami-Lakes Office: Annual Character Education Fun Day

Each year the Miami-Lakes office hosts its Annual Character Education Fun Day. Agencies from around Miami-Dade County participate and bring hands-on learning opportunities and cultural experiences for the 2,000 students who participate.



Real World Career Experiences

Exploring is an innovative, worksite-based program. Exploring is based on a unique and dynamic relationship between youth and the organizations in their communities. Local community organizations initiate a specific Explorer post by matching their people and program resources to the interests of young people in the community. The result is a program of activities that helps youth pursue their special interests, grow, and develop. The 12 career fields are aligned to the 16 U.S. Department of Education career clusters.

Middle School Explorer Clubs

Interest in the concept of career orientation has skyrocketed in recent years, due in large part to the focus of the U.S. Department of Education. All over the country, schools are conducting research into the career interests of middle school students.

The national Exploring office has responded by creating new and innovative coeducational Middle School Explorer Club programs for students in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. There is also a new Explorer Journey to Excellence program through which councils and districts will receive recognition for growth in membership and density.

Exploring Career Fields



COMPETENCE



2014 Law Enforcement Exploring Conference

Last summer, the National Law Enforcement Exploring Conference was held on the campus of Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. Through the efforts of many dedicated volunteers from local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies, 1,933 Law Enforcement Explorers participated in the celebration of the 55th anniversary of Law Enforcement Exploring.

Indiana State Police Superintendent and conference chair Douglas Carter kicked off the week at Monday's opening show. One of the highlights of the show was the recognition of the Orange County,

California, Sheriff's Department for starting the first Law Enforcement Exploring Post, Post 449. In addition, Indiana Lt. Gov. Sue Ellspermann delivered the keynote presentation. Sgt. James A. Zywicki from the Hartford Police Department's Post 9910, Hartford, Wisconsin, was awarded the coveted Distinguished Advisor Award.

Another notable event was the election of the national youth representatives. Cindy Garcia from Post 707, sponsored by the Chicago Office of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Chicago, Illinois, was elected national youth representative. Sabrina Capriotti from Post 154, sponsored by the Howell Township Police Department, Howell, New Jersey, was elected vice national youth representative.



2014 Fire/Emergency Services Exploring Conference

Fire/Emergency Services Exploring posts from across the United States participated in the National Fire/Emergency Services Exploring Conference in July. The event was held on the campus of Indiana University and at the Fire Training Center in Bloomington, Indiana.

Indiana State Assistant Fire Marshal Robert Johnson delivered the opening keynote message to the 112 participating Explorers and Advisors. Program co-chairs John Madson and Keith Wyatt

coordinated the firefighting and emergency services skilled events. Nyle Zikmund, the chair for the National Fire/EMS Exploring Committee, also participated in the conference.

Competitive activities included Taking a Hydrant, Firefighter Combat Challenge, Knot Tying, Spinal Immobilization, and Search and Rescue.

CONNECTION

Denver After Dark

By Calin Sterling, Learning for Life and Exploring Executive, Denver Area Council

Denver After Dark is an all-night career exploration event put on by the Denver Area Council every October. This was the 17th year the council has planned this extraordinary event for local youth. Thanks to volunteers from local Explorer posts, Boy Scout troops, Venturing crews, and business partners, numerous youth were able to learn about various third-shift careers through hands-on activities, simulations, and tours.

The evening began around 8:30 p.m. when over 100 youth between the ages of 14 and 20 met for a brief discussion about the opportunities and expectations of the event. Attendees and adult volunteers then boarded three buses donated through the Denver Sheriff's Department and were transported to various third-shift operations. Each bus had a different schedule and stopped at four tour locations between 9 p.m. and 2 a.m.



IV insertion practice on a model limb

Locations included Jefferson County Detention Center, 911 Dispatch, Denver City Jail, Denver Health's Paramedic Division, Wheat Ridge Animal Hospital, Sky Ridge ICU, Arapahoe County Detention Center, 9News, and Fire Station No. 6. Each location offered a different opportunity or scenario for the youth to experience. Attendees were able to practice CPR or learn how to insert an IV, go behind the scenes to meet the cast of 9News, and get fingerprinted at the jail. A select few were able to take a cat's temperature at the animal hospital. A midnight snack was donated by Olive Garden to keep the energy levels high.



#DenverAfterDark winner posing with a practice body model

Throughout the evening, attendees were encouraged to document their experience through a "selfie" contest. Numerous photos were uploaded to Instagram under #DenverAfterDark to share the fun with their friends and family. The person who took the winning selfie was awarded two tickets to a local movie theater.

The tours continued until 2 a.m. when all in attendance were dropped off at Jump Street, an indoor trampoline park. Here the youth were given the opportunity to make thank you cards for their favorite tours, complete a short survey on their experience, and let loose until their parents picked them up at 5 a.m. Their reflections demonstrated the variety of skills and knowledge they took away from the night, including how to save a life and the many reasons not to get arrested.

The Denver Area Council has already started preparing for the next Denver After Dark.

CARING

Caring Youth, Caring Adults

Members of the Longview, Texas, community consistently contact the city police department to inquire about a program for young boys and girls in sixth through eighth grades. The police department currently sponsors the third longest tenured law enforcement Exploring post in the country. With their experience in delivering a quality career education program for high school students, the chief of police opted to expand the program's reach by sponsoring a Middle School Explorer Club. With the expanded reach, the younger age group will have more years of experience with the Longview Police Department, which will have a greater influence on them to make positive life choices. Along with having more time to learn about police work and responsibility, they will also have the opportunity to attend more National Law Enforcement Conferences and learn how to make more informed decisions as they enter the workforce over the next few years.

The Explorer post's high school students' reactions have been very positive. The post Advisors have encouraged the Explorers to be leaders and set positive examples for the younger club participants. This is an opportunity for the older youth to show that they care about the younger youth in their community. Thank you to the Longview Police Department for creating a safe, caring environment for young men and women.

CONTRIBUTION

Exploring Program Leads to Lifelong Career



By Michael Knight, National Youth Representative Advisor

The principles of the Law Enforcement Exploring program have been utilized throughout both my personal life and my professional life. From the perspective of my youth, the discipline instilled as an Explorer was at times challenging and not understood, but it has become second nature as an adult. There are many traits learned as an Explorer that may not have made sense at the time, followed by the comment of “Why do I have to do it that way?” As I approach my 30th year in law enforcement, I can look back on a daily basis to see the foundational values instilled as an Explorer. I have been blessed to have the passion for the career of law enforcement, which all began as a Law Enforcement Explorer in Lansing, Illinois.

One of my Advisors, Mike Todd, was not only a role model and mentor but became a professional colleague and true friend. I have spoken to numerous Explorers throughout my career and one common theme is they had at least one Advisor who became a role model to guide them through the challenging years as a teenager. My advice is when the appropriate time comes, be sure to go back to your Advisors and just say, “Thanks.” They will have the insight to know why you are expressing appreciation.

There is a certain segment of this generation of young adults that has a sense of entitlement, a poor work ethic, and no loyalty to a profession. As I have traveled around the United States attending events, my interaction with Explorers is just the opposite. Based on the training received from the Law Enforcement Explorer posts, I know when I’m talking with an Explorer. The young man or woman with an Exploring background clearly is recognized by their professionalism either in a casual conversation or during job interviews, which I regularly conduct. This is in part due to the support of law enforcement agencies and the dedication of post Advisors.

I have had the opportunity to travel and work around the world in my profession in law enforcement. My counterpart on the West Coast and I have worked together for many years, and only recently I discovered that he too was in Law Enforcement Exploring. In fact, his son attended the last national conference. Stories similar to this occur on a regular basis in my career field. Law enforcement is a profession that is generational and often passed from parents to their sons and daughters.

The advice I would give to young adults is to be well-rounded with excellent communication skills. A specific degree will give you the knowledge base for a career in law enforcement, but that doesn’t set you apart from others. In the competitive market for jobs, an Explorer who is more diverse in education and civic/church group involvement, and able to relate with others will be the one who is noticed. Active involvement in outside organizations is crucial. It provides a varied background in leadership traits, communication skills, and respect for others. The ability to communicate and have deference for all types of individuals is paramount in a career in law enforcement. The Law Enforcement Exploring program—and law enforcement in general—is best analogized as a glass bowl. An individual’s actions—from social media posts to public interaction—are very transparent. Keep this in mind, as the law enforcement profession is one of honor and held in high esteem by the public.



2014 Learning for Life National Executive Board

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Brooke Parkinson, Program Operations/Team Leader
Michelle Poster, Project Coordinator

Angela Sanchez, Director of Curriculum Programs
Bill Taylor, Director of Exploring
Marty Walsh, National Director
Debbie Williams, Project Coordinator

Participation Totals*

PROGRAM	YOUTH	UNITS
Exploring Posts	100,088	4,604
Explorer Clubs	10,765	324
Learning for Life Curriculum Based	422,139	1,774

*Totals as of December 31, 2014

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