

# **THE GRIZZLY YOUTH ACADEMY:**

## **DREAM, BELIEVE, ACHIEVE**

### **An Ending as the Beginning:**

*“At the end of our tour, my last impression will be of a young man (with whom I had lunch) who passed me on the way out of the cafeteria. He turned and smiled and said ‘Thank you ma’am, so much for coming and visiting’.”--- Grand Juror*

### **And Now the Rest of the Story:**

The California National Guard Grizzly Youth Academy (Grizzly Academy), located at Camp San Luis, opened its doors in August, 1998 to 73 student cadets. This first class graduated in January 1999. Since then, nearly 4,000 youth (ages 16-18) have completed the 22-week long academic/residential phase. The Grizzly Academy serves at-risk youth from central and northern California.

## **THE NATIONAL GUARD YOUTH CHALLENGE PROGRAM**

The National Guard Youth Challenge program was established in 1991, when the United States House Armed Services Committee tasked the National Guard to develop a plan to help at-risk teens and “add value to America.” In 1993, the Youth Challenge program began a three-year pilot program to provide values, skills, education, and discipline to young people using the structure and esprit de corps of the military model. Fifteen states participated in the pilot program, which became a permanent National Guard program in 1996.

Today, the Camp San Luis-based Grizzly Academy program is one of 34 such operations in 27 states and Puerto Rico. A second program in California is based in Los Alamitos and serves southern California counties.

## ORIGIN

The 2010-2011 Grand Jury visited the Grizzly Academy and recommended that subsequent Grand Juries also visit.

## METHOD

Two different groups from the 2011-2012 Grand Jury visited the Grizzly Academy at different times, in the fall and the winter, thereby allowing Grand Jurors the opportunity to observe two different cadet cohorts. During an orientation by Major Oberg and key staff, Grand Jurors were provided informational materials and background on the National Guard commitment to the program. Following a question and answer session, Grand Jurors toured the cadets' living quarters (barracks). Grand Jurors then had an informal discussion with the principal (first tour) and assistant principal (second tour) about the education program. Each visit concluded with conversation over lunch with the cadets, a highlight of the tour.

*“The Grizzly tour was an eye-opener for me. I had heard about the program and work that was being done with the young people, but to see them in operation and meet the staff was terrific. My takeaway is how impressed I am with the staff (cadre) and their commitment to the program and the kids enrolled. The staff really take an interest in the cadets and go all out to see that the cadets succeed. They are so involved with them and know what makes them tick and what guidance is needed. Plus, they are such encouragers.”--- Grand Juror*

This commendation report is intended to be informational in nature and highlights both the student and cadet aspects of the program. The report includes comments from Grand Jurors and cadets, as well as comments and information obtained from Major John Oberg, Director of the Grizzly Academy.

## NARRATIVE

### **The Grizzly Academy Mission**

The mission of the Grizzly Academy is three-fold:

1. To provide a safe, structured environment that promotes academic achievement
2. To develop leadership traits that improve self-esteem, pride, and personal confidence
3. To teach life skills that will benefit young men and women in the adult working world (such as personal budgeting, personal hygiene, punctuality, teamwork, and responsibility)

### **The Grizzly Academy Admission Requirements**

In order to be eligible for the Grizzly Academy, there are eight basic requirements. Cadets-to-be must:

1. Have no felony adjudications/convictions or pending charges, not be awaiting trial or in trial proceedings
2. Be between 16 to 18 years of age by the first day of the 22-week session
3. Be a high school drop-out or at risk of dropping out (i.e., extremely behind in credits)
4. Be a citizen or legal resident of the United States and reside in California
5. Volunteer (the program is not an alternative sentencing program)
6. Be committed to making a life change
7. Be physically, mentally, and emotionally capable of completing the program
8. Be drug-free (there is a mandatory drug test during the first 45 days). Failure to pass the test results in mandatory expulsion - NO exceptions

### **Grizzly Academy Funding/Cost**

The Grizzly Academy is funded primarily through the Federal government (75%) and State of California (25%), which includes state lottery monies. Other nominal funding is obtained through grants and donations. Tuition, room and board, and books are provided at **no cost** to the

families. Each cadet is also assigned a laptop computer to assist with studies; access is allowed to monitored internet sites only. There is a minimum personal clothing requirement that must be met by the family upon admission to the program. In addition, there are **optional** costs near the completion of the residential phase, such as yearbook, class ring, and pictures.

## The Grizzly Academy Program Phases

The Grizzly Academy program is divided into three phases.

1. The two-week acclimation phase is a time when the candidates are evaluated for physical and mental strengths and weaknesses; they are subjected to the strict, quasi-military daily routine to determine if they are prepared for the rigor of the program. During the two-week acclimation phase, the average wash-out rate is 14%.
2. The “ChalleNGe” phase is a 20-week residential period of academics, physical fitness, individual and group counseling, life skills training, and team building. This phase most resembles a military boarding school as cadets live in barracks, eat in the base dining facility, and attend school on the base. Following the 5:00 AM wake-up, the student-cadets have a half hour to dress, make their bunks, get ready for school and march in units to the chow hall. Classes begin at 8:00 AM and run until noon and from 1:30-3:30 PM. At 3:30 PM, cadets participate in physical training or attend counseling groups until 5:00 PM. Dinner is from 5:00-6:30 PM, followed by mandatory study hall from 6:30-7:30 PM. Lights are out at 9:00 PM. During the 20-week residential phase, the wash-out rate is 7%.
3. The post-residential phase is a one-year mentoring program<sup>1</sup> completed in the cadet’s home community with guidance provided by a carefully screened and matched mentor, respected and trusted by the cadet. Mentors are given an orientation by the Grizzly Academy staff and report back to the staff throughout the post-residential phase. In this way, the Grizzly Academy tracks the progress of its graduates. According to Major Oberg, 91% of Grizzly Academy graduates in the post-residential phase are either:

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<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy that with its one-year mentoring phase the National Guard’s ChalleNGe Program is the second largest mentoring program in the nation after the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program

- Employed full-time (12% in military service)
- Attending high school, college or technical/vocational training full-time
- Employed part-time and attending school part-time, or
- Acting as volunteers in their respective communities a minimum 30 hours per week.

*“I was impressed with the staff (cadre). They were all enthusiastic about the program, were well-trained, and most importantly, they genuinely cared about the students. This was exemplified by everyone, from the commanding officer to the assistant principal, the day staff, and the cafeteria workers. The respect shown to the students was reflected back by those very students.” --- Grand Juror*

## **Mentor Criteria**

Mentors must meet a strict set of criteria to become involved in the Grizzly Academy program:

- Cadets must know the mentor and want to work with them. A cadet selects his/her mentor based on the “friendly match” approach versus the “cold match” approach employed by Big Brothers/Big Sisters.
- Mentors must be the same sex as the cadet, but rare exceptions may be granted
- Mentors must be a minimum 25 years old
- A mentor may not be a member of the cadet’s immediate family
- Mentor candidates must undergo Megan’s Law screening and are Live-Scanned, an immediate, computerized personal background search. Any mentor candidate with a felony conviction must obtain approval from the Program Director and is considered on a case-by-case basis.

## Charter High School<sup>2</sup>

According to Major Oberg, when the Grizzly Academy opened in 1998, the decision was made by the planners and local officials to establish a charter school because it allowed for:

- Multiple revenue streams, from the Department of Defense and the State of California, to finance the school operation, and
- Greater flexibility with curriculum design, so that the ChalleNGe Program's eight core components could be integrated

During its first five years, the Grizzly ChalleNGe Charter School (GCCS) was chartered by the Paso Robles School District. In 2003, it was re-chartered under the San Luis Obispo County Office of Education (SLOCOE). The school continues with the SLOCOE charter today because of its longstanding, successful relationship with SLOCOE, which provides credentialed and classified staff.

The Grizzly Academy is one of only two ChalleNGe Programs in the nation that utilize the charter high school model. The majority of the other ChalleNGe programs in the nation use a GED attainment model as the principal means of education.

GCCS has the ability to award high school diplomas to cadets who meet graduation requirements. Students can earn up to 55 credits in language arts, math, science, P.E., and other electives. GCCS is currently chartered through the SLOCOE as an alternative high school and is accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC).

*"I have never liked school before becoming a Grizzly. Now I can hardly wait to get to class. I knew the Academy would help me with my studies and would help me get in shape...but I didn't know it would help me set goals—help me get to where I want to be." --- as told by a cadet to a Grand Juror*

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<sup>2</sup> A charter school is a public school that may provide instruction in any grades K-12 that is created by a group of teachers, parents, community leaders or a community based organization. --- as defined by the California Department of Education.

The focus is on academic excellence. Academic instruction predominantly occurs in a classroom setting. This training is supplemented with ten off-site field trips during the residential phase. The destinations of these trips vary, depending on the curriculum. Field trips have included museums, the Monterey Bay Aquarium, local colleges and universities, Hearst Castle, and live theatre performances.

*“The educational program is structured in an orderly fashion, but not in lockstep, so students can advance at their own pace. Behavior modification techniques are well-designed. On-line tutoring is available from Kahn Academy<sup>3</sup> This is a good strategy to reinforce math instruction.” --- Grand Juror*

### **The Grizzly Academy Education Statement**

*“Since the Grizzly education program places a heavy emphasis on intervention and remediation, students in need of improving skills to meet grade level standards are grouped together to receive increased support. Small groups may be pulled out for specific interventions, individualized tutoring, extended time for assignment completion, and more. In addition, full time instructional assistants work in the classroom with the teachers. Cadre is available to assist with discipline and counselors are available to support students with emotional issues.*

*“Additional student performance indicators that are pertinent to improving student achievement are:*

- *Attendance*
- *Homework completion*
- *Class completion; and*
- *Student satisfaction (indicators of feelings towards school).*

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<sup>3</sup> The Khan Academy is a non-profit educational organization created in 2006 by an MIT graduate, Salmon Kahn. With the stated mission of “providing a high quality education to anyone, anywhere” the website supplies a free on-line collection of more than 3100 micro lectures via video tutorials. They can be found on YouTube. Sample subjects are mathematics, history, American civics, economics, and computer science.  
Source: Wikipedia

*“The changes in these educational behaviors from the students previous school experiences indicate success since many of the students were non-attendees and therefore did not complete homework, assignments or courses.*

*“Finally, the staff has participated in staff development in areas designed to understand the “culture of poverty” and strategies for relationship building among students and between staff and student.”<sup>4</sup>*

## **Education Statistics<sup>5</sup>**

- Grizzly Academy graduates in the last two classes/years: 357
- Number of GED and high school diplomas awarded since 1998: 1,461
- Number of GED and high school diplomas awarded in the past two years (four classes): 135
- Average improvement in grade levels obtained during the 20-week residential phase: 1.2 grade level increase

## **Other Training**

The cadre is responsible for other training at Grizzly Academy as part of the disciplined routine. They teach cadets the importance of being prompt, dressing appropriately, focusing on daily tasks (including homework), acting ethically, and accepting responsibility for their actions. The cadre is also responsible for the cadets’ physical fitness, personal hygiene, health, and welfare. Physical training, marching, and barracks inspection are all integral parts of teaching cooperation, tolerance of others, and teamwork.

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<sup>4</sup> Grizzly Academy Education Mission Statement, Purpose and Summary

<sup>5</sup> Grizzly Academy informational materials

## **Counselors and Case Managers**

There are four counselors and four case managers at the Grizzly Academy. Counselors possess a master's degree and provide individual and group counseling to cadets. The counselors also work with parents to develop plans for cadet home passes, and serve as the principal link between parents and cadets.

Case managers primarily track cadets who are in the post-residential phase through the mentors. They also team with counselors to help cadets develop "My Action Plans" (MAPs). MAPs include short-term and long-term goals to achieve when cadets graduate and return to their communities.

## **Service to the Community Is a Win-Win Situation**

Since it opened, Grizzly Academy cadets have donated their time to more than 50 non-profit organizations in the county. In the past two years, Grizzly Academy cadets have provided more than 25,000 hours of community service to an assortment of county-wide organizations. Based on the state's minimum wage of \$8.00 per hour, the community service translates into a benefit of approximately \$200,000 in San Luis Obispo County.

The Grizzly Academy has a special relationship with the Sexual Assault Recovery and Prevention (SARP) Center (located in San Luis Obispo). According to Major Oberg, there are three aspects of the SARP relationship:

1. SARP provides a male and a female counselor who leads two separate counseling/education groups, called "Her Power and My Strength." This once-per-week session is conducted over 10 consecutive weeks.
2. At their local headquarters, SARP provides once-per-week therapy for six selected cadets.
3. Cadets participate in the annual "Walk a Mile in her Shoes" walk around downtown San Luis Obispo, and provide community service support for the event.

In exit surveys administered prior to graduating from the residential phase, cadets report that community service is one of most important and fun things in which they participated. Many cadets report that assisting others through volunteer work has helped them to feel part of the community in San Luis Obispo County.

Cadets particularly enjoyed working at the Arroyo Grande Care Center with elderly patients, as well as participating in the community service events supporting Relay for Life/American Cancer Society and donating hair to “Locks for Love” for wigs for cancer patients.

### **Savings to Society**

In addition to local community service, there is a larger benefit to society as a whole. Since the inception of the nationwide ChalleNGe program, the program has:

- Saved \$109 million, based on an average \$14,000 yearly cost for each cadet vs. \$40,000 in annual corrections cost per juvenile
- Saved taxpayers nearly \$32 million each year, based on students receiving their GED vs. ongoing educational costs
- Provided \$20.2 million worth of hours of community service, based on four million hours performed by program graduates since 1993
- Removed 20% of 16-to-18-year-olds enrolled in the program from federal assistance programs
- Contributed an increase in the tax revenue base of \$26-\$30 million, based on program graduates joining the workforce

### **The California National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program Awards Received**

- 2001: “Excellence in Mentoring” Award (National Mentoring Partnership)
- 2003: LTG Herbert R. Temple “Leadership” Award (National Guard)
- 2005: “Best All Around” ChalleNGe Program (National Guard)
- 2006: Richard A. Wolf “Excellence in Innovation” Award (National Guard)
- 2006: “Health and Hygiene Core Component” Award (National Guard)

- 2007: “Best Post-Residential Performance” Award (National Guard)
- 2008: “Golden Bell Award for Excellence in Education” Award (California School Board Association)
- 2009: “Outstanding Volunteer Organization of the Year” Award (National Multiple Sclerosis Society)

## **Cost-Benefit Analysis of the National Guard ChalleNGe Program**

The Rand Corporation conducted a cost-benefit analysis of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe program, which was sponsored by The National Guard Youth Foundation. The findings of the analysis “support public investment in the program as currently operated and targeted.”<sup>6</sup> The following excerpts are from the analysis.

*“Decades of research show that high school dropouts are more likely to commit crimes, abuse drugs and alcohol, have children out of wedlock, earn low wages, are unemployed and suffer from poor health. The ChalleNGe program, currently operating in 27 states, is a residential program coupled with post-residential mentoring that seeks to alter the life course of high school drop-outs age 16-18.*

*“A rigorous evaluation of the ChalleNGe program employing random assignment has demonstrated that the program has positive effects on educational attainment and employment. The cost-benefit analysis presented in this document estimates that those and other program effects yield \$25,549 (2010 calculations) in social benefits per individual admitted to the program, or \$2.66 in social benefits for every \$1.00 expended for a return on investment of 166%.*

*“The program’s benefits accrue mostly in the form of higher lifetime earnings attributable to higher levels of educational attainment induced by the program.*

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<sup>6</sup>Perez-Arce, Francisco, Louay Constant, David S. Loughran and Lynn A. Karoly. A Cost-Benefit Analysis of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2012.

*“Under baseline assumptions, this cost-benefit analysis suggests continued operation of existing ChalleNGe sites will yield substantial net benefits to program participants and society-at-large. This quantitative finding supports public investment in the ChalleNGe program as currently operated and targeted.”*

Major Oberg points out, “I would add to the RAND Analysis that I believe that our program provides a life-changing experience and a much-needed holistic program to a group of students who are desperately in need of structure, education and a sense of belonging to the world.”

## **FINAL COMMENTS**

### **From the Cadets**

- “The Grizzly Youth Academy program has allowed me to graduate from high school with a diploma and prepared me to be the first person in my family to ever graduate from high school and attend college.”
- “The food is good and plenty of it.”
- “The teachers really like us.”

### **From the Grand Jurors**

- “Impressive”
- “Good facilities”
- “Disciplined”
- “Excellent food”
- “The cadets were polite, very bright, and willing to talk”
- “The dormitory rooms were extremely neat and clean, as was the bathroom and shower”
- “The staff/cadre we encountered seemed both capable and caring”
- “The Grizzly people are what make the program work, and because of that, the kids are very fortunate to be able to participate in the program”