

## Easy Steps to TWILIGHT SCHOOL WITH A TWIST

### A community wide health and exercise program

Camptonville, CA is a tiny town (pop 697) nestled in the Sierra Nevada foothills along Hwy 49. Our closest town is Nevada City almost 30 miles away. Our County seat lies in Marysville a hundred mile round trip away. Our non-profit Camptonville Community Partnership has been running community-driven health programs in Camptonville since 1996. Our community is familiar with the Twilight School concept where we “take over the school” one evening a week and invite the community to share their skills and knowledge with their neighbors. It’s always been a free program funded through Foundation support but this would be the first time we would be hosting exercise and health based only classes for all ages. Hence the name *Twilight School With A Twist*.

If you think this is a program you’d like to try in your neighborhood here are some simple steps to get you started:

1) Gather the interested parties. ASK: How will this work in my town (or neighborhood)? Host a meeting and spread the word. This will help build your buy-in, partnerships and volunteer base for the project. (Use the newspaper, flyers, email, phone trees, word of mouth, the Internet, facebook, etc.) Cast your net widely; include schools, business, neighbors, churches, local associations and clubs.

2) Find a venue (odds are partners from above have the resources necessary or know someone who does. For our program we have an agreement with our school district. We use the elementary school campus one evening a week to host our program.

3) Gather staff

Whether they are paid or volunteer, to organize and produce the weekly exercise program. We had a three person staff to manage and “teach” the family games and baby fit classes (tip: consult your local First 5 for partners). We also had community volunteers with specialized knowledge share their expertise, which ranged from Frisbee Disc Golf to the Cupid Shuffle.

Duties include:

A) Advertise your program: w/ posters, flyers, email, media release, facebook, phone tree (etc). We use all of these often to get the word out

B) Hosting a weekly program with different types of opportunities for exercise and enrichment. You may include Family Games for all age fun (see booklet); host yoga or fitness class. Try Zumba or line dancing. Your aim is to get people up and moving. Be creative!

C) Track data: sign in sheets that include age and satisfaction surveys can hold a lot of good information you can track to make your program better.).

4) Line up fun volunteer instructors. Who in your community is already an exercise guru? Ask them to be a part of your program for one week or one month. It's great advertisement.

5) Broad Health Education is important! Find out who are the leading experts in your area. Ask them to volunteer. (UCD extension is a valuable free resource,) Also there is a multitude of information available on the Internet. Including videos we used...DVD's and you tube along with our experts in the field.

6) Most of all have FUN!

## Twilight School With a Twist: Lessons Learned

Below are LESSONS LEARNED from our experience at producing the weekly fitness classes. They were held every Thursday evening from 6-7:30pm at our local school site. The school was a natural partner. We filled out a facilities use permit (free) and with a 3 person staff began.

1. Monthly advertisement (local news media) and weekly reminders – by phone help a lot – We were fortunate enough to have the school listed with [blackboardconnect.com](http://blackboardconnect.com) and we were able to call all families in the community who were enrolled in school and send a prerecorded message – very short and sweet with the day, time, place and what was happening.
2. Signage: flyers were posted at every bulletin board and in front of school. In addition every Thursday we put up a large sign up in the parking area of school and another on the front of the building reminding all children and parents that this evening was “Twilight School”.
3. A “floater person” worked well to address needs such as: getting snack and recipes out to the classes and adults, helping in case of an accident, bathroom breaks and as another responsible adult to hear the “rules” from or to verify information about what was happening.
4. Adult supervision – we are not offering babysitting – if a child was able to find an adult other than a parent to be their responsible person they were welcome.
5. Have all materials ready – 6:00 was dinner time for many households as well as for staff. The staff after a day of working at their jobs, feeding their family and driving back to the facility found it was great just to pull out a crate already loaded with sign-in sheets, recipes, surveys, raffle tickets with collection jar, paper, markers, pens, cups, pitchers etc. Any of the staff could set up the front sign-in table. Family Game materials were made available by the school PE staff and things were then delivered to each class as it was needed. The class instructors were given satisfaction surveys and tally slips and told how to gather information needed. (This made for easy record keeping at the end of the night.) Being prepared gave staff a chance to set up quickly and deal with and “changes” to the schedule with little to no stress.
6. Break – everyone needed a break from the “family games” especially the parents. A wholesome snack and water breaks gave us a chance to talk about healthy food choices and gave everyone a cool down time.
7. Water – every room was provided a pitcher or two of cold water and cups – exercising bodies need hydration!
8. Raffle tickets –filled out at each Twilight School attended- were used as an incentive. At each Social 3-4 winners were chosen to receive a raffle prize (donated by a community business or individual). Regular attendees of the weekly fitness classes also knew they increased their odds to win by the number of weekly sessions they had attended. Each week they simply had to fill out a new ticket and their chances grew. Besides getting a good workout, greater attendance meant a greater opportunity to be drawn at the quarterly event. Also remember have all age “Prizes” available for the children as well such as jump ropes,

badminton sets, bat and balls, and concentrate on your age groups in attendance at each session.

9. How do you start on time when people Show up late? – Ours happens to be a much laid back community –6:00 till 7:30, especially in the winter, was sometimes difficult. It was dinner time and people are inclined to relax and get their children settle for the night. Adults were OK with the time frame as it was a break from work and still early. We chose to ignore the fact that people were arriving late and got started with those who were there with stretches and obstacle courses, which didn't require a team. The DVD's we used offered a limber up session and most of our instructor did the same. Single adults were usually on time and ready to workout. Many of the children were the driving force behind the parents attendance. Staff would go around at lunch time at school and remind all the children on Twilight School Nights. We did emphasize on our weekly reminders that we started at 6:00 During the Summer Swim Program we let parents know that if they were not on time we would leave on the school bus without them. They would then have to transport their children to the pool (approx. 50 miles round trip). We had late arrivals the first week only!
10. Biggest draw – Offer good exciting classes with live instructors – professionals if possible. Being that the program is free to attend, people feel good about coming. Our PE – Games mistress was experienced and knew how to present games and activities and often knew most of the parents.
11. Health Education Classes – Poll your attendees and see what they would like to learn. Set about finding people or resources to provide for request and then call and remind them they asked for it!
12. Good recipes – Offer what your community likes – we have many organic veggie people who were interested in our program. We offered fruit and veggie juicing demonstrations and recipes at one of our potlucks, worked out very well. Offer ones that are healthy as well as affordable.
13. Pot Luck Dances – We found if we provided the main dish or had staff bring items of a main course in ample amounts it worked better. Make the area attractive and fun to be at, especially for the children. Our last potluck provided a play area outside with beanbag toss and other games to give parents and opportunity to visit and yet children were safe and self regulated.
14. Pictures – it was nice to show people what the potlucks looked like and the children loved finding them selves and their friends in the pictures. Get pictures of the classes with the instructor if possible it tends to bring others in.
15. Music – Be prepared for malfunctioning equipment! Improvise or SING!
16. Staff awareness – people learn many things from classes that are offered – don't judge what might be important to others just be open and offer the information.
17. Kids cooking – The kids were very proud of what they had been taught to do in the cooking class – gave them great kudos to share their creations – good self esteme boosters. The tools of the cooking trade such as the rolling pin offered a different experience for many of them.
18. Fruit smoothies – especially if they can help make them! We talked about the blueberries, strawberries, juice and yogurt and how good it was for their bodies – without adding and sugar– how sweet it was.

19. People really like to help if they are asked and able!
20. Volunteers – We could not have made Twilight School happen without our volunteers, who help to put on a successful program and to offer a variety of options for people who attend. Good reliable people will help with what ever needs to be done and besides people like to help and share their talents if asked in a respectful manner! Let other strut their stuff. It works!
21. Fun – nothing more – only that enthusiasm and laughter go a long way after a hard day of work and a good workout.