

# PRESS-TELEGRAM

## Amid coronavirus crisis, few are more essential than the child-care teams at Long Beach's Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCA

Staffs have shifted to serving children of first responders and other workers in essential jobs



Children keep their distance but still have fun at the Boys & Girls Clubs of Long Beach. Courtesy photo

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Early one morning last week, California National Guard Staff Sgt. Liliana Yanez kissed her 6-year-old daughter, Isabeya, and said goodbye, knowing she was in good hands with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Long Beach while mom went off to work.

In this COVID-19 crisis with normal child care centers and schools having to close, Yanez is one of many parents with essential jobs faced with the question: Who you gonna call to take care of your child?

A good starting place would be the city's two premier youth agencies, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Long Beach and the YMCA of Greater Long Beach.

Don Rodriguez, CEO of the Long Beach B&Gs, said all after-school/child-care centers had to close unless they were serving children of first responders and other workers in essential jobs.

"Although we had to close doors to our members, we jumped at the opportunity to serve our community and help the unsung heroes in the frontline dealing with the coronavirus crisis," he said.



National Guard Staff Sgt. Liliana Yanez with her 6-year-old daughter, Isabeya, at the Boys & Girls Clubs of Long Beach's Eastman Center. Courtesy photo

Alfredo Velasco, YMCA president and CEO, said YMCA branches have been converted to support children of essential workers. "We have pivoted from conventional programming to confront this unprecedented health crisis," he said.

Rodriguez said the Dean A. Eastman/Fairview B&G Club at 700 E. Del Amo is averaging about 25 to 35 children a day, with the majority of their parents working at Long Beach Memorial Medical Center.

At first glance, things look fairly normal at the Eastman Club with kids engaged in a variety of activities. But a closer look shows kids following new social distancing rules and staying six feet apart. In one area girls are playing with hula hoops but keeping a safe distance from each other. In another area

a young girl is working at her computer doing school work while two boys are playing at a pool table a safe distance away.

"We are running our regular programming departments using the games room, art, gym and learning centers and rotating kids throughout the day," Rodriguez said. "This works for us because we have to stick to the 1:10 ratio, no more than 10

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people in one room at the same time. We also keep the same group of kids together throughout the day per orders from local and state governments.”

Rodriguez said they have kids wash their hands every hour and keep six feet apart, which is not normal for them. “It’s been difficult for our staff to explain to the kids why they can’t stand close to their friends.”

He said the hours at the Eastman Club have been extended from 6 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. to accommodate medical/emergency personnel.

Sue Snead, director of marketing & communications at the YMCA, said the Y is taking care of about 100 kids of essential workers daily at the Los Cerritos, Los Altos, Fairfield and Lakewood Y centers. The occupations include health care, police and fire, military, social work, Port of Long Beach, education and the city’s water department.

At one of the Y centers, children draw pictures of their parents’ jobs. Olivia drew a colorful picture of her firefighter dad putting out a fire. Tayvion drew a picture of her mother, a grocery store cashier with customers waiting in a long line. Others did art work of their parents who were nurses and police officers.

At a Y gym, it was interesting seeing photos of boys playing basketball but staying six feet apart.

I wondered if the Lakers could do that.

Parents were very complimentary about the care their children were getting at the Boys & Girls Club and the YMCA.

“It’s great that the Boys & Girls Club is helping me and other first responders,” said Sergeant Yanez of the National Guard. “My daughter, Isabella, really likes it at the club.”

Celinda Cerda, a patient services technician, NE-Q, at Long Beach Memorial Medical Center, and mother of two boys, fourth-grader Angel and kindergartener Saul, thanked Memorial and the Boys & Girls Clubs for partnering to help health care workers “during these tough times.”

“When the schools closed, I got worried about child care,” she said. “Now, when I leave my boys at the Boys & Girls Club, I leave with peace of mind, knowing my boys are safe and happy.”

Sara Canto, a social worker investigator with the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, thanked the YMCA for doing “an amazing job” with her kids, Michael, 9, and Andy, 4. “The program is incredible with all of their activities and precautions because of the coronavirus,” she said.

Kelly Reynolds, an executive assistant at the Port of Long Beach focusing on construction of the new bridge replacing the Gerald Desmond Bridge, said she has participated in YMCA programs before and is very pleased with the Y’s care of her daughters, Harlequin, 6, and Finley, 5.

Here’s a footnote: Finley was the first baby born in the 2015 new year at Long Beach Memorial and was featured in the Press-Telegram, according to her proud mother.

In addition to helping the children of essential workers, both youth agencies also are helping families of their regular members with meals. Rodriguez said the Boys & Girls Clubs wanted to thank Chris Sweeny of Right Mealz, John Morris of Boathouse on the Bay and Dr. Lauren

Sylwanowicz of Long Beach State Basketball Alumni for providing meals to regular members.

He thanked Chef Bruno/Caterina’s Club of Anaheim for providing meals for the children of essential workers.

Rodriguez said his nonprofit also has just recently worked with the city to transform its Petrolane clubhouse at MLK Park into a homeless shelter.

Snead said the Y is also providing a drive through meal pickup-up (breakfast and lunch) for free/reduced lunch students who were getting their meals at Bellflower Unified schools. The Los Altos Y is providing grocery delivery to seniors in addition to other services at other Y centers.

The Boys & Girls Clubs and the YMCA deserve a big shout out and pats on the back for their work in the community, but wait until this crisis is over before you give them the pats.

Rodriguez summarized the situation well: “The people in this community are the reason why we’ve been able to keep our doors open for so many years. It made the most sense to give back in a way we’re the best at – keeping young people safe and engaged in positive activities.

Those that need us most now are those heroes working at the frontline of this pandemic. I couldn’t be more proud of our board and staff for stepping up during this critical time.”

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For more information on the Boys & Girls child care program for essential workers, call Don Rodriguez at 562-595-5945 or email at [donaodr@bgclubb.org](mailto:donaodr@bgclubb.org). For more information on the YMCA's program, call Alfred Velasco at 562-279-1738 or email at [alfredo.velasco@lbyymca.org](mailto:alfredo.velasco@lbyymca.org)



The "Stay Well" sign was just put up on windows of the YMCA center in Lakewood. (Courtesy YMCA)



Kids standing in line six feet apart to go to restrooms to wash their hands at the YMCA Los Altos center. (Courtesy YMCA)



Kids playing basketball six feet apart at the YMCA center in Lakewood. (Credit YMCA)



Drawings of jobs of first responder parents by their children at YMCA center in Lakewood. (Credit YMCA)



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