

First, congratulations on becoming a father. Second, how long have you been with Seattle Parks and Recreation?

Thanks Scot. I've been with SPR as a regular employee since November 2007.

Seventeen whole years.

Yeah, they've kind of flown by. I've had different experiences at different sites, seen a lot of how the city has changed, policies have changed, leadership has changed – I rely on a lot of my past experience for my work, in all of the roles I've filled.

In your time at SPR, what roles have you filled?

I started as a Rec Leader at the Garfield Teen Life Center, which at the time was a temporary site, a portable set up adjacent to Washington Middle School. I was responsible for direct teen programming there. After that, I moved to Rainier Community Center, where the bulk of my time was with youth learning how to motivate and engage them.

After three-to-four, maybe five years, I moved to Rainier Beach and was given an opportunity to learn how to implement good programming. I learned how to get programs evaluated. There was where I wanted to go from “Folks are having a good experience” to “Folks are having a good experience AND we get some hard data to assess impacts”.

Over time, I became an Assistant Coordinator and got responsibilities for staffing and program scheduling. I became an Assistant Coordinator with Adult Programs, Paid Programs and Partnerships at Van Asselt and then IDCCC. After two and a half years of that, I moved to the coordinator position at Garfield CC – Here we are. I'm on parental leave and planning on coming back before the Summer. Like I said, almost everything I do as a coordinator is just building on my past experience, and that past experience has lead me to want Community Centers to be an entry point to the community.

That's an interesting and steady progression. Tell me more about that last part – what do you mean by entry point?

Well, it's like how lots of grassroots groups or organizations have great ideas, but they don't have a lot of experience engaging with an entity like the “City”. Developing relationships with larger, more established organizations is different from sitting down with an individual who has a great idea and bringing them to the level. Partnering at the Community Center level can be a stepping stone to knowing how to work with the City, and getting people through the door like what we did with Summer Food is the first step.

Thank you for your perspective. To latch on to Summer Food Service Program – a large part of our collaboration – How long have you worked in any capacity with the Summer Food Service Program? It's been around for a very long time.

My first interaction was when I went to Rainier Community Center. I heard about the program there, saw it in action and started understanding what it's about on the operation side. Deliveries, what you guys [Human Services Department] were expecting at the site level and being responsible for

having the food distributed appropriately. We had Summer Day Camp on-site, so Summer Food Service was a good program for offsetting food costs for kids who spent the whole day there.

When I went to Rainier Beach, it was the same but there was this added value. We had thirty to forty kids coming in from the day care programs, but then another thirty to forty kids who were just accessing the community center.

So you had a lot of Drop-ins at Rainier Beach Community Center?

Yes, exactly. We had a lot of drop-ins who came in either to grab a meal, or because they had a club or sports and grabbed a meal while they were there for those programs. Then, we also had walking camps of kids who would drop in and know when to grab a meal, so it was really busy.

When I eventually got to Garfield, the year we were supposed to have Day Camps, they got canceled. I decided to stay a Summer Food Service Site, and I thought it might help to use the program to bring people into the Community Center.

So you've seen it at multiple sites, and at multiple levels. Broad question, but how has your perspective of the Summer Food Service Program evolved as you've seen it from different vantage points?

I think it's really just that the program is what you make of it. Besides what Human Services provides in terms of standards and training, one thing we've talked about is that I've used this program as a Youth Training Opportunity for years. Some sites do the same, where it's a way of training their interns or their staff, and new Parks and Recreation employees get to go through learning the ropes every time Summer rolls around.

Going back to Rainier CC, we had AmeriCorps – AmeriCorps folks were doing the day-to-day, and the Community Center was in charge of knowing if the numbers were correct. If your numbers weren't correct, or you'd tracked it wrong – the site could end up being charged for the meals. After a certain year, the Community Center took on the whole thing, service and tracking.

My first time at Rainier Beach though, I had to learn to set up a whole room for service for thirty to forty kids to sit and eat at a time, all by myself, within thirty minutes. Often times the youth – the teens doing recreation want to help out and ask if they can. Rainier Beach also had other Youth Interns for other programs through the YESL program – for me there was a lightbulb moment.

If we train and ask the youth interns to handle the service, we can handle keeping track of the meals and mentoring the youth. Over time we could add in activities for youth interns or volunteers to engage kids with, make it fun, and look at ways of promoting other programming while the kids and teens got free meals.

Teen interns and volunteers frequently were given support roles on projects that were fun and engaging, but sort of “one-off”. They learned specific hard skills related to recreation, and they learned how to work as a team, and really built off of skills they have practiced or learned in school. There's something about a job though that is more than just that – there's more structure and consistency.

Summer Food Service was a way of building in those elements. How do you manage your breaks and manage your time while also being very community engagement focused? I got to mentor interns with an eye for keeping the structure while also asking and assessing what opportunities those youth want or need. There are some great lessons to be learned about the day-to-day, like how to sanitize, set up a room, and properly serve community members- but there are more critical questions that make it fun. What are your talking points when you're encouraging a fifth grade kid to separate their trash? How will you approach asking someone to clean up their chair if they spilled and are about to walk away? There are so many learning opportunities.

The job of a recreation leader is to create learning opportunities. Drop-in games in a game room is working on social interaction. If it's in sports, it's how to be a positive older role model in the gym. Cooking, or Entrepreneurship – design a program and a journey for them to learn these things whether it's the first time trying it or you're cultivating the seeds already planted. The job is to plant seeds and create safe learning opportunities for youth, and it's a win-win when you can do that and feed the community.

It's nice that there's also a natural model for society there. Older youth trained to serve their younger peers and build community. When you became a Coordinator, it's my impression that you had the ability to sign up for your Community Center. What drove you to apply for Garfield despite not having the Summer Day Camps?

My rationale was that as a first year coordinator I wanted to make sure I was seeing the whole cycle of everything that goes on in a year. The Summer before, there was some question on whether or not they would have Day Camps, so I planned it either way. Either route could work with Summer Food, and the Community Center could pivot on order counts. At the end, when it was decided that we wouldn't have Day Camps, I decided it would be a good experiment – what kinds of people are coming to access the community center through the Summer Food Service Program?

You've spoken a bit about the youth interns placed at Community Centers. Summer Food Service Program sort of coincidentally overlaps with the addition of these interns every year – what does the overlap look like day-to-day?

Well, the goal for the youth is that they learn good, positive soft skills that they can take to an opportunity like a part-time job and be successful. Realistically, it's not super boring or high-minded. It's a lot of fun. It's engaging, it's very social, it's making changes and drawing up plans specific to each youth and building their development plan with them. Before all else, they are an employee and this is a job for them, and they're being taught to communicate their schedule, be responsible about their time and have good team communication – at no time do I want to hear from mom or dad, I want to hear from them.

Then, it's on-site training. Food safety, breaking down tables, setting up tables, how to communicate issues, how to identify issues, talk about expectations, about having a positive attitude and being professional. That's where I start, usually with groups of 6-8 or 3-4 depending on the year. There comes a point every summer where youth can get bored or dissent – but the important thing is to give them agency and responsibility over a part of the program, so they are invested. Some things are the same for everyone – Separating out food waste, being a good door monitor and communicating the rules of the Summer Food Service Program, how to use the Share

Table, et cetera. There are tough critical questions that the youth have to ask and figure out, like how to explain to someone they can't have the pre-packed lunches if they are 19 or older.

What could benefit youth interns and workers that are placed at a site that operates the Summer Food Service Program, in your opinion?

Going back to prior conversations, a more universal training would be good. There's training site supervisors have, straight from Human Services, and then training for the youth who start later separately. When they get to the site, it's a blank slate for that training. It would be great if all youth who may be serving meals could be trained straight on SFSP operation. I also think it's important to have material that's dispersed virtually – even if it's general material, it would help to be able to access more of that when needed.

Some sites may be a fan of this marriage between youth interns and SFSP – some might not – but I imagine it'd be good for Human Services to know what it looks like at different sites and be aware of these times where a structure organically grows and ends up multiplying impacts in the community.

What could benefit regular or lead staff at sites that operate the Summer Food Service Program?

Aside from me or Garfield in general, I don't know how to quantify this – but having the approach and ability to innovate is extremely important. It's important to come up with new things, using SFSP not just to feed but to engage. We can show off what Community Centers have to offer! Over last Summer, we were trying out new plug and play activities like games, coloring pages, language arts activities and read-alouds that coincided with meal times. It was a great opportunity to let our youth interns learn how to create programs of their own, and we gave kids multiple reasons to come in to the community center, both for the food and activities.

It's good synergy. We're meeting a basic need – and hey, we have a bunch of other stuff to do while you're in here and you're not eating a lunch or a snack. We had multiple people who first found Garfield CC through Summer Food show up at Tae Kwon Do and express their gratitude for learning about what's available in their community!

One final thing I'd like to add is that SFSP is not only a good touch point, but it's a rare time where direct public service has a face to it. We are SPR and we are the City, and we're out here providing meals and building programs not just for you, but with you and the youth.

Thank you so much for your time Derryn. I look forward to working with you in the future, and wish you a happy and healthy family!

Being a site with Summer Food Service Program is a commitment to a social good – but it also fits neatly into the missions and structures of many of the hosts that decide to become SFSP sites. We in the Seattle Human Services Department would love for folks like Derryn to continue working towards keeping the youth and families of Seattle safe, healthy, happy and empowered.