

2012 Anwatin Ski and Bike Team Evaluation Report



The Loppet
Foundation

September 5, 2012

Presentation of the Evaluation Findings
Anwatin Ski Program – Year One
September 5, 2012

The Loppet Foundation’s Loppet Adventure’s Anwatin Ski Program

The Loppet Foundation is a 501c(3) non-profit organization whose mission is to promote and support cross-country skiing in the Minneapolis area - especially among inner-city youth. One way the organization fulfills its mission is by sponsoring a ski program for middle school youth at Anwatin Middle School in Minneapolis.

The Anwatin Ski Team is a newly funded, three year program designed to engage youth, grades 6-8th, in year round outdoor activity. Team members train together with a coach three times a week over the course of the year through Anwatin’s Community Education afterschool programming. In the fall, the afterschool program includes dry land training and roller skiing. Once there is snow, team members hit the ski trails. After ski season, participants move on to mountain biking and trail running. In addition to weekly training, team members participate in a number of competitive races, including the Junior Loppet, the Tri-Loppet and Trail-Loppet. They also go on weekend trips and participate in Loppet Adventure summer camps. The goal of the program is to sustain year round participation in endurance sports and to support development of passion for healthy, outdoor activities.

Purpose of the Evaluation

The overall purpose of the evaluation is to measure the extent to which goals of the three-year plan are met. The evaluation is designed to inform and provide evidence to Loppet Foundation staff and stakeholders about progress made in the Anwatin Ski Team including participants’ ski and bike skills, attitudes toward the activities, and behavior within and beyond the program. Periodic monitoring and assessment of the program occurred, using both quantitative and qualitative methodology. The evaluation was planned by the evaluator and Loppet Foundation staff and created to measure the goals of the program within the limits of resources available.

Methodology used in the evaluation:

❖ Initial Assessment of Anwatin Ski Team Program, November, 2011

In November, sixteen members of the Anwatin Ski Team filled out a two page, confidential questionnaire.

❖ End of ski season survey, March 27, 2012

At the end of the season banquet, Anwatin Ski Team members were asked to reflect on the ski season and write responses to six questions. Twelve team members completed the survey.

❖ Parent/Guardian Feedback, March 27, 2012

At the end of the season banquet, parents/guardians were asked to fill out a survey about the ski program. Nine parent/guardian surveys were completed.

❖ Group Interview, Tuesday, May 29, 2012

A group interview was scheduled after school at Anwatin. Two males participated in the interview.

❖ Focus Group, Wednesday, August 8, 2012

A focus group was scheduled after a mountain bike race at Wirth Park and took place in the Loppet office (no Loppet staff were present). Six athletes participated (all males).

Initial Assessment of Athletes on Anwatin Ski Team

In November, athletes on the ski team were asked to fill out an initial questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire was threefold: to learn about team member attitudes toward the ski program, to gauge participant intention to participate in the ski program, and to provide baseline data about experience with endurance activities.

Summary of Results

a) Beliefs of athletes at initial assessment

- 100% of athletes believe that they will get stronger and 94% believe they will become better skiers by being an athlete on the ski team
- 75% of athletes believe it is important to attend practice three times a week
- 86% of athletes indicated that they intend to race or compete
- 60% of athletes describe themselves as endurance athletes

b) Prior experience with skiing, roller skiing and trail running

The chart below includes the number of times youth had participated in the activities of cross country skiing, roller skiing and trail running (self report).

Activity (# times)	0	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	13-15	16-18	20+
Cross country skiing	1	2	1	1				11
Roller skiing		4		3	1	1		7
Trail running			1	4	1	2	1	7

Most of the athletes felt supported by family members with regard to their participation on the ski team. Over half of the athletes' family members had some kind of experience with skiing (8/15).

c) Reasons for joining the team fall under the following categories:

1. Prior experience with ski program and loved it
2. Desire to improve ski ability, be athletic and become more fit
3. Social connection with team members
4. The FUN factor

Overall Themes and Findings from the Evaluation Data

The following are themes and findings from evaluation of the Anwatin Ski Team program. Data from the initial assessment, student and parent end of season survey, and two group interviews were analyzed and themes emerged across the data.

Themes:

1. Athletes love to ski.

In each assessment, athletes mentioned their love of skiing. They also expressed a desire to improve technique and speed. Specifically, athletes mentioned wanting to improve classic, V2, and skate technique. For example, one athlete talked about how they have learned to pace themselves better and improved the timing of the poling. Several athletes noted how they are able to ski faster. Some mentioned that their endurance had improved.

“I love skiing and will try to do my best.” (IA)

“I really improved my skiing this year. It helped me get better in races.” (FG)

“Every practice I was working on my endurance; that really helped. I passed this kid that kept being in front of me in earlier races.” (FG)

“I have been learning more technique than last year, like double poling and skating.” (FG)

Athletes were asked how they felt after a practice. Athletes said that they would often feel tired after practice, but that they felt happy. Other feelings include feeling less stressed, stronger and fitter, and excited about what they had done. For more than one athlete, the program seemed to re-energize them.

“When I got home from ski practice I always wanted to do things; go out and ride my bike, be active.” (FG)

“(After practice, I feel) tired but awesome.”

So, what keeps them coming back for more?

“The speed.”

“The races, I like the races.”

“Because I have fun and I love it!”

“Because it is a great opportunity to have fun and get into good shape.”

2. Being on the team provides an opportunity for new experiences, most notably the trips.

Athletes were very enthusiastic about the trips. They talked about the opportunity to do biathlon on one trip and how much fun they had at the lodge. They described the canoe trip on the river and how much fun it was to camp. An overwhelming recommendation for the program was to “keep the trips!” and “do more trips!”

“You get to do a bunch of stuff; races and ski a lot, the woods are right there, you get to do a canoe trip and ski trip.” (FG)

“You go on awesome trips.” (FG)

“ (*Best part of the program*) The opportunities such as biathlon (and) overnight camps.” (parent)

“This year it was Rainbow Resort. That was amazing. You could ski on the lake, you could have time in the game room. That was really fun.” (FG)

The athletes described other new experiences, like using clips when mountain biking, having the opportunity to do biathlon, and canoeing down a river. They appear to enjoy learning new skills and using new kinds of equipment.

3. Athletes enjoy being on a team and believe it is important to support one another

The importance of supporting the team was a strong finding in the evaluation. According to the athletes, supporting the team means:

- Being nice to each other
- Helping out someone if they fall
- Helping out someone if they are getting picked on
- Cheering each other on at races

“You need to support your team and be friendly.” (FG)

“We are friendly to each other, we respect one another; we also have a sense of humor and will help out if you fall.” (FG)

Words that the athletes used to describe the team include: “ Fun, very supportive, funny, awesome, crazy.” Being on the Anwatin Ski Team provided an opportunity to meet new friends and belong to a team.

“They talk, they ski hard, they work hard.” (end season survey)

“Best thing about the ski program is the sense of the team work it teaches the players.”
(parent)

“When I started, I didn’t know anyone, I started to meet others.” (FG)

“ (*Best part of the program*) The experience of being on a team, being outside, exercising, and maybe mostly the rewards of hard work.” (parent)

One athlete talked about how some team members quit. When asked why they quit, they said it was really because they misbehaved.

4. The competition/racing component of the program is challenging but rewarding.

Nearly all of the athletes responded positively when asked about ski racing. Some athletes described feeling nervous at the start of the race, but confident once they began skiing and passing other skiers. They liked racing other kids, experiencing the ups and downs of the hills, having the opportunity to show others what they can do, and trying to improve upon previous races.

“I thought they (*races*) were very fun.” (end season survey)

“They were really difficult, but I wanted to do it again as soon as I was done.” (end season survey)

“They were challenging, but I felt good when I finished them.” (end season survey)

“I think it is really fun to ski, you can show other people what you can do, at practice it is just you; I like that, showing others.” (FG)

“I don’t think anybody here likes to lose; but I REALLY don’t like to lose. Sometime after the last race (Jr Loppet), I got a medal but I screwed it up for me and my partner and I was really disappointed. But this year, I know what to do, just get back up and don’t stop trying.” (FG)

Some athletes talked about feeling confused or uncertain once they got to races that were crowded with other skiers. They also wondered why younger skiers could pass them.

“With the Mayors Challenge, a lot of younger kids were passing us, I thought – what the heck? Why are they passing us?” (FG)

“When I got there, I saw a whole lot of people wearing the same suits, bibs; I thought oh my god, I am going to be racing against all these people; J2,3,4 all combined; and high school students.”

Secondary but related themes that emerged from the data include the following:

1) Athletes appreciate the gear

Athletes talked about how it was exciting to earn medals at the races and how much they liked the jackets given to them by the Foundation. Others noted that they had the opportunity to earn a bike last year. One athlete said he was working on earning the clips for his pedals. It appeared to be a motivating factor for the athletes.

“You earn a lot of trophies.”

“You can get equipment, like ski poles, spandex, jackets.”

2) Athletes like being outdoors in winter

Team members talked about the benefits of being outside in the winter. They appreciated that even though the snow year was poor, they still got to be outside doing activities.

“I have always liked being outdoors, indoors is all stuffy. You feel like you can do whatever you want when you are outdoors.” (FG)

“ (*The program*) Helped student to realize there’s a lot of things to do in winter.”
(parent)

What is appealing about being on the Anwatin Ski Team?

- Doing races with other kids
- Trying new equipment (biathlon, roller skiing, mountain biking)
- Hanging out with friends in the program
- Being outside in winter
- Going down hills
- Learning new skills

5. The challenges of the program are few and are based mainly on weather and logistics.

The lack of snow – This was an overwhelming and expected response due to the poor year of snow. For some athletes, it didn’t seem to bother them too much. But for others, they talked about getting “mad” or “bummed” that there wasn’t more snow. They jokingly talked about doing snow dances so that we have a better snow fall in the coming year.

Transportation – A few athletes and parents commented on the fact that transportation was a barrier to getting to practice.

Communication about events – Parents want more lead time in knowing when events are happening.

6. Anwatin team members are looking forward to continue with skiing

Athletes shouted a resounding “Yes” when asked if they were planning to continue with skiing. Some even talked about wanting to ski in high school, but if they go to Patrick Henry, they didn’t know if they would be able to ski. All of the participants in the focus group discussions expressed interest continuing to ski. They talked about wanting to improve and do even better than they did this past year. The only things they would like different about the program next year is to have help with transportation issues and perhaps get ski suits to identify them as part of the Anwatin Ski Team.

Athletes appreciated the encouragement by the coaches. They understand that being on the team takes a lot of commitment. When asked what it takes to be an Anwatin Ski Team athlete, they said “good grades, teamwork, you gotta show up, have the right clothing, and be friendly to others.” Parents commended the coach and program. Some responses indicate that parents appreciate that the program teaches the youth that exercise can be fun, athletes can experience the rewards of hard work, and it has at this been a wonderful way to keep active and handle defeat.

“Getting these kids out doing good, physical activity, that is so necessary, especially at this age and can set the stage for lifetime activity.”

Parents and youth alike thank the Loppet Foundation for providing this experience for them.