

2014 Anwatin Ski and Bike Team Evaluation Report

The Loppet Foundation

September 29, 2014



Presentation of the Evaluation Findings
Anwatin Ski and Bike Program – Year Three
September 29, 2014

The Loppet Foundation’s Anwatin Ski and Bike Team

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 middle school ski and bike programs. The Loppet Foundation provides the framework for year-round ski and bike teams with the goal of changing the trajectory of lives by instilling passion for lifelong outdoor activities. The Foundation provides coaches/mentors, equipment, uniforms, and transportation for year-round bike and ski teams.

Snapshot of Anwatin Middle School Ski and Bike Program

The Anwatin Ski and Bike Team is a program designed to engage Anwatin Middle School youth 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 a try out period of dry land training, trail running and roller skiing. The team is selected in November. In winter, team members hit the ski trails to train and race. 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 Ski race, the Tri-Loppet urban triathlon and Trail-Loppet, a trail running race. Youth also participate in weekend trips and 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 purpose of the evaluation is to measure the extent to which goals of the program are met. The evaluation is designed to inform and provide evidence to Loppet Foundation staff and stakeholders about progress made in the Anwatin Ski and Bike Team including participants’ ski and bike skills, attitudes toward the activities, and behavior within and beyond the program. The evaluation includes periodic monitoring and assessment of the program, 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. Each year, the evaluator met with the Loppet Foundation staff to discuss results and refine the evaluation.

Methodology used:

❖ Mid Year Ski Assessment, January, 2014

All team members were asked to fill out a mid year season assessment. Sixteen boys and girls completed the assessment.

❖ Girls Focus Group, December 16, 2013

A girls' only focus group was conducted on December 16, 2013. Six girls participated in the focus group discussion.

❖ Team Focus Group - Girls and Boys, April 24, 2014

A focus group with boys and girls was conducted on April 24, 2014. Eight youth participated in the focus group discussion.

❖ Final Focus Group Interview - September 3, 2014

A focus group with boys and girls was conducted on September 3, 2014. Seven youth participated in the focus group discussion.

Summary of Mid Year Assessment - Anwatin Ski and Bike Team, 2014

In mid January, athletes were asked to fill out a 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 practices and races, and to gauge family interest in youth participation in skiing.

Beliefs of athletes

- **100%** of athletes believe that they will become physically stronger and believe they will become better skiers as an athlete on the ski team
- **81%** of athletes **strongly agree** it is important to attend practice three times a week; **29%** **agree** it is important to attend practice three times a week
- **93%** of athletes indicated that they intend to race or compete
- **68%** of athletes describe themselves as endurance athletes

Food choice of athletes

- **56%** of athletes indicated that they **always** choose foods that are healthy; **37%** indicate that they **sometimes** choose foods that are healthy

Most of the athletes felt supported by family members with regard to participation on the ski team. Over three fourths of the athletes' family members had some kind of experience with skiing.

Reasons for joining the team fall under the following categories:

1. Prior positive experience with skiing
2. Social nature of joining and being part of a team
3. Perception that Ski and Bike Team activities are varied and fun
4. Desire of participants to become or stay fit
5. Interest in being outdoors

Overall Themes and Findings from the Evaluation Data. The following are themes and findings from the third year of the evaluation of the Anwatin Ski and Bike Team program. Data from the girls' focus group, midyear assessment, end of season survey, and two focus group interviews (boys and girls) were analyzed. The themes that emerged from the data are described below.

Themes from year three evaluation of Anwatin Ski and Bike Team

1. Social - The social and friendly nature of the team draws youth into the program and retains them.

Youth expressed strong affection for their team. Some joined the team because their friends were already on it. Others joined because they wanted to make new friends. They talked about enjoying the activities and workouts because they are doing them with friends.

“I joined the ski team because my friends, they were talking about it, and it sounded fun, so I joined and it was fun.”

“It is hard, but everything that we do, bike, ski, running, it helps you relax from school after a tough day and just hang with your friends. That is why I love the ski team. I have fun with my friends on the bike, running or skiing, and asking my friends to do races with me.”

Some youth used the word “family” when describing the team. Teammates both encouraged and pushed one another to do their best.

“My friends push me a lot. They cheer me on; even if they are racing, they cheer me on. They try to make me use my whole strength and energy to go as fast as I can and also have fun.”

“I feel like it is a big family”

“Having other friends by you and becoming a part of the ski family helped a lot. It is a confidence booster knowing everybody knows everyone on the team.”

2. Variety - The variety of adventure activities keeps the team interesting and fun.

Youth discussed that they liked being on the team because there is a variety of activities that they do throughout the year, depending on the season. They talked enthusiastically about trail running, roller skiing, mountain biking, skiing, and canoeing. Some joined the team initially because of the skiing, but in spring, when they were exposed to mountain biking, they realized that they loved mountain biking too.

“I originally didn’t know that mountain bike was part of the team. I joined because of the skiing but then I really started to enjoy the mountain biking and the running.”

“I really wanted to join the ski team because A, I really like skiing and B, I really like biking and running and C, I wanted to get in shape.”

“I like the variety of things that we do. We may mountain bike twice, but it is not the same and it stays interesting. Sometimes we might canoe and it is just really fun. And, I also really like being able to talk with my friends and Coach Allie while I am doing these activities because I don’t have the attention span to mountain bike for as long as we do, when I talk to them, time gets away from me.”

The trips associated with the Ski and Bike Team are a huge hit with the youth. Youth talked about skiing to Michigan, eating good food, seeing the ice caves, roller skiing for miles, and pushing themselves to exhaustion. The trips were described as highlights of the year in both the written assessment and in the focus groups. One boy said that words could not even describe how amazing the trips were.

“Michigan trip was a highlight because we had a neat experience, there were different courses, and learned how to control my skis.”

“Highlight was the trip to Michigan because it was just pure skiing.”

“They are awesome. They are just amazing. You can’t even explain them. We had homemade breakfast in the morning; we had tacos. We got to make our own food.”

“One of my highpoints was the camping trip that we did about three weeks ago. We had a lot of training and I think I got a lot better at running and roller skiing.”

“High point, I roller skied for 14 miles and then I realized that my roller skiing got better. Then jogging came and we all died.”

“My high point was definitely going to Michigan skiing in the beautiful places that we skied and staying in that awesome lodge.”

3. Skill Building - Athletes learn skills that help improve their performance and make the team experience more enjoyable.

The written assessment and focus group results indicate that youth are learning a large variety of different skills, from understanding how to pace themselves during a race to knowing how to dress appropriately for the weather. Youth discussed specific skills in ski technique, mountain biking and running. They were adept at describing how the coaches would identify what they needed to work on and how helpful it was to get advice on how to improve. The improvement in endurance and technique made the whole experience of practicing and racing more fun.

“I like getting better at skiing and learning new techniques.”

“I have learned how to mountain bike and roller ski and canoe.”

“I think I learned a lot about technique, and got better at technique for both kinds of skiing.”

“I mountain biked a little before, but it was pretty cool to have other people pushing me and making me try my hardest. I think it is pretty cool to go over obstacles.”

“After a while you get better and better and catch up with your group so you are feeling happier and happier that you are catching up.”

4. Perseverance - When facing challenges, youth prove tenacious.

Youth discussed the importance of effort. Being on the ski and bike team requires hard work. In the focus groups, they took time to share their “war stories,” - times when they were faced with challenges and how they worked through them. One boy talked about how he got hurt, but decided to race anyway. And, a girl talked about how she ran a race even after hurting her arm. Some talked about the challenge of not being fast or being at the back of the pack, but they talked about the importance of not giving up.

“I have one that really stands out, because I got hurt really bad and I actually ended up placing. Coach Will, he tried to take me back to the van, and halfway there, I decided I just wanted to go back and ski. I got hurt on the practice loop.”

“I had a major crash at the beginning of the season and I hurt my arm, but then we had a running race that week, and I still came and did all the running.”

“I remember my first mountain bike race, you know that big gravel hill? By chalet? On my bike, I hit my brakes at the bottom and skidded and fell off my bike. I got three scars. I didn’t do that race but then I did all the others.”

“It takes the will to want to be in it, if you are not in shape, that is ok, you can get in shape and everyone will wait for you and stuff like that, but you need to make sure that you don’t give up.”

“I agree, it takes a lot of effort, if you don’t put a lot of effort into this stuff Coach Allie will think that you don’t really want to do it.”

5. Healthy Pursuits- Healthy habits are taught, modeled and practiced.

Some youth talked about how they wanted to join the Ski and Bike Team because they wanted to become physically fit or lose weight. When discussing what they have learned by being on the ski and bike team, youth talked about how they have learned to eat healthy, especially in preparation for competition. When youth go on the Ski and Bike Team trips, they eat healthy foods. In this way, the Loppet Foundation is modeling healthy eating.

“I joined because I thought I was getting fat, so that is why I joined, so that I could get fit.”

“I’d say we were having fun and it helps us keep fit, and have a healthy diet.”

“We learned lots of nutritional stuff, like don’t eat candy before a race, eat noodles, get good sleep two days before the race.”

“Well, actually every time we go on a trip, we eat healthy. Like on camping trips or the winter trip.”

“Something that will fill up our bellies but be good protein and energy for us that will last us the whole day while we are doing the things we love to do outside.”

It is one thing for the Loppet Foundation to serve healthy foods and snacks while training or while on trips. But what happens when athletes go home or are making choices on their own? Some indicated that their participation on the Ski and Bike Team has resulted in healthier eating outside of the program.

“Yes, my diet has changed... a lot. When I hadn’t joined I would eat anything I want, but now that I joined I have to eat right. I exercise sometimes and I am a lot more confident about myself.”

“I used to eat a lot; like I used to eat almost anything that I can find, like a huge amount of it, but then now, I eat like just a little bit and usually healthy stuff and not like junk food. Usually I would eat like a whole bag of Takis or chips by myself, but now I don’t eat it that much, because I don’t really like it now.”

“Same. I used to eat a bag of Taki’s, then after that pop, and maybe some chips with it and ice cream, but now I just, I still eat them but now just a little bit.”

6. Embracing the Outdoors - Youth love winter.

All of the Ski and Bike Team pursuits are outdoors, in nature. Youth often used the word “love” when referencing their affinity for skiing, both in the written assessments and in the focus group. When probed, they talked about their desire to be outside in the winter, when most of their peers are inside. They talked about how they have learned to dress for the outdoors and how much they love the snow. It appears that for some participants, being on the ski and bike team has resulted in a higher tolerance for cold, wintery weather.

“I want to be outdoors more.”

“I learned how to get my own winter gear ready, before that, I didn’t have much experience with that stuff. I have learned how to gauge the temperature better too.”

“I think it toughened me up. I am more tolerant of the cold.”

“I learned how to endure the cold a little bit better.”

“I didn’t care about the cold, I love the snow. I love winter.”

“I did a bunch of camps this summer and whenever there was a question about what is your favorite season, I always chose winter, because I really like all the cross-country skiing.”

Unintended Outcomes

In addition to the themes noted above, other “unintended outcomes” emerged from the data. They are as follows:

1. The coaches are key in building the team and supporting them as they mature as athletes.

Youth wrote and talked passionately about their coaches. They discussed how instrumental coaches are in teaching basic skills, motivating the team to work hard, and supporting the team year-round.

- “They (*coaches*) really help us a lot and push us to do the best we can and also the reason why we did so good was because of the coaches. Without them, we wouldn’t be so good.”
- “They really helped me a lot with technique. I wouldn’t know half the stuff I know now without Coach Allie and Coach Kevin.”
- “They teach us technique to help us be faster. If they see a flaw in your technique they help you make it better and also they just push you. And if you are like, if you can’t go on, they say, ok, rest a little bit and then go as hard as you possibly can.”
- “At the end of my first 5k, I saw a bridge and I saw all the coaches cheering me on and I was just exhausted. But when I saw them, all of the sudden I had all this energy and I finished earlier than I probably would have without them.”

At the end of one focus group, about 50 minutes into the discussion, youth were asked if they wanted to add anything else to the discussion. One youth made the following statement.

- “Yea, I want to add that the coaches changed my life. I never had this much fun before, since I was a little kid. I really had fun with my own classmates and the coaches.”

2. Youth are becoming the expert in the family. Many youth talked about how they have gotten their family members out for a ski since they joined the Ski and Bike Team. They described teaching their siblings how to ski or taking their family out in the canoe. This illustrates not only the skills that they youth have learned but also how they want to take a lead and show their family members how they can also do the activities.

- “This encourages me to get outside and try to get my family outside too.”
- “Yea, I feel like I get my family outside more too.”

- “My grandparents, they live near a lake in Michigan, and they have a canoe, so I got to take my family canoeing when we were all there.”

3. Youth are looking ahead and thinking about skiing in high school and even in college. When asked if youth are planning to ski in high school, a loud and strong “Yes” echoed in the room. Youth talked about how they are planning to ski in high school and even in college. They also said that once they are in high school, they would come back to Anwatin to visit the Ski and Bike Team and encourage them to stick with it.

- “It also leads to high school things. Like if you start running, skiing and biking in middle school, then when you get to high school you just continue it. And maybe you get even better and you do it in college.”
- “Yea, scholarships. And then you ski in college. Yea, so it affects your whole life.”
- “I want to keep skiing on in my years.”
- “I am going to be really sad when I have to go to high school and leave the Anwatin Ski Team.”