

Boys & Girls Clubs of Miami-Dade hailed for performance

BY MARILYN BOWDEN

The Boys & Girls Clubs of Miami-Dade last year won the fourth annual Switchboard of Miami/Katz Barron Squitiero Faust's Most Valuable Non-profit All-Star Award, which recognizes a nonprofit demonstrating outstanding performance, positive impact on the community and paramount service to clients – an achievement that has also earned the clubs Miami Today's 2016 Gold Medal Award for an Organization.

Boys & Girls Clubs, now in its 70th year, offers after-school programs in core programs such as homework assistance, arts & crafts, literacy and social skills. Additional programs include music instruction, tennis, karate, dance and intramural sports. The program runs concurrently with Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

"We see a high need for affordable educational programs for kids," says Boys & Girls Clubs of Miami-Dade President Alex Rodriguez-Roig. "What makes us effective is that we stick to our core principals – helping kids and helping families. Our mission hasn't changed in 70 years.

"We don't need to be popular or trendy. We just want to help the kids out."

That persistence and dedication is paying off in big ways. According to an independent study by Damooei Global Research, the annual impact of the clubs on the Miami-Dade community is \$78 million.

That impact is measured in several ways. Improved high-school graduation rates result in increased lifetime earnings. Affordable after-school programs help parents to remain employed or attend classes to upgrade their skills.

There's also a huge economic gain from keeping kids occupied during the after-school hours, when teens are most likely to get in trouble. For example, during the period of the Damooei study, none of the teen girls attending the clubs became mothers. The rate of teen child-birth among girls not attending the clubs was 21 per thousand – at a cost to taxpayers of \$255,022 per birth.

Damooei computes the county's annual savings from the reduction in youth crime rates and arrests attributable to

the clubs at \$5.59 million.

Mr. Rodriguez-Roig estimates about 8,000 youngsters ages 5-16 attend Boys & Girls Clubs of Miami-Dade across its five facilities. "We always want to be able to service more kids," he says, "but that depends on our financial resources. We have a professional staff, but volunteers are the key to making everything happen."

The clubs can help kids stay motivated, he adds, by giving them the opportunity to pursue their own interests in a safe environment.

"A lot of times kids have little time at school to explore their interests," Mr. Rodriguez-Roig says, "and at home they may have limited internet access. That's something they can do at the clubs. We have a robotics program, a music program – little things that augment our other programs, sometimes in a big way.

"It's like an ice cream shop that has a lot of different flavors so everyone can find one they like. That's how we keep the young people engaged, so they're eager to come to the club."



Photo by Sergio Alsina

Louis Wolfson III of sponsor Pinnacle Housing Group presents the Gold Medal award to Alex Rodriguez-Roig of the Boys & Girls Clubs.