

RAINIER BEACH WATERFRONT ACTIVITY CENTER PROJECT FOR SOUTH SEATTLE KIDS

The Rainier Beach Waterfront Activity Center Project (RBWAC) is working to help youth in 98108, 98118 and 98178 achieve better life outcomes

BACKGROUND & MAKING THE CASE

1. *The Pritchard Island Beach Bathhouse is wonderful asset but it does not serve the South Seattle Community as well as it could, and it is only reserved for use by the community an average of 43 times per year. The RBWAC would be used daily from dawn till dusk.*
 2. *The RBWAC is about creating equitable access to the waterfront in South Seattle for underserved youth and the general public.*
 3. *People in more northerly neighborhoods, but in particular youth, have better access to beneficial water-dependent activities like swimming, and paddling. Access to vigorous aerobic exercise like this can lead to better academic, health and life outcomes.*
 4. *Seattle Parks and Recreation has repurposed most of the City's bathhouses into alternative, non-water-dependant uses including theater, dance, pottery, with programming and management responsibility the responsibility of not for profit groups such as the Seward Park Clay Studio.*
 5. *Public surveys establish that there are many ways to improve the park without damaging the elements that are most attractive to users.*
 6. *Work with us to develop a Community Based Plan to persuade the Parks Department to improve the park and re-purpose the bathhouse as a waterfront center with programming designed with THIS community's needs in mind.*
- **ACCESS:** Youth from 4th to 12th grade in Southeast Seattle do not have equitable access to the same kinds of people, programs, equipment, and facilities that support beneficial, life-altering activities as students in other neighborhoods.
 - **MORE:** In presenting this proposal our goals include not only improvements to the Park for the entire community, but a particular focus on students. Objectives include that students don't just graduate from high school, but go on to gain post high school advancement that will enable them to lead more productive and successful lives. Our initiatives will help them to achieve that success.
 - **SCIENCE:** Science has established an unequivocal link between vigorous exercise and improved health and academic performance (i.e. better grades), that can lead to markedly improved life outcomes. Working hard releases neuro-chemicals that build brain cells, improve learning and retention, improve health, mood, and impulse control.
 - **SWIMMING:** Fewer youth in South Seattle can swim, and a far greater number have fear of being in water over their heads. Such students are three times as likely to drown as their more advantaged counterparts in other neighborhoods.
 - **BARRIERS:** The RBWAC Project is working with our south end partners to bring equitable access to the resources necessary to change this. "Opportunities" are meaningless without real access, but despite good intentions, numerous barriers to access still exist. Barriers to real access to beneficial programming such as that provided by some schools and Parks programs in other communities include: cost (real and perceived), transportation distance, inflexible schedules, existing program capacity, family and job conflicts, cultural conflicts – in both directions, lack of properly trained adult leadership, fear of water, inability to swim, fear of the water, political will on the part of decision makers, and yes a history of individual and institutional racism.
 - **PROGRAM SCOPE:** RBWAC programs will all include rigorous academic support developed jointly with students, parents, teachers, and schools, and long-term, mentoring relationships with well-trained, stable, caring adults. RBWAC programs will be designed around students' schedules and constraints to meet their needs. RBWAC program initiatives will support positive physical activities such as strength and fitness programs starting in elementary grades; A "float safely" program focused on enabling students to overcome fear of the water; Water-dependent sports like competitive sprint paddling, dragon boating, Salish Canoeing, outrigger canoeing, or swimming; Recreational and competitive programming and (with community partners) paddling & weight lifting teams, and other brain-building activities. RBWAC is working with community groups, Parks & Recreation, Schools, for- and not-for-profit groups, agencies, foundations, and individual donors to bring about change.
 - **WHAT ARE THE PRIORITIES**
 - Great, accessible, paddling and strength and fitness programs, after school academic support.
 - ADA access to the water, and park improvements.



- Recognition of the Salish culture, art, and history in the neighborhood, and the village that existed on Pritchard Island for thousands of years before first contact.
- Preserving the quiet nature of the park. Adding floats for hand-carried boat launching and dragon boat, and safety launch moorage. Increased access to the bathrooms for park users
- Access to the bathrooms, better park security, better maintenance



- **WATER-DEPENDENT ACTIVITIES:** such as those provided for communities further north at the Green Lake Small Craft Center or Mt. Baker Rowing and Sailing, but designed to surmount the barriers for **THIS underserved** South Seattle neighborhood; These activities and facilities will be positive, 100% participation programs with no 'bench'; Schedules will be flexible and accommodating; Everyone will get the same instruction, do the same work, and have the opportunity to compete at their own level; We will identify, recruit, train, and support Coaches/Mentors/Teachers/Tutors who are more closely identified with this community; All will be held to high, "best-practices" standards and be well-trained to serve our students.



- **FLOAT SAFELY:** The incidence of drowning among the immigrant and African American communities is over seven times that of Caucasian and higher income groups. Many adults from the south end community are afraid of the water and pass this fear on to their children. Before a student can learn the strokes necessary to swim across the pool, they must overcome their fear so that they can get into the pool at all. An RBWAC goal is to materially increase the number of people who surmount their fear of the water and learn to be safe in the water – making 98118 a safer community. We will focus on helping our students progress at their own pace to a place where they can float calmly and safely in deeper water. **Overcoming fear of the water** opens up access to opportunities and builds confidence and optimism about trying new things. Students can have safe fun at the beach or in the pool, or on the swim team, or pass the float test and row on the lake.

- **PADDLING:** Seattle has nationally acclaimed, school-based indoor rowing PE programs that lead many students toward finding boathouses on the water. Green Lake has a nationally ranked paddling. But south-end students do not participate in these amazing activities with the frequency of north-end students because of a lack of real access. The proposed PBWC programs will change that, and S. Seattle students will have equal access to this opportunity.

- **OVERCOMING BARRIERS:** RBWAC has identified the barriers to participation and designed an approach to surmount them. With the other on-water programs being at or near capacity, Seattle needs another water-dependent program location, at another waterfront center. There was a public boathouse in Rainier Beach 100 years ago. So why not today? The facility will also be able to support ADA accessible programming, as well as distance swimming, triathlons, and other vigorous outdoor activities.



- **CURRENT PARK ACTIVITIES:** A waterfront center will not adversely impact any other activities currently hosted in the Park, and will not impact the wetlands or woods south of the Bathhouse. In fact having a waterfront activity center operating all day and all year will provide access to the restrooms that are now, for the most part, locked up and inaccessible except during the brief periods when lifeguards are on site.

- **HOW IT WILL WORK:** RBWAC will work and evolve through strong, well-crafted public-private partnerships. Programs work because STABLE, EXPERIENCED, COMPETENT, CARING PEOPLE - *being more important than 'just' boats* - will be there for all youth, but in particular African American boys. Caring, experienced coaches, tutors, and mentors - role models - will be around them often, and demonstrate an obvious commitment to them.

- **RECOMMENDED READING INCLUDES:** *Ebony Magazine:* <https://www.ebony.com/take-back-the-water-how-these-black-men-and-women-are-making-waves-in-aquatic-sports/>; *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain*, by John J. Ratey, MD and Eric Hagerman, Little Brown & Company, New York, 2008; *The Deepest Well: Healing the Long-Term Effects of Childhood Adversity*, by Nadine Burke Harris MD, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, New York, 2019; *Suga Water*, or *A Most Beautiful Thing* all three books and film by and about Arshay Cooper and the impact on his life



- **REFERENCES:** Much of our program comes from research on youth health and learning and advances in neurochemical research and increased awareness of the impact of trauma on youth behavior and learning. RBWAC is making use of lessons learned from the highly successful programs in Seattle, New York, Chicago, Milwaukee, Philadelphia and other mentoring, and outreach programs around the US and Great Britain. The book, *Spark*, and in particular the information on the success of a more robust PE program in Naperville (Illinois) Central High School should be grounds for confidence and optimism about the potential of this program.

WHY RBWAC? Because every student should have access to these opportunities. See the website at <http://rainierbeachwaterfrontcenter.org> TAKE THE SURVEY(s), Tell us what you think! We need local parents, young people and other volunteers that look like the neighborhood for the steering committee and other tasks.

That could be you.

