

Night Sky Youth Camp Program Summary

The Night Sky Youth Camp is an annual overnight camping experience held each July at Oakoasis County Preserve that brings together youth, families, volunteers, and community partners for a weekend focused on community, nature, wellness, and environmental education. Originally launched during this past summer's July camp, the program was created to provide youth with an opportunity to step away from screens, connect with the outdoors, and build meaningful relationships with their peers through shared experiences and guided activities. Campers begin the program by settling into their campsites, setting up tents, and participating in welcome activities and team-bonding exercises designed to create a supportive and inclusive environment. Throughout the weekend, participants engage in a variety of hands-on experiences that encourage curiosity, collaboration, and personal growth.

A major highlight of the camp is the partnership with County Park Rangers, who lead a guided hike through Oakoasis County Preserve and provide an interactive animal presentation. During these sessions, youth learn about California's native ecosystems, including local flora and fauna, wildlife conservation, and the importance of protecting natural habitats. The guided hike allows campers to explore the preserve while gaining a deeper understanding of the environment around them.

In the evening, the program transitions into a unique night sky experience, where participants learn about constellations and engage in stargazing activities under the guidance of camp leaders. Campers also take part in a community drumming circle, storytelling activities, movement exercises, and other group experiences that promote creativity, cultural connection, and teamwork.

The camp places a strong emphasis on wellness and mindfulness. On the second morning, participants begin the day with a guided yoga session led by Mika, followed by a morning nature hike and reflection activities that encourage self-awareness, gratitude, and connection with both the natural world and the camp community.

The most recent Night Sky Youth Camp was organized in partnership with Park Takeover, whose collaboration helped expand outreach and community engagement. Parents and volunteers are also encouraged to participate alongside campers, helping create an intergenerational atmosphere where youth can learn from mentors, community members, and family supporters throughout the weekend.

By combining outdoor recreation, environmental learning, cultural activities, and wellness practices, the Night Sky Youth Camp aims to teach young people not only about nature, but also about the value of community, cooperation, and caring for the world around them. The program fee is \$25, ensuring that the experience remains affordable and accessible for families across the region.

Planning is currently underway for the next Night Sky Youth Camp, scheduled for July 2027, and we are actively seeking participants, families, and volunteers who would like to join us for another memorable weekend of learning, connection, and discovery under the stars.

MDYC: Youth Workforce

The MDYC Youth Workforce Development Program is a paid workforce development initiative that prepares young adults ages 16–24 for careers in creative industries, entrepreneurship, and community leadership through hands-on learning, professional mentorship, and paid work experience. Supported by a \$50,000 Community Grant Program award from the County of San Diego District Attorney's Office, the program provides participants with the technical, professional, and leadership skills needed to succeed while fostering a strong commitment to community engagement and service.

The program follows a structured 12-week curriculum, with workshops held every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. Each session is designed to mirror the workflow of a real nonprofit organization, giving participants consistent opportunities to learn, collaborate, and apply new skills. The curriculum follows a Plan, Produce, Report model: Mondays focus on planning, orientation, workplace safety, entrepreneurship, and project preparation; Wednesdays emphasize production through hands-on work in the café, print shop, and stewardship activities; and Fridays are dedicated to portfolio development, market preparation, leadership practice, reporting, and reflection. This structured rhythm helps participants develop professional habits while understanding how successful organizations plan, execute, and evaluate their work.

At the center of the program is the MDYC Hub, a collaborative workspace divided into specialized learning zones that simulate real workplace environments. Participants rotate through the Café Counter, where they receive training in food safety, customer service, food preparation, and point-of-sale operations; the Print Studio, where they learn graphic design, publishing, photography, branding, and large-format printing; the Stewardship Corner, where they participate in environmental education and sustainability projects; and the Market Prep Station, where they prepare products, displays, and promotional materials for local farmers markets. Participants also maintain a Youth Workstation, where they document their progress, build professional portfolios, complete leadership activities, and reflect on their learning throughout the program.

In addition to technical training, every participant serves in a professional workforce role that reflects the operations of ASCENDtials. These roles include Market Operations Intern, Communications & Content Intern, Youth Program Intern, Partnership & Outreach Intern, Administration & Compliance Intern, Data & Evaluation Intern, and Program Team Intern Lead. While rotating through the different skill tracks, participants gain experience in leadership, teamwork, project management, communication, organization, and accountability, preparing them for future employment in nonprofit organizations, creative industries, and small businesses.

Experiential learning is a cornerstone of MDYC. Throughout the 12 weeks, participants earn \$16 per hour while gaining real-world experience in café operations, print production, entrepreneurship, environmental stewardship, and community engagement. They create marketing materials, produce publications and branded products, assist with community events, manage farmers market booths, develop business concepts, and build professional portfolios that showcase their work. The program culminates in a graduation showcase where participants present their accomplishments to families, employers, and community partners while exploring employment, freelance, and educational opportunities.

Beyond workforce development, MDYC emphasizes the importance of giving back to the community. During ASCENDtials' recent Night Sky Youth Camp, MDYC participants volunteered alongside staff by helping with event setup, supporting younger campers, assisting with activities, and contributing to the overall success of the program. Their participation created meaningful connections between the organization's workforce development and youth enrichment initiatives, allowing participants to practice leadership while serving as positive role models for younger youth.

This collaboration reflects ASCENDtials' commitment to building a connected community where each program strengthens the next. As MDYC participants develop professional skills, they are also encouraged to mentor younger participants, volunteer at organizational events, and become leaders within the ASCENDtials community. Likewise, youth who participate in programs like the Night Sky Youth Camp are introduced to future opportunities available through MDYC, creating a continuous pathway for leadership, workforce development, and lifelong community involvement.

By combining paid workforce experience, technical training, entrepreneurship, environmental stewardship, leadership development, and community service, the MDYC Youth Workforce Development Program equips young adults with the confidence, experience, and practical skills needed to succeed in the workforce while empowering them to become active contributors to their communities.

MAET mini earthkeepers program

The Mini Earthkeepers Agricultural Entrepreneurship Training (MAET) Program is a hands-on youth initiative that combines environmental education, gardening, and entrepreneurship to help young people develop practical workforce and leadership skills. Through the program, participants learn how to grow and maintain gardens, understand sustainable agriculture, create value-added products, and develop business fundamentals such as customer service, marketing, pricing, and financial literacy.

ASCENDtials is proud to partner with McGill School of Success to expand the impact of MAET by building upon the school's existing garden program. Together, the two organizations are creating a pathway that allows students to take what they learn in the garden and apply it in real-world settings. As students gain experience growing produce and creating handmade

products, they will also receive training to become youth vendors, preparing them to sell their products and interact with customers at ASCENDtials' community farmers markets.

The long-term vision of the partnership is for McGill students to participate as vendors at ASCENDtials' City Heights Farmers Market, the Oak Park Farmers Market, and future ASCENDtials community markets as opportunities expand. Through these market experiences, students will develop confidence in public speaking, customer service, teamwork, and entrepreneurship while learning how local food systems and small businesses contribute to stronger communities.

By connecting classroom learning with hands-on business experience, the MAET Program provides youth with a unique opportunity to become environmental stewards, young entrepreneurs, and active members of their communities. The ongoing partnership with McGill School of Success reflects both organizations' shared commitment to preparing students for future educational, workforce, and leadership opportunities through meaningful, real-world experiences.

Fall Equinox Night Sky Camp

The Fall Equinox Night Sky Camp is an overnight outdoor experience that celebrates the transition into autumn through nature, astronomy, wellness, and community. Held each September, the camp invites youth, families, volunteers, and community members to reconnect with the natural world while exploring the significance of the fall equinox through hands-on learning and reflection.

Throughout the weekend, participants enjoy ranger-led nature hikes, environmental education, night sky exploration, constellation mapping, community drumming, campfire storytelling, guided yoga, mindfulness activities, and stargazing. The program emphasizes the balance represented by the equinox, encouraging participants to reflect on personal growth, gratitude, and their relationship with nature while building meaningful connections with others. The experience is designed to foster environmental stewardship, teamwork, wellness, and a lifelong appreciation for the outdoors.

The Fall Equinox Night Sky Camp continues ASCENDtials' mission of making outdoor education accessible and engaging by bringing together local partners, volunteers, and families for an immersive weekend of learning, community building, and exploration beneath the night sky.

Divine Femininity Youth Retreat

The Divine Femininity Youth Retreat is an immersive wellness and leadership experience designed to empower young women through self-discovery, mindfulness, and community connection. The retreat provides a supportive environment where participants explore confidence, emotional well-being, personal growth, and leadership while strengthening their relationship with themselves, one another, and the natural world.

Throughout the retreat, participants engage in guided yoga, meditation, reflective journaling, creative workshops, group discussions, nature-based activities, and community-building exercises. These experiences encourage participants to develop resilience, self-awareness, healthy communication, and a deeper appreciation for wellness and self-care. The retreat also fosters meaningful friendships and mentorship opportunities, creating a space where young women feel supported, inspired, and empowered to grow as leaders within their communities.

The Divine Femininity Youth Retreat reflects ASCENDtials' commitment to holistic youth development by combining wellness, education, cultural enrichment, and outdoor experiences. By providing participants with practical tools for personal growth alongside opportunities for reflection and connection, the retreat encourages young women to build confidence, embrace leadership, and carry those skills into their schools, families, and communities.