

Early Yachats Youth Group Program History

Compiled 2020

By Joanne Kittel and Michael Hempen, Co-Chair & Board Member, View the Future

Acknowledgments

Information in this history was obtained from oral interviews with people who were involved with the creation and development of the Yachats Youth Group Programs, specifically: Debbie Jackson, Stacey Smith, Chis Graamans, Blythe Collins, Karl Christensen, Carl Miller, Leon Sterner, Phil Schuster, Susan Stoddard, Valeria Tutrinoli, Caroline Bauman, Jessica Waddell, Joan Stephens, and Jackie Martine,. Most of those interviewed continue to call Yachats their home.

Appreciation to Rose Valentine, last president of the Friends of the Commons, and to the Little Log Church and Museum for the loan of all the Friends of the Yachats Commons' records.

Our deep appreciation to Debbie Hempen, Bette Perman, and Diane Disse for editing.

Many individuals involved in acquiring the Commons and initiating the Friends of the Yachats Commons group had children. A number of those children were home schooled.

In 1991, an alternative school was initiated with funding from the Friends of the Yachats Commons (the Friends) and from One of Us (OOU) events. The school was located in what is now the Commons kitchen, and Chris Bellevita was the teacher. Unable to secure more funding the school had to close. However, through creative efforts people formed social and recreational activities for the children through an indoor park. Donations were secured for second-hand play equipment.

Children played on the grounds on the west side of the Commons. The Friends wanted to build a playground, but the Yachats City Council was hesitant due to liability issues. Eventually the Council relented. The Friends went to work writing grants and securing donations through their creative fundraising activities. In 1993, with the help of a very large contingency of volunteers, the playground was assembled.

In the Fall of 1992 Ingrid Olson took charge of a children's afterschool program in the Commons basement for about two years paid by a grant secured by Caroline Bauman and the Friends. A home school program started as well. Those programs were the beginning of the Yachats Youth and Family Activities Program (YYFAP).

Debbie Jackson moved to Yachats in 1993. She had four young children, and she quickly became involved with the efforts of providing social and recreational opportunities for local children. She also was involved with other parents in the development of the indoor park. Debbie joined the Friends board and was the liaison to the youth programs. The Friends had fundraisers such as dances to support the indoor park and after school programs.

November 4, 2020

As programming expanded, the Friends decided a director was needed. Debbie resigned from the Friends, and with their support, and with the help of many volunteers, developed a 501(c)(3). The YYFAP board was large and was made up of the Friends' board and involved parents. One of those volunteers was Chris Graamans who was involved with the Early Youth Group and YYFAP for 15 years. Some of the other board members that Debbie remembered over the earlier years were Stacey Smith, Lee Ann Fourcier, Bob Powell, Nancy Otterson, Myron Eckhart. Debbie was the director for 18 years, writing grants, organizing fundraisers, doing program development, teaching and mentoring with her board and volunteers. YYFAP partnered with One of Us Productions to organize fundraising events.

YYFAP expanded with more activities, projects, and programs. For example, Family Night, which brought families together for a dinner and social /reading evenings; Helping Hands, which involved adolescents with community projects like helping older individuals with yard work; Creative educational sessions, which offered critical thinking mysteries for fourth through seventh graders during a week-long summer program; painting classes taught by local artist Helen Pheifle; Food Pantry, which the kids helped run; and a Peace Garden. Special events were presented by the children including the annual MLK celebration of diversity and talent shows. One fun activity involved providing cameras to all the kids in YFAPP. With those cameras, the kids took photos all over town and created a montage. Parental support and involvement were always integral to the sustainability of the program.

YYFAP has always had the Commons basement and has never been asked to pay rent for that space. Eventually, under the leadership of Mayor Susan Smith, the City Council saw the value of YYFAP to the community and beyond. The City became a major financial contributor to YYFAP from the first time YYFAP submitted a budget request. When the preschool was started in Room 4, YYFAP negotiated with the City for a rent amount.

YYFAP continues to be an important resource in supporting our youth and their families. If early founding programs are included, YYFAP will be celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2021. It has endured and will as long as the Yachats Community supports our younger population.