

**WE ARE**  
**MIAMI-DADE**  
**PARK &**  
**RECREATION**

**Every great community has a great park system.** The accredited Miami-Dade Park & Recreation Department is the third largest county park system in the country: 263 parks; more than 12,848 acres of land; 2.5 million residents; and 10 million annual visitors. We play a vital role in the development of a healthier, more comfortable and environmentally-conscious lifestyle in Miami-Dade County. The quality of our facilities, programs and services have been recognized with the NRPA National Gold Medal Award and the Florida Governor's Sterling Award for excellence in management and operations. We are one of the most unique and diverse park and recreation systems in the world. The Parks Department is improving the quality of life in Miami, transforming it into a more livable, loveable and sustainable place to live. We positively impact the community's health, environment, social well-being, and economic prosperity daily. Here's how our parks and recreational programs impact our community as do schools, roads, the airport and seaport departments:

### **Health and Social Benefits for Kids and Adults**

- **Over the last two decades overweight adolescence nationwide has doubled** according to the Center for Disease Control (*Miami Herald*, Feb. 2, 2010). According to research by the Miami-Dade County Children's Trust, although Miami enjoys great weather all year, local students trail the nation in physical exercise. The Parks Department aggressively addresses this problem through our *Fit To Play* Program, after school and in summer, which teaches kids healthy nutrition and gets them physically active.
- **While working parents aren't home to supervise their kids, Miami-Dade Parks programs provide juveniles with fun, wholesome activities to participate in** during the 3-6 p.m. time period, when school-age children are most likely to commit or be victimized by crime; to smoke, drink or use drugs; to engage in premature sexual activity or to get involved in gang-related activity. According to the Census Bureau, at least 7 million children go home to an empty house after school, because their communities do not offer affordable out-of-school programs.
- **Adults need recreation**, social interaction and relaxation to counteract the stresses of life and work. All three lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels, control weight, anxiety and depression, according to a Curtin University of Australia survey. Benefits are amplified by safe, natural, tranquil settings like parks.
- **Community recreation promotes ethnic and cultural harmony.** It reduces alienation, loneliness and anti-social behaviors in children and adults.

### **Environmental Benefits**

- **The education programs at our Nature Centers, the Deering Estate at Cutler and through EcoAdventures™ tours and Miami MetroZoo foster stewardship** by exposing kids and adults to the beauty and fragility of Miami's ecosystems and the need to protect them.
- **Trees in parks counteract global warming in two ways.** Trees remove CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere, store the carbon and release oxygen. A single mature tree can remove more than a ton of CO<sub>2</sub> in its lifetime.
- **Tree canopy reduces temperatures.** The cooling effect of a tree is equal to 100 room-size air conditioners operating 20 hours/day, resulting in lower fuel consumption for cooling.
- **Penetrable surfaces of park land and green space**, as opposed to streets and buildings, **help to clean water**, filtering and cleansing pollution from water before it reaches the underground water supply.

### **Economic Benefits**

- **It costs 12 times more to send a juvenile to jail—\$117.00 per day—than to provide preventative recreation programs—our After-School Program costs \$10.00 per day.**
- In 2009, parks and recreation departments in Miami-Dade County spent **more than \$200 million in operating expenditures.**
- Investing in residential area parks and open spaces leads to **increased neighborhood property values.**
- **The Parks Department receives 3.51%** of the County budget and spends the majority funding local jobs.
- Park and recreation facilities and associated operations in Miami-Dade County are responsible for **maintaining 10,000 jobs annually.**

## SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

### Health Benefits for Kids

- Miami-Dade Parks programs and services provide solutions to many of the health and welfare issues that affect kids today, including childhood obesity and juvenile delinquency.
- One of the greatest healthcare challenges Americans are facing now is the alarming number of kids suffering from obesity. Childhood obesity has nearly quadrupled since 1984. The Center for Disease Control reports that obese kids are more likely than kids of normal weight to become overweight or obese adults.
- Unsupervised kids are most at risk between 3-6 p.m. The U.S. Department of Justice reports they are most likely to commit or be victimized by crime; to smoke, drink or use drugs; to engage in premature sexual activity; or to get involved in gang-related activity.
- According to the U.S. Census Bureau, at least 7 million children go home to an empty house after school, because their communities do not offer affordable after-school programs.
- Studies show: **After-school programs help to decrease juvenile crime, violence**, drug use, smoking, alcohol abuse, and teen pregnancy. **Also, after-school participants improve their test scores** and have fewer instances of being late for and skipping school.
- The Miami-Dade Parks *Fit To Play* and the After-School programs produce the following:
  1. **They teach kids about healthy nutrition** and get them active in exercise routines that can be continued into adulthood.
  2. **They produce healthier, more active kids** and lay the foundation for a healthier lifestyle.
  3. With the University of Miami as our partner, **U.M. Miller School of Medicine medical students provide educational and interactive sessions** for the kids and address health-related issues.
  4. **U.M.'s Athletic Department provides its fitness trainers and student-athletes** to talk to the kids about the importance of exercise, prevention and healthy eating.
  5. Miami-Dade Parks' *Fit To Play After-School Program* keeps kids safe and off the street.

### Health Benefits for Adults

- A study by the American Planning Association makes the following assessments concerning the value of health improvement and parks:
  1. **Contact with nature**—plants, animals, pleasing landscapes, and wilderness—**offers a range of medical benefits**, including lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels, enhanced survival after a heart attack, more rapid recovery from surgery, fewer minor medical complaints, and lower self-reported stress.
  2. **Exercise is more beneficial**—leading to **enhanced tranquility** and more **relief of anxiety** and depression—when it occurs in natural settings, like parks, rather than along urban streets.

## SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

### Environmental Benefits

- **Direct exposure to nature is essential for the healthy childhood development of children, (physical, learning, spiritual and emotional). Interaction with nature is a critical component in combating the growing problem of childhood obesity and what Richard Louv, author of “Last Child In the Woods,” describes as “nature-deficit disorder,” a complete loss of connection with the natural world.**
- **Miami-Dade Parks’ Nature Centers, EcoAdventures™ tours and Miami MetroZoo, all serve the purpose and value of exposing children and adults to nature and the ecosystems and wildlife around them.**
- **A study of the environmental benefits of parks by the American Planning Association and FRPA concluded the following:**
  1. Park resources can lessen the impact of **climate, air, and water pollution** on public health.
  2. **Climate** - A mature tree canopy reduces air temperature by about five to ten degrees. The cooling effect of a tree is equal to 100 room-size air conditioners operating 20 hours per day.
  3. **Air Quality** - Trees in parks also help improve air quality by removing pollutants from the atmosphere. A single mature tree can remove more than a ton of CO<sub>2</sub> in its lifetime.
  4. **Water** - Parks along urban waterways help to keep water clean by absorbing and cleansing the polluted run-off from impervious surfaces before it reaches the water.

### Economic Benefits of Parks

- **Miami-Dade Park & Recreation programs and services are a central driver of Miami-Dade County’s economy, as is the case with schools, roads, the airport and seaport.**
- There are broad and direct benefits associated with the development and continued investment in Park and Recreation open space, facilities and programs—here are a few:
  1. Investment in beaches, parks and open spaces attracts tourists and brings revenue; Florida beach vacations are the number one vacation choice of Americans.
  2. **Americans not exercising costs the country \$1.4 trillion in health care costs every year.**
  3. Facilities such as the Crandon Tennis Center and the Tropical Equestrian Center bring tourist dollars to our community when visitors come to special events.
  4. **In 2009, park and recreation departments spent over \$200 million in operating expenditure.** This is projected to grow to \$292 million by 2017. Private sector businesses, like architects and construction companies benefit from the capital investment made in the County’s facilities.
  5. **Park and recreation facilities and associated operations in Miami-Dade County are responsible for creating nearly 10,000 jobs annually.** Employment associated with park operations is expected to grow to 12,400 jobs by 2017, with 61 percent of those positions created in the private market, as the benefits of having an expanded park network come to fruition and population grows.

# STATISTICS

## **Statistics - Health Benefits for Kids**

***Overweight children are more likely to develop physical health problems in adulthood, such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.***

- One of the greatest healthcare challenges that Americans face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the alarming number of youth suffering from obesity. The prevalence of obesity has nearly quadrupled among boys and girls in the last 25 years. As reported by the American Obesity Association, diabetes, hypertension and other obesity-related chronic diseases that are prevalent among adults have now become more common in youngsters. The percentage of children and adolescents who are overweight and obese is now higher than ever before. Poor dietary habits and inactivity are reported to contribute to the increase of obesity in youth.
- Today, in the United States, 58 million people are overweight; 40 million are obese.
- According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), obese youth are more likely than youth of normal weight to become overweight or obese adults, and therefore more at risk for associated adult health problems, including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, several types of cancer, and osteoarthritis.
- In 1982, 4 percent of children were reported as overweight. In 2001, that percentage had grown to 16 percent. Thirty-three percent of Black and Hispanic children were reported as being overweight.
- The likelihood of being overweight increased among Miami-Dade County high school students between 1999 and 2005. Male Hispanic high school students are most likely to be overweight.
- In 2008, 9 percent of female high school students were reported as obese; 17 percent of males as compared to 7 percent of females in Florida and 15 percent of males in Florida.

***Exercising regularly is associated with short- and long-term benefits, such as strengthening bones, controlling weight, increasing mental health and decreasing the risk of diseases like diabetes and hypertension. Current physical activity recommendations encourage youth to exercise for 60 minutes per day, five days per week.***

- When compared with high school students in the nation as a whole, students in Miami-Dade County were less likely to engage in the recommended amount of physical activity or any kind of vigorous physical activity.
- In 2006, only 27 percent of students in Miami-Dade County exercised at the current recommended levels, compared with 31 percent of students in Florida and 36 percent of students in the United States.
- In addition, playing on a sports team was less common for students in Miami-Dade County in 2006. Only 46 percent of students reported playing on a sports team in Miami-Dade County as compared with Florida (51 percent) and the nation (56 percent).

***Watching television excessively reduces time available to engage in after-school programs, intellectual activities and exercise, and is associated with lower academic test scores.***

- In 2006, about half (51 percent) of all Miami-Dade County high school students reported watching three or more hours of television on an average school day; students in Miami-Dade County are more likely to watch television excessively than the average for students in Florida (41 percent) and the nation (37 percent).

# STATISTICS

## **Statistics - Miscellaneous**

***The demographics served by Miami-Dade Parks are the same as the general demographics of the County:***

- Under 18 years old - 22.2%, over age 65 - 15.4%.
- White - 77.4%, Black - 19.5%, White Non-Hispanic 17.8%.
- Foreign born 50.9%; Hispanic or Latino origin 62.4%, Asian - 1.6%, American Indian and Alaska Native - 0.4%, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander - 0.1%.
- Other than English spoken at home 67.9%.
- High school graduates 67.9%; bachelor's degree or higher 21.7%.
- Median household income \$43,495; living below poverty 15.3%.

***Miami-Dade County is one of the most racially and ethnically diverse counties in the United States.***

- Almost 70 percent of children that live in Miami-Dade County are foreign-born or have at least one foreign-born parent. The same proportion speaks a language other than English at home.

***Nearly 40 percent of all children live in households headed by an unmarried person, a percentage that continues to rise and exceeds the percentage for Florida and the nation.***

- Families with children in Miami-Dade County are slightly more likely to face poverty than families in Florida and the nation, and incomes of single-parent families are typically less than half that of married-couple families.

***Racial and ethnic identity is not only associated with differences in language and culture, but also can be related to disparities in health, school performance and other aspects of child well-being.***

- In 2006, more than half (56 percent) of the children in Miami-Dade County were Hispanic; nearly a quarter (24 percent) were black non-Hispanic; and 17 percent were white non-Hispanic.

***Many immigrant children face significant challenges in integrating into American life. They are more likely than native-born children to live in poverty, have poorer health and have parents with little education. Native-born children of immigrant parents often face similar challenges, including economic hardship and decreased access to public benefits.***

- Immigrant children are more prevalent in Miami-Dade County than in Florida and the United States. In 2006, 12 percent of all Miami-Dade County children living with their parents were born outside of the United States, compared with only 5.5 percent in Florida and 3.4 percent in the nation.

***Mothers and fathers both play important roles in their child's development. Living with only one parent is related to a greater likelihood of problems with a child's physical and mental health, educational outcomes and behavior.***

- While most (62 percent) of Miami-Dade County children lived in married-couple families in 2006, 30 percent lived in single-mother families and 7.1 percent lived in single-father families. Miami-Dade County has a lower rate of children living in married couple families than either the state of Florida (65 percent) or the nation (68 percent).
- In 2006, 33,739 babies were born to mothers living in Miami-Dade County. Between 1999 and 2006, births to unmarried mothers in Miami-Dade County increased from 41 to 47 percent, exceeding the rates of those in Florida (45 percent) and the nation (39 percent).

## STATISTICS

### Statistics – Miscellaneous – (Continued)

***Income disparities account for a substantial portion of the negative effects associated with growing up in single-parent families. Moreover, among all family structures, higher income is associated with positive outcomes for children, including better health, higher academic achievement and greater financial well-being in adulthood.***

- The median income for all families with children in Miami-Dade County was \$45,940 in 2006, less than the median income for families with children in both Florida (\$52,180) and the United States (\$56,319).
- Partially as a result of having lower incomes, families with children in Miami-Dade County were more likely to receive public assistance than families in Florida and the United States. In 2006, more than a quarter (27 percent) of Miami-Dade County children lived in families that received cash assistance income, supplemental security income or food stamps, compared with Florida (18 percent) and the nation (19 percent).

***Children living in poverty are disproportionately exposed to a host of risk factors that can affect development; including malnutrition, abuse, parental depression and low quality child care. Poor children also are more likely to experience poorer physical and mental health, engage in risky behaviors and fare worse academically than children who are not poor.***

- Female-headed families with children (those headed by an unmarried woman) were far more likely to be poor as compared with married-couple or even male-headed families.
- In 2006, in Miami-Dade County, the poverty rate for female-headed families with children was 34 percent and nearly five times higher than the rate for married-couple families (7 percent) and twice as high as that for single male-headed households (16 percent).
- Black and Hispanic families with children are substantially more likely than white families to live in poverty. This disparity is significantly greater among single female-headed families. In 2006, 44 percent of black and 32 percent of Hispanic female-headed families were poor, while only 20 percent of white non-Hispanic female-headed families were poor.

# SOURCES

## **We Are Miami-Dade Park & Recreation Sources**

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6. *Road and Travel Magazine*
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