Disneyland RESORT News

Walt Disney Parks and Resorts Hosts Symposium for Nonprofit Organizations from Across U.S.

DISCOVER TOGETHER" event provides a forum to discuss new research showing significant benefits to kids from positive relationships with influential adults

ANAHEIM, Calif. (1/28/2014) – Building on a rich history of creating memorable experiences that bring families together, Walt Disney Parks and Resorts hosted dozens of nonprofits from across America at the Disneyland Resort for "Discover Together," a two-day symposium focused on how adults can make a difference in children's lives by spending meaningful time with them.

"At Walt Disney Parks and Resorts, we're fundamentally committed to nurturing, inspiring and empowering children and their families," said Tom Staggs, Chairman of Walt Disney Parks and Resorts. "Through our work with community organizations, we provide support to address a wide range of kids' and families' immediate needs – from school supplies to hot meals. Beyond that, our focus is on creating opportunities to strengthen bonds between children and the influential adults in their lives. Today we're excited to bring together nonprofit organizations from across the country to start a dialogue about how we can all play a role in ensuring that the next generation succeeds and thrives."

Walt Disney Parks and Resorts invited nearly 60 nonprofit organizations from around the U.S. to participate in the symposium, which included one day dedicated to sharing and discussing new research and a discussion on how to measure success—an area of need for many organizations. In addition, Disney offered a full day of Disney Institute's Leadership Excellence training. The symposium was offered free of charge and designed to help participants share their experiences and best practices and leverage the tools provided to create even stronger programs of their own to benefit communities nationwide.

Symposium participants heard findings from a new white paper released by the Center for Childhood Creativity that analyzed a wide body of academic studies that demonstrate the powerful influence positive parent-child interactions have on a child's ability to learn, grow, and thrive. The white paper was made possible through a grant from Walt Disney Parks and Resorts.

In addition, leaders from the Search Institute presented their groundbreaking American Family Assets Study, which found that kids who have the support from family on 21 identified "assets" or strengths are more than three times as likely to take personal responsibility and keep their commitments, show caring and empathy to others and volunteer in their community. The study also noted that these kids are almost twice as likely to get mostly A's in school. Walt Disney Parks and Resorts provided a grant to Search Institute to expand this research.

"Our research shows that relationships play a much greater role in making families strong than their family's structure, ethnicity, and socio-economic status," said Kent Pekel, president and CEO of Search Institute, which conducted the *American Family Assets Study*. "If organizations that serve kids can support and enhance these relationships, they can make an even greater difference in the child's life."

“Positive parent-child interactions – how parents and children communicate through language, shared experiences, and mutual discovery – powerfully influence how children learn, grow, and thrive,” said Stephanie Rafanelli, Director of Research and Curriculum Development for the Center for Childhood Creativity.

At the symposium, Staggs shared that Walt Disney Parks and Resorts provided support to KaBOOM! to launch the “America’s Most Playful Family” contest, which is designed to elevate the national dialogue about how families spend time playing together. The contest officially kicks off today. The grand prizewinner will be announced in May and will receive a Disney Parks vacation and the opportunity to work with KaBOOM! to grant an Imagination Playground to a nonprofit organization in the family’s state of residence. Families can learn more about the contest at kaboom.org/playfulfamily.

“We’re thrilled to be working with Walt Disney Parks and Resorts to encourage families to think about and share with others how they engage in active play,” said KaBOOM! Founder and CEO Darell Hammond.

With the goal of providing more opportunities for families to spend time together giving back in their community, Walt Disney Parks and Resorts is also underwriting Ready, Set, Go! training for local nonprofit organizations. The daylong training by generationOn, the youth division of Points of Light, provides nonprofits with training, resources, and other tools to more effectively engage youth volunteers and provide more family-oriented volunteer activities. Training was held yesterday in Anaheim with additional Disney Parks-supported trainings being planning in other U.S. communities, including Orlando, FL, and Honolulu, HI.

Walt Disney Parks and Resorts has long supported nonprofit organizations that serve children and families in the U.S. and around the world. In 2013, The Walt Disney Company donated more than $371 million in cash and in-kind contributions to support the well-being of children and families. Walt Disney Parks and Resorts also collaborates with local organizations and encourages the donation of time and talents by Cast Members through Disney VoluntEARS, a company-sponsored initiative supporting employee volunteerism.

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