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LAUSD Continuation High School Students Take Part In A Meaningful Virtual Retreat

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Funded by the Play Equity Fund in partnership with The Mark Hughes Foundation the retreat mimicked the experience of an in-person retreat.

SAN PEDRO, CA, USA, May 13, 2021 /[EINPresswire.com \(http://www.einpresswire.com\)](http://www.einpresswire.com)/ -- Renata Simril, President of the [Play Equity Fund \(https://playequityfund.org/\)](https://playequityfund.org/) says, “The lack of equal access for all kids to play is a crisis hiding in plain sight.” [Sharefest](#)

[\(https://sharefestinc.org/\)](https://sharefestinc.org/) sees the same disparity and was honored to receive a generous grant from the Play Equity Fund in partnership with the Mark Hughes Foundation to provide a retreat experience for the Continuation High School students they work with. Unfortunately COVID stopped their plans to have an in-person retreat. Instead Sharefest held a virtual retreat designed to mimic the experience of an in-person retreat. While it is hard to 'play' on screens, the students enjoyed being led through various activities designed to open them up to deeper discussions.

Much like team building initiatives in an in-person retreat environment, the activities were all built on a social science framework paired with a learning approach. For example, students were charged with accomplishing a complex task together using the chat feature in Zoom. They had to work together to create a numerical sequence without repeating or skipping numbers. The Sharefest Youth were allowed to discuss strategy, but not specifics.

One of Sharefest's long time Instructor-Mentors, Luis Guererro, shared, "The first activities were fun, but the following activities were a lot more socioemotional based which allowed for the class to sustain a safe space for vulnerability and self-expression. Additionally, energy was increased in the classroom, leading to higher participation." Luis went on to say, "After one particular session, students reflected on potential career paths and/or goals. The significance of this particular reflection was that students expressed high confidence and drive to achieve their goals."

Many students started the digital retreat unengaged with blank screens. By the end of the experience they were on video sharing their thoughts and experiences openly. The goal of creating a safe space for youth to engage while developing a positive group dynamic between youth and their peers / teachers was certainly achieved. The trust built between students and their Instructor-Mentors during the experience is already acting as a building block to stronger supportive relationships.

Sharefest works inside five LAUSD Continuation High Schools providing classes, experiences and mentoring designed to help students envision their future and provide them with tools and support to achieve their goals. Since starting at Avalon Continuation High School in 2009, for example, they have seen an increase in

graduation rates by 400%!

“All of the students we work with face tremendous barriers to economic success. By investing in their schools and communities we are creating catalysts for broader, sustainable community change,” says Sharefest Executive Director, Chad Mayer. “Partners like the Play Equity Fund and the Mark Hughes Foundation are essential in our mission. We believe opportunities like this retreat and, when we can do it safely, in-person experiences that allow our youth space to play, learn and be supported are essential as they grow into their potential. We are grateful for the investment of the Play Equity Fund in partnership with the Mark Hughs Foundation and look forward to a continued partnership as we are able to gather in-person with our students again.”

About Sharefest:

Sharefest exists to empower underserved youth to transform their futures and become leaders of collaborative community change. Sharefest programming helps keep students enrolled in school through graduation, achieve significant increases in their GPA and develop social skills that help them reach college or career goals. In 2020 alone Sharefest served 408 youth, their continuation high school students increased their GPAs by an average of 28%, and 248 Sharefest students earned credits toward graduation.

About Play Equity Fund:

A 501(c)3 public charity, the Play Equity Fund was established by the LA84 Foundation in 2014 as its charitable partner and supports programs and actions to ensure all children have equal access to the transformative power of sport and structured play. The Play Equity Fund supports the sports-based youth development ecosystem for greater impact, raises awareness of inequities and develops partnerships to advocate for funding and sustainable solutions to ensure children in communities of color have access to pathways for lifelong well-being. The Play Equity Fund is the only nonprofit focused solely on Play Equity as a social justice issue.

About the Mark Hughes Foundation:

Established in 1994, the foundation contributes to organizations or programs that

improve nutrition, support disadvantaged children and families, provide early interventions, and prevent physical and emotional abuse.

Audrey Howes

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[Local nonprofit, Sharefest, invites community to go 'Game On' at their annual gala on Saturday, October 2](#) ([/article/552181875/local-nonprofit-sharefest-invites-community-to-go-game-on-at-their-annual-gala-on-saturday-october-2](#)).

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