

Press Release

Grizzly Youth Academy keeps the ‘Grizzly spirit’ going well beyond graduation for cadets

The Grizzly Youth Academy creates new online resource that lets graduate cadets keep up the Grizzly lifestyle after they graduate

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SLO TRIBUNE | EDUCATION – The Grizzly Youth Academy has partnered with the Cal Poly Digital Transformation Hub (powered by AWS) to create the new Grizzly [Rank Up] application that enables Grizzly cadets to maintain ongoing personal accountability and day-to-day Grizzly routines even after they graduate from the Academy. The Grizzly Youth Academy is one of more than one hundred academies in the National Guard Youth Challenge program which supports at-risk youth. This goal behind [Rank Up] is to support long-term success for cadets as they graduate and move back into the world on their own two feet. Cadets will be trained to use the application on a daily basis, and can access and plan their daily routines around Academy activities. These include exercise routines, daily goals and tasks, further supported by motivating content developed by former cadets, staff, and cadres at the Grizzly Youth Academy. Cadets and graduates can ‘Rank Up’ as they achieve self assigned accomplishments, and those whom maintain ‘Gold Phase,’ or the highest honor, are spotlighted as a way to encourage other cadets on their journey.

Grizzly Youth Academy students voluntarily apply to join a five-month education and intensive discipline and rehabilitation program using National Guard cadres to instill disciplined routines, like exercise and ‘one team, one battle’ teamwork mentality. Additionally, local educators are leveraged to satisfy ongoing high school education requirements to keep the cadets on track. Grizzly cadets have experienced trauma in their communities, and come from a broad swath of California, reaching from Fresno to San Luis Obispo to Santa Barbara. Upon graduation, cadets return home with their newly acquired skills and outlook, and are expected to reintegrate with the same communities and social life they came from, while trying to move forward with their lives in a healthy and productive way. Graduates share a strong interest in staying connected to the Grizzly ‘spirit’ and discipline they learned. However, it can be very difficult for graduated cadets, especially if they live far away, making it difficult to be involved in programs like the Academy’s post-graduation independent study program. Graduated Grizzlies yearn for that connection to the Academy program and their peers that fundamentally transformed their lives over the five-month tenure.

To address this gap, the Grizzly Youth Academy has launched the new Grizzly [Rank Up] application. [Rank Up] allows cadets to plan their daily goals after they leave the academy with items like exercise routines, academic activities, work-related activity and other tasks cadets need to accomplish. As tasks are completed, the cadet will accrue points, in order to ‘Rank Up.’ This simulates their day-to-day experience at the Academy. As they prepare for graduation, cadets will be introduced to ‘Rank Up’ for their day-to-day planning. Cadets can access additional exercise routines through video content delivered by National Guard cadres (much like drill sergeants) and can watch video streams on physical training and receive updates from their former platoon hard at work. The cadet’s case manager also gets a progress report, which helps facilitate a deeper discussion with the cadet, especially in that critical year following graduation. Rank Up will also include a competitive leader board that shows how well the four different platoons are faring against one another. In addition cadet can see how well they rank with other members that have chosen to publicly share their progress to keep the ‘one team, one battle’ spirit alive as they progress through life after graduation.

“We hear from so many of our graduates that they miss Grizzly and the positive environment that enabled them to succeed. Using this application to maintain a connection with GYA and peers for encouragement will dramatically increase successful outcomes and transitions to adulthood,” said Principal Piette.

“I was worried about life after Grizzly, but I feel motivated using [Rank Up],” said Cadet Snuffy, 1st Platoon Class 44. *“It’s super easy to use and fun to compete! I earned the rank of Sergeant First Class. I love the workout videos especially since it is led by some of the cadres that used to smoke our platoon. It also has notifications to keep me honest and on track with my daily activities.”*

To learn more about the [Rank Up] solution, go to www.abcdefg.org

Customer FAQ (Cadet)

Q: Is this a part of my daily routine when I join the academy?

A: The tool will be introduced just prior to graduation in the final weeks at Grizzly, with the intention to configure the phone/tool with cadets' unique Action Plan schedules, commitments, Health/Exercise and optional contacts, peers, mentor, MD, groups, 800# etc., as they are defined with counselors/teachers.

Q: Do I have to use it while I'm at the academy? What about after I graduate?

A: There will be training on how to use the tool prior to leaving the academy, but it is intended to support and encourage you for 12 months after you graduate.

Q: What are you going to do with my information and who gets to see it?

A: Only GYA or your Mentor may receive data about the types of tasks you are completing and how engaged you are which will enable them to serve you better in your post graduate needs.

Q: Can other cadets view my progress or see how I compare to my peers?

A: There is an option to share your ranking with others but by default this information will be kept private.

Q: Can I see my grades in this so I can stay on track?

A: This feature exists someplace else at GYA.

Q: Will this help me with my independent study program?

A: If Independent Study is on your Action Plan, the tool will remind, encourage and reward you for attendance. (Or ZOOM in if required)

Q: Will this help me with my future or current employer somehow?

A: Yes! Employers value people who are on time, physically and mentally ready and focused. The tool can help you accomplish all those things and more.

Q: Will this allow me to contact my fellow cadets, cadres or teachers after I graduate?

A: Yes, there will be options to join groups of peers and other teacher/guard-led videos.

Q: What if I don't have wifi/Internet access at home or have trouble with the app?

A: All students need wifi / cell service support for distance learning, and there will be Support for an App person.

Stakeholder FAQ (Cadres, Staff, Teachers, Administrators)

Q: How will we fund and support the ongoing expense for this?

A: Part of cost of program; 12 months post-graduation support paid by State/US Government.

Q: Who is going to develop and maintain the application and content?

A: To be determined.

Q: What are the privacy and sensitivity implications of this? Are there regulatory or compliance issues with handling this type of data?

A: As minors their personal data would be sensitive - Parent approval and industry standard security features. Only data that is explicitly shared by the cadet will be available for others to see. This primarily includes the cadets points in the app and no other personal data.

Q: What can we do with the data?

A: Mentors and GYA Counselors/Teachers receive weekly reports on how cadets are doing with commitments/life and if immediate challenges need a call or check in asap. (Could monitor a student daily if needed.) Longer term trends can be identified from anonymous group data about how long support is effective, if reaching out can bring youth back on track, what features most useful, other features needed. LOTS of possibilities.

Q: How do we know this will lead to better, longer-term outcomes? How would we measure that?

A: Recent surveys of in-session and graduated youth consistently reflected a desire to stay connected with GYA structure, people, routines and support they feared they could become distracted without. Engagement with the App will measure their usage, the weekly reports will reveal cadets' success/struggles.

Q: How do we ensure that the graduates will actually use this after they leave?

A: Youth surveyed expressed interest and desire for a support app, and they have smartphones.

Q: How do we know they won't cheat and game the system?

A: If obvious and problematic, counsel the youth.

Q: Will we need somebody on our staff to administer this?

A: After ACTION PLANS created /approved, Tech Support* Person needed to configure phones per each cadet AND troubleshoot long-term hardware issues and reporting requests.

Q: How much time will it take to learn to use the system?

A: Fairly straight forward; maybe an hour or two?

Q: How will we keep this updated and current?

A: Anticipate upgrades from feedback and experience and as budget and priorities arise.

Q: Is this something that we can scale through the other National Guard Youth Challenge programs? If so, how would we do that?

A: Absolutely!

Our ability to support and track graduates and show high percentages of successful activity 12 months post-graduation will be very attractive to other Challenge Programs. We would introduce the program to others.