

2001

Park &

Recreation

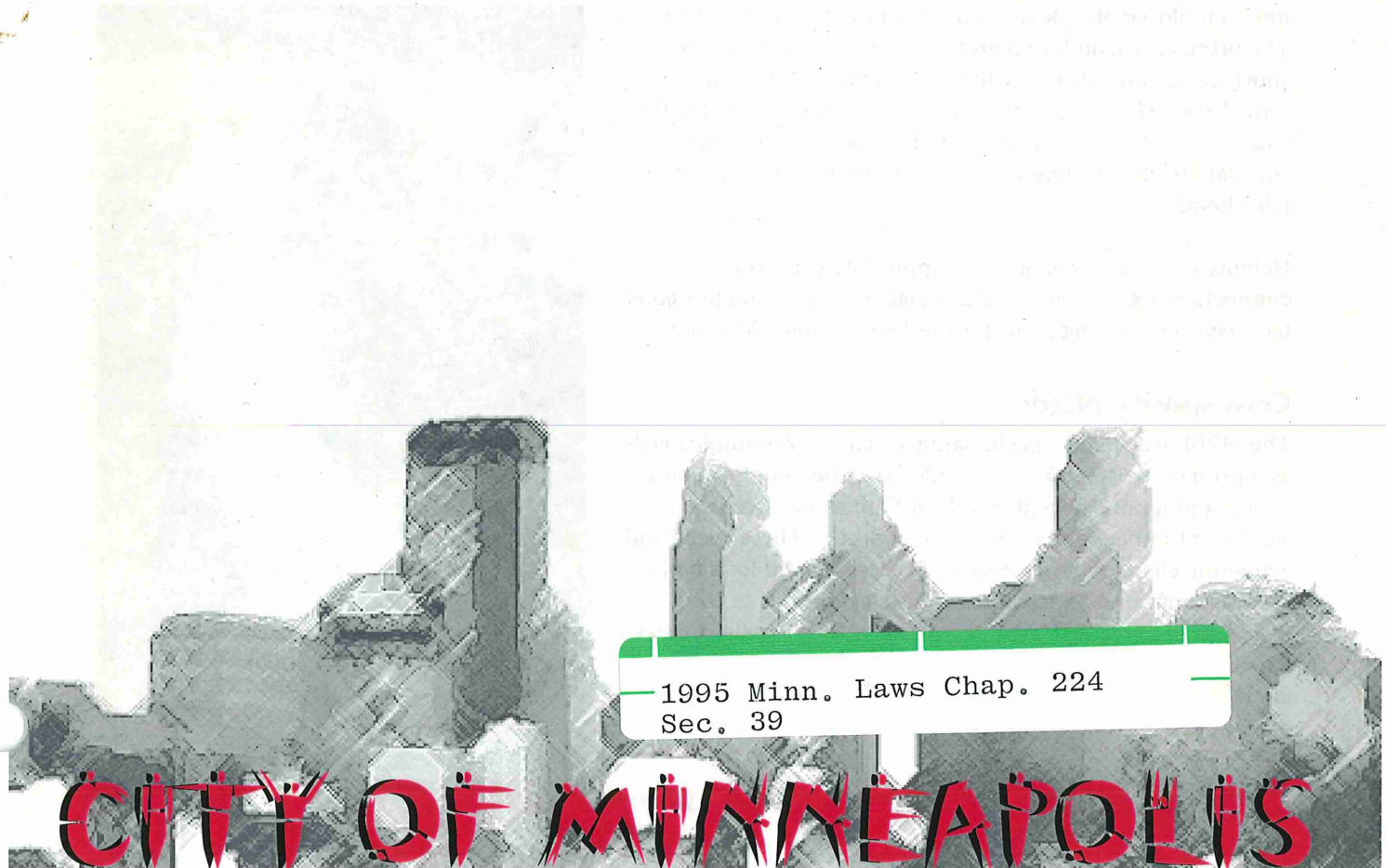
Summer Youth

Report

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1995 Minn. Laws Chap. 224  
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CITY OF MINNEAPOLIS

## Introduction

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) received funding through the Minnesota Youth program (MYP) to operate youth employment and training programs during the summer of 2001. This report includes an overview of the program, results achieved, a profile of youth serviced and program costs.

## Program Overview and Background

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board was founded in 1883 and is responsible for maintaining and developing the Minneapolis park system and providing recreational programs for the city's residents. This semiautonomous body manages a total of approximately 6,000 acres, indoor ice arenas, tennis centers, three outdoor pools and a water park and slide.

Forth-four recreation centers are staffed year-round, including 30 neighborhood centers, nine community recreation centers with auditorium-gymnasiums and five neighborhood recreation shelters.

Over 1 million residents of all ages from all walks of life take advantage of more than 6,000 MPRB programs annually. These programs serve pre-schoolers to senior citizens, and special programs serve those with mental or physical disabilities. Various classes, crafts, games, cultural events, environmental programs and sports are available.

The Board believes it is of paramount importance to help young, unskilled youth make the connection between school and work. Providing opportunities for these youth helps them evolve into productive and achieving members of the community.

MPRB operates Teen Teamworks, a summer employment program that has served more than 3,850 youth since its inception in 1986. This program offers positive park maintenance and recreation assistance, work experience and educational opportunities to unemployed or underemployed at-risk youth between the ages of 14 and 18. The primary reason for unemployment is not necessarily a shortage of available jobs, but a lack of basic skills and unrealistic expectations of what is required to succeed in the work world. Without appropriate intervention, this may translate to chronic unemployment or underemployment in adulthood.

Helping young teens acquire an appreciation for the connection between academic, social, judgment and job skills has been the ongoing focus for the Teen Teamworks project.

## Community Needs

The MPRB has identified changing social and economic needs as a primary reason for an expanded summer employment and training program. Recent trends in Minnesota have had a significant impact on families with children. These social and economic changes have created a higher demand for a more diverse community-based program that responds to the unmet needs of neighborhood families. Minneapolis children who live in highly stressed; disorganized family environments are faced with multiple risk factors, which can combine to place youth in jeopardy of a lifetime of restricted



opportunities. Many Minneapolis youth are rapidly heading for adulthood poorly prepared both academically and emotionally. Projections indicate that many of these youth will be unable to hold jobs due to a lack of fundamental literacy skills and work habits.

Minneapolis is becoming more culturally and economically diverse. Each neighborhood is unique and reflects both the positive and negative changes experienced by other major metropolitan areas over the past decade. The increase poverty, alcohol and other chemical abuse, teen pregnancy, gang activity, serious juvenile crime, and school dropout rates underscore the need for youth employment and training programs.

### Program Activities and Services

“Teen Teamworks/Earn While You Learn” offer Minneapolis youth the opportunity to earn money and learn appropriate work maturity skills through a combination of work experience and academic enrichment. There are essentially three components to the program: daily participation on a work crew; weekly classroom sessions; and voluntary recreational opportunities on a bi-weekly basis.

### Employment and Recreational Opportunities

The majority of youth work on crews performing basic ground maintenance in the city’s parks. Youth on these crews spend most of their hours removing trash, raking sand lots, pulling weeds, spreading wood chips, edging paths, and other routine or special maintenance tasks.

Crew of eight to ten youth and one supervisor are assigned to perform daily and special maintenance chores at each park. Youth work nine seven-hour days in two-week pay period, with the tenth day (payday) designated as a voluntary recreation day.

In implementing the 2001 project, the MPRB promoted several youth to Junior Assistants. These youth ad worked in TEEN TEAMWORKS previously AND HAD BEEN RECOGNIZED AS outstanding youth worker in their crews. These youth were involved in the Supervisor training process and provided great insights into the needs of youth. In the program Junior Assistants were leaders out in the field helping with difficult projects and working with crew members who needed extra support. This position was a great learning experience for the youth and became a position that other youth are striving to achieve.

Each year, Teen Teamwork youth participate in several special projects that go beyond general park maintenance work. One project had TEEN TEAMWORKERS design and paint a traveling mural that will go to different park buildings throughout the city to inspire other park users and to promote the program.

The Individual Placement component to the Teen Teamwork program was again such a success that this year we were able to place 30 youth one on one with a full-time MPRB staff member. These volunteer mentors came from all divisions of the MPRB. The work tasks youth completed proved to be very rewarding experiences for the teens. These special assignments included:

#### Southside Service Center

Youth placed here were exposed to an assortment of job assignments. A youth worker assigned to Shipping and Receiving was able to learn all aspects of his job. From taking and filling orders, stocking shelves to keeping track of inventory on paper and on the computer.

#### Maintenance Division

Working in the field under the direct supervision of park keepers and crew leaders provided another positive job opportunity for teens. Youth workers worked at different Park Centers or on routes helping to provide the basic cleaning and ground maintenance. Teaching youth how to operate power equipment safely and to ensure parks were secure for park users was a high priority. Other experiences included setting up, marking

and maintaining of football, soccer, softball and baseball fields. Youth also received training for the appropriate procedures for the cleaning and water treatment of wading pools.

**Recreation Division**

Youth assigned to work with Building and Center Directors were responsible for monitoring the safety of small children using the wading pools, tot lots and other park facilities. Teens helped schedule the use of park equipment and rooms, answered phones and establish a positive relationship with park users and other staff. Teens also planned and organized their own group activities such as craft projects or sport events. Teens developed important leadership skills and had the opportunity to become mentors themselves.

**Administration Division**

Two youth assigned to the downtown offices were a valuable asset to personnel in all divisions. These youth learned to run the switchboard, work on the computer, file and type. They also gained communication and organizational skills, as well as a great sense of self-esteem and self-confidence.

**Horticulture Division**

Youth were assigned to work with the gardening staff at the Rose Garden. Youth helped with the planting, pruning and weeding of gardens and learned about applying fertilizers and making your own compost.

**Finance Division**

Three youth workers had the opportunity to work along side staff in the finance department and were exposed to a variety of job assignments. Youths helped maintain various financial/payroll/accounting records; distribute financial information; process on-line expenditure/revenue transactions; operate computer spreadsheet/word processing applications; assisted in preparing financial reports and helped maintain inventory records.

**Academic Enrichment**

In addition to these work experiences, all youth also participate in the academic enrichment component of the Teen Teamwork project, which focuses on three areas: Basic skills development in reading, writing and math; Exploration of personal and social issues facing today's youth (for example, teen parenting, family violence and substance abuse); and Integration of classroom topics with work experience on the various crews (for example, teamwork, job seeking and keeping skills and filling out job applications).

These sessions introduced relevant topics to the participants and encouraged them to practice their reading, writing, math, and critical thinking skills. Supervisors and youth workers felt the educational sessions were beneficial because they got some helpful tips on how to communicate better with people and how to get and hold jobs more successfully. The educational sessions



also helped youth learn and practice job and social skills such as listening, communicating, contributing to group activities and understanding and meeting expectations.

In the past both academic and life skill lessons were covered in the weekly four hour educational session that youth attended. Both youth and educators agreed that more time was needed to accurately present and process all the information being offered. In 2001 funds were used to expand and enhance the existing educational/life skill component of the program. The academic segment remained in the classroom setting and was dedicated to improving math, reading and writing skills. The life skills segment was presented at the worksite (part) of each crew in a more intimate, relaxed setting for three additional hours.

Topics were selected on the basis of comments from participants in previous years, as well as formal and informal assessment of Minneapolis students and teachers during the school year.

Using a variety of interactive teaching techniques, including panel discussions and field trips, educational staff help the youth learn about appropriate work attitudes and behavior, sexual harassment, educational options, career exploration, decision-making and conflict resolution skills, teen parenting, and violence and family issues.

Having the Certified teachers in 2001 and the expanded Life Skills component allowed over 120 youth to earn and additional elective credit for a total of two. Having these credits to put toward high school graduation and the opportunity to re-take and pass the basic skills test meant a lot to the youth.

### Profile of Youth Served

TEEN TEAMWORKS 2001 youth workers ranged in age from 14 to 18; however, 74% were 14 or 15 years old. The majority (70%) of all youth workers were male. Research has consistently demonstrated that there is a higher correlation of "at risk" youth among adolescent males, especially young males of color.

An overview of 2001 youth workers statistics is represented below:

|                      |           |
|----------------------|-----------|
| YOUTH HIRED          | 181       |
| Male                 | 126 (70%) |
| Female               | 55 (30%)  |
| 14 – 15 years of age | 155 (85%) |
| 16 – 18 years of age | 26 (15%)  |
| Black                | 134 (74%) |
| White                | 20 (11%)  |
| American Indian      | 8 (4%)    |
| Hispanic             | 9 (5%)    |
| Asian                | 10 (6%)   |



## Outcomes

All staff, worksite supervisors and educational staff in the Teen Teamworks demonstrate an ethic of service to the youth. There is a real sense of caring and commitment. Supervisors and educators are highly conscious of the fact that, for many of the youth, they may well be the only positive adult role model. They routinely go “above and beyond” their job responsibilities in their efforts to help these youth.

The program is also making real strides at building a sense of community in each of the city’s neighborhoods. Youth are performing a much-needed community service in their “home” parks, which is appreciated by neighborhood residents. At the same time, they are also learning to value and respect the city’s natural resources, as well as work with peers from their neighborhoods to achieve common goals.

## Program Costs/Funding Sources

The program cost per participant (including the educational curriculum development and leadership) was \$2,762 per participant.

### Public Funding Sources:

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| Minnesota Department of Economic Security   | \$250,000 |
| Minneapolis Department of Family and Health | \$10,000  |
| Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board       | \$255,000 |

**Total Funding from Public and Private Sources**      \$500,000

## 2001 Earn While You Learn Student Evaluation

*“What is one thing you learned from the Life Skills topics that you think will help you make decisions now or in the future?”*

Some of the student responses were:

- Why teens should wait to have sex
- Not to have sex while I am still in school
- About HIV
- Not to have unprotected sex
- About budgeting my money
- About how things can affect my whole life
- Communication and how to relax
- How to spend money wisely
- I learned it’s best to be assertive and not to have sex
- Knowing what ready really means
- Not to waste my life
- Think before I made a decision
- Plan for what I want and save money
- Positive ways to communicate a point
- Don’t have sex while I’m 14
- The risks of having sex
- Stop and make a list of reasons not to have sex
- About my health

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## For Additional Information, Contact:

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## Comments from Youth Participants

*"The thing I like about work is when we do a lot of work and get recognized for it."*

*"I think this was a good program because it [gave me] a chance to see what it was like [to have] a job at a young age."*

*"People say good things about our work on the parks."*

*"I have really enjoyed this program this year. I like the feeling of helping out the community."*

*"After being in this Teen Teamworks for the Park Board, I feel good because I helped clean our environment and also learned about teamwork."*

