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- Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board



## 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 1996. This report includes an overview of the program, results achieved, a profile of youth served and program costs.

## Program Overview

### 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. This semiautonomous body manages a total of approximately 6,000 acres including 170 park properties, 60 playgrounds, six municipal golf courses, gardens, picnic areas, indoor ice arenas, tennis centers and three outdoor pools across the city.

Forty-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 programs annually. These programs serve pre-schoolers to senior citizens, and special programs serve those with mental and/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 connect 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 over 2,200 youth since its inception in 1986. This program offers a 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 among this age group 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.

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

### Community Needs

The MPRB has identified changing social and economic needs as a primary reason for an expanded summer youth employment and training program. Recent trends in Minneapolis 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 on a daily basis which can combine to place youth in jeopardy of a lifetime of

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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. The relationship between dropping out of school in adolescence and chronic unemployment or underemployment as adults is not primarily from a shortage of available jobs, but from a significant deficiency in the work skills and attitudes expected of them in the workplace.

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 last decade. The increase in 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.

Minnesota statistics include the following:

- 17 percent of youth are school dropouts. (Source: 1990-91 MN Dept. of Education)
- 17.4 percent of teenage girls become pregnant. (Source: 1990 MN Dept. of Health)
- 12.4 percent of children live in households in poverty. (Source: 1990 U.S. Census)
- 42 percent of 12th grade youth use alcohol or illegal drugs at least once a month. (Source: 1992 Minnesota Student Survey)
- 7.9 percent of youth are victims of neglect, physical, sexual or psychological abuse. (Source: 1990 Minnesota Department of Human Services)
- 2.6 percent of youth have committed a violent or delinquent act. (Source: 1990 Minnesota Department of Public Safety)

## **Program Activities and Services**

During the summer of 1996, MPRB received funding under the Minnesota Youth Program to operate four Teen Teamworks program components: park maintenance, bike patrol, Earn While You Learn educational sessions and Pride, Respect and Inner Strength workshops.

### **Park Maintenance**

Crews of eight to ten youth completed park maintenance work at neighborhood parks with an on-site adult supervisor in charge. Tasks completed included: maintenance of the J.D. Rivers Children's Garden, spreading wood chips, cleaning up lake shores and swimming areas, edging park lawns and paths, serving as support staff at community events, and general maintenance of neighborhood parks. Youth were assigned to work in their own neighborhood to help increase their connection to the community and allow neighbors to see the results of their efforts.

### **Bike Patrol**

Youth worked with Minneapolis Park police to patrol parks and bike paths, provide information to bikers and other park users, and help at neighborhood bike rodeos where children learn bike safety.

### **Earn While You Learn Educational Sessions**

All youth in the MPRB summer youth program participated in weekly sessions focusing on issues such as:

- Attitudes about work
- Value of money, banking and savings
- Decision-making: budgeting and spending
- Dealing with conflict
- Jobs and career interests
- Job interview skills
- Success in school; future goals and planning
- Awards and recognition ceremony

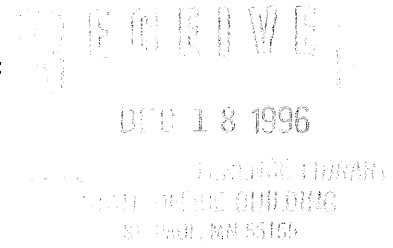
The sessions involved experiential learning, small group sharing, reading and reporting of articles related to each topic, math exercises and structured role playing. These sessions were led by staff from Lutheran Social Services, the MPRB Youthline Outreach Mentor Program and certified teachers hired to integrate selected reading and math exercises related to the subject matter. Participants were paid an hourly wage for attending these sessions and

attendance was excellent. Approximately 150 youth earned enough hours to qualify for an elective credit from the Minneapolis Public Schools.

### **Pride, Respect and Inner Strength Workshops**

The other educational component was Pride, Respect and Inner Strength, a series of three hour workshops each crew member attended which was led by staff from Lutheran Social Services and the Harriet Tubman Center. These workshops focused on helping youth create their own definition of pride, respect and inner strength and understanding how these qualities impact their daily lives and relationships.

- Topics presented through lectures, videos, group discussion and activities included:
- Respecting each person's right to express opinions—agreeing to disagree
- Small group discussions on what is pride and respect
- How self-control relates to inner strength
- Advice youth can offer to others struggling to find their inner strength
- Creating a message—a collage—about pride, respect and inner strength
- Making good decisions about pride and reducing violence



Each park had respectful and insightful participation. The video, South Central: Looking For Pride, elicited profound remarks and discussion among youth about the realities of gangs, drug dealing, temptations to make easy money, and deaths of friends and family. Each participant wrote a memo to themselves about their own pride, respect and inner strength. Finally, youth self-addressed an envelope and the memo, along with an "Inner Strength" handout was mailed to them.

### **Outcomes**

Youth participants accomplished the following:

- Completed projects in their neighborhood parks
- Earned money
- Developed positive relationships with adult role models and other youth
- Learned the value of teamwork
- Acquired landscaping, gardening and recreation program skills
- Developed more initiative, independence, responsibility and maturity
- Developed an awareness of career options while learning skills necessary for successful employment
- Developed an awareness of the importance of succeeding in school

### **The community benefitted in the following ways:**

- Completion of need park maintenance and recreation program work
- Youth gained experience as resources for improving neighborhoods
- Youth participated in positive activities and behaviors
- Increased respect for park and recreation facilities by youth
- Removal of graffiti from picnic tables, benches, buildings, tot lot equipment, tennis backboards and baseball/softball benches

### **Program Costs/Funding Sources**

**Public Funding Sources:**

Minnesota Youth Program .....	\$250,000
Minneapolis City Council/CDBG Funds .....	\$75,000
Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board .....	\$153,600

**Private Foundation Sources:**

Pillsbury Company Foundation .....	\$25,000
Dayton-Hudson Foundation .....	\$20,000

**Total Funding From Public and Private Sources: .....** \$523,600

## Cost Per Participant

The average state cost per participant for the 1996 Minnesota Youth Program operated by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board was \$1,588.

## Statistical Profile of Youth Participants

The overall 1996 summer youth employment enrollment was 247; however, the number of youth funded by the Minnesota Youth Program was 173. A demographic profile of these participants follows:

	Total	Percent
Total Enrollment .....	173	100
Male .....	109	63
Female .....	64	37
14-15 Year Olds .....	133	77
16-17 Year Olds .....	64	21
18-21 Year Olds .....	3	2
African American .....	105	61
Asian American .....	24	14
Native American .....	5	3
Hispanic.....	2	1
White .....	26	15
Other .....	11	6
Young Persons of Color .....	138	80
Young Persons With Disabilities .....	10	6
Public Assistance Recipients.....	135	78
Participants With Limited English .....	16	9
Teen Parents .....	14	8
Juvenile Offenders.....	24	14
Foster Children.....	7	4
Students .....	135	79
Participants With Limited School Success .....	55	32
School Dropouts.....	10	6
Post-High School Participants.....	18	11

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