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1998

# MINNEAPOLIS PARK & RECREATION SUMMER YOUTH REPORT

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## 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 1998. This report includes an overview of the program, outcomes, a profile of youth served, and program costs.

## COMMUNITY NEEDS

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. Increases in poverty, alcohol and other chemical abuse, teen pregnancy, gang activity, serious juvenile crime, and school dropout rates 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 face these multiple risk factors which can set them up for 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. The MPRB has identified these changing social and economic needs as a primary reason for an expanded summer employment and training program.

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

MPRB operates Teen Teamworks, a summer employment program that has served more than 3,000 youth since its inception in 1986. This program provides park maintenance and recreation assistance to the city, as well as work experience and educational opportunities to unemployed or underemployed at-risk youth between the ages of 14 and 18.

High unemployment among this group of youth is primarily due to a lack of basic skills and unrealistic expectations of what is required to succeed in the work world, not a shortage of available jobs. Without appropriate intervention, this may translate into chronic unemployment or underemployment as adults. Helping young teens acquire an appreciation of the connection between academic, social, judgment and job skills has been the ongoing focus of the Teen Teamworks project.

## PROGRAM ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES

"Teen Teamworks/Earn While You Learn" offers Minneapolis youth the opportunity to earn money and learn 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 biweekly voluntary recreational opportunities.

## EMPLOYMENT AND RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

The majority of youth work on crews performing basic grounds maintenance in the city's parks. Crews of 8-10 youth and one supervisor at each park spend most of their time removing trash, raking sand lots, pulling weeds, spreading wood chips, edging paths, and performing other routine or special maintenance tasks. Youth work nine 7-hour days in each two-week pay period, with the tenth day (payday) designated as a voluntary recreation day. Each year, Teen Teamworks youth participate in several special projects that go beyond general park maintenance work. In 1998, the MPRB added a new Individual Placement component to the Teen Teamworks program. Sixteen youth worked one-on-one with a full-time MPRB staff member. These volunteer mentors came from all divisions of the MPRB, and the experiences proved to be very rewarding for the teens. These special assignments included:

### ● *Southside Service Center*

A youth worker assigned to Shipping and Receiving was able to learn all aspects of his job, from taking and filling orders, to stocking shelves and keeping track of inventory on paper and by computer. Two youth assigned to the front offices were a valuable asset to personnel in Forestry, Environmental and Operations divisions. These youth built communication and organizational skills while learning to run the switchboard, work on the computer, file and type documents. All youth helped with building and grounds maintenance and gained a great sense of self esteem and self confidence.

### ● *Maintenance Division*

Youth workers were assigned to different park centers or on routes under the direct supervision of Parkkeepers and Crewleaders, providing basic cleaning and grounds maintenance. A high priority was placed on teaching the youth how to safely operate power equipment and ensure the parks were secure for park users. Other experiences included setting up, marking, and maintaining football, soccer, softball and baseball fields. Youth were also trained in the appropriate procedures for cleaning and treating the water in park wading pools.

### ● *Recreation Division*

Youth assigned to this division worked with Building and Center Directors and were responsible for safely monitoring 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 established a positive relationship with park users and other staff. Teens also planned and organized their own group activities such as craft projects or sporting events. Youth working in this area experienced valuable opportunities to build leadership skills and become mentors to other youth.

## ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT

In addition to work and recreational experiences, all youth also participated in the academic enrichment component of the Teen Teamworks project, which focused 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 the work experience (for example, learning teamwork, job search and retention skills)

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Basic skills remediation in reading and math formed the core subject areas in the classroom. These sessions introduced relevant topics to the participants and encouraged them to practice their reading, writing, math, and critical thinking skills. The educational sessions also helped youth learn and practice job and social skills (listening, communicating, hand shakes, participation, following expectations) and gave them an opportunity to express themselves. Other aspects of the curriculum included weekly exploration of special topics of interest to the youth. These topics were selected on the basis of comments from participants in previous years, as well as input from Minneapolis students and teachers during the school year.

Using a variety of interactive teaching techniques, including panel discussions and field trips, educational staff helped 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. One highlight of the 1998 program occurred during group discussions on "Dealing With People That Are Different." Youth really opened up to each other, sharing some of their own painful experiences and offering support to one another.

Youth who successfully complete the Earn While You Learn program earn an elective credit towards their high school diploma. Many youth see this as a key benefit of the program.

## OUTCOMES

Through the Team Teenworks project, disadvantaged youth learn job-seeking and retention skills during positive on-the-job training experiences. During their participation, youth learn how to communicate with their peers, be on time, follow directions, work as a member of a team within a multi-cultural/ethnic work crew, and positively interact with the public. In addition, youth acquire many park maintenance skills (including gardening, landscaping, lawn care techniques and tool safety) throughout the summer.

The Teen Teamworks experience not only allows youth to earn a bi-weekly paycheck, it also facilitates community service and leadership opportunities, enhances educational attainment, and provides an opportunity to be mentored by caring, available, and concerned adults. Supervisors and educators are highly conscious of the fact that, for many of the youth, they may be the only positive adult role model. They routinely go "above and beyond" their job responsibilities in their efforts to help these youth.

Parents have indicated that the Team Teenworks experience results in greater success in school due to increased self esteem, greater self discipline, greater respect for adults in authority, and improved ability to follow directions. As an added bonus, youth earn money for school clothes and supplies, and gain plenty of practice in getting up early.

The program is also making real strides at building a sense of community in each of the city's neighborhoods. The program enhances adult/youth relations, as youth are perceived as contributing members of the community. 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 and work with peers from their neighborhoods to achieve common goals.

## PROFILE OF YOUTH SERVED

A total of 213 youth participated in the program this summer. The Minnesota Youth Program funded the participation of 152 of these youth. A demographic profile of these 152 participants follows:

	Total	Percent
Total Enrollment.....	152	100
Male.....	93	61
Female.....	59	39
14-15 Year Olds.....	117	77
16-18 Year Olds.....	35	23
African American.....	107	70
Native American.....	12	8
Asian American.....	14	9
Hispanic.....	5	3
White.....	14	9
Young Persons with Disabilities.....	3	2
Public Assistance Recipients.....	93	61
Participants with Limited English Skills.....	10	7
Teen Parents.....	9	6
Juvenile Offenders.....	28	18
Foster Children.....	9	6
Students.....	150	99
Participants with Limited School Success.....	30	20
Post-High School Participants.....	2	1

## PROGRAM COSTS/FUNDING SOURCES

The average state cost per participant for the 1998 Minnesota Youth Program operated by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board was \$1,551.64.

Minnesota Department of Economic Security.....	\$235,850
Minneapolis City Council/CDBG Funds.....	\$70,000
Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board.....	\$130,850
Pillsbury Company Foundation.....	\$15,000
Dayton-Hudson Foundation.....	\$20,000

## THE MINNEAPOLIS PARK AND RECREATION BOARD

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, 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.

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, including individuals 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 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.

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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."