

GANGS in Texas Cities

MODEL PROGRAMS REPORT No. 1: Parks and Recreation



Office of the Attorney General

DAN MORALES

Texas Attorney General

September 1991

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Model Programs Report No. 1 Parks & Recreation



Attorney General Dan Morales visits a community program in Abilene, profiled on page 33.

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Texas Attorney General**

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Office of the Attorney General
State of Texas

DAN MORALES
ATTORNEY GENERAL

September 1991

Dear Concerned Texan:

A few months ago, I issued a report, *Gangs in Texas Cities*, as a first response to the alarming growth of criminal street gangs. At that time, I encouraged new partnerships among various groups, both governmental and private, at all levels of involvement. Preventive programs were a part of my policy recommendations for stemming the tide of criminal behavior among youth.

Texas' parks and recreation professionals are on the front lines of work to prevent gang violence and to provide positive alternative activities for youth at risk of involvement in criminal behavior. This report, the first in a planned series on Model Programs, highlights the innovative work of parks and recreation programs in eight Texas cities where preventing gang violence is a community priority.

The following cities, and many others like them, are using recreation as a major alternative to gang behavior:

Abilene
Dallas
McAllen

Amarillo
Houston
San Antonio

Corpus Christi
Lubbock

Recreational skills provide life-long benefits. Many claim that recreation is effective in reducing delinquency and crime, attaining and sustaining physical and mental health, and developing positive self-image and character. I concur with this analysis. Of course, recreation as a preventive measure for at-risk youth is not the **only** solution, but it is one that has been effective. Considering the enormity of the problem, I think any solution that works is worthy of pursuit.

Most of the articles that appear in this report were supplied by the **Texas Recreation and Park Society**. I am grateful to them for providing this wealth of useful information, and it is my hope that this report will be helpful to you in determining creative solutions for our youth, since the youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow.

Sincerely,

Dan Morales
Attorney General

Gangs in Texas Cities

MODEL PROGRAMS REPORT

No. 1: Parks & Recreation

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SOLVING THE GANG PROBLEM:

What Works

By itself, law enforcement cannot "solve" the gang problem. A 1991 survey of eight major Texas cities found over 700 gangs with some 13,000 gang members---in those eight cities alone. Thirty-eight of the fifty largest cities in the state report the presence of gangs on their streets. We can't just lock them all up---nor should we. These young people are our future, our children. They deserve better from us.

We must begin by asking ourselves why children are choosing this dangerous and destructive path. In most cases, the answer is that they have not chosen it. Most kids join gangs for lack of anything better to do. They join gangs because they cannot find status and acceptance anywhere else; because much of the time no one knows where they are, and no one is watching what they do. These are idle hands, and idle minds.

There is much we can do to solve the gang problem. We can bring young children in from the streets after school, when their parents are still at work. We can provide them with baseball bats and gloves, and keep score. Kids need field trips in the summer and a safe place to make friends. They need nutritious snacks and lunches. And, above all, they sometimes need the undivided attention of a responsible and friendly adult. No one is in a better position to offer this wide range of services than the local parks and recreation departments of our cities. This volume represents a sampling of the rich diversity of ideas they are offering to Texas youth today.

Some of the programs featured here are gang prevention programs per se; most are not. But all are going head-to-head with gangs in direct competition for our children's loyalty and trust. Some programs offer kids the chance to be creative with air-brush art---in place of graffiti. Other programs offer boxing and wrestling---in place of knife fights. They offer team sports instead of gang wars. They offer children a companionship, acceptance, and excitement. They offer leadership and the opportunity to be a leader.

Accountability must be a major ingredient in any major social service initiative. We need ways to measure what works. It is partly for this reason that the Attorney General is establishing a state-wide gang database. Eventually we should be able to say with some confidence whether the gang problem in a particular city is getting better or worse. In the meantime we

can search for fresh and promising ideas. What we are offering in this volume is a report on the positive, imaginative, and innovative programs that are winning children away from the streets of Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, Corpus Christi, Abilene, Amarillo, Lubbock, and McAllen.

Although we must strive for accountability, we must also remember that many of the kids who flirt with the idea of joining a gang, and many of those who find their way into recreational programs and neighborhood centers, are not yet in trouble with the law. Most are not young criminals, and the difference made in their lives will not necessarily show up in crime statistics. Ultimately the measure of our success is in their presence, their frowns of concentration and their smiles. Success can sometimes be uneventful. We must get behind these programs; we must guard against complacency; and we must be persistent.

The programs described in this volume are only a sample of the many worthwhile initiatives underway in Texas today. The Attorney General welcomes information, stories and photographs from gang prevention and intervention programs throughout the state. Please send all materials to:

The Office of the Attorney General

Research & Policy Management Division

PO Box 12548

Austin, Texas 78711-2548

(We cannot guarantee the return of any photographs and other materials.)

Dallas, Texas:

The Dallas Juvenile Gang Intervention Program combines all the right ingredients with an unusually creative flair. The program is collaborative and community-based. It provides a broad range of services, yet targets the gang problem in very specific ways.

INCREASING THE PEACE:

The Dallas Juvenile Gang Intervention Program

This article is derived from interviews and notes provided by program director Luis Llerena.

The Dallas Juvenile Gang Intervention Program is a collaborative response involving three major city departments: Park and Recreation, Health and Human Services, and the Dallas Police Department. The city has been developing program sites since July 1, 1991. Program leaders select the areas most affected by the gang problem and designate the local park and recreation centers as headquarters for late-night outreach programming. The Dallas City Manager's Office requires citywide collaboration of all city youth service providers. In keeping with this policy, the gang intervention program taps the resources of a wide variety of public and private organizations.

The idea of using the park and recreation centers has been very effective. Many private programs are housed in converted residential buildings; but while these facilities may provide a comfortable and intimate setting for many purposes, they are not equipped to support the full range of recreational events needed for active young people. Local park and recreation centers are equipped with gymnasiums, large meeting rooms, and other attached facilities like tennis courts, basketball courts, soccer fields, softball fields and swimming pools. The Dallas Juvenile Gang Intervention Program takes full advantage of the city's existing assets, choosing from over 40 park and recreation centers and 22 swimming pools.

How the Program Works. In a selected neighborhood, when the recreation center would normally close its doors at eight or ten o'clock in the evening, the gang intervention staff takes over. Program staff plan and supervise all late-night activities. In the afternoon the staff is on the streets, near the schools and in places where young people hang out, establishing rapport with the kids, handing out flyers, and letting them know about upcoming events. Eventually the program staff comes to be known, trusted and heard among neighborhood youth.

Many young people who are involved in gangs are not involved in violence. Luis Llerena estimates that, among the gang-involved youth that he knows,

"Ninety percent of them are just along for the ride. They are involved in criminal activity, but not involved at the same level as the 10%. The 10% are the ones involved in the murders, the drive-by shootings, the burglaries, the violence in general. The 90% are at risk, but they can still be reached by a program such as ours."

The program adheres to a firm and well-publicized policy toward the more violent ten percent: the recreation centers do not allow the participation of a young person who has multiple warrants for his arrest, or a record of criminal activity and no desire to change. That person is regarded as the responsibility of the police gang unit.

The gang intervention program actively promotes choice as a theme: young people choose what to make of their lives. Llerena continually reminds them that they can either be hunted by police gang units or they can respond to the recreational gang intervention program. They can end up in prison or they can take advantage of the services the city offers to help them change their lives for the better. Llerena says,

"I think this is very crucial: we need to teach young people decision-making skills. That's another service that's provided by our program. Many young people forget to think about the consequences of their choices."

Promoting the Message. "The choice is yours" is the heart of the anti-gang public service promotional initiative. The gang intervention program works in collaboration with the Dallas Police Department's Gang Unit to sponsor television ads, T-shirts, and posters. Funding is an ongoing problem, and many projects are still in the planning phase. Posters have been made and distributed, but so far they only appear in English. Spanish translations are ready, but cannot be printed until additional funds are found. The plan is for all public service announcements to be in both Spanish and English.

A T-shirt campaign will incorporate a catchy phrase---"increase the peace"---from a recent anti-gang movie, *Boyz N the Hood*. With the city attorney's advice, Llerena is approaching Columbia Pictures for permission to use the phrase, and for help in funding the T-shirt project. If Columbia Pictures gives its blessing, Llerena will extend the use of the "increase the peace" slogan to all his public service announcements.

Community Relations. In the neighborhoods, the program has established community advisory councils for gang intervention activities. Their role is to mobilize and include the people of the neighborhood in the planning process so they will be able to see themselves as part of the solution to their own

problem. Members of the community are aware of all the plans being implemented, and they are involved in an advisory capacity in the actual design of the anti-gang program for their center.

Every park and recreation center already has a neighborhood advisory council by virtue of a city policy requirement. The gang intervention councils supplement these, and are subordinate to them. This reinforces the existing community structure, instead of rivalling it. It wins a focused concern and support for the gang intervention effort. In addition to these adult advisory councils there are also youth advisory councils. The gang intervention program supports these units by encouraging young people who are developing maturity and responsibility to join the youth council. The youth councils raise their own funds, plan projects, and learn to play a leadership role in their community.

The city's gang intervention program is not intended as a permanent addition to the park and recreation centers. Funding limits Llerena's team to the establishment, training and implementation of a program that can be carried on by the regular recreation center staff and the community.

"We come in like a trauma team, establish the program, train folks, and then move on to the next targeted area in the city."

It is an important philosophical element of the program that gang-involved young people are part of the special anti-gang curricula for only a limited amount of time. It is Llerena's conviction that young people who are identified as gang members should be encouraged to put that identity behind them as soon as possible.

"Our intent is to earmark these young people initially and then to mainstream them into the normal youth programming of the park and recreation department."

Llerena extends this policy to the families: they may be earmarked initially as a special needs groups, but they are encouraged to eventually become a part of the normal programming.

Parenting Classes. Many programs attract young people through activities geared to the special needs of teenagers, but do nothing to address the ongoing problems that their families are experiencing at home. Many parents have not themselves been parented correctly or sufficiently, and many simply follow the example of their own parents in how they raise their children. The city's program addresses this problem by offering parenting classes. Culturally sensitive curricula are furnished by the Corporate Child Development Fund in Austin, Texas.

According to Llerena, parents of gang-involved youth are often afraid of their own children. Frequently the children are physically bigger and stronger than their parents, and are as articulate as their parents when they argue. Parents who have not learned to deal with their children effectively often become fearful and intimidated.

"And of course when the young person comes home carrying a 9 mm weapon, or if an Uzi machine gun is found underneath that person's bed, the parents are terrified. They forget that these young people are their own children, and consider them actual criminals inhabiting their homes. When this happens, parents are not only desperate, but they have a sense of giving up. It's not that they don't want to try, but they are literally overwhelmed with fear, with anxiousness, with a sense of not knowing what to do."

The parenting classes are designed to help parents understand where they came from, who they are, and why they are the way they are. Many parents need to understand how their own parents related to them before they can learn to relate to their own children in a more positive and productive way.

Journey Anti-Gang Camp. The Bill Barrett Trust/Communities Foundation of Texas, Inc. and the Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Dallas, Inc. sponsor a camp with a strong anti-gang program. The Dallas Gang Intervention Program takes every opportunity to send its gang-involved youth to the Journey Camp. In a recent session some thirty young people participated in a challenging high ropes course and listened to hard-hitting presentations about the choices they were making. Representatives from the Drug Enforcement Agency were present, along with the Dallas Police Gang Unit and representatives from state corrections institutions. Inmates were brought in under heavy guard to describe their experiences in terms that were, for these young people, riveting. The combination of activities provides the campers with the kind of physical and emotional intensity they are attracted to. For some, the experience is pivotal.

The Gang Intervention Program continues to refer gang-involved youth to the Journey Anti-Gang Camp, and is currently trying to arrange for the use of a local high ropes course for youth who are not able to participate in the three day trip. Program staff find that the high ropes play an especially effective role in the development of trust and comradery:

"When you are up there 35 feet in the air between two trees on a half inch cable, these tough guys realize that because of our training and our ability we can keep them safe and guide them in a way that will help them stay alive."

Llerena's message is quite literally meaningful to the youth participating in the Gang Intervention Program: in many cases, the program workers are helping young people with a choice that is a matter of life or death.

Services and Training. Job Training Partnership Act funds are distributed in Dallas through a non-profit agency known as the Private Industry Council. A number of non-profit agencies subcontract for these funds, and young people involved in the Juvenile Gang Intervention Program are eligible for services. The available services include training in eleven job competency areas. Youth also learn how to prepare resumes and fill out application forms. They are taught such vital things as how to behave in job interviews, how to ask appropriate questions, and what to wear.

Other services include crisis pregnancy counseling, and alcohol and drug abuse prevention. Program youth have access to free treatment for alcohol and drug abuse. Schools, public agencies, and private non-profits have come together in a collaborative effort to provide additional services and opportunities, such as GED preparation for young people who have dropped out of school. Llerena says,

"This is the key that every city has to understand, that we need to drop the sense of turf in regard to service provision areas and in regard to the relationships between the profit and the nonprofit and the public provision of services."

Project Clean Slate. One of the Gang Intervention Program's most highly visible activities is "Project Clean Slate." Program staff invite the community to come out on a Saturday morning and paint over the gang graffiti defacing property in the neighborhood. The city provides the paint, and program staff members work alongside the people of the community. Program workers scrupulously avoid language and behavior that could be construed as challenging to the local gangs. The cleanup crew assumes the attitude of adults demonstrating their resolve to deal with vandalism quickly and consistently.

Project Clean Slate is somewhat controversial. Critics have charged that the graffiti cleanup campaign is a superficial response, and pessimists have predicted that the gangs would just repaint the clean walls. But Luis Llerena, like many professionals in the field, sees the clean up strategy as an important first step in gang prevention. He offers an analogy in defense of this program:

"When you cut your finger you don't allow it to bleed thinking you will cut it again eventually. Each time the finger is cut you give attention to it to insure its proper healing."

Until recently, the newly painted walls stayed clean, and the participating neighborhoods seem to find their Saturday morning work a heartening and symbolic gesture of their determination to increase the peace. In Llerena's words,

"The gangs in the area seem to get a message. And the message is that the adults are still in charge."

Lubbock, Texas:

The key phrase is "cooperative effort." In every respect, from mobilizing the community to winning grant funds, the projects that enlist the help of more than one organization have the advantage. The program featured in this article is supported by police and schools, in addition to Parks and Recreation.

B-POP/R-POP:

Summer Recreation for Lubbock's Teens

Lee Osborn, Director, Lubbock Parks and Recreation Department

If you were to drop by Lubbock's Alderson Junior High gym on a typical Sunday evening in the summer, you would find about 200 teenagers playing basketball, socializing with their friends, and not being the nuisance they were three summers ago. These teens are participating in a program called B-POP (Butler Park Outreach Program), which is organized by the City of Lubbock's Parks and Recreation Department, and which is funded through a Community Development Block Grant. B-POP provides alternative recreation and leisure activities for these teenagers by opening neighborhood gyms, by planning teen dances and parties at city community centers, and by allowing teenagers to socialize in a relaxed, but supervised environment. Besides parks and recreation staff, personnel include the school district's coaches at the gyms and police officers, usually out of uniform, who are in attendance at all B-POP events.

Organized three years ago, in a cooperative effort among the Parks and Recreation Department, the Police Department, and the local school district, B-POP was proposed as a solution to the problem of too many teenagers just "hanging out" at Butler Park during the summer. The teens' presence and their activities at the park caused citizen complaints, police action, and was beginning to hurt the park's reputation. After the B-POP Program was implemented, several positive results occurred immediately. Citizen

complaints concerning the park ended. Teens were happy to have programs in school gymnasiums and community centers at their disposal to exercise and socialize. Besides the police receiving fewer complaints concerning teen mischief, the officers who worked with the B-POP program found themselves getting better acquainted with the community and with the teenagers. The program not only gave the teens alternative leisure and recreational opportunities, but helped promote other community center activities, and put the city government in a positive light.

For its third summer, B-POP was expanded to include R-POP (for Rodgers and Rawlings Parks), which is a sister program established through Community Development Block Grant funds in two other areas of the city. B-POP/R-POP, as it is now called, is generating the same positive response from the teens and the citizens in these new neighborhoods. Each R-POP Program operates on the same premise as B-POP, but each is flexible enough to be tailored to the interests and activities of each neighborhood's teenagers. Along with scheduling the nights the gyms and community centers are open for teens, tournaments are planned, volleyball nights are scheduled, and dances are arranged. The expanded programs have achieved the same positive results as the initial program. Last year B-POP attracted 6,729 teens, while R-POP, in its first year, attracted 4,728 teens. Obviously, both the citizens and the city government have a good feeling about this program.

As B-POP/R-POP prepares for its fourth summer, the program's mission continues to focus on the changing interests and needs of Lubbock's teen population. The program's goal continues to be to provide positive recreational and leisure services for teens. In addition, the program will continue to maintain a creative responsiveness to meet the needs of the participating teenagers. With community support and a positive partnership among those involved, B-POP/R-POP promises to again have a successful summer.

San Antonio, Texas:

The program described in this article is supported by a consortium that reaches out to the business community, professional sports, and a national non-profit association. The article was provided by the National Youth Sports Coaches Association of San Antonio, and Frank Martin, Executive Director.

SAN ANTONIO CREATES BASKETBALL LEAGUE FOR AT-RISK KIDS

No one knows kids' sports better in San Antonio than Frank Martin. After all, that's his job. For nearly eight years, Frank has been the Director of the Texas Chapter of the National Youth Sports Coaches Association (NYSCA), a non-profit educational program providing training for volunteer coaches and administrators in non-school youth sports programs. The NYSCA of Texas offices are in San Antonio, where Frank oversees NYSCA chapters in 50 Texas communities.

Over the years, Frank has kept in touch with almost all of the youth league presidents and administrators in San Antonio to encourage them to train and certify their coaches and to offer a variety of other assistance to the league.

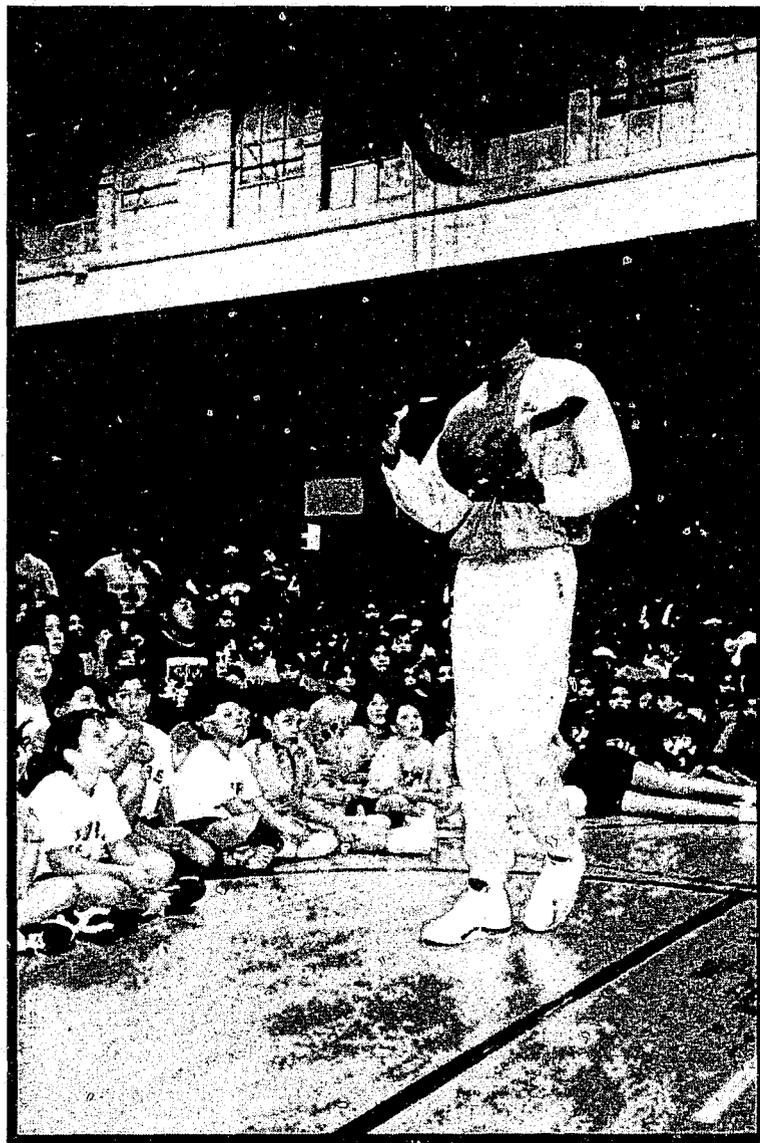
Almost from the time the NYSCA program was established in the Alamo City, Frank has been lobbying local recreation and sports leaders to encourage them to develop more sports leagues for at-risk kids in the less affluent areas of the city---the central city and south side. His philosophy was simple---get the kids off the streets at night and into the gyms and playgrounds where they could compete against others in a friendly sports environment under supervision of trained volunteer coaches.

Last December, while attending a meeting with Parks & Recreation, YMCA, and Boys and Girls Club leaders, Frank and Spurs' Assistant Coach, Gregg Popovich, devised a community-based basketball league that would include all of these agencies and would have strong anti-drug messages. Within three weeks of the first meeting, Frank and Gregg had sold the idea to the Spurs organization, and the Spurs All American Youth Basketball League began to take shape.

A five-member Board of Directors, consisting of representatives from each of the three community organizations, NYSCA, and the Spurs, began meeting twice weekly to put the entire basketball league together. The Spurs Foundation and the Diamond Shamrock Corporation donated jerseys for all the players, as well as basketballs, score books, and some administrative funds. NYSCA trained the volunteer coaches free of charge and provided

materials on staying drug-free for the coaches to discuss with team members.

Meanwhile, each organization signed up its players, registered its teams, established common playing rules and age groupings, recruited referees, and decided on playing locations and an eight week schedule. League play began the week of January 28 with over 1100 participants and 116 teams---less than six weeks from the time the idea of a drug-free basketball league was first conceived. The teams were separated into four conferences---Eastern, Western, Southern, and Girls---and each conference had four age groupings from 9 to 16 years of age.



San Antonio Spurs star Willie Anderson talks to members of the Spurs All American Youth Basketball League at a clinic conducted at Woodlawn Gym, San Antonio Parks and Recreation Department.

One hundred sixty-four volunteers completed the six-hour NYSCA coaches certification training that included the requirement to sign their players up for the NYSCA All American Drug-Free Team, a new anti-drug concept created by NYSCA nationally. This program supplied educational materials, a support letter from President Bush, and sports celebrities. Late in the season, each player attended a special basketball clinic conducted by Spurs star Willie Anderson, who agreed to be the honorary captain of the league, and Coach Popovich. During the clinic, both Willie and Coach "Pop" talked about drugs and encouraged kids to "Just Say No" when offered the opportunity to try drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. Over 1000 kids and parents attended the free clinic and received a variety of gifts from the Spurs and NYSCA.

Plans are already underway to expand the league next year in order to accommodate the 800 additional players who are expected to register. The league will expand to additional areas of the city and will include age groupings for both younger and older kids. With continued strong support from community-minded businesses like the Spurs and Diamond Shamrock, there's almost no limit to the league size and the amount of good it will do for the at-risk kids of San Antonio.

For more information contact NYSCA of Texas at (512) 654-4707.

Houston, Texas:

The spirit of voluntarism and community service belongs at the heart of a program like this one. The Park Kids are not passive recipients of services: they are a positive and proactive force in themselves---promoting the "drug-free" message, turning their energies to community service projects, and joining forces with other groups of enterprising young people.

MAINSTREAMING SUBSTANCE ABUSE EDUCATION

*Linda I. Rudd, Senior Superintendent, Recreation and Leisure Services,
Houston Parks and Recreation Department*

"That was the most fun I've ever had in my entire life!" began the message nine-year-old Roberto left on the answering machine in my office. I smiled. I knew what he meant. That day about a thousand members of the Park Kids "Say Yes To Life Club" program had been to their first city-wide "School's Out Bash at Springwoods Park." "I'm going to tell my Daddy to stop drinking beer

because it's not good for him!" My smile widened. He got the message---good!

Living in a city the size of Houston can be risky business for any kid, much less park kids. Every recreation center in the city has a group of "regulars" we affectionately call "park kids". They come to the park every day. They participate in various structured and free play activities and programs. They are there all day when school is out and during the summer. Most of them could be called "latchkey children," but not in the true sense of the term. Both of their parents probably aren't working---not because they don't want to work, but because they can't find a job. It is through these children that you keep your finger on the pulse of the neighborhood, and thus, the communities that make up our city. Drugs at the park have always been a problem, but a minor problem considering the vastness of the city and the number of recreation centers operated (more than 50). But somehow, overnight, the problem accelerated from "pot smokers" and "glue sniffers" to "crackheads" and "drug lords."

In the spring of 1988, the Houston Parks and Recreation Department consciously decided to combat the surge of the drug epidemic into our recreation centers by developing a strategy to incorporate drug abuse education into our youth programming. From the beginning, we decided to widen the scope to include other negative lifestyles which threaten children and youth by incorporating unwanted pregnancy, juvenile crime, and child abuse prevention into the program concept. The objective would be two-fold: provide prevention technique training for staff and develop a youth program with a preventive focus.

Various agencies in the city have resources to provide prevention training. By contracting with a prevention training specialist, we gathered together these resources and coordinated an intensive training program for recreation staff that gave them a knowledge base from which to work. Ongoing training in prevention and related issues is provided each quarter through a contract with the University of Houston's School of Social Work.

Since we knew kids like to socialize with each other, and we had heard repeatedly from them that "kids listen to other kids, not adults," we decided to develop programs that kids could control. By using a club format, a peer group could be formed with a positive peer pressure focus featuring social interaction with adults and other kids, coordinated events and activities, educational programs and community service projects. Thus, the Park Kids "Say Yes To Life" Club was born.

Each recreation center in Houston's Park System has organized a Park Kids "Say Yes To Life " Club for their youth participants, age 6 to 18 years old. Each club meets weekly to plan and participate in club activities. Each

member receives a free T-shirt with the club logo. (Logo Licensed by "Life. Be In It." USA) Club officers are elected by the membership yearly. New members are inducted into their club in a ceremony that includes a candle lighting and reciting the club pledge. Clubs operate under the supervision of an adult (a staff person, parent, or volunteer) who provides support as needed to carry out the club activities.

The program is administered by the Recreation Leisure Services section through a program manager from this office and an advisory board made up of staff representatives from each of the regions. Once a month, each region's board members develop a regional special event for all the clubs in their respective region. Once every quarter, a city-wide event is coordinated by the program manager for all clubs to attend.

Activities focus on recreation, education, and enrichment. Some examples of recreation activities are: traditional recreation with a prevention slant, like developing games with a drug prevention slogan; craft projects with a positive lifestyle focus; and skits with a crime prevention theme. Education is provided in a recreational setting: through a sports professional speaking on living a healthy lifestyle; or through a mini workshop with a prevention theme; or through a presentation by a community agency with a wide range of information and resources. Enrichment of life comes through exposure to



Park Kids "Say Yes to Life" in Houston.

other lifestyles and cultures, and strengthening self-image through community service and voluntarism.

As an incentive, an awards system has been incorporated into the community service aspect of the program. Club members who participate in community service projects log their hours of service and receive service patches at the Annual Youth Conference held each year during spring break. The community service projects may range from painting the playground equipment at their park, to visiting seniors at a nursing home, to working an exhibit booth at a festival.

The Park Kids program has opened a new area of activity for our recreation center operation. A major benefit is that this program has provided us with a means by which the "hard to reach" 13-18-year-old age group is affected in a positive manner. Events such as career days, health fairs, fashion shows, exchange programs, dances, concerts, conferences, and festivals are just a few of the activities that have worked very well for us.

Because the program is unique and innovative, we have the opportunity to set new rules about what we do and how we do it. Our high visibility has brought us many invitations to participate in "outside" events. This allows us to provide a wider range of activities to our youth while conserving our resources. Many agencies in our city are involved in providing diverse activities for youth. By networking with these agencies, we have developed these available resources to be put back into our program.

A recent outgrowth of the program is the involvement of the Garden Villas Park Club in the Tree Kids Program. Tree Kids is an entrepreneurial program for youth under the umbrella of Houston's Releaf/2 x 2 Program. (The goal of the Releaf Houston/2 x 2 Program is to plant two (2) million trees in Houston by the year 2000.) Youth groups may sell and plant trees in their community and keep the profits. In the case of the Garden Villas Club, the trees are donated to the group, so they keep all of the money they can make. This gives the club a treasury to use as the members desire.

As we complete our third year of operation, the program has gained momentum. Youth participation continues to be strong at all levels. Park Kids talk constantly about the ill effects of drugs and have helped push the drugs out of their parks. Vandalism has slowed down, and park pride has swelled. The community is more aware of us and has respect for what we are doing. Agencies look upon us as partners rather than as opponents.

Along the way, however, we have encountered tough competition for federal funding. As a profession, we are not always thought of as a vehicle for prevention and intervention through education and diversion activities. Hopefully, the funding trend will move to prevention through recreation. In the

meantime, we are blazing ahead and will find the needed resources along the way. Still, we are proud that we will touch the lives of thousands of young citizens and, hopefully, make them better adults and Houstonians.

McAllen, Texas:

This program addresses the gang problem where it really lives--in the spray paint "tags" that mark out turf and send out the challenges between rival gangs. The anti-graffiti "airbrush art" initiative is an upbeat and imaginative twist on the community clean-up idea.

LIFE IN THE SHADOWS

Larry Pressler, CLP, McAllen Parks and Recreation Department

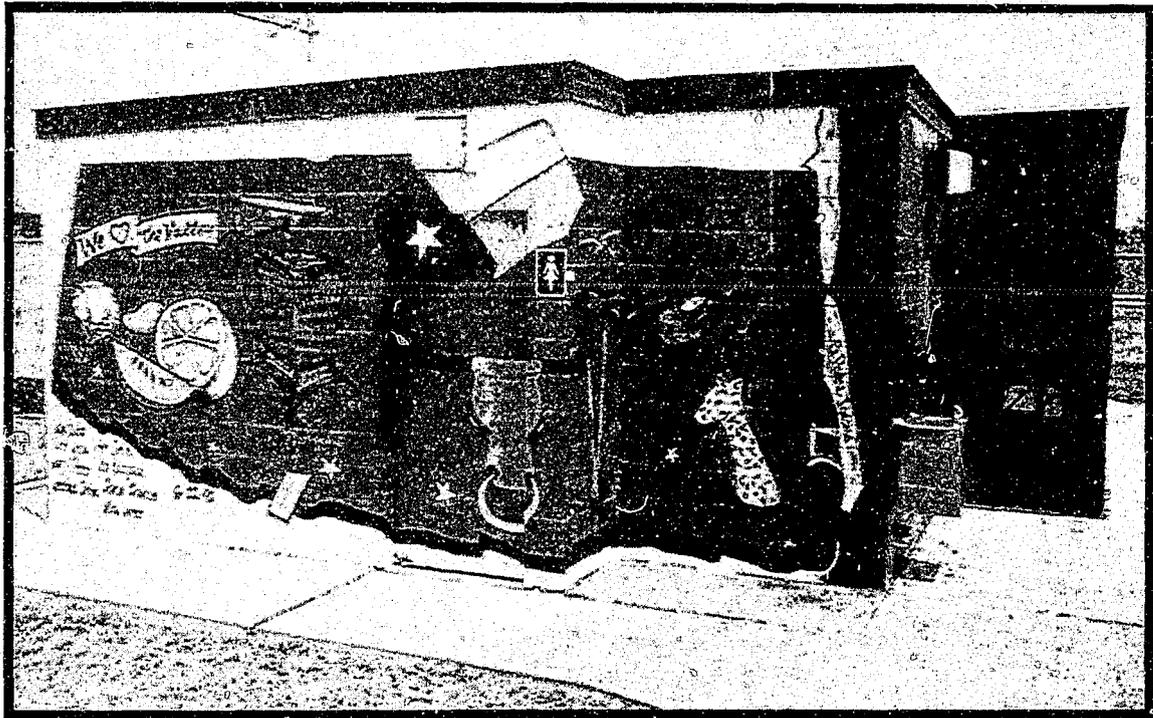
Have you ever noticed how many songs have sunshine in their lyrics? The word suggests to the listener that when the sun shines on your life, everything is okay. We all know how the songs go, "sunshine, lollipops and..." and "The sun will come out---tomorrow..."

For many young people, there IS no sunshine; they live under a psychological cloud. They're not bad, something has just "gone wrong." Whether the child of a dysfunctional family or an innocent victim of a tear in our moral fabric, they don't fit our model of normal, well-adjusted kids. They live in the shadows of social norms.

While preparing for this article, I asked 10 different people how they would define "youth at risk." As you might suspect, I got 10 different examples, ranging from barrio gang members to doctors' kids! Although we all think we know what "at risk" means, it is such a broad, colloquial term that it has different connotations to everyone. With two teenage daughters myself, I'm not too sure that ALL kids aren't at risk in one way or another.

There are many theories about why so many kids are on the edge. I asked our police chief for his ideas, and he thinks "kids are at risk because too many parents are still growing up themselves. We are all part of the ME generation and we're so busy finding OUR niche in life that we have fundamentally abandoned our children's moral education."

In March of this year, over 1,000 teachers met in Austin for the Texas Conference on At-risk Students. Their goal was to learn how to provide special help to the 82,000 Texas students who are currently considered at



Graffiti Airbrush Art is designed to help curb vandalism. Several neighborhood gangs have asked to use the department's airbrushes to repaint walls they previously defaced.



risk of dropping out of school. Also in March, members of local law enforcement agencies met with officials from Los Angeles and Chicago to explore methods of coping with young people who are at risk of becoming gang members. Now recreation and parks professionals are exploring ways in which WE might provide recreational services to those that are considered at risk.

It seems as though, all of a sudden, society has awakened and recognized that the future of our society really IS our kids. Is it possible that our society is finally sophisticated enough to look at social problems in economic terms? When teenage pregnancy, drugs, alcohol, and school dropouts were looked upon as only social problems, they got little more than lip service. Now, in our "Alan Greenspan" era, where everything can be related to economics, even leaders of industry are ready to join in the battle.

Data from the Texas Education Agency indicate that a male Texan with fewer than 12 years of education will earn \$260,000 less during his working years than his counterpart with a high school diploma. Extrapolating this to the 82,000 students who are at risk of dropping out of school, this equates to a loss in earnings and tax revenue for the state of \$16.89 billion. These are terms that students of "Reaganomics" can relate to. For every 20 kids who drop out of school, our Economic Development Council has to bring another low-tech manufacturing plant into town!

Parks and recreation departments have always been at the forefront in providing wholesome activities for young people. We have been "program factories," albeit often overlooking that our activities are only vehicles to help kids develop social skills necessary to function in a grown-up world. Equally overlooked is the fact that we might be grossly under-utilized as a bridge between the educational services provided by the school system and the parental teachings provided by the family.

Living and working in a unique area, on the Texas/Mexico border, the parks and recreation departments in the Rio Grande Valley must be a little more sensitive to at-risk populations than many other areas of the country. To compensate for this, the McAllen Parks and Recreation Department has tailored programs toward unspoken demands of the "hard to reach" children. Activities like the year-round Mexican Folkloric Dance Program help Hispanic children appreciate their cultural roots.

Graffiti Airbrush Art is a custom-designed program to reach out to kids who have been labeled at risk. This program was designed to help curb vandalism and control graffiti in city parks. The program was taught by a local "Hot Rod" artist, was free, and was marketed directly to the "street kids." It ended with 60 children happily painting four restrooms with positive images instead of negative graffiti. As a result, vandalism has been virtually

eliminated at the four sites, and several of the neighborhood gangs have asked to use the department's airbrushes to repaint some of the walls they had previously defaced with vulgar gestures and initials.

Changing society is a difficult task. It is almost impossible to bring some of the at-risk kids out of the shadows. With a little special programming for those who cry silently, however, it is possible to spread a little sunshine where once there were only clouds.

Dallas, Texas:

The author of this article makes a crucial observation: recreational programs that compete with gangs must be exciting, and they must be based on today's "street" culture. Youth at risk of joining gangs are used to living on the edge. They are used to feeling the adrenaline that flows with fast action and danger.

RECREATION'S ROLE IN GANG INTERVENTION

*Pamela Robinson-Young, Recreation Leader,
City of Dallas Parks and Recreation Department*

In the past few years, America has witnessed a dramatic increase in vandalism, student drop-out rates, shootings, and delinquent behavior which can be attributed to the increasing number of street gangs. The Attorney General has cited Dallas and Ft. Worth as having the highest gang population in Texas. These groups are primarily made up of adolescents. Some members are as young as nine, while others are adults. Gang sizes in Dallas vary from 6 to 200 members, and they appear in rural and suburban areas as well as metropolitan areas.

According to Maslow's theory of self actualization, humans have a basic need to belong and be accepted. Many young people feel that no one cares about them, and this makes them prime targets for charismatic gang leaders. Gang leaders seek out adolescents much like themselves: poor students, frequent targets of racial slurs, and those whose families are locked into cycles of poverty. Many youths latch onto the gang message of camaraderie and macho thrills and remain blind to the violence and tragedy that is part of gang life. Gang membership flourishes when parents and families aren't involved in their children's lives. In the Ledbetter neighborhood of Dallas, I have noticed that juveniles tend to follow preceding generations in gang activity.

Gangs, cults, and cliques fulfill various ethnic, racial, and cultural needs that society and families have failed to meet. The resulting void creates an environment where gangs are allowed to grow like a cancer.

It is a well-publicized fact that gang members are involved in crime and drug trafficking. However, not all youth gangs are involved in such unlawful activities; indeed, some gangs are actually social clubs. The sense of power purchased by the proceeds of crime is as sweet and addictive as any drug and as hard to break away from. Adolescents with few interests and little excitement in their lives rally to the call of the gang leaders as if to a siren's call. Gang activity is an exciting new game; it is a wild and forceful fantasy and many at-risk youth seize the opportunity to act it out.

Youth participation in high risk behaviors can no longer be ignored, nor can it be viewed simply as a law enforcement problem. Juvenile prisons have become known as "gang universities" where youth become more street smart and violent than they were before they were incarcerated. Gang activity must be viewed as a public and community issue because of the toll it exacts in injuries and deaths, and because of the underlying social problems leading to violence. It is our responsibility as recreation professionals to provide opportunities for positive activities and constructive behavior.

Leisure and recreation professionals can provide alternate choices to gang involvement, and play a major role in helping to prevent or redirect inappropriate behaviors. When youth involved with gang related activities are provided with involvement, support, and attention, idle time can be turned into a rewarding experience with productive results. Leisure professionals need to be trained in and sensitive to gang issues. In the past, recreation professionals concentrated their efforts on children in poverty areas, organizing activities that encouraged group participation, high self-esteem, and acceptable behavior. It is time that recreation professionals reassume the responsibilities that inspired the recreation movement.

Municipal park and recreation departments can maximize their role by offering appropriate activities to high-risk youth by collaborating with other public and private agencies in geographical areas with identifiable gang activity. Leisure professionals may need to educate city leaders, citizens, and parents about the importance and economic advantage of a strong, well-structured program that targets youth gangs. Programs should emphasize adventurous leisure activities, exciting recreational opportunities, parenting skills, communication skills, drug awareness workshops, employment assistance, education, crisis intervention, self-esteem building workshops, and other life-skills training. If financial support of the program is impossible, staffing, in-kind services, networking, and interagency cooperation should be sought out.

Unfortunately, the reality is that budget cuts in recreation services are creating a "Catch 22" situation. Recreation professionals must seek cooperation from agencies providing health care, counseling, education, employment assistance, vocational skills, and other needed services. High risk youth must be channeled into positive roles before joining gangs. It is extremely difficult to leave a gang; it's like trying to break a drug addiction. Gang members are usually members for life---sometimes a very short life. The challenge is how to keep angry, lonely, good kids from becoming "punks" walking the streets with guns in their pockets. The key to keeping youth out of gangs is to provide a natural adolescent experience and meet the needs of the individuals targeted. Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, church, and other social groups provide places for adolescents to be together, but traditional forms of peer groupings do not relate to today's culture or, in some cases, to specific cultures. Therefore, these traditional outlets are not functioning for many adolescents as originally intended.

A recreational program dealing with youth gangs needs to target urgent issues affecting these youth as these issues develop or change. The programs should be offered at a variety of times to meet the diverse schedules of the population being served. Programs should provide opportunities for individuals to be involved in stimulating physical, mental, and social activities. Recreation professionals need to be flexible, able to handle high amounts of stress, and able to deal with volatile situations. A gang intervention program needs to be headed by a "street smart" professional, one who is willing to work when and where the gangs congregate.

Goals, functions, and services of a model recreation program could include:

- **Assessing the needs of gang members: jobs, health, education, etc.** Youths need to be encouraged to stay in school and complete their education. If these children, who lack the resources to achieve success in the classroom, drop out, their talents and ambitions will be transferred to the streets. Often school administrators are happy to be rid of problem teens, and these children are not encouraged to remain in school.
- **Offering a variety of alternatives to joining gangs through leisure and recreation activities.** Playgrounds, parks, and recreation centers need to be available after school, on weekends, during holidays, and in the summer. Excess leisure with nothing to do can easily be the reason many are willing to be inducted into a "chic selective fraternity."
- **Concentrating efforts in neighborhoods identifiable as gang areas.** Police storefront programs and bicycle and horse patrols need to be used in these areas, bringing the officer into closer contact with the community.

- **Maximizing municipal recreation's role through cooperative efforts with other public and private agencies.** Social service agencies and other resources should be welcomed into the recreation centers to provide services for, and work with, indigent and low-income families. Substance abuse agencies must reach out to at-risk populations, and facilitate interagency cooperation and networking by functioning as a support mechanism for professional entities.
- **Maintaining current and accurate data on services available to high-risk youth.** Data on the availability of medical services, GED training, job counseling, etc., should be collected. This information needs to be posted in public areas. A geographical map of available youth services should be posted in a public area.
- **Enhancing communication to "at-risk" youth.** This can be accomplished by producing a newsletter/calendar of events, using gang members as reporters, planners, distributors, etc. Articles should focus on positive activities in which gang members participate. Communication with parents can be enhanced by providing workshops and group counseling.
- **Increasing resources for gang reduction.** One method could be by providing grant information and other resources to other agencies. For example; the Health and Human Services Department might qualify for a grant where the Parks and Recreation Department may not. Networking with all agencies involved with youth to meet and share ideas and information will help.
- **Encouraging private and public partnerships for gang interventions.** Possible locations for gang intervention programs might be commercially zoned areas. A local business could donate an empty building or warehouse. Gang members need a place to meet on neutral turf---a safe place where they feel they belong.
- **Generating community awareness and support of gang programs.** Parks and Recreation Departments could consider encouraging businesses to hire gang members for jobs. If a young person brings in money for the family, feelings of self worth are reinforced; the person learns responsibility and feels a sense of accomplishment.
- **Recognizing positive behavior through the use of a reward system.** Youths should be provided with opportunities to work together as a team toward positive results.

A future without recreational programs aimed at gang intervention can offer little besides alienation, addiction, prison, and death to gang members. At-risk youths perceive gang membership as a romantic adventure, giving little thought to tomorrow, much less next week. Recreation programs need to be fast-paced and exciting in order to gain their attention. Recreation

professionals must consider the need for adventure and romance when planning for this special population.

Unfortunately, our rapid changing life styles have caused many frustrations which are frequently manifested in juvenile crime and alcohol and drug abuse. Gangs will never be totally eradicated, and gang violence will periodically occur; but with strong "street wise" leadership, the community can attack the problem and possibly diminish some of the gang effects. Recreation not only provides refreshment from the fast pace of our complex lives, but it also enriches the lives of those who participate by improving their physical and mental health. Recreation can provide a healthy outlet for adolescents looking for somewhere to go, a place where they belong and for someone to "care." If the public wants to be rid of violent gangs, recreation must be an important part of the lives of young people.

For a complete list of reference sources, please contact the author.

Dallas, Texas:

The importance of teaching young people to find self-expression through the arts is a recurring theme in many outreach and enrichment programs. The vital role of adult mentors is another. The Fair Park program provides both---exposure to the arts and culture, and substantive interaction between accomplished adults and young people who are just learning to aspire.

ARTS ENRICHMENT:

A Preventive Approach for Youth at Risk

*Richard Karamatic, Assistant Events Manager/Fair Park,
City of Dallas Parks and Recreation Department*

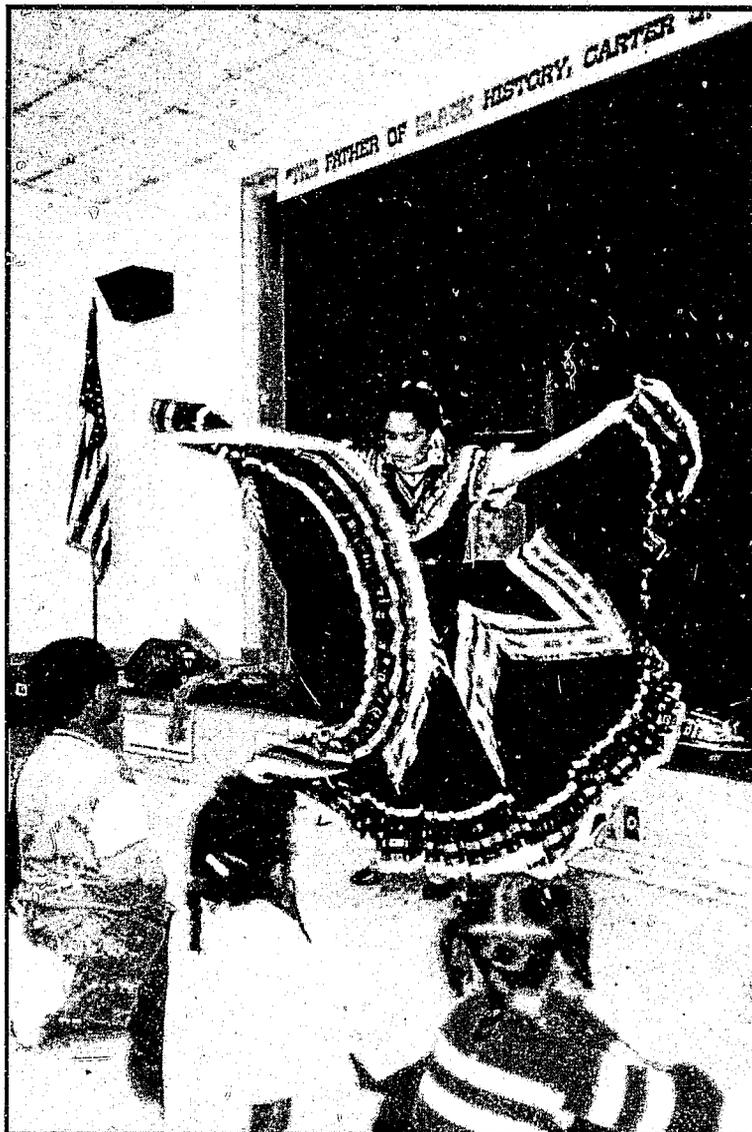
Fair Park, operated by the City of Dallas Parks and Recreation Department, provides meaningful programs and strategic interaction with organizations, schools, community leaders, minority businesses, and individuals in the South Dallas/Fair Park area.

The Fair Park Administration Arts Enrichment Program, funded by a \$170,967 Meadows Foundation grant in February 1989, provides after-school arts-related activities for students in three Dallas Independent School District elementary schools near Fair Park. During the 1990-1991 school year, 229 students were enrolled in the free Arts Enrichment Program. The program's

goal is to expose minority youngsters to a wide variety of activities including drama, art, crafts, painting, music, theatrical performances, ballet, museum visits, dance, and related cultural activities. Field trips expand the children's cultural horizons, by providing them with opportunities to hear from and visit with potential role models in the local arts community.

Recent field trips taken by students in this program include visits to: Old City Park, the Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas Black Dance Theatre, the Majestic Theatre, the Music Hall at Fair Park, Ballet Dallas, the South Dallas Culture Center, Stephanie Collection of African American Art, "Origami" Christmas Tree Display at the Dallas Museum of Natural History, the Dallas Zoo, the Bill of Rights Exhibit at Fair Park, "Big Bird and the ABC's," and Earth Day Rainforest Round-up. According to Gerald Fricks, Community Relations Manager for Fair Park, "We have encouraged the involvement of the participating children's parents in this program. Parents are welcome to attend field trips as well as in-school activities." The added parental involvement reinforces the importance of cultural arts for the children.

A traditional Mexican dance entertains students at Fannie C. Harris Elementary School in Dallas, Thanks to Fair Parks' After-School Arts Enrichment Program.



Mr. Fricks pointed out that in addition to field trips, frequently artists, performers, and members of the cultural arts community visit the participating schools to demonstrate their talents and talk with the children. This provides the opportunity for mentoring or positive role models to which these children might otherwise never have been exposed. Two recent activities involving role models or mentors are summarized below.

Arbor Day Tree Planting Ceremony. This was a special program to involve the students in an Arbor Day effort. Three hundred bare-root trees were donated by the Dallas Civic Garden Center for this event. The trees, along with detailed planting instructions, were distributed to the three schools participating in this Fine Arts Enrichment Program in celebration of this tree planting ceremony. A bald cypress tree was planted near the Leonhardt Lagoon in Fair Park on January 25, 1991. There were 45 students on hand for the ceremony. Fair Park Assistant General Manager Phil Huey officiated at the ceremony, and spoke to the children about the importance of trees. Michael Cheever of the Dallas Civic Garden Center, located on the Fair Park grounds, hosted a tour for the children at the Garden Center following the tree planting ceremony. The children were taught about the value of trees. They also planted a tree at Fair Park that would become a permanent part of the landscape, and experienced the joy of planting their own trees at home where they could chart their trees' growth and development.

Program Featuring Benjamin Carson, M.D. On February 18, 1991, Dr. Benjamin Carson, M.D., considered to be one of the most gifted neurosurgeons in the world, spoke to the 200 students at the Joseph J. Rhoads Elementary School. Dr. Carson, called "a man of miracles" by *Reader's Digest*, spoke on what motivated him to overcome poverty, racism, and low grades to become one of the most accomplished and respected neurosurgeons in medicine today.

We may not know why exposure to the right person or program at the right time in a child's life can be the pivotal point in turning that child's life around, but we all know that it happens. At Fair Park, the City of Dallas Parks and Recreation Department, working hand-in-hand with the Meadows Foundation and the school district, is trying to ensure that this phenomenon occurs more frequently for kids in the South Dallas/Fair Park area.

Schools participating in the Arts Enrichment Program:

Fannie C. Harris Elementary School
4212 East Grand, Dallas
Principal: Dorothy Crain
Students participating: 69

Joseph J. Rhoads Elementary School

4401 Second Avenue, Dallas

Principal: Dr. Roscoe Smith

Students participating: 60

Phyllis Wheatley Elementary School

2908 Metropolitan, Dallas

Principal: Patricia Pickles-Thomas

Students participating: 100

Dallas, Texas:

The author of this article raises an important issue: the need for accountability. He points out that for any service organization the process of learning what its community wants, what it needs, and what succeeds for it, is on going. In this recreational program, the youth served are customers, the people of the community are patrons, and winning the budget battle is a matter of living up to a mission.

YOUTH AT RISK

The Challenge for Recreation Professionals in the 1990's

*Jerry W. Howard, District Manager,
CBD and Dallas South, Park and Recreation Department, City of Dallas*

The phrase "youth at risk" describes children with potential for getting involved in unacceptable and/or deviant behavior. Many youth, because of their environment and other contributing factors, are more susceptible to unacceptable behavior such as drugs, gangs, teenage pregnancy, and crime.

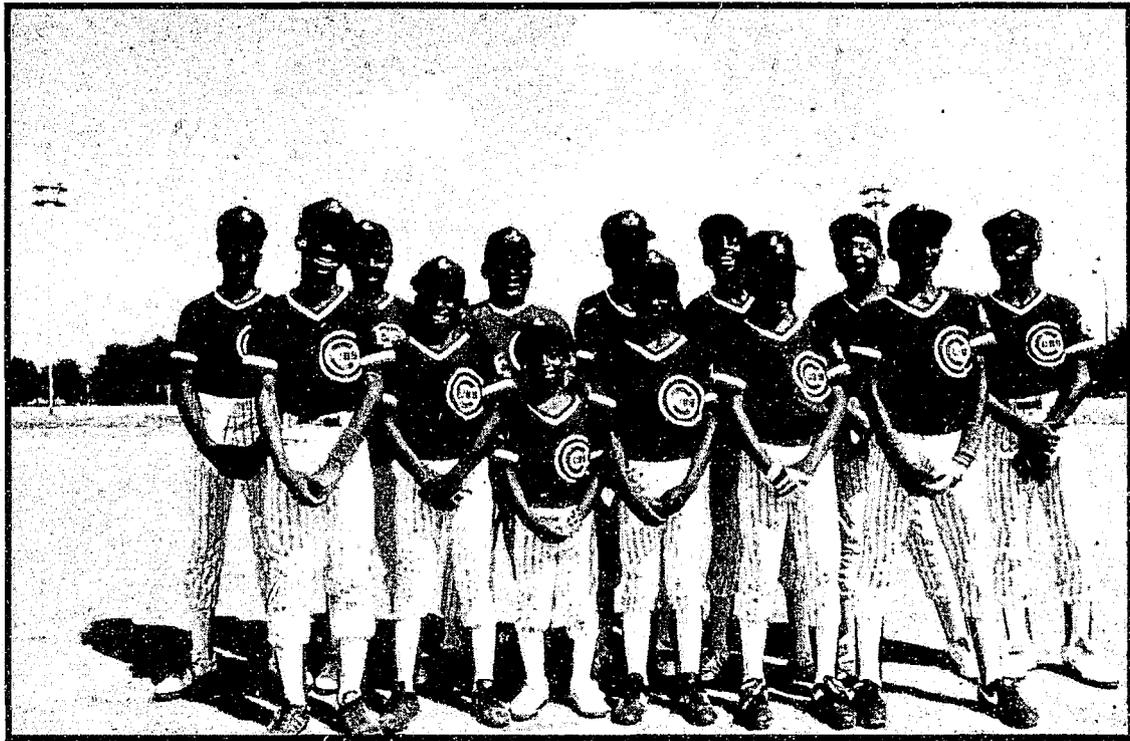
What can we do as public recreation professionals to help these youth become productive members of our society? Furthermore, from a public servant's standpoint, how do we plan, organize, stimulate, and implement effective strategies to deal with the many complex problems facing the youth?

The critical issues facing public recreational professionals in the 1990's are:

- Education
- Leadership/Credibility
- Effective Marketing and Proper Documentation

Education. Education involves re-thinking what we do to meet the needs of our communities. Education, like the socialization process, is never finished. We must challenge ourselves to stay abreast of current trends. There are several issues which may affect the recreation industry and the communities we serve. Social and technological indicators suggest changes in the coming years which must be addressed now. As Ivan Doig, author of *English Creek*, stated: "We cannot go through life paying attention to the past at the expense of the future." If we wait until the issues and problems are upon us, we will be forced into a reactive mode, rather than taking the initiative and adopting a proactive attitude.

Keep in mind, a little knowledge, misused, is dangerous---and a great amount of knowledge not used properly is even more dangerous. It is imperative for the education process to cover all bases in order to deal with the complexities of our society. This process must include the following: management, human behavior, networking, marketing, street jargon, community attitudes, individual differences, cultural diversity, religious beliefs, gang cultures, environment, effects of substance abuse, history, and community relations.



Dallas' Park Pals Youth Baseball League: team sports build a sense of belonging for youth.

Leadership/Credibility. The word "leadership" generally refers to top administrators in an organization (i.e., Park Board, CEO, and Vice Presidents). While top leadership is an important component of any organization, we sometimes overlook the critical importance of the mid-level manager or supervisor who directly interacts with the consumers. It is at this level that perception becomes reality, and the image of the department is engraved in the minds of the patrons.

The success or failure of any leisure service organization is anchored at this level, where the goals of top leadership are evaluated and carried out. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that we recruit and select managers who are competent, sensitive, credible, visionary, and assertive. They must have exhibited proper and effective leadership capabilities. Their actions will demonstrate to citizens on a daily basis the vital role which public recreation plays in the development of well-rounded youth.

Moreover, each community leisure coordinator must continue to look for new and innovative programs to fulfill the mission of the agency. New programs should be substantive and designed to accomplish definite objectives. All "youth at risk" activities should be designed to reach an individual and/or group goal. A few examples of innovative programming provided by the Dallas Park and Recreation Department include:

"Looking Good, Feeling Good" is a program for girls ages 10-17, living in low to moderate-income neighborhoods of South Dallas. This program offers advice on beauty, hygiene, self-esteem, and health advice.



Boxing can be an alternative to late night cruising.

"This program grew out of a need in our community to assist our young ladies with advice and tips on how to care for their skin, body, and hair (Growing Up and Liking It)."

--Anita Simms, Community Recreation Program Manager, J.J. Craft and M. Dunn Recreation Centers.

The Dallas Park and Recreation Department's Park Pals Youth Baseball/Softball League provides over 600 youths the opportunity to play organized baseball or softball on a fun, competitive basis.

"The program is an excellent vehicle for teaching character, winning and losing, leadership, discipline, and teamwork, where the goal is to provide baseball and softball as an opportunity for children in Oak Cliff and South Dallas who ordinarily would not have the chance to play."

--Cindy Schnetzler, Community Recreation Program Manager, Singing Hills Recreation Center.

Through the Summer Minority Enrichment Program (SMEP), from June 3 to June 15, 1991, one Hispanic and one African-American Cadet from West Point will be visiting Dallas' minority communities to promote higher education, encourage high aspirations, have some immediate impact on enrollment, assist the host organization in its community mission, and present themselves as role models.



Recreation professionals must demonstrate the vital role that leisure plays in the development of well-rounded youth.

"We make every attempt to acquaint our youths in our recreation centers with other cultures and ethnic groups and their contributions to America (i.e., special celebrations, holidays)."

--Gaytha Davis, Community Recreation Program Coordinator, East Region, District IV.

Effective Marketing and Proper Documentation. In times of streamlined budgets and departmental downsizing, we are forced to examine and document our very existence on a daily basis. What is the community's perception of the quality of leisure services delivered by our agencies? Are we seen as a vital part of those life-giving, life-saving activities necessary for survival?

We must take time to document our positive accomplishments by using every avenue for communication. We have to let everyone know what role we play in the development of our youth and display openly the successes of our programs. Policy makers and the general public must be made aware of our efforts on an ongoing basis. We must establish ourselves as the leaders in the industry and the best providers of leisure services in our communities.

We should look for efficient, effective methods of transmitting success stories to the public, realizing that every success adds credibility to our profession.

In conclusion, there is a scientific dictum which states: "If anything exists, it exists in some amount. If it exists in some amount, it can be measured." Public leisure service organizations will be measured in the 1990s by their effective programs for youth at risk and the community's awareness of the impact of those programs.

Abilene, Texas:

A truly preventive program has to begin with very young children. The profile of a young gang member closely resembles that of a high school dropout--and dropouts, for the most part, start out as children who are not prepared for school.

PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS:

A Thriving Market

*Ann Steward, Rose Park Recreation Center Coordinator,
City of Abilene Recreation Division*

The Abilene Recreation Division is continuously moving ahead in the field of providing quality preschool programming. Programs now in effect are the regular school year preschool program and the various center-based preschool activities, classes, and special events.

The preschool program, in existence since 1982, has shown a dramatic increase in participation in the last decade from six to 23 children. Betty Taylor, School Coordinator, and Marie Green are instructors in charge of the program. They teach the children valuable skills: writing, math, grammar, science projects, phonics, socialization, music and movement, dance, dramatics, cultural diversities, and physical education. The City of Abilene feels very fortunate to have such a fine program offered for \$55.00 a month, five days a week. The instructors not only teach the children skills for later learning but also teach acceptance and adaptability toward others in the community who are less fortunate.

An intergenerational program with the elderly in the community is an integrated part of the preschool program. For example, the Abilene Day and Health Care Center for Adults has adopted the Rose Park preschoolers. This coalition has proven quite successful with activities such as Adopt-A-Grandparent, a Thanksgiving dinner, a sing-along program, Easter egg hunts, and century birthday parties.

The preschool program builds to a climax in May, when toddlers don their caps and gowns and enter into their first commencement exercises. The children, ages four to five, enact a program for parents and loved ones which is both entertaining and thought-provoking. This preschool program helps to build a strong, positive foundation for these children through the efforts and dedication of fine teachers who, next to the children's parents, occupy a very influential role in these children's lives.

The preschool program is just the beginning. The activities and classes based in Abilene's recreation center pick up where the preschool programs leave off. Classes showing the highest levels of interest and participation are Little Feat, Pee Wee Picasso, Turtle Mania, Little Chefs, and Parent-Child play groups. All the programs offered at the center are either taught by recreation center professional staff or qualified early childhood development teachers. And, remarkably, these particular programs are taught for a very nominal fee of \$5.00 to \$10.00 for an entire session.

Because of the low cost of these programs, the Abilene Recreation Division is able to reach out not only to those who can afford good quality programming but also to those less fortunate children, more often considered "at risk", who can benefit greatly from socializing and interacting with their peers.

All children, perhaps especially at the preschool level, need involvement and positive peer group interaction. To see each child thrive, grow, and enjoy life makes this an exceedingly worthwhile endeavor.

Abilene, Texas:

Many children who are economically disadvantaged and in self-care much of the time are not eating well. The school lunch program does much to alleviate the damage that poor nutrition can cause in young people. The Abilene program extends this vital benefit throughout the long summer. Parks and recreation departments are uniquely well-positioned to fill the social support loss that many children feel when the school doors are closed.

SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM

An Opportunity for More Than Just Recreation

*Tony Neitzler, Assistant to the Director, Community Services Department,
Abilene Parks and Recreation Department*

In 1987, the City of Abilene co-sponsored a community needs assessment that concluded that nearly 3% or almost 1,000 of the city's households were experiencing hunger as a problem. One recommended approach to the situation was for the City of Abilene or the Abilene Independent School District (AISD) to apply to the Texas Department of Human Services to fund a Summer Food Service Program for Children in Abilene.

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is a US Department of Agriculture program administered by the State. It was originally conceived as a means of extending the benefits of the National School Lunch Program into the off-school months for children who need assistance. Typically, school food-service providers adopt and implement SFSP's, though USDA requirements do allow local governments and non-profit groups to sponsor programs. In 1988, the AISD was unable to take on the program, and City Manager Jim Blagg asked the city's Community Services Department to investigate the feasibility of operating the program in conjunction with its Summer Playground Program. The Playground Program is a structured recreation program that runs for approximately two and a half months each summer in the city's six recreation centers. One center is devoted to programming for the physically and mentally disabled.

Upon investigation---and with creative assistance from the school district, the Texas Department of Human Services, and USDA---the department satisfied itself that it could meet the challenge. In May of 1988, the program began at the centers.

To understand the challenges faced, one must understand some of the program's structure. An agency that elects to sponsor an SFSP becomes contractually obligated to provide meals to any person 18 years or younger who comes to an approved site and requests the meal at advertised mealtimes. Further, SFSP is a direct-cost reimbursement program. Only qualified meals actually served are eligible for reimbursement, and only allowed costs may be recovered. (In the first year, it was \$1.71 per meal for food packaging, transportation, and storage, and \$.13 per meal for program administration and management.) The meal reimbursement cannot absorb losses due to spoilage or for meals prepared and not served. Contracts may be used, but they must be approved by the state. There are no approved contractors for this type in Abilene.

As finally implemented, Abilene's SFSP became the first, and so far only, urban self-preparation program in Texas. To accomplish this, the school district donated the use and utilities of one of its school kitchens that was to be closed for the summer. Kitchen operations were supervised by the Community Services Department's Senior Citizens Program Manager and Staff Nutritionist. Food preparation staff were hired from SFSP proceeds and employed on a flexible basis so hours could be adjusted to meet meal demands in the field.

The Parks Division provided the transportation of meals to the sites where Recreation Division staff served and supervised the meal services. Recreation staff also assumed the responsibility for estimating daily meal demand and ordering meals within one hour of the published meal times. This kept "unreimbursable meal" costs at an acceptable level.

At the close of the first SFSP season in 1988, 9,072 meals had been provided at an average of \$1.11 food cost per meal and \$.07 per meal for administrative cost. At the end of the second program year, 13,088 meals were provided for \$1.48 food cost per meal with an administrative cost of \$.05. The City of Abilene was fully reimbursed for these costs. In the third program year, the AISD took over the program, prepared the grant application, managed the kitchen service, and delivered to the sites. Recreation staff continued the on-site services. The third program year, 15,000 meals were provided. The third-year project, operated jointly with the school district, was so successful that fourth-year plans call for expanding into unserved neighborhoods by using local schools.

In September of 1990, the International City Management Association honored Jim Blagg, the City of Abilene's City Manager, and the city's Community Services Department with its annual award for outstanding programming in the area of social infrastructure for the program's successes.

But the most significant achievement is that five of the six sites where SFSP is offered are located in neighborhoods where 50% or more of the children qualify for National School Lunch Programs according to school enrollment statistics. The sixth center serving the special populations group has an enrollment characterized by at least 50% of the enrolled families at or below poverty level. Recreation Division records suggest that at least 85% of the participants in the Summer Playground/Summer Food Service Programs come from families where both parents work or where there is a single parent who works. These families are freed from the responsibility of preparing at least one meal a day by SFSP and are assured that the meal provided by the program meets minimum USDA standards for children's nutrition.

If your municipal recreation department wishes to consider bringing Summer Food Service Programs to your community, contact your local Texas Department of Human Services officials or your local school district. In many cases, school districts are interested in providing the service, but they have no suitable summer sites or staff other than kitchen staff. In those cases, a recreation center or park facility may be just what they need to offer an SFSP to the community. And there are always opportunities to work out joint projects, thanks to the willingness of USDA and the state to work with local communities.

Corpus Christi, Texas:

Studies have shown that hard-core gang members typically have histories of spending many hours every day without adult supervision, from a very early age. Nothing could be more central to gang prevention than a program which addresses the child-care problem faced by so many families in which a single parent, or both parents, must work.

LATCHKEY AFTERSCHOOL CARE:

One Solution

Linda Hodge, Corpus Christi Park & Recreation Department

Each day more and more working parents face the difficult decision of whether to let their children go home alone to an empty house. Realizing the need for an afterschool child-care program, the City of Corpus Christi Park and Recreation Department took on the responsibility and challenge of developing lifetime leisure skills in children, while providing child care for working parents.



Arts and crafts are one of several after-school activities of the Latchkey Program.

Schools do not place enough emphasis on recreation and lifetime leisure skills. While our educational system concentrates on the 3 "R"s, the 4th "R," recreation, is often neglected. By developing recreational skills and interests during youth, one benefits physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially throughout life.

Goals and Objectives for the LATCHKEY Program:

For the participant:

- Provide a safe, professionally supervised environment.
- Provide self-reliance skills.
- Provide quality recreation experiences.
- Develop physical skills and coordination.

For the parent:

- Keep the tuition fee affordable.
- Provide scholarships for those unable to pay.
- Provide education in areas that concern the well-being of their child (drugs, abuse, etc.).

For the school district:

- Keep vandalism down.
- Provide an alternative for children who would normally "hang around" the school.
- Keep the cost of co-sponsorship to a minimum.

For the Park & Recreation Department:

- Promote recreation.
- Run the program on a self-supporting basis.
- Develop attitudes for future adults that support quality-of-life issues.

The Corpus Christi LATCHKEY Program has several unique features. It is co-sponsored by the City Park & Recreation Department and area school districts---each taxing entity contributing a share of its resources to solve a single community problem. The Park & Recreation Department handles the administrative duties of the program (hiring and training of staff, recordkeeping, providing supplies and equipment, collecting tuition, printing of materials, budget, lesson plans), while the school districts provide physical support (facilities, utilities, telephones, and restrooms).

On a daily basis, children participate in a variety of lesson plans to meet the objectives of the program.

Arts & Crafts: Arts and crafts projects are geared to the age and ability of each child.

Organized Games and Sports: Children are encouraged to participate in indoor and outdoor games, and are taught to play the games, with an emphasis on sportsmanship.

Self-Reliance and Citizenship Skills: Children are taught the basic skills necessary in today's society (avoiding drugs, dealing with strangers, safety at home and on the playground). To round out the lesson play, activities that encourage and develop good citizenship are implemented (writing thank-you cards, sending cards to nursing homes, cleaning the community, etc.). Each topic is reinforced and supported by an activity.

Classes: Working parents who are unable to pick up their children after school, are also unable to take their children to organized classes. Realizing this, program staff arrange for classes in gymnastics and karate. A recital is scheduled at the end of the year to "show off" the newly learned skills.

Friday Special Events: Every Friday, events are held to give children a special way to end the week. With the help of community volunteers, we are able to provide quality programming for the children. Fire and Police departments, McDonald's, and the Symphony are a few of the many resources utilized each Friday.



Sportsmanship is stressed in all indoor and outdoor games offered by the Latchkey After-School Program.

The LATCHKEY Program is licensed by the state. It employs over 140 people, is offered at 36 elementary schools in three school districts, and serves 2,200 children, including over 200 attending on scholarships.

The Corpus Christi LATCHKEY Program has won both state and national awards. The Texas Recreation and Park Society (TRAPS) awarded it the Lone Star Programming Award, and it received national recognition from the Public Institute of Technology for innovative programming.

The program has been deemed very successful in Corpus Christi. The parents, participants, and city and school officials praise the program. It is self-supporting, has immediate as well as long-range benefits, solves a community problem, and perpetuates the field of recreation.

Corpus Christi, Texas:

The concept of "lifetime leisure skills" is another important ingredient in the complex challenge of preparing today's youth for adulthood. We cannot take it for granted that all children will be taught to relax, enjoy themselves in positive ways, and benefit from physical exercise.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN AT RISK

Linda Hodge, Corpus Christi Park & Recreation Department

All youth are at risk in today's society. There are so many opportunities for children to become involved in undesirable activities. It doesn't matter what age, sex, race, or socio-economic background---children are vulnerable. They are exposed to a multitude of problems and situations that they must deal with on a daily basis. Can involvement in recreation reduce their risks and help provide solutions to their problems? The answer is yes.

Recreation isn't just all fun and games. Many claims have been made about recreation as a means of reducing delinquency and crime, of building and sustaining physical and mental health, of developing character, and of bringing about other desirable results. The benefits of recreational skills are now recognized as essential to modern life. In spite of that, we still do not place enough emphasis on recreation and education in lifetime leisure skills.

Children need to be exposed to a wide range of creative leisure activities and recreation opportunities. Under proper leadership and guidance, youngsters stand a much better chance of demonstrating normal and acceptable behavior, and of deriving satisfaction and fun from the activities in which they participate. The Corpus Christi Park and Recreation Department realizes the importance of recreation education for children and offers many leisure programs to meet their needs.

Latchkey Programs/Summer Youth Programs. The movie *Home Alone* was a box office hit. A child is accidentally left home alone to care for himself. He fights off robbers, goes shopping, and has the full run of the house. Of course, everything turns out okay, but real life is not always like that. The number of working parents has increased; parents are faced with the difficult decision of whether to let their children go home alone to an empty house unsupervised. What solution can recreation specialists offer?

Latchkey and summer recreation programs co-sponsored by school districts and Park & Recreation Departments are a solution that works. Corpus Christi's LATCHKEY After-School Program is offered during the school year. The Summer Youth Program is offered during the summer vacation months. School sites are perfect locations. The facilities are child-proof and set up to handle large groups of children. Recreation specialists provide programs that include arts and crafts, sports, drama, music, self-reliance skills, and weekly special events.

Youth Sports. Youth are faced with pressures and stress just like adults. Frequently too much emphasis is placed on winning, and not on having fun. Children need time to learn simply to enjoy recreation. The Corpus Christi Youth Sports Programs reach out to those children who have been left out of organized school teams or have not had the opportunity to be involved in Little League play. Sportsmanship and teamwork are stressed, and scholarships are provided.

Reward Recreation. The Recreation Center Section has joined forces with other groups to provide rewards to youth who have participated in worthwhile programs. One program, Communities In Schools (CIS), seeks out children from families where a parent or a sibling dropped out of school. CIS offers those children a helping hand in the form of tutoring, counseling, or other support necessary to keep them in school. Recreation staff complimented CIS's efforts by offering "reward recreation." Children who participated in CIS's program during the month were rewarded with a special event. Another program was Homework Hangout. If a child went for tutoring Monday through Thursday, the child then was eligible for a special event held on Friday.

Recreation is important, and the role it "plays" in the development of our youth can make a big difference in the direction a young life takes. Think about each phase of our life and how recreation might affect it. For a child, recreation creates an atmosphere to learn social skills, coordination, and expression, and aids in developing strong body and mind. In the adolescent years, recreation skills provide for a positive alternative to the many negative influences that youth are faced with today. As a person reaches mid-life, if recreation has not been an active part of his or her life, it is easy to become a spectator instead of a participant. Many older adults who lack leisure skills find it difficult, if not impossible, to try new activities once they reach retirement. Develop recreation skills and interests as a youth, and the benefits last a lifetime!

Amarillo, Texas:

This article describes how one medium-sized Texas city offers a wide range of recreational activities all year round, for all ages.

AMARILLO PROVIDES BROAD ARRAY OF SUMMER PROGRAMS

Duane L. Polster, Assistant Director of Parks and Recreation, City of Amarillo

Recreational activities are for all seasons in Amarillo, but summer is still the busiest season. Training, competition, entertainment and fun of all kinds are scheduled for adults and children of all ages, throughout the city and throughout the year.

Summer Programs. The planning and scheduling of summer programs begins very early in the year in Amarillo. The months of February and March are generally dedicated to reviewing last year's seasonal employees' records and evaluating possible returnees. Many other activities are reviewed, and dates are set for special events. Preparations are begun for summer children's programs such as the annual Fish Derby which is held in conjunction with National Fishing Week, the Hershey Track Meet, the Ashley Whippet Competition, the World Jr. Frisbee Disc Contest, and many other special events.

The Summer Recreation Program is scheduled in 25 parks throughout the city. The program includes four evening sites during the hours of 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. The evening sites include one outdoor site to accommodate

children while their parents play volleyball, and three indoor facilities (school gyms) which the Recreation Department rents from the Amarillo Independent School District. The evening gyms are used as recreation sites for neighborhood children as well as our adult summer basketball program. The City of Amarillo is unique in not having recreation or community centers. All indoor sites used by the Parks and Recreation Division are rented from the school district. This eliminates the duplication of tax money being used for similar or duplicate facilities.

During the summer, an outdoor series referred to as "Starlight Theater" takes place each Tuesday evening on the stage at Ellwood Park. Local professional musicians are hired and paid through a co-sponsorship of the Musicians Performance Trust Fund and the City of Amarillo. The Parks and Recreation Department actively seeks a sponsor to help with the city's share of the co-sponsorship.

Summer recreation for children. Planning and scheduling summer children's programs are an important part of the seasonal activities. Amarillo provides recreation for children of all ages, from kindergarten through high school. The city contracts with a local organization known as Kids, Incorporated to provide a variety of activities throughout the year for youth. The summer activities include softball, T-ball, and golf. Other activities during the various seasons of the year include soccer, track, cheerleading, flag football, tackle football, basketball, volleyball, and bowling.

The summer recreation activities also include a free lunch program that is served to underprivileged children. These sites are established by the number of free or reduced lunches served at an adjacent school during the regular school year. Twelve recreation sites have small wading pools that attract more than the average number of children. The 12 small pools are filled and drained each day for safety and health reasons. Children attending the neighborhood recreation sites can expect to play a variety of card games, board games, softball, soccer, and numerous other games and activities. On a scheduled basis, recreation specialists attend each site teaching arts and crafts, parachute games, and tennis lessons. During the course of the summer, children's attendance at the Summer Recreation Program will exceed 150,000.

Adult athletic activities. Activities include softball, volleyball, golf, target shooting, and tennis. The adult softball program is generally the largest single program offered, with a spring-summer league which runs from April to July. A fall league begins in August and continues through October. The City of Amarillo has three four-field complexes, one small four-field complex, and eight individual fields to be used for softball or baseball.

Four of the above-listed 28 fields are on Amarillo Independent School District's property. A special agreement allowed the city to build backstops and add lighting to these fields. The city is allowed to use the school facilities after school, on weekends, and during the summer. The Amarillo athletic program received two awards for being in the top ten cities showing an increase in softball league registration for 1990.

The volleyball program has been steadily increasing for the past seven years. Volleyball is played year-round in Amarillo. The summer league is the only league that is totally played outdoors. The fall league (September through November) begins outdoors in September, then finishes the season indoors during October and November. The winter and spring leagues are played indoors. The indoor facilities are gymnasiums belonging to the Amarillo Independent School District.

The City of Amarillo opened a new 18-hole Comanche Trail Golf Course in 1990. This course and the 36-hole Ross Rogers Golf Course offer numerous summer activities for young and old alike. Over 100,000 golfers have used the Ross Rogers course alone during 1989-1990.

The Municipal Rifle Range located on city property south of the city offers firearms safety courses by qualified instructors. Again, this facility is open year-round with special courses offered during the summer and fall.

Summer is a very busy time of the year for the Amarillo Municipal Tennis Center. Leagues are scheduled and lessons are planned for every hour of the day from 8:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m. Lessons are scheduled for ages three years old and up. The Juniors Program, under the direction of the tennis pro Jan Munch-Soegaard, has more than doubled over the past two years. Five tournaments a year are scheduled at the Amarillo Tennis Center, attracting players from a three-state area. Players not able to get into the often-filled Tennis Center can seek out a place to play at one of the city's 51 courts throughout the area. Fifty of the neighborhood courts are lighted for play at no charge.

These programs provide the full range of recreational opportunities to people of all ages in Amarillo, all through the year---but the spring and summer months make Parks and Recreation come alive.

Dallas, Texas:

Dr. Alexander's remarks sum up the vital challenge facing us.

TODAY'S YOUTH: A Serious Challenge for Parks and Recreation

*Drew W. Alexander, M.D., Adolescent Health Associates, PA
Dallas, Texas*

As Parks and Recreation moves into the 21st century, so does the population it serves. There are many changes on the horizon. Today's adults, who were yesterday's children and today's parents, remember a day when going to the park and the recreation center was very safe---almost too safe---and little different from playing in the backyard. Supervision was so good that in a parent's absence any adult in the neighborhood would protect, oversee, supervise, motivate, and reprimand any and all children and teens in the neighborhood. In simple terms, it was very difficult for children of the past to get into trouble.

In 1991, not only has adult supervision and protection lessened, but there are also many adults today who employ and engage youth in antisocial and illegal activities. Children often face difficult adult decisions and risks before the onset of puberty. Elementary-age children are aware of alcohol, drugs, crime, violence, sex, and even war. Some elementary-age youth have moved beyond awareness to experience. That experience comes often with the help of grown-ups and the media who through role modeling and interpersonal contact seduce children and teenagers into inappropriate behaviors. The guaranteed protection given youth in past generations has faded. Today's youth must be personally and individually responsible for themselves. Responsibility entails making honest, healthy, and morally correct decisions.

Puberty and the teenage years are a time to learn and understand oneself while working with parents, peers, and others who make the community a better place in which to live. Although this maturational process begins with the start of formal education, it accelerates in the late elementary and junior high years. The challenge for today's families lies in helping children make safe decisions before puberty has begun. In an era when eight-year-olds traffic drugs, ten-year-olds get pregnant, the focus on safe decisions in childhood seems imperative.

As our society moves into the 21st century, our youth are more exploited and less protected. Parks and Recreation and other institutions play a more and

more integral role in the management and support of young people's growth and development. These facilities will require trained staff and expanded resources to compete with adults having ulterior motives. Parents and families will be ever more important as healthy role models and leaders for youth. The old-fashioned sense of neighborhood and community needs to remain so that children and teenagers may have safe, healthy, and supervised environments in which to grow, experiment, and spread their wings.

Moving into the 21st century forecasts the need for supervised and healthy recreational activities for Dallas' communities. The "latchkey kids" grow in number, and structured, healthy, supervised recreation seems harder to fund. Yet "recreational alcohol and drug use" seems easy to access. Yesterday's youth who are today's parents and adults face priority challenges in providing for today's youth. Today's youth, who will define 21st century adulthood, require healthy and safe environments in which to grow and develop.