
Project Hope in Scottsdale, Arizona¹

Presenter:

Daul Valenzuela²

Recreation Manager, Human Services Division, Scottsdale, Arizona

Background

Scottsdale, Arizona, is not immune to the problems which make the lives of our nation's youth and families challenging, difficult and sometimes desperate. Concerns expressed at annual youth town hall meetings, local parent councils, and school youth forums, along with police statistics on the number of emerging gangs and amount of graffiti in the parks, led the community to conclude that part of the problem was the amount of idle time experienced by young people during nonschool hours.

Although an affluent community, Scottsdale's fastest-growing population is the poor. In 1980 only 3.5% of the population lived below the poverty level. By 1990 the poverty rate had jumped to 5.9%. With the city rapidly expanding in population (1990: 130,069; 1995: 165,430 estimated), the number of people living below the poverty level is also rapidly increasing. The problems associated with economic deprivation (e.g., delinquency, teen pregnancy, school failure, drug and alcohol abuse, teen violence) are all a growing source of concern. In 1994 referrals for violent crimes increased 53%, and documented gang members increased by 51% over the previous year. These problems were not confined to low-income families.

Risk factors associated with transitions, mobility, low neighborhood attachment and community disorganization also occur in Scottsdale. Rapid growth is attracting an ethnically diverse mix of young adults and families searching for economic opportunity. The promise of relocation is often met with disappointment as entry level employment, with

inadequate or nonexistent healthcare benefits, fails to provide the compensation needed to economically sustain individuals and families. Scottsdale's new citizens often leave behind traditional support systems.

The 1993 Maricopa County Needs Assessment found that 34% of respondents in Scottsdale had no family, and 11% reported no friends in the area, or no friends at all. Ten percent said they shared their residence in the past year with someone who could not afford their own housing, and 10% said they were displaced within the past three years. The survey also identified barriers to receiving social services in Scottsdale: 61% did not know where to find a particular service, 36% could not afford service, 28% were ineligible for nonfinancial reasons, and 26% had family/personal objections to seeking services.

Without family or friends to temper the effects of unrealized dreams and frustrations, the likelihood of problem behaviors increases. In 1994 Scottsdale's Police Crisis Intervention Team recorded an increase of 15% in domestic violence calls, an 18% increase in family relations problems, a 23% increase in requests for suicide counseling, an 18% increase in sexual abuse interventions, a 21% increase in child abuse calls, and a 27% increase in contacts for runaways.

Further, the city reports a 44% increase in juvenile crime since 1989; in 1992 juveniles made up 26% of all those arrested in Scottsdale. In 1993 and 1994 Scottsdale citizens ranked crime, drugs and gangs as their highest and second highest priority concerns. In 1993, 61% of Scottsdale high school students believed there were gang members in their schools, 54% said they knew gang members and 74%

¹ Material is taken edited by Witt, P.A., & Crompton, J.L. (Eds.). (1996). *Recreation programs that work for at-risk youth: The challenge of shaping the future*. State College, PA: Venture Publishing, Inc.
Out of print, used by permission of publisher

² City of Scottsdale Human Services Division P.O.Box 1000 Scottsdale, AZ 85252 Phone: (602) 994-2457

said they knew someone who had brought a weapon of some kind to school. There were 93 births to teens in Scottsdale in 1993 and 433 high school dropouts in 1993. The 1991-92 dropout rate for Scottsdale School District was 34th out of 105 districts in the state. Illegal drug activity is also a problem. A survey of high school students reported that 36% used marijuana, 17% said they had used hallucinogens and smaller percentages reported having used narcotics, cocaine and methamphetamines. A 1993 survey of Scottsdale high school students showed rates of substance abuse at least as high as state and national rates. Fifty-two percent of high school students had used alcohol within the last 30 days compared to 43% statewide in 1991. Thirty-two percent of high school students reported smoking cigarettes compared to a national average of 29%.

Program Description

Program Goals

With the above issues in mind, Project Hope was created to provide a holistic set of services to meet the recreational, employment, educational, and other social service needs of youth in Scottsdale. Thus, the teen program in Scottsdale is an investment in renewing the spirit and restoring hope in today's youth. Although Scottsdale had a lot of beautiful parks and an array of programs, no programs existed in 1990 for middle schoolers or teens.

The goal of Project Hope is:

To provide a variety of safe supervised places for middle-school and high-school-aged youth to gather, feel a sense of belonging and ownership, interact with positive role models and be empowered through learning social and instrumental skills to become healthy productive young adults.

As a result of participating in the program, participants are expected to:

- (a) increase self-esteem among teens participating regularly;
- (b) improve self-discipline, decision-making and leadership skills;
- (c) increase positive interpersonal relationships;
- (d) increase knowledge of issues affecting youth;
- (e) facilitate the development and/or maintenance of positive, functional life and leisure skills; and

- (f) increase knowledge and skills in creating and using sources of help when needed.

To achieve these outcomes, Project Hope seeks to work collaboratively with other community institutions to create shared prevention strategies that serve as vehicles for strengthening protective factors which diminish the risk factors causing adolescent behavior problems in Scottsdale.

To help measure success in meeting its goals, outcome targets were set:

- (1) a communitywide collaboration will be developed, consisting of youth, adults and service providers with a shared vision of the positive development of youth and families in Scottsdale (formed in June 1993);
- (2) risk and protective factors unique to Scottsdale will be identified through a comprehensive risk and resource assessment, based on Hawkins and Catalano's Communities That Care Model for risk-focused prevention (completed in June 1995);
- (3) a comprehensive Prevention Plan will be completed, approved by community leaders and implemented through a system of task forces within Scottsdale's community collaborative (completed in December 1995); and
- (4) benchmarks (i.e., statistical indicators) will be created by community leaders and members of the community collaborative from risk factors identified in the community risk assessment, and updated annually to measure change against the baseline data. Correlation between reduction of risk factors and reduction of problem adolescent behaviors will determine the degree to which the program has met its goal (completed in December 1995).

Program Content

Project Hope consists of a number of program elements, each of which came about through a unique set of collaborative arrangements.

Middle School Madness: In spring 1990, the Scottsdale Parents Council approached the city with its concern that there was nothing for middle-school-aged children to do in the summer months. While there were no budgeted funds available, staff from Scottsdale Recreation, Scottsdale Boys and Girls Clubs and Scottsdale Parents Council pooled resources and created a series of special events for middle schoolers. An eight-week program, Middle School Madness, has been funded by the city at one of its Community Centers during subsequent

summers since 1991 for \$10,000. The program is now called *The Zone* and serves middle- and high-school-aged teens.

In the fall of 1991 a recreation leader began a teen outreach program in another of Scottsdale's community parks adjacent to a high school. Initially, the program focused on having food and volleyball once a week in the park and using this activity as the basis for establishing positive relationships with a caring recreation leader. This was followed by efforts to create a gathering place the teens could make their own inside the community center.

Youth Intervention Unit: In 1993 the city's mayor and council approved the launching of a \$500,000 youth intervention unit. Further, they approved funds for two full-time positions for teen recreation programmers in two of the four city community centers. A year later an additional full-time position was created for a third community center teen programmer and the YMCA agreed to take ownership of teen programming in the fourth center.

LINKS: In 1993 two years of community visioning efforts (including a youth forum representing students from all of Scottsdale's middle and high schools, a community leader's summit on changes taking place in Scottsdale, and a long-term youth visioning committee composed of service providers) culminated in the formation of a community collaboration. It was called LINKS, and was composed of youth and adults interested in creating a safe, healthy and productive community.

As a participant and leader in these visioning efforts and the LINKS collaborative, Scottsdale Recreation Division created interdisciplinary partnerships to meet adolescent needs. Further, the Division has maximized limited resources during nonschool hours in all four of its community/neighborhood centers. Existing recreation resources have been reallocated to create teen programs, and new resources have been added to create full-time adult leadership based on the principle that the single most important factor in reaching healthy adulthood is a positive relationship with a caring adult.

Job Skills: Scottsdale Youth and Family Services provides *job skills, employment opportunities and behavioral health services* with teens in consultation with recreation leaders at teen centers instead of limiting services to their central offices. Scottsdale Prevention Institute conducts leadership, cognitive and social skill building training with youth and staff, while assisting in the creation and refinement of a research instrument with Arizona State University, the YMCA, and Boys and Girls Clubs, to measure the effectiveness of programs with

teens. Scottsdale Police are changing teens' perceptions by participating with teens in recreation activities.

Other programs have also been created: The Youth Leader Program is a one-to-one mentoring experience between youth and city employees that exposes youth to career choices and the world of work and involves them as contributing members of their community. In 1994, 110 teens were recognized at the end of the summer program for contributing over 12,000 hours of voluntary service. Those who elected to do so earned high-school credit.

Education Support Program: As a result of the alarming number of high-school dropouts, the high-school principal, recreation manager, and other city and school staff, created an *alternate classroom* at one community center and a *GED class* was instituted at a second center. Funded initially by Scottsdale Concerned Citizens and the school district, the alternate classroom is now funded by a state grant through the school district. The GED class conducted by Rio Salado Community College continues with both adult and teen participants.

The need for *homework assistance* was met by recruiting an Honors Society from Arizona State University to provide volunteer tutoring. In its second year of operation, Friends of the Library, through the local United Way agency, funds a coordinator for the program. Another center's tutoring staff is funded by an annual allocation by the local Setroma Club.

Other Programs: *Teen Councils* have been formed at each center to involve youth in leadership skill building opportunities and facilitate planning and operation of their own programs. Fundraising and service projects, with the assistance of parent groups, are another integral component.

Other program components facilitating outcomes include having participants actively involved in all phases of recreation programming (e.g., planning, conducting and evaluating); introducing a free-food component provided by Waste Not, a nonprofit organization that delivers Scottsdale restaurant food to areas of need in the community; annual awards ceremony for recognition of skills learned and goals reached; guest speakers and theme presentations focusing on specific youth issues, e.g., sexuality, teen rights and responsibilities; citywide grass roots basketball league in conjunction with the YMCA and Boys and Girls Club, cultural activities that promote self-identity and pride, e.g., photo art project and exhibit at Center for the Arts, several murals and other community building activities.

A unique aspect of the program is the park reinstatement program which involves a behavior contract created with kids who previously might have

been kicked out of the parks for misbehaving. These youth are now referred to an outreach counsellor to develop a behavioral contract on the basis of which they are readmitted to the program.

Staffing and Scheduling

Staffing varies for the different teen programs. The city's teen programs located at its three community centers are staffed with a full-time teen programmer and part-time staff to maintain a 1:20 ratio. The 1:20 ratio helps justify the budget and provides a useful benchmark when requests for additional funding are made.

Program hours vary from one center to the next. For example, at the center adjacent to the high school, hours are 2 to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday during the school year. Hours at another center are 3 to 10 p.m. Monday through Friday with middle schoolers coming after school and high schoolers coming after 5 p.m. The third center is open in the evening hours Thursday through Sunday. Teens are involved in setting hours at all three centers.

The YMCA and Boys and Girls Club use a similar mix of full-time and part-time staff with three programs offered at their sites and one at the city's neighborhood center. The YMCA has one program one night a week and another program the other five evenings of the week. The Boys and Girls Club program is two evenings a week at both locations. Staff at these programs not only report to a full-time community center coordinator at their individual locations but also meet and plan on a regular basis through the formation of a teen programmers' cross sectional team. This group's meetings often expand to include representatives of the Boys and Girls Club and YMCA, Youth and Family Outreach Counselors, and staff from other agencies.

The Youth and Family Outreach Counselor has recently been assigned to a newly formed team composed of community center coordinators in charge of park and recreation staff in each of their respective areas. The team reports directly to the Parks and Recreation Director. This frees up the former supervisor, a recreation manager to perform training, neighborhood enhancement development and expansion work with the LINKS community collaborative to promote integrated prevention strategies and enhance youth and family services coordination, marketing and evaluation.

Staffing for the five middle school programs is coordinated by a full-time recreation leader who selects, trains and supervises part-time coaches, instructors for specialty classes and leaders for clubs at each of the middle school locations. Each middle school provides a staff person who serves as school

liaison to the after-school program. Activities are held twice per week after school, from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m.

Marketing

The teen programs in the community centers, Boys and Girls Clubs and YMCA are free and attract youth from their immediate neighborhoods. While the Community Service's quarterly program guide lists all programs offered to all ages and is delivered to each household in Scottsdale, it is not read by many teens. Word of mouth, teen staff "working" the school and the neighborhood, student newsletters and PTO newsletters seem to be the most effective vehicles for reaching teens rather than the traditional flyer or media release.

The middle-school programs charge a fee to help cover part of the program cost. Programs are well-attended in more affluent neighborhoods; however, programs in less affluent areas have experienced numbers considerably below capacity. The formation of an advisory council for these programs is underway with an initial goal of finding ways to increase participation.

Financing and Resource Allocation

The three community center teen programs and the five middle-school programs are primarily funded from general revenue generated by the city of Scottsdale. Programs are supplemented considerably by in-kind services and cash donations from other key player agencies in Scottsdale. A limited breakdown of program staffing and costs follows:

Middle School Program annual budget:	\$122,800
Staffing: 1.4 FTE full-time, 3.7 part-time	
Community Center Teen Programs annual budget:	\$100,000
Staffing: 3.75 FTE full-time, 1.75 part-time	

Measurement of Program Outcomes

The number of safe, supervised places teens can gather has grown from none to twelve in the past five years. Two each are operated by the YMCA and Boys and Girls Clubs and serve an average of 30 to 40 teens per week per location. Three city community centers serve an average of 160 teens per day with over 350 registered participants. Five middle schools are serving over 500 students after school with intramural sports, classes and clubs. The latter is a new program funded by the city and supported by the Scottsdale School District as a result of extensive research and lobbying of the Mayor and Council and Scottsdale School Board by the

Scottsdale Parents Council, the same organization that approached the city five years ago about middle school students.

The primary vehicle for measuring the effectiveness of community centers, YMCA, and Boys and Girls Club teen programs is a participant pretest/posttest instrument developed collaboratively with Scottsdale Prevention Institute, Scottsdale Recreation, Boys and Girls Club, YMCA and the Arizona State University West Recreation Program.

The pretest/posttest is designed to measure perceptions both at the beginning and end of a school year teen program that will provide indications of changes in teen behavior and attitudes. It has already proven to be an effective vehicle for determining which programs have the greatest impact on improving participant perceptions. Future program planning is based on what is gained through the insights provided by this information.

Participant and parent surveys, along with feedback from adult leaders, service providers and other involved parties, are other vehicles used to measure program outcomes.