
The Sunnyvale Teen Express Program (STEP) in Sunnyvale, California¹

Presenter:

John Christian,² Director

Kelvin Fountano,² Recreation Program Coordinator

John Lawrence,² Recreation Supervisor

Background

Effective programming for youth and teens has been identified in Sunnyvale, California, (population 120,000) as a high priority for the Parks and Recreation Department in the 1990s. The radical shifts in family structure in recent years (related in many cases to divorce, remarriage, and economic recession) are elements of social change which have significantly affected children and teens. For example, the 1990 census estimates that 19% of the households with children in Sunnyvale are headed by a single parent, and of those, 80% are single mothers. Even for those households with two parents, many of which may represent blended families, 66% have both parents working outside the home. It is also significant that 6% of Sunnyvale's children overall, and 16% of the children of single mothers, live below the official poverty level.

Program Description

In the fall of 1993, the Sunnyvale city council took action on two policy documents which provide a framework for the provision of services for middle-school and high-school youth in the city. These documents provided the conceptual guidelines for the Sunnyvale Teen Express Program (STEP) and the Columbia Neighborhood Service Center which is currently under construction. The four objectives for the overall program are to:

(1) Provide coordinated services to those youth already identified. A group of 50 high-risk youth and their families will be targeted, including preteenagers and teenagers who have been involved with the criminal justice system, school truancy, gang activity, and/or substance abuse, as well as youth from abusive or deprived home environments.

(2) Increase middle-school performance by coordinating educational, health, and social services to students and community members. The goals are to (a) increase student performance by 5% on standardized achievement tests; (b) reduce absences by 20%; (c) reduce disciplinary referrals by 10%; and (d) increase parent contacts by 10%.

(3) Provide rehabilitation, predelinquency, neighborhood education, leisure services, youth employment, and neighborhood volunteer services. This would reduce the FBI crime rate by 5% and help maintain an annual juvenile offender recidivism rate of 4% or less.

(4) Promote leadership and training opportunities through youth involvement in the advisory and program planning process of youth and teen services.

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.

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² City of Sunnyvale Parks and Recreation P.O.Box 3707 Sunnyvale, CA 94088-3707 Phone: (408) 730-7516

STEP and Columbia Neighborhood Service Center

To bring STEP and Columbia Neighborhood Service Center to fruition required a collaborative effort between the Sunnyvale city council, the office of the city manager and several city departments; Sunnyvale area youth, teens, and their parents; community residents; Sunnyvale school district; social service organizations; local court and probating agencies; Stanford University; Advanced Micro Devices; and AGFA Film Corporation.

Program Planning

Sunnyvale Parks and Recreation Department has a long history of providing recreation services, staff support, facility support, and funding to the Sunnyvale school district. However, most of these youth and teen services focused on noontime and special event programming. Research, surveys, community input, and staff recommendations clearly outlined a need for after-school programs. In 1992 STEP was introduced, offering Sunnyvale area youth and teens fun and exciting activities in sports, leisure services, recreation, community services, job training, employment placement, volunteer opportunities, and teen alternative programs. STEP now offers over 75 after-school and summer programs on a year-round basis. The after-school programs are scheduled from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. each day at two middle-school sites. Field trips are scheduled to coincide with teachers' in-service training days. The elements which comprise STEP are shown in Exhibit 16A.

The Columbia Neighborhood Center concept was developed in response to two different situations. The first was the financial inability of a local school district to provide a middle-school gymnasium. The second was the desire of the city to provide a neighborhood center which would meet the long-term goals of improving the performance of students at Columbia Middle School while reducing the crime rate in the neighborhood. Accomplishment of these goals is through the coordinated delivery of a broad array of community services including educational, health, social, recreation, and public safety services. These services meet the needs of middle-school youth in the nonschool hours as well as providing services to support and enhance youths' educational performance and meeting their social service needs. In addition, services are offered to provide the balance of the neighborhood residents with social, recreational, and educational opportunities.

Some of the services currently being offered at existing school facilities include: classrooms, libraries, computer centers, multipurpose rooms, and swimming pools. Construction of Columbia's Neighborhood Center will provide a health center including two medical exam rooms, private waiting and reception area, and a records storage area; three soundproof counseling rooms to be shared by juvenile probation services, the Department of Social Services, and education counselors; a large lobby area; a job listing and interview area; and office space for the site manager, case manager, and recreation and school district physical education staff; and locker rooms. The gymnasium will feature a basketball court, bleachers to hold approximately 1,000 people, space for two crosscourt basketball courts, and three volleyball courts or six badminton courts. The Neighborhood Center will open in late 1996.

Staffing

STEP is supervised by a full-time recreation program coordinator who reports directly to the Sports, Aquatics and Teen Division Manager. Four recreation specialists and five recreation leaders work part time or on-call. Staff are also supported with program and coordination by a Teen Advisory Council.

The Neighborhood Center will largely be operated with existing staff: either city, school district, or repositioned social service agency staff. Overseeing of the center requires two additional positions: a site director and clerical staff person. Cost of the overhead will be shared by the district and the city.

Marketing

Most STEP after-school and field trip programs are fee-based with fee waiver and scholarship programs available for those who qualify. Nonfee programs such as noontime activities, late night basketball, and a special teen project through Stanford University are available year-round. Local newspaper agencies, Sunnyvale's cable channel, school newspapers, and daily school bulletin announcements are effective marketing strategies. The STEP Program also publishes a free monthly teen newsletter (FRESH) which is mailed directly to the homes. FRESH has a mailing list of over 700 middle-school and high-school teens. Registration tables and a display area are located on-site at each school; flyers and posters are displayed throughout each campus; registration

Exhibit 16A**Sunnyvale Teen Express Program (STEP)***Teen Alternative Program (TAP)*

- Juvenile Diversion
- U-turn (Chowchilla State Prison)
- Tackle (Stanford University)

*Special Events and Field Trips**After-school Programs*

- Middle school
- High School

*Youth Employment**Youth Volunteer Program**Teen Council**Special Interest Programs*

- EPIC Photo Club (AGFA Film)
- FRESH (Teen Newsletter)

Columbia Neighborhood
Service Center

brochures are printed for each eight-week session; and staff are assigned to each school to continually distribute flyers and promote activities.

The Neighborhood Center has received considerable press coverage. A series of neighborhood meetings and school presentations were scheduled over a three-month period. Ongoing marketing efforts will continue through the completion of the Columbia project and beyond.

Financing and Resource Acquisition

The STEP Program budget was \$26,704 in fiscal year 1994-95. The cost for constructing the Columbia Service Center is approximately \$3.3 million of which Advanced Micro Devices will cover \$1

million. The annual operating cost is projected to be \$287,000 (\$95,000 for facility maintenance and \$192,000 in staffing costs). These costs will be shared by the city and Sunnyvale school district. Anticipated revenues from leisure services in service center are \$34,000.

Measurement of Program Outcomes

Identifying the need and importance of an after-school and weekend youth and teen program was based on months of program evaluations, surveys, data research, and staff and community input. Collaborative agencies all agree that this planning was crucial for success. Long-term performance measures such as improved achievement on

standardized tests and reduced crime rates are currently being monitored. Immediate impact was apparent through higher job placement rates, higher teen program registrations, less vandalism on school sites during in-service days and vacations, participant retention, and parental involvement. Additionally, through the field trip program, many participants visited area amusements sites and state landmarks for the first time. Many students who were unable to participate on school varsity teams because of academic or economic restrictions were able to play in city sponsored leagues. The completion of the Neighborhood Center will allow these and future programs to expand.