
The Oakland Summer Performing Arts Day Camp (OPAC) in Oakland, California¹

Presenter:

Cleve Williams,² Director

Jennifer Koney-Li,² Visual Arts Coordinator

A recent publication by the Black Community Crusade for Children looked at seven urban areas in the south, east, and west. The report came to two conclusions regarding actions that need to be taken: (1) youth need more involvement with caring adults, adults who can create a mentoring and positive relationship; and (2) means need to be found to revitalize neighborhoods. Both of these issues speak to the necessity of empowering people to do things and take increased responsibility for themselves. (Cleve Williams)

Many recreation departments have reorganized their administrative structures in order to better serve the needs of at-risk youth. In Oakland, California, creative partnerships aimed at serving the needs of at-risk children and youth have been forged between the Office of Parks and Recreation, the Oakland Unified School District, nonprofit organizations, churches, colleges, private industries, and the community at large. The overall goal is to establish the “building blocks” necessary for human development from preschool through the teenage years. These building blocks consist of after-school programs; education, health, recreation, social, cultural, and athletic programs; employment and job preparation programs; and individual, family, group, and peer advisory counseling.

To avoid fragmentation and to facilitate the coordination of efforts, an Interagency Youth Advisory Committee made up of nonprofit, voluntary sector, law enforcement, and public education organizations is in the process of being established. In addition, the city has created an Interdepartmental At-Risk Youth Advisory Committee made up of

representatives of the police department, health and human services, library, museum, and city manager’s office. The Office of Parks and Recreation (OPR) is playing a lead role in the organization and leadership of these committees (see Exhibit 31A).

The OPR organizes its youth-oriented activities under three areas: extended school care; prevention and intervention services; and teen centers. *Extended School Care Services* are aimed at avoiding problems created by lack of parental supervision after school and during school holiday periods. Programs are offered for elementary- and middle-school children at a variety of sites including schools, the Oakland Public Library, several nonprofit agencies, and at Housing Authority sites. *Prevention and Intervention Services* consist of late-night recreation programs, the implementation of a teen curfew, youth outreach services, and programs that attract teens to constructive alternatives to gang and delinquent activities. Brief descriptions of these programs are given in Exhibit 31B, page 278. Seven *Teen Centers* offer places for teens to gather and interact in a safe, teen-centered environment.

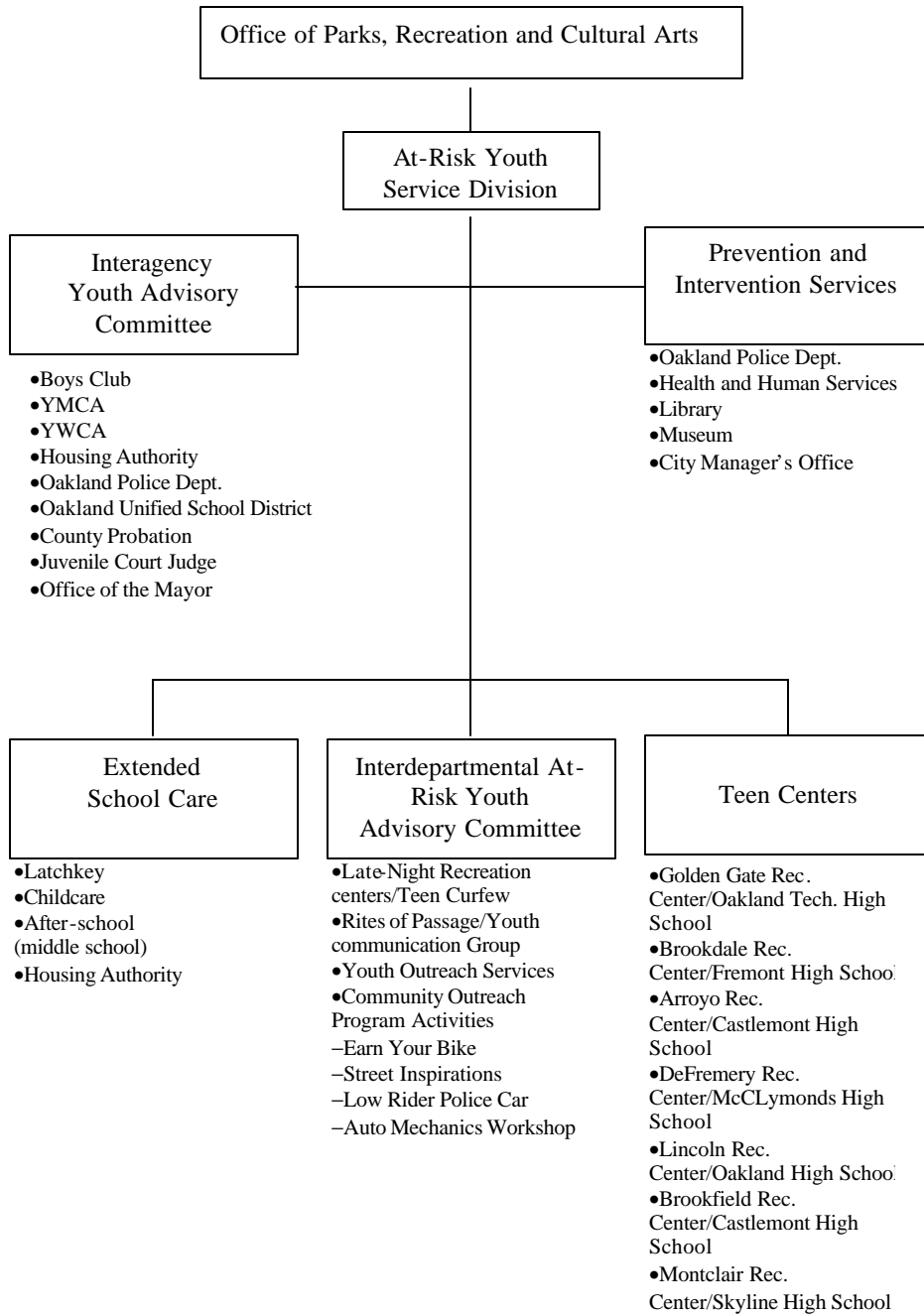
¹ Material is taken edited by Witt, P.A., & Crompton, J.L. (Eds.). (1996). *Recreation programs that work for at-risk youth: The challenge of shaping the future*. State College, PA: Venture Publishing, Inc.

Out of print, used by permission of publisher

² Oakland Office of Parks and Recreation 1529 Lakeside Drive Oakland, CA 94612-3092 Phone: (510) 268-3092

Exhibit 31A

Oakland Organization Structure for At-Risk Youth Services



One of the outstanding programs organized by the OPR is the Oakland Summer Performing Arts Day Camp (OPAC).

OPAC Program Summary

The Oakland Summer Performing Arts Day Camp provides a pivotal opportunity for Oakland-area 6- to 18-year-old youth to learn how to express themselves through dance, music, drama, and the visual arts. The program was established on the premise that cultures and societies have always created art as a vehicle for expression of their values, hopes, and beliefs. Every aspect of a person's life is touched by art in one way or another.

The curriculum encourages participation in the four artistic disciplines (i.e., dance, visual arts, music, and drama) and is taught by professional artists/instructors. Additionally, a Masters Camp component provides an opportunity for intensive training with artists-in-residence in the areas of dance, music, and drama, while exploring career possibilities in the arts through guest artist lectures, discussions, performances, and excursions. The curriculum is designed to expand appreciation of lesser known arts and cultures, thus fostering appreciation of differences between people and cultures. The program is conducted in a noncompetitive atmosphere without the judgment of "good, better, best." Schedules are coordinated with other community arts programs to avoid overlap and to encourage use of existing community art resources.

In 1991 initial funding and support for a pilot effort was provided by the mayor's office with some private monies used to supplement these city funds. After demonstrating success, the city council was approached for funding for future years. This pattern of action for initiating programs has been used widely in Oakland.

In 1992 the program operated at two sites and served 160 participants. By 1994 it had grown to include 700 participants ages 6-16 (320 for 2 sessions of 2 weeks each), together with 60 youth ages 12-18 in a Masters Camp.

The day camp operates from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., with extended care available from 8 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. and after camp ends until 5:30 p.m. The day camp is held at a centrally located school site, accessible by public transportation. Fees are low to reflect the financial status of the participants: \$20 per two-week session; \$45 per one-week Masters Camp; \$25 per week for extended care. In 1994 scholarships totaling \$2,875 were awarded.

Objectives of the program are:

- (1) to provide an affordable, accessible, high-quality creative arts experiences for Oakland-area children in a safe and nurturing environment in order to prevent crime and delinquency;
- (2) to provide low-cost, safe, alternative childcare;
- (3) to expose low-income inner city youth to the arts;
- (4) to foster and nurture appreciation for all forms of creative expression, and, by doing so, to emphasize the importance of each child's vision and voice and improve his or her self-esteem;
- (5) to teach and to practice good audience listening skills in order to develop an art audience;
- (6) to introduce possible career paths in the arts; and
- (7) to celebrate the diverse community that is Oakland through cultural arts expression.

Key Players

OPAC is planned in partnership with the Oakland Public School District, the mayor's office, prominent members of the local arts community (e.g. Michael Morgan, Director of the Oakland Symphony), Laney Community College, and the Cultural Arts Division of the OPR. Additional partners who help with implementation include the Federal Lunch Program, Summer Youth Employment Training Program (SYETP), Studio One Teen Club teaching assistants, community members, and parent volunteers.

Resource Assessment

Implementing OPAC required an assessment of currently existing programs, organizations, and material resources that could augment and benefit the program. To be successful it was necessary to be innovative and build on successes. Some of the resources used to foster development of the program have included:

- *Mayor's Office*: catalyst; spearheaded fundraising; increased visibility.
- *Parks and Recreation Department*: administrative coordination; determined structure; implemented program.
- *School District*: facilities; maintenance staff; loaned musical instruments.
- *Local Artists and Art Organizations*: curriculum recommendations; artist/teaching staff; guest artists; distributed brochures.
- *Local-College*: curriculum recommendations; supported program.
- *Federal Government*: free lunch program.
- *SYETP*: provided recreation staff.

Exhibit 31B**Recreation Programs To Reduce Youth Participation in Delinquency, Gangs and Drug-Related Activities****Philosophy**

Special attention should be paid to the issues of crime and delinquency prevention through public park and recreation agencies. Crime prevention goals and enabling legislation have substantial public support. Local public park and recreation agencies and collaborative partners offer untapped potential to help abate criminal behavior and to prevent crime and delinquency.

Programs

The following are programs that the Oakland Office of Parks and Recreation (OPR) has implemented for the specific purpose of preventing delinquency, gang involvement and drug use among youth and young adults.

Nite Hoops (Midnight Basketball): Through a partnership among the city, Golden State Warriors, and several nonprofit agencies, Oakland created Nite Hoops to provide a place for young men to play organized basketball during the late night hours from 9 p.m. to 2 a.m. The program incorporates a mandatory component for participants' attendance in educational and employment training sessions.

Workrecreation (At-risk Youth Employment): OPR recruits youth (ages 14-18) at-risk of delinquency into a five-week summer youth employment program which has provided work experience for Oakland youth for 40 years. Delinquent and/or at-risk youth are referred by the court system, social service agencies, and the school district. Youth work Monday through Thursday in OPR facilities learning horticultural techniques and recreation programming skills. Fridays are reserved for classroom training on career goal setting, job application preparation, job interview skills, evaluation, and safety and work standards. Counselors assigned by the court or the social service agencies monitor the work assignments and evaluate the youths' work performance.

Prevention After-school/Shining Stars Directory and Information Referral: Oakland offers an after-school program including academic and arts-based programs at seven school sites for 600 middle-school and junior high-school youth; innovative youth services are contracted through nonprofit agencies; the Shining Stars Directory of all local youth service agencies and programs is available for reference; and a computerized information retrieval system is operated by the Oakland Library.

Gang Prevention Outreach: Nontraditional outreach strategies are used by OPR to recruit youth who are at greatest risk of becoming involved in violence and crime to provide them with positive alternatives. The prevention and intervention services are aimed at attracting and recruiting youth (ages 13-21) who are "nonjoiners" of conventional recreation programs, but who exhibit behaviors that are early indicators of "dropping out," as positive, contributing members of society. Examples of the hard-to-reach youth are those engaged in delinquent activities, gangs, violent behaviors, drug use, alcohol use, truancy, vandalism, and dropping out of school.

Youth workers (intervention specialists) go to locations where these youth congregate, and talk with them on their terms and on their turf. They attempt to draw them into special nontraditional programs. Many of the programs are designed and developed by the youth themselves. The programs teach values and life skills including teamwork, individual responsibility, respect, leadership, conflict resolution, and self-esteem. The programs offer tutoring, remedial education, mentoring, counseling, cultural awareness, communication skills building, and recreation.

Youth Communications Group: This OPR program is specifically aimed at serving youth who are regarded as "troublemakers" and who congregate in groups in the community; get in trouble with police; and shun traditional recreation programs and facilities. Youth workers channel group activities toward increasing youth awareness of life options; motivating them to pursue positive alternatives in the community; getting them in activities where they see immediate and positive benefit to their own communities; and discussing the destructive outcomes of certain negative influences. The program also provides educational and tutorial assistance in reading, writing, math, and computer workshops in a nonthreatening environment; and provides weight-training and other recreational activities of interest to the youth.

Exhibit 31B (Continued)

Low Rider Car Club: The Low Rider Car Club program works with youth vulnerable to neighborhood gang involvement and encourages them to participate in activities that “give something back to the community.” The program educates and mobilizes at-risk youth to help eliminate neighborhood eyesores through graffiti removal and trash cleanup programs. The program’s theme promotes safer neighborhoods and schools and increases the youths’ connection with the community.

The Low Rider Car Club program builds bridges between troubled youth, police, and schools. Recently, the program symbolically adopted a neighborhood junior high school located in an area marred by heavy drug dealing, crime and gang activity. Members of the Low Rider Car Club, streetwise themselves, serve as mentors, teach troubled teens how to work on cars and find employment, and offer safe settings for recreational activities.

Earn Your Bike Program: The program offers unclaimed bicycles from the police department inventory and bicycles donated to needy youth (ages 9-18) who earn the bicycles by volunteering a minimum of 40 hours of community service (e.g., cleaning up city parks or erasing graffiti). Participating youth learn about the new Helmet Safety Law and how to repair bicycles and operate them safely. Youth also learn about self-esteem, discipline, taking pride in their community, and earning something valuable through hard work.

Broad Reach-Maritime Training: The training and job placement program gives Oakland at-risk urban youth/young adults (ages 18-25) a unique opportunity to experience the economic, entrepreneurial, and fun aspects of commercial fishing. Learning a trade, new skills (e.g., fishing, net hauling, boat handling, navigation, seamanship, boating safety, equipment nomenclature), discipline, and self-respect and being provided a new avenue for economic gain are the key prevention elements for these youth, many of whom deal drugs for a living.

Hard core, at-risk youth who are screened and referred by the Youth Communications Group program staff enter into the maritime training and on-the-job experience program in commercial fishing. Youth serve as crew members on a 26-foot Coast Guard-approved fishing boat guided by experienced fishermen. In the four-day training program, the youth crew members assist in operating the boat and participate in herring fishing in the San Francisco Bay area. The youth earn \$10 per hour while in training and, after graduating, acquire the potential for earning \$20 to \$25 per hour.

This program offers assistance with job placement. The California Department of Fish and Game has agreed to help the Maritime Training Program in placing all graduates. OPR staff have conducted and videotaped job interviews with the youth, disseminated the interview tapes to potential employers, and secured job offers for some of the youth.

- Teen Clubs:* provided teaching assistants; volunteers
- Parent/Community Volunteers:* supervised lunch time and recreation program.
- Local Businesses:* made in-kind donations; distributed programs.
- Existing Art Education Programs:* used as augmentation, not competition. Program dates were planned with them in mind so as to build upon each other’s efforts (i.e., Laney Orchestra Camp).

Collaborative Planning

Planning in partnership with the mayor’s office, the city manager, council members, and other city departments proved to be fruitful, but required careful attention to communication channels and follow through. Being equally accountable for the outcome

of the project, all players had to be equally invested and able to state their objectives and concerns from the start of the project. Some potential problems of collaboration have been: communication delays; lack of clear policy direction (mayor versus city council; council member turf issues); and coordination with the city manager’s office (city manager versus mayor).

Additionally, it was important to get an early buy-in from the site organization (i.e., school district) where the program was held. Representatives needed to be involved in the planning process from the start. Facility-use decisions needed to be communicated to the site employees (e.g., principal, secretary, custodial staff) and agreements developed with the facility supervisor (i.e., custodian) stating when the site would be open and locked each day and the level of cleanliness required.

Staffing

The quality and reputation of a performing arts day camp is directly dependent upon employing an expert and experienced teaching staff who are not only well-established in their artistic discipline but who also have an interest and commitment to teaching their craft to children. Since the OPAC program is short and intense, experienced teachers are hired so that preparatory training is kept to a minimum. References are checked and interviews are carefully conducted. As part of this process, evaluation of the leaders' ability to work well with children, encourage creative growth, and patience and spirit required to pass on their craft is also necessary. Finally, instructors must be able to work well within a bureaucracy. Since much paperwork and structure is necessary to conduct such a complex program, cooperative and enthusiastic personalities are a necessity. Interviews also stress the need for staff to be dependable and fully responsible.

The program needs coordinators, besides a director, to take responsibility for such specific areas as: registration, lunch time, supplies and equipment, teaching assistants and volunteers, extended care, and final performances. The use of coordinators helps diminish the daunting magnitude of administering the project.

Staff Training and Orientation

Once instructors and staff have been hired and contracted, orientation meetings are held both to introduce the program organization to the staff, and for staff members to meet each other. Staff responsibilities are concisely laid out. A staff handbook has been developed. During training sessions plenty of time for questions is allowed. Agenda items include:

- I. Introductions of administration staff and the vision.
- II. Introductions of teaching staff.
- III. Site specifics and logistics.
- IV. Program description, daily schedule and staff responsibilities.
- V. Supply and equipment needs.
- VI. Final performance and art exhibit arrangements.
- VII. Getting paid/necessary paperwork.
- VIII. Questions.

Communication

With a large staff and a complex program involving many different key players, establishing effective

communication channels is critical. Mechanisms used to facilitate good communication include:

- providing on-site staff folders for class registration lists and last-minute updates;
- placing a communication board near the staff folders for announcements;
- scheduling mid-program staff meetings and teacher appreciation gatherings;
- consulting expert teaching staff during the planning process; giving them evaluations to complete at the conclusion of the program; and recognizing their contributions; and
- sending meeting minutes and agendas to affected key players; keeping records.

Marketing

A descriptive, easy-to-comprehend program brochure is the primary promotion tool. The challenge with the program brochure is to describe an extensive program, while making the brochure visually appealing as well. Use of a logo and color printing helps. Review by potential recipients is also critical. Some additional considerations are:

- charging low or no registration fees;
- providing information on scholarships and application procedures;
- allowing students to select their classes with alternate choices;
- carefully tracking and honoring class limits; and
- inquiring about musical instrument needs on the registration form.

To date, marketing strategies have included mass mailings, distribution through the schools, classroom recruitment talks, fairs, recreation and art centers, local businesses, community cable channel, and radio community service spots. Efforts are made to reach those children who are hard to reach. A poster, designed by a camp class, is also used to promote the program.

Implementation

OPAC was implemented after careful research, planning, staffing, advertising, and registration. Organizing the students into age groups and classes was achieved through color-coded name tags imprinted with class numbers and names. A registration database was critical for tracking students and developing class rosters. Children were assigned to subgroups by age and artistic discipline. Having a large, wall-sized chart with class names, numbers,

teachers, locations, and times provided a valuable central information source.

Ensuring the safety of every student is the primary responsibility of all staff at all times. Daily attendance, a simple check-in/check-out system for extended care, hall monitors, and plenty of lunchroom and recreation staff have combined to ensure that students are accompanied at all times.

Students and staff are reminded of the importance of daily clean-up. Nurturing a respect for the environment and site has helped to curb possible messes.

Methods currently used to measure program outcomes include: evaluation forms (parent/staff/class); the number of returning students; review of final performances and exhibitions (participation level); parent and student comments; and noting the level of excitement.

Budget and Financial Considerations

For 1994 the OPAC program budget was approximately \$80,000. The following major expenses were incurred:

Instructor Salaries	\$46,970
Administrative Support	6,350
Program Director	3,500
Security	1,875
Custodial	2,200
Extended Care and Lunch Time Recreation	11,550
Brochures and Printing	800
Supplies and Rentals	3,500
Scholarships	2,875