
Parks Department's Summer Jobs in Tampa, Florida¹

Presenter:
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Background

In 1992 the Tampa Parks Department initiated what would become three summer employment programs designed to provide youth ages 14-18 with positive work experiences, marketable skills and supplemental learning opportunities. The program initially drew on the experience of the city's Private Industry Council which had been providing job opportunities for youth through the U.S. Department of Labor's Summer Youth Employment Program and Job Training and Partnership Act since the early 1980s. When federal guidelines changed to require remedial classes for participants in the Summer Youth Employment Program, the Council saw participation drop from 150 youth to five. Classroom instruction, unfortunately, conflicted with available work shifts for youth. To avoid this problem, the Parks Department developed construction crews. Because the targeted sites were in operation all day, youth could attend school for two hours each morning then invest several hours on site in the afternoon.

In 1993 there was on construction crew of fifteen youth, ages 14-18. In 1994 a second crew was added for a total of 30 youth. Under the guidance of a professional carpenter, crews worked 20 hours per week, four hours each day, constructing boardwalks and fishing piers. Two hours each day were devoted to expanding computer skills at a local vocational school. Under the general heading of "STEPS Toward Environmental Partnerships" (STEPS), the Parks Department currently coordinates three separate job programs: Operation Brightside, Environmental Services Program, and Youth Construction Crew.

Operation Brightside

Program Description: Thirty-five hours per week on the job (seven hours a day) working with grounds maintenance crews raking, weeding, and picking up litter in parks, recreation centers, and the cemetery. One crew worked in a large cemetery taking pictures of headstones, drawing maps, and doing surveys. Information was entered by these young adults into a computerized data base inventory. In addition, the program includes three hours per week of evening training on ethics, heritage, pride, self-esteem, hygiene, good eating habits, pregnancy, and the importance of a good education.

Target Population: Minorities 14-18 years of age with a minimum 2.0 grade point average, good attendance at school, responsibility, good attitude, and a mixture of low-income and middle-income households.

Budget: funded by Anheuser-Busch (\$50,000 for salaries); Tampa's Urban League (\$6,600 administration); and the city of Tampa (\$5,204 for supervision). Total cost was \$61,804 for 25 participants, or \$2,472 per person. (Three dropped out but three more were added.) Total cost does not include in-kind use of equipment (e.g., mowers, weed eaters). Participants paid for their own safety shoes.

Environmental Services Program

Program Description: Twenty hours per week on-the-job working with parks grounds crews in a mentorship capacity on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and one-half day on Thursdays. Participants were also involved 12 hours per week (six hours every Monday

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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and Friday) in a customized training program learning to read and do math, utilizing grounds maintenance type problems and activities. Participants learn how to open a bank account, how to use a computer, to design a landscape plan, and to identify plants. Participants were also exposed to professionals who gave them information about different careers, e.g., forestry, drafting.

One of the keys to the success of the program was meeting with crew supervisors ahead of time, outlining the program and getting their commitment to be involved. Participants also had to be committed to the program since many had to catch buses at 5:30 a.m., five mornings a week, in order to report to work at 6:30 a.m. Bus passes were provided.

Target Population: Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) standards-low income, at-risk, in trouble with the law, poor grades, ages 16-20.

Budget: funded by the city parks department (\$1,000 for supervision), the Private Industry Council (\$23,350 for salaries and administration) and a Teacher Quest Grant (\$1,440 for salaries). Total cost of \$25,790 for 11 participants, or \$2,344 per person, includes bus passes and safety shoes (\$55 per person). The above cost does not include in-kind equipment (e.g., trucks, mowers). Six participants dropped out, of whom two had to drop out to go to summer school in order to graduate, and one dropped out due to complications related to pregnancy.

Private Industry Council Construction Crews

Program Description: Twenty hours per week 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. constructing boardwalks and fishing piers in a park with a carpenter as foreman. Twelve hours per week, two hours per day, at the local v-tech learning to read and write with a standard computer program working at their own pace.

Target Population: Students 14-18 years of age. JTPA criteria-low income, at-risk, in trouble with the law, low grades.

Budget: funded by the Private Industry Council (\$27,900 for administration and supervision), the city of Tampa (\$20,000), and the city of Tampa Parks Department (\$3,444-supervision). Total cost was \$51,344 for 15 participants, or \$2,090 per person not including wood (\$20,000 of this is the price of wood and other materials for constructing docks, boardwalks, and other projects) including safety shoes (\$55 per person). Five participants dropped out.

Evidence of Program Effectiveness

Some of the comments from the kids afterwards were "I loved the program because it taught me that I could

be treated like an adult." Some of the quotes in the newspaper were: "I loved the program because now I know I have a choice!" "I can either go to college, or I can work for the parks department!" All three programs have worked out well and have been expanded. The Parks Department has approval to hire 19 of the best participants to work on Saturdays and half days on Sundays throughout the school year. This will be offered as a reward to the most reliable and hard-working participants in the summer programs. Two participants have graduated and are now full-time park employees. Both are enrolled in a two-year horticulture program at the local community college.