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## Project S.A.Y. (Save-a-Youth) in Anaheim, California<sup>1</sup>

*Presenter:*

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### Background

Anaheim is a city of 266,406 residents, 31% of whom are Hispanic and 59% are Caucasian. Spanish is spoken at home in 16% of the households. While the median family income in Anaheim is \$45,407, in certain segments of the city (particularly where there are high concentrations of minorities) the median income is approximately \$27,000.

As early as 1984, the Anaheim Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department recognized that the community was facing a problem relative to its youth.

- Groups of unorganized youth between the ages of 13 and 21 were increasingly responsible for such crimes as vandalism, substance abuse, graffiti, assaults, burglaries, and thefts.
- Existing youth-related service programs were only somewhat effective because of: (a) limited bilingual/bicultural staff; (b) the absence of networking among city, community-based schools, parents, and private sector interests; (c) the lack of programs targeted at gang prevention/intervention; and, (d) the city's crisis-oriented rather than preventive service delivery.

These findings prompted the 1986 creation of Project S.A.Y. (Save-A-Youth), a youth-oriented gang/drug intervention program. The initial program

dealt with youth between the ages of 13 and 21; however, city staff realized that a large number of younger, more impressionable youth were still not being reached. These youth were falling under the influence of gangs, though in most cases they had not made up their minds about participating in them.

As a result, the city sought and received a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Family and Youth Services Bureau, to create Kids-in-Action, a prevention component for Project S.A.Y. with activities focusing on self-esteem and confidence building for children 5-12 years of age. Thus, the city was able to mount a three-pronged approach to youth gang/drug problems to include prevention, intervention, and suppression components. The suppression component was already being provided by the Anaheim Police Department.

Despite these initial efforts to address the problem, gangs and drug usage continued to be a growing concern. Therefore, in 1991, the Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department helped facilitate an interdepartmental task force to address the problem comprehensively. Task force recommendations led to the formation of a Citizens' Task Force comprised of a broad coalition of citizen representatives from businesses, schools, human service organizations, civic groups, and religious organizations. Grass-roots neighborhood residents were also represented. City staff, including the Police Chief, Parks, Recreation and Community

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<sup>1</sup> 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

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Services Director, Planning Director, Fire Chief, and other city staff served as ex-officio members of the Task Force.

The Task Force convened public forums throughout the city and gathered the input from more than 600 residents. This information was used to help create a strategy for addressing Anaheim's gang and drug issues. The strategy identified ten gang and drug issues and recommended over 90 actions to address these issues. School, religious, and nonprofit organizations, the business community, and numerous city departments were delegated specific tasks to implement the strategy.

In June 1992 the Anaheim City Council adopted the "Citizen Task Force Report" and appointed a full-time city staff position to work with the community to help coordinate and facilitate implementation of the recommendations. In 1995 the Task Force was replaced by an interdepartmental neighborhood services committee composed of executive managers representing various departments including Parks, Recreation and Community Services. The full-time city staff position formerly assigned to gang/drug prevention is now responsible for implementing a broad range of services designed to revitalize depressed and deteriorating neighborhoods. Project S.A.Y. is a critical component of the overall neighborhood revitalization strategy.

## Program Description

### Goals and Objectives

The long-term goal of Project S.A.Y. is to assist youth in avoiding gang and drug involvement, and become productive, law-abiding citizens. Specific short-term objectives which give context to the long-term goal are as follows:

- (1) to keep youth in school (reduce absenteeism/truancy);
- (2) to return youth to school (prevent students from dropping out);
- (3) to assist youth in achieving passing grades (reduce incidence of failing);
- (4) to assist youth in completing informal/formal probation (reduce repeat offenses);
- (5) to assist youth in reducing drug activity; and
- (6) to assist youth in reducing gang activity.

### Key Players

Project S.A.Y. works closely with public and private nonprofit agencies to facilitate the delivery of services to target neighborhoods. Private businesses

provide support through contribution of funds and/or in-kind services. The most significant key players are the Anaheim Religious Community Council (ARCC), the Anaheim Boys and Girls Club, Anaheim Family YMCA, Salvation Army, Anaheim Union High School District, Anaheim City School District, Centralia School District, Anaheim Police Department Gang and Community Policing Details, Orange County Probation Department, Anaheim Private Industry Council (PIC), and YWCA Youth Employment Service. Several Anaheim businesses including Rockwell Corporation, Carl Karcher Enterprises, Disneyland, the California Angels, and the Mighty Ducks of Anaheim have consistently supported Project S.A.Y. activities.

### Program Content

Project S.A.Y. consists of a combination of outreach, paraprofessional counseling, recreation, and sports activities to encourage youth involvement in positive activities.

**Prevention:** Kids-in-Action targets children ages 5-12 and provides comprehensive, nontraditional recreation, sports, and outreach programs in eight targeted neighborhoods of the city. Programs are offered in community centers, elementary schools, or on park sites. Recreational and educational activities are designed to promote positive self-esteem, build confidence, develop cultural pride, and reinforce and support various classroom prevention programs in place in the Anaheim elementary schools such as Drug and Alcohol Resistance and Education (D.A.R.E.) and Wipe-Out Graffiti, a graffiti abatement and educational curriculum.

An early assessment, referral, and evaluation tracking method is used on youths participating in the program. A procedure and referral system documents behavioral problems in participants for assessment and follow-up by the outreach worker. With this linkage the outreach worker and recreation staff can address the behavior of the child and work with the parents and community resources to affect positive change.

On the surface, a Kids-in-Action site looks similar to other after-school programs currently being offered across the United States. College-age staff in uniform interact with groups of children and conduct activities ranging from arts and crafts to sports.

Upon closer observation, subtle differences between Kids-in-Action and other after-school programs address the root causes of youth gang involvement and substance abuse. The sites have a distinct identity through the prominent display of the multicolored Kids-in-Action logo in activity areas and on participants' shirts. A minimum of two

bilingual/bicultural staff work at each site, each trained to recognize social problems and provide referrals to community service outreach workers. Staff members' cultural sensitivity enables them to establish trust with parents which in turn leads to more consistent participation by the children.

Kids-in-Action sites are open fifty weeks per year with early afternoon and evening program hours to accommodate Anaheim's growing year-round school population. Many activities emphasize cultural pride, including Ballet Folklorico dances and holiday celebrations such as Cinco de Mayo, 16 de Septiembre, and Dia del Muerte. Off-site excursions to local businesses involve the participation of the Hispanic owner and/or manager as a positive role model in order to send a "can-do" message to the children. Youngsters are encouraged to join each site's Community Club and participate in neighborhood clean-ups, graffiti "paint outs," and tree planting/beautification efforts to promote environmental stewardship and community responsibility. Recreation programs emphasize skill development, sportsmanship, and team play over winning and losing. A specialized curriculum which discourages gang affiliation, antisocial behavior, and substance abuse is introduced into small group activities such as arts and crafts, and role-playing.

**Intervention:** Project S.A.Y.'s intervention component targets youth ages 13-19 and works extensively on junior and senior high school campuses. Together, the city and the Anaheim Union High School District have developed a paraprofessional antigang and drug counseling and behavior guidance program. Gang-awareness training for school administrators and teachers enables school personnel to make appropriate referrals to one of the city's five Community Service Outreach Workers. The outreach workers are assigned to areas of the city which correspond to specific high-school attendance boundaries and their supporting junior high and elementary feeder schools.

Outreach workers are trained in conflict resolution and provide mediation assistance between individuals and groups to prevent potentially violent situations. All of the current staff are bilingual, college educated, and come from backgrounds similar to the clients they serve. Workers are usually sensitive and understanding as well as savvy and street-smart. They have proven equally adept at communicating with educators, corporate officers, city administrators, police officers, high-school students, and gang members.

Each outreach worker carries an average load of 50 active clients, although they involve many more in recreation activities including summer camp, sports, tournaments, workshops, educational programs,

special events, excursions, and rap sessions. Outreach workers also conduct parenting workshops which focus on recognizing youth gang involvement and the resources available for referrals.

Outreach workers have offices at high schools and junior high schools to maintain close relationships with clients and school truant officers. The Anaheim Police Department's school-based gang investigator works with outreach workers in intervention programs including assemblies and rallies.

Outreach workers spend the majority of their time in one-on-one paraprofessional counseling and assessment sessions with clients and members of their families, usually in the client's home. The outreach workers are able to make referrals to a variety of public and nonprofit sources. A tracking procedure is followed for all participants, to assure appropriate evaluation, referral, and follow-up.

Supporting elements tied to prevention and intervention activities include efforts by the Anaheim Religious Community Council in parental education, and the work of the Boys and Girls Clubs and YMCA in recreation programming. Breakfast and lunch are available through a U.S. Department of Agriculture funded program at selected sites including neighborhood centers where the Kids-in-Action programs operate.

**Suppression:** The third component of Anaheim's antigang/drug strategy focuses on law enforcement. In 1991, the Anaheim Police Department formed a Gang Unit to investigate and prosecute gang-related crimes proactively. However, at the same time the Police Department strengthened prevention and intervention programs by assigning a gang investigator to work directly with Project S.A.Y. and the schools to identify potential problems on campus and in the neighborhood, and to strategize jointly in resolving conflicts and issues. The gang investigator operates in an enforcement capacity to deal with situations of a criminal nature, but also counsels youth and parents to try to avoid problematic situations that will involve "suppression" responses in the future. In a related effort, the Police Department's Community Policing Detail is forming a Police Athletic League which will target at-risk youth and further enhance the recreation activities associated with Project S.A.Y.

## Evaluation and Program Impact

### Tracking System

Project S.A.Y. participants are closely tracked, beginning with their initial assessment and continuing through high school and beyond as

**Exhibit 4A Project S.A.Y. – Outreach Long-Term tracking Card**

Client name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Enrolled In School Yes Jr.High Trade Jr. College University	Attendance Reg. Att. Freq. Abs. Freq. Tardy Truant Formal Withdrawal	Grades Good (A/B) Passing Failing	Probation Informal Formal 1 <sup>st</sup> Offence 2 <sup>nd</sup> Offence Completion Date: _____	Employment P.T. Job F.T. Job Skilled Self-Supporting	Illegal Activity Gang Related Drugs Weapons Assault Theft Murder/Attempt Other: _____
Today's Date: _____ Age of Client: _____ Comment: _____					
Enrolled In School Yes Jr.High Trade Jr. College University	Attendance Reg. Att. Freq. Abs. Freq. Tardy Truant Formal Withdrawal	Grades Good (A/B) Passing Failing	Probation Informal Formal 1 <sup>st</sup> Offence 2 <sup>nd</sup> Offence Completion Date: _____	Employment P.T. Job F.T. Job Skilled Self-Supporting	Illegal Activity Gang Related Drugs Weapons Assault Theft Murder/Attempt Other: _____
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Today's Date: _____ Age of Client: _____ Comment: _____					

feasible. While statistics exist to measure program participation and criminal incidents, a true evaluation of the program's effectiveness needs to be measured on an individual basis. The long-term impact of Project S.A.Y. is evaluated according to the following criteria:

- A. *Basic Education*  
Achieves high school equivalency (GED), or  
Achieves high school graduation
- B. *Higher Education/Employment*  
Enrolls/attends trade school, or  
Enrolls/attends community college, or  
Enrolls/attends university/four-year college, or  
Gains full-time employment (self-supporting)
- C. *Criminal Activity*  
Remains off probation, and  
Is not incarcerated in the criminal justice system,  
*and*  
Does not exhibit criminal behavior

"Long-Term Tracking Cards" are kept on each client (see Exhibit 4A, page 54) within the first month of initial contact. The outreach workers make three status report entries per year. The tracking cards become a permanent part of the client's files and are maintained in perpetuity.

#### **Other Evaluation Components**

In addition to the tracking system, a variety of other surveys are utilized to help evaluate the success of the intervention and prevention components of the program. These include:

- (a) *Test group-Kids-in-Action*: Pretest and posttest surveys are conducted at a park site during the summer program.
- (b) *Periodic surveys of specific activities*: Surveys are conducted at all Kids-in-Action sites throughout the year to determine the effectiveness of specific activities.

(c) *Special event surveys*: Surveys are conducted at the conclusion of all special events.

(d) *Participant surveys*: Surveys of participants in both Project S.A.Y. and Kids-in-Action are conducted three times per year to determine the effectiveness of the program.

(e) *Parent surveys*: Annual parent surveys of Kids-in-Action children are conducted to determine the effectiveness of the program from the parents' point of view.

(f) *School personnel surveys*: Surveys of elementary and junior high/high school personnel are conducted to determine the effectiveness of the program.

(g) *Evaluations at Kids-in-Action sites*: Site evaluations are conducted three times per year to evaluate attractiveness of the site as it relates to encouraging participation in the programs.

(h) *Evaluation by program staff*: Staff complete a program evaluation three times per year to determine effectiveness of the program.

(i) *Police personnel survey*: Annual surveys of police personnel are conducted to determine effectiveness of the program.

Further testimony to Project S.A.Y.'s effectiveness occurred in June 1994. A grass-roots group of churches, the Orange County Community Congregation Organization (OCCCCO), successfully persuaded the City Council to allocate an additional \$250,000 to services targeting youth and families in central Anaheim. OCCCCO's justification included numerous references to how Project S.A.Y. has met the community's gang and drug prevention and intervention needs. Approximately \$170,000 of the allocation was directed to Project S.A.Y. activities, with the balance directed to other human services which indirectly support gang prevention and intervention.