

CITY OF OAKLAND OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK
AGENDA REPORT

2007 MAY 22 PM 6:53

TO: Office of the City Administrator
ATTN: Deborah A. Edgerly
FROM: Office of Parks and Recreation
DATE: May 22, 2007

RE: **Informational Report on the Office of Parks and Recreation Radical Roving Recreation Program**

SUMMARY

Radical Roving Recreation (RRR) is a program initiative in the Office of Parks and Recreation targeted to underserved and hard-to-serve youth in the City of Oakland. The goal of Radical Roving Recreation is to foster youth development and leadership through a program that is flexible, personal and supportive emotionally, spiritually and physically. This program targets youth who are exhibiting or have exhibited risk factors such as: use of alcohol or drugs; history of early aggression; social or learning problems; exposure to violence at home, in the neighborhood or in the media; parental drug or alcohol use; friends who engage in problem behavior; academic failure or poor commitment to school; poverty; homelessness; recent divorce, relocation or other family disruption; or access to firearms. RRR seeks to connect with these youth through a program designed to provide significant leadership opportunities and life experiences. By engaging these youth in a supportive community, RRR seeks to prevent criminal behavior and reduce the number of youth in the juvenile justice system.

RRR is currently housed at Campbell Village (in partnership with the Oakland Housing Authority) and Tassafaronga Recreation Centers and has a presence through its Roving Teams at Allendale and Mosswood Recreation Centers. OPR would like to operate at least one RRR site in each Council District, with additional centers in areas with the greatest need.

FISCAL IMPACT

The current total budget for the Radical Roving Recreation program is \$383,668 and is funded from the City's General Purpose Fund (Fund 1010). The staffing budget for RRR includes one Program Director and approximately 4 FTE part-time staff. These part-time staff are based primarily at Campbell Village and Tassafaronga, and spend a portion of their hours at Mosswood and Allendale recreation centers, and as part of the Street Team and for special RRR projects. OPR continues to seek grant and partnership opportunities to expand the program in order to offer a greater variety of activities and to reach more youth.

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BACKGROUND

Many of Oakland's youth live in neighborhoods that are surrounded by OPR's 24 recreation centers and 140 city parks. In some of those areas there is a heavy concentration of poverty and crime where, on any given day, 4,000 youth are truant or expelled from school, leaving them to roam the streets with the possibility of engaging in activities that are neither productive nor safe. OPR's challenge is to take these youngsters off the street, provide structure in their lives and encourage them to return to school to graduate with a diploma, or enroll in classes that would build toward completion of their GED (General Education Development) certificate.

In partnership with the Oakland Unified School District's Community Day School, OPR launched the pilot RRR program in June 2004. RRR provided activities and experiences in water sports including boating, sailing and lifeguard skills. Participants were also involved in drama, dance, theatre, outdoor adventures, self-esteem building, rap sessions, cooking classes, and traditional sports to ensure physical fitness and mental health building.

The Radical Roving Recreation pilot program served sixty-seven (67) diverse youth, who were referred to OPR by Oakland Unified School District (OUSD). Of the 67 participants, 65 youth had never visited a recreation center, much less participated in OPR programs. Thirty-four participants graduated from the program, 6 earned a certificate in basic sailing giving them unlimited access to sail or kayak at Lake Merritt Boating Center (free of charge), 7 participants learned to swim, 4 qualified and were employed in summer jobs at Oakland Parks and Recreation and one was involved as a volunteer for OPR. One participant returned to Juvenile Hall, although it is important to note that while incarcerated he telephoned the department to thank the staff for caring about him, and for providing him and others with a safe space.

RRR operates on a Monday through Saturday schedule; hours are flexible and vary according to community needs and demands. Morning hours are dedicated to GED test preparations, parenting classes and structured learning classes for those who have not graduated from high school. Afternoon programs are geared toward empowerment and self-esteem building through RRR's core programs.

Program Strategies

Radical Roving utilizes the following program strategies to reach this population:

- Provide program spaces that are safe and encourage healthier lifestyles.
- Empower youth to lead the dialogue of change.
- Engage the entire community from the bottom up.
- Address youth needs, including: education, housing, and family stability.
- Hire staff that are culturally competent, passionate and reflect the diversity of Oakland's youth.
- Seek ongoing private and public funding resources to expand and deliver services.

KEY ISSUES AND IMPACTS

Radical Roving Recreation (RRR) is targeted to underserved and hard-to-serve youth in the City of Oakland. The goal of Radical Roving Recreation is to foster youth development and leadership through a program that is flexible, personal and supportive emotionally, spiritually and physically and “meets the youth where they are.” This program targets youth who are exhibiting or have exhibited risk factors and seeks to connect with these youth through a program designed to provide significant leadership opportunities and life experiences. By offering essential services in the form of innovative recreation programs, OPR’s Radical Roving Recreation program seeks to prevent criminal behavior and reduce the occurrence of youth being incarcerated or otherwise involved in the juvenile justice system.

OPR’s RRR program provides an array of recreational experiences in different forms, at a variety of locations, and to an underserved targeted population. RRR activities address the whole person by eliminating transportation barriers, assisting in addressing housing issues, and preparing youth with life skills that translate into successful educational experiences and employment opportunities.

Outreach - RRR Street Outreach Team

To assure that underserved Oakland youth are recruited for RRR, a Street Outreach Team seeks out youth where they are and redirect them to the closest recreation center that offers the program that interests them. Outreach is targeted to: (a) high crime communities and hot spots in Oakland, (b) group homes, (c) Alameda County Probation Services and OUSD’s Community Day School.

Recreation Internship for RRR Staff

To develop young professionals in the parks and recreation field, OPR works with local colleges to provide internship opportunities for youth aspiring to become future leaders. Working in RRR provides college students with an introduction to some of the challenging dynamics of working in urban communities. RRR has teamed up with California State University East Bay (Hayward), San Francisco State University and the University of California at Berkeley to attract youth who are passionate about working in Oakland to help change negative behavior and engage in community capacity building. The internship program features 20 hours of training with a rotation of programs beginning with RRR, and transitioning to sports, special events and cultural arts.

Staff Training and Development

RRR participants are radical youth in radical times, and so our programs must be of a radical nature to maintain the involvement of youth who are often called hopeless. OPR staff members are not adequately equipped to address the complex issues the young people bring to recreation centers and RRR sites. Regular and repeated trainings in conflict resolution, anger management, and mediation skills are essential to RRR’s success. OPR also seeks to team up with other agencies that can provide intensive training for both staff and the youth.

Family Outreach

In order to have a lasting impact, RRR must also seek to address the root of the problem which is rooted in the dynamics of the family. The family issues facing our youth include mental health, chemical dependency, poverty, physical abuse, neglect, homelessness, generational patterns, and the lack of economic opportunities – all of which continue to breed hopelessness and despair. To reach families, OPR uses non-traditional or “back door” approaches that include “Family Days” on the second Saturday of each month and music or arts programs that involve both the young person and his or her family. The longer term goal for this aspect of the program is to provide one-stop relief stations where the families can be counseled, school truancy addressed and the process can be explained on how to clear past criminal records. The station would also serve as a site for child care registrations, adult registrations in the Peralta College system and the adult education system with OUSD. OPR Center Directors, Supervisors and the department Director would recruit and retain the resources needed to begin the process of repairing and rebuilding the family and the community as a whole.

Community Partners

RRR will be successful through partnerships with like-minded organizations and individuals. To ensure that program goals are met, OPR has teamed up with a number of other public agencies as well as non-profits organizations that include: East Bay Conservation Corps, Alameda County Probation Department, Oakland Police Activities League, Alameda County Public Health Department, and the Oakland Housing Authority. Other community based organizations including the Exile Alternative Diversion Program (EADP) and Films in the Hood have also lent their support to the program.

The underlying goal of Radical Roving Recreation is to reduce the population of youth in the juvenile justice system by working side-by-side with the Alameda County Probation Department. It is our ultimate goal to work with the County to provide services to the youth while they are incarcerated with the expectation of establishing positive linkages for the youth to engage in once they return to society, thereby reducing their need to return to past negative behaviors.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Radical Roving Recreation (RRR) program is a new initiative that has required careful planning. Still in its development phase, recruitment strategies and program evaluation tools are under development. Currently, there are 65 participants who were referred to OPR from group homes, foster care, other service providers and street outreach. OPR staff meet with these providers regularly in order to build and participate in a network of support and supportive services for the young people most in need of them.

The RRR program is offered at Campbell Village Recreation Center (800 Willow Avenue) and Tassafaronga Recreation Center (975 85th Avenue). Activities at these two sites include yoga, gardening, “Dinner @ 6”, footwear design, life skills classes, and excursions. RRR operates at Campbell Village and Tassafaronga Monday through Friday, 2:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. Friday evenings at Campbell Village are reserved for a weekly poetry and music “Open Mic”. Roving crews also provide programming at Allendale Recreation Center (3711 Suter Street) and at Mosswood

Recreation Center (3612 Webster Street) where participants are offered art and music classes. All RRR program environments are safe, inviting, and inclusive. Participants are aged 13 to 21 years, with diverse backgrounds and experiences. Some current and future (summer) RRR activities include:

- **Monday Night Yoga.** The emotional and physical challenges of yoga are used as a method to teach anger management.
- **Footwear Design 510.** Youth receive instruction in sketching, developing design, and customization of footwear.
- **Dinner @ 6.** Each week, RRR youth meet together to cook healthy and affordable meals, and then sit down to share the meal together and enjoy good discussion. On occasion, special guests are invited to share their own insights on various topics.
- **RRR Youth Advisory Board.** The RRR Youth Advisory Board has representation from the Council Districts where the RRR programs currently exist and will grow as the sites grow. In addition to youth from the recreation sites, the Advisory Board includes youth involved in the Probation Department, from group homes, and from partnering community-based organizations. The board meets once a month, sets policy and procedures, and organizes activities for this targeted population.
- **Student in Training (SIT).** The Student in Training program provides pre-employment job skills development in the areas of parks stewardship, recreation, conservation, and government. Working in partnerships with East Bay Conservation Corps, the Student Conservation Association, and AmeriCorps, OPR's goal is to provide 20-40 youth annually with the opportunity to expand their knowledge and skills in outdoor environments. Youth are required to complete the establish curriculum set forth by the partnering agency and return to their communities to practice their new knowledge. Successful participants will be given assistance in job placement with OPR and similar organizations.
- **Entrepreneurship (Starting a Small Business).** RRR provides entrepreneurial opportunities for youth to learn how to start a successful small business. OPR has designed a curriculum that focuses on money management, bookkeeping skills and balancing a checkbook. Participants go through a series of classes taught by the business community including local community colleges and the College of the Arts. Upon completion of the program, the youth will be encouraged and expected to develop a business plan and a product.
- **What Every Youth Should Know.** This program provides participants with basic skills in reading, writing and math to support them in their capacity to complete high school or to obtain a GED certificate. Given that RRR participants are often deeply alienated from tradition education methods, OPR is committed to using non-traditional methods in a much less intimidating environment.
- **Youth Empowerment Music Program.** Many RRR youth dream of being professional entertainers. The Youth Empowerment Music Program provides aspiring musicians an avenue in which to explore their talents and learn the fundamentals of music theory.

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Participants learn the rudiments of reading music, basic chord structure, music history from a culturally relevant perspective, and the role of music in their lives and in society.

- **Readers, Writers & Storytellers.** Every person has a story to tell – especially youth who live in crime-ridden communities – but their voices are often ignored or silenced. The Readers, Writers and Storytellers program provides a forum for participants to tell their stories in a supportive environment. Professional writers provide workshops on writing, marketing, publishing and presentation.
- **Learn To Swim.** Since Oakland is surrounded by water, the ability to swim becomes a matter of public safety. The Learn-to-Swim program offers six comprehensive course levels that teach participants how to swim skillfully and safely. RRR participants who successfully complete the program have the opportunity to work as Junior Lifeguards and Lifeguards, provided they meet the skills and age requirements.
- **Excursions.** The Excursions part of RRR is offered to expose youth to a broad array of experiences and opportunities: theatre performances, sport activities, deep-sea fishing, concerts, government debates, midnight basketball leagues, overnight workshops and seminars, college tours, museums, and outdoor life.

The whole philosophy of Radical Roving Recreation is based on a fundamental respect for each person and to try to meet the person “where they are.” The activities OPR offers within this program are meant to provide opportunities to develop skills and abilities in ways that are meaningful to the participants.

OPR is currently pursuing partnerships with local university recreation programs to develop evaluation tools that will enable the department to assess RRR’s effectiveness. Straightforward measures like the achievement of a GED or a reduction in crime recidivism for participants are important indicators of success, but OPR hopes to also demonstrate that RRR nurtures the whole person and supports sustained emotional, physical, and mental wellness.

SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES

Radical Roving Recreation provides for deep and lasting impacts on all areas of the quality of life in Oakland:

Economic: RRR provides job-readiness programs, skills training, community building, emotional support, and mentoring – all of which contribute to participants’ capacity to be solid employees and innovative entrepreneurs thereby increasing the likelihood that they will obtain gainful employment.

Environmental: With its emphasis on recreation and park stewardship, RRR encourages participants to be well-informed about the environment and their impact on it.

Social Equity: Recruitment strategies for RRR specifically target the most difficult to reach and underserved of Oakland’s youth.

DISABILITY AND SENIOR CITIZEN ACCESS

Radical Roving Recreation programs and facilities are accessible to disabled patrons and comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other non-discrimination laws and regulations. The program is not relevant to Senior Citizens.

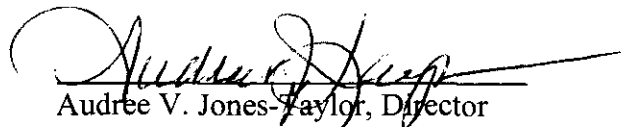
RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that City Council accept this informational report on the Office of Parks and Recreation's Radical Roving Recreation program.

ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL

Staff requests that City Council accept this informational report on the Office of Parks and Recreation's Radical Roving Recreation program.

Respectfully submitted,



Audree V. Jones-Taylor, Director
Office of Parks and Recreation

Reviewed by:

Karis Griffin, Recreation Supervisor

Prepared by:

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APPROVED AND FORWARDED TO THE
LIFE ENRICHMENT COMMITTEE:


Office of the City Administrator