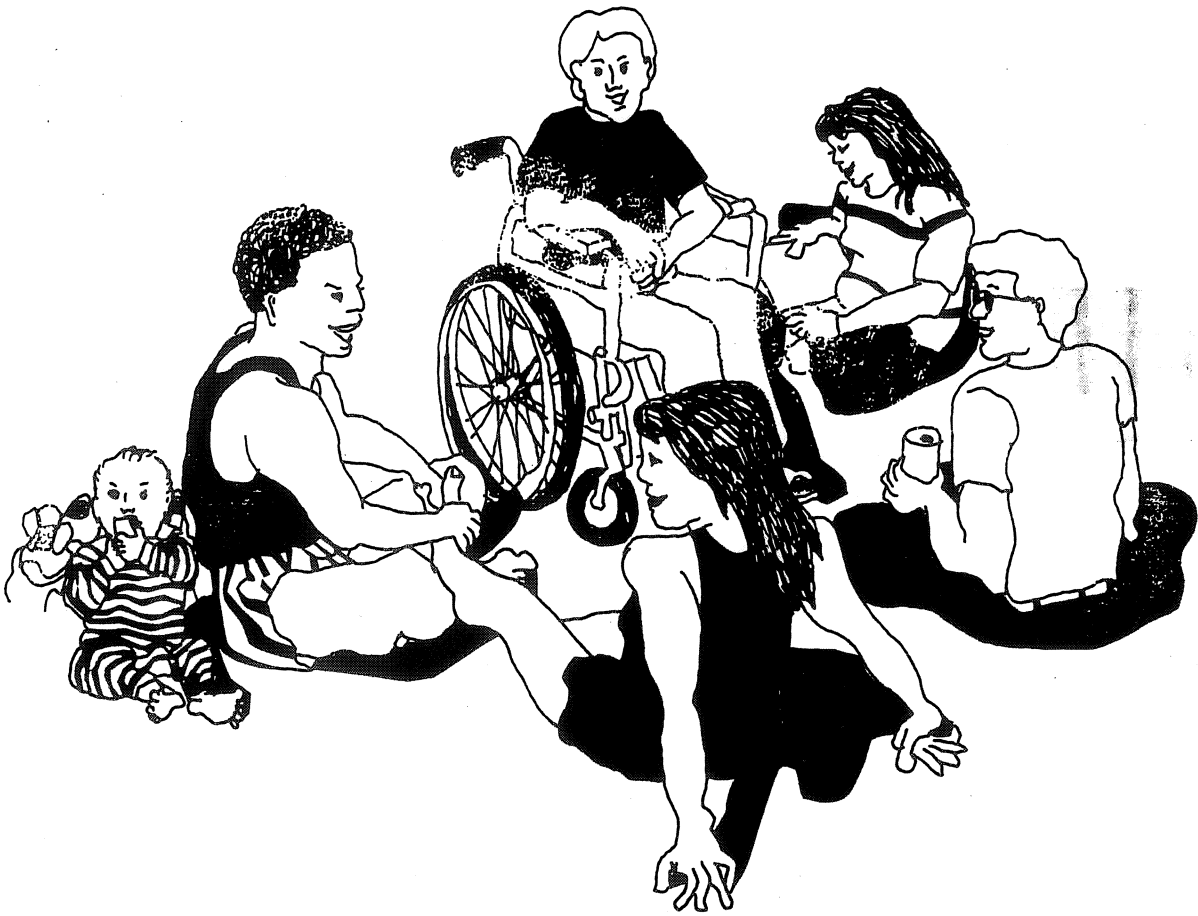


Kid in Santa Monica

Part I: The Community Speaks Out



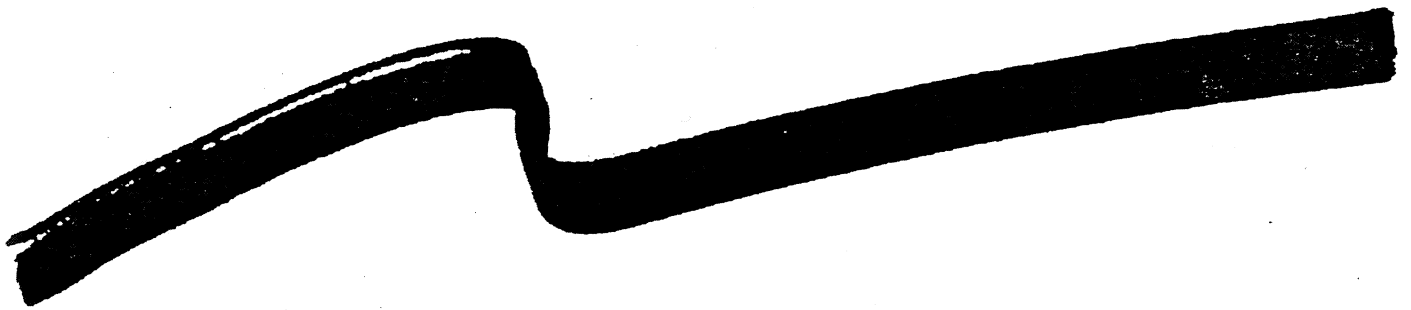
The Santa Monica Committee for Youth
Executive Summary
September 1989

Kids In Santa Monica

Part I: The Community Speaks Out

"We must let our children know that they are important: who they are, what they think, how they feel and what they do all have value. We can tell them with our words, but they will look to our actions. And of all the actions we can take, the most important will be to empower the youth of Santa Monica. We should do more than make them part of the process. We need to enable them to become the architects and engineers."

Preamble
Kids in Santa Monica
Part I: The Community Speaks Out



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Executive Summary
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Acknowledgments

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Thank you to the many community members who have made invaluable contributions.

They include:

The Santa Monica City Council

The Santa Monica City Manager, John Jalili

The Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District Superintendent, Eugene Tucker

The Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District: Administrators, Faculty and Students

The Santa Monica Commission on the Status of Women

The Santa Monica Social Services Commission

The Santa Monica Childcare Task Force

The City's Management Team on Gangs and Drugs

Santa Monica's Youth Serving Agencies

Latino Resource Organization

Pico Neighborhood Association

Teenline, Cedars-Sinai Medical Center

The Young People of Santa Monica

A special thanks to all other groups, individuals, and City Departments who participated in this work.

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BACKGROUND OF THE YOUTH STUDY

HISTORY

Throughout the 1980's a number of groups (The Santa Monica City Council and staff, the Santa Monica/Malibu Unified School District, the Parent-Teacher Association Council and the United Way) engaged in independent efforts all leading to a common conclusion: the needs of young people in Santa Monica warrant additional attention. In recognition of this fact, the City Council authorized a comprehensive study to look at existing youth services, identify unmet needs and recommend strategies for enhancing youth programs.

A working group of individuals with expertise in youth issues, called the Santa Monica Committee for Youth, was appointed by the City Manager and convened in June of 1988 to undertake this study. The Committee surveyed young people, school principals and service providers and held community forums for youth, parents, educators, City staff and funders, in order to gather information which would supplement existing data. The findings were then examined and organized into a number of issue-oriented topics and specific action recommendations were formulated.

The result was the first comprehensive assessment of the needs of Santa Monica's Youth compiled into the committee's final report: "Kids in Santa Monica Part 1: The Community Speaks Out". Some of the committee's general impressions, as well as key findings and recommendations, included in the larger report, are summarized below.

KIDS IN SANTA MONICA: THE COMMUNITY SPEAKS OUT

According to the U.S. Census of 1980, there were nearly 14,000 Santa Monica residents under the age of 18, comprising over 15% of the City's population. Although there are no precise projections, there are indicators that the youth population is increasing, as is its ethnic diversity. In the fall of 1988, 43% of the students attending Santa Monica public schools were from minority backgrounds. Almost one-third of families with children under 18 were headed by a single female and 45% of family households had an annual income of under \$15,000.

Although a variety of sources contributed to "Kids in Santa Monica Part 1: The Community Speaks Out", we have tried to be most attentive to the voices of the young people themselves: some were clear and strong, while others were faint and halting. One young man wrote in big, bold letters about the need for recreational activities and "somewhere just for kids to go", finishing up with an assertive and humorous poem in rap. A girl, who seemed to be isolated from existing resources, wrote in tiny print about the violence in her household which she felt helpless to change.

The cumulative body of all we have learned has led us to some basic conclusions about what it is like to be a young person now living in Santa Monica:

- Young people today feel especially fragile and vulnerable. They are exposed to pressures at increasingly early ages which prior generations faced later or not at all (drugs, sex, gangs, and even video games). They feel unsafe and threatened by a variety of things, ranging from earthquakes to random gang violence.

- The lack of control and abundance of choices contribute both to young people's freedom and the stress they experience.
- Many young people now feel powerless to influence the course of events around them, from environmental pollution and the nuclear threat to substance abuse and gang activity among their friends.
- The young people in need of attention include both the children of privilege, who may have more than enough things but too little purpose, and those in poverty who may lack the basic necessities to succeed.
- Perhaps most importantly, many of our youth lack self-esteem and they feel powerless to change what they don't like in the world around them.

When we went to schools to ask students for their ideas, we encountered skepticism. Some questioned the value of their participation in the Youth Survey. They told us that people are always asking for their ideas, but then nothing is done with them.

We must let our children know that they are important: who they are, what they think, how they feel and what they do all have value. We can tell them with our words, but they will look to our actions. And of all the actions we can take, the most important will be to empower the youth of Santa Monica. We should do more than make them part of the process. We need to enable them to become the architects and engineers.

COMMUNITY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

TEEN PREGNANCY AND PARENTING

- ✓ Nationally, almost half a million babies are born to adolescent mothers each year. Children of teenagers run higher risks of health and mental health problems. Women who give birth as adolescents are more likely to raise their children alone and in poverty. Most drop out of school and face prospects of unemployment and welfare dependency.
- ✓ Birth rates for Hispanic and Black adolescents in L.A. County are three to four times higher than for other ethnic groups.
- ✓ Precursors to teenage pregnancy include low self-esteem and lack of hope for the future, as well as inadequate information on reproduction, contraception and responsible sexual behavior. Survey results indicate the presence of these problems among Santa Monica public school students.
- ✓ There is little reliable data regarding teenage pregnancy in Santa Monica, but one local pediatrician reports that she sees at least one adolescent girl each week who tests positively for pregnancy.
- ✓ There is only one small program in Santa Monica for parenting adolescents and their children, with very limited services.

The Committee Recommends...

- ◆ Expansion of existing child care and social services for parenting adolescents.
- ◆ Additional prevention efforts, including health education, counseling, recreation, employment and advocacy services.
- ◆ A joint effort with nearby communities to develop a comprehensive prevention and intervention program.
- ◆ Further study regarding on-campus health services and educational models to counteract pressures toward premature sexual behavior.

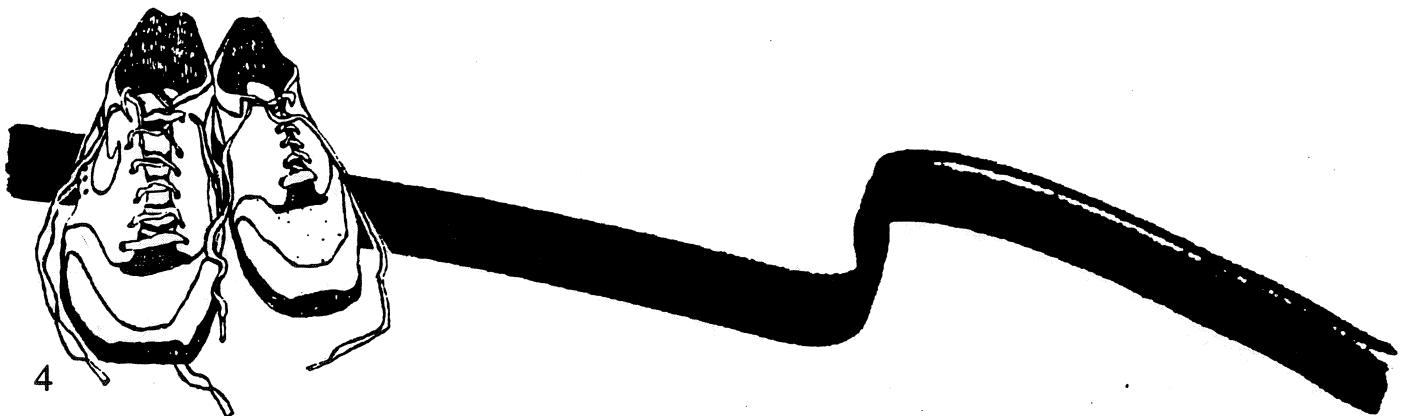


SUBSTANCE ABUSE

- ✓ Half of high-school students in Santa Monica public schools use alcohol on a regular basis. The percentage who report using illicit drugs is lower than the national average, but remains a cause of concern.
- ✓ One in ten admitted that they missed school in the previous year due to alcohol or drugs, considered by experts as a sign of a fairly serious substance abuse problem.
- ✓ Both middle-school and high-school students in Santa Monica think drug abuse is the number one problem among their peers. Alcohol abuse ranked third. Teenagers are aware and concerned about the connections between substance abuse and other problems, such as suicide, school dropout and violent crime.
- ✓ A key local provider of treatment services reports that 80% of young people referred come from substance-abusing families.
- ✓ Prevention education resources are adequately available, but their effectiveness has not been truly tested. There are obvious gaps in existing resources for identifying and treating adolescent substance abuse.

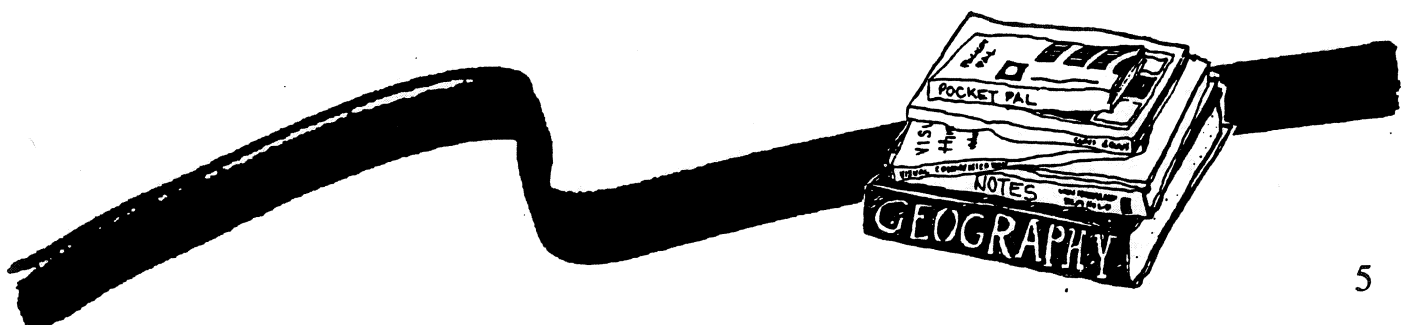
The Committee Recommends...

- ◆ Thorough evaluation of prevention education methods, as well as increased prevention efforts which address contributing factors (such as family alcoholism).
- ◆ Increased training for parents, teachers, youth service personnel and young people themselves regarding early identification of substance abuse and intervention resources.
- ◆ Greater support resources for young people in the process of recovery.



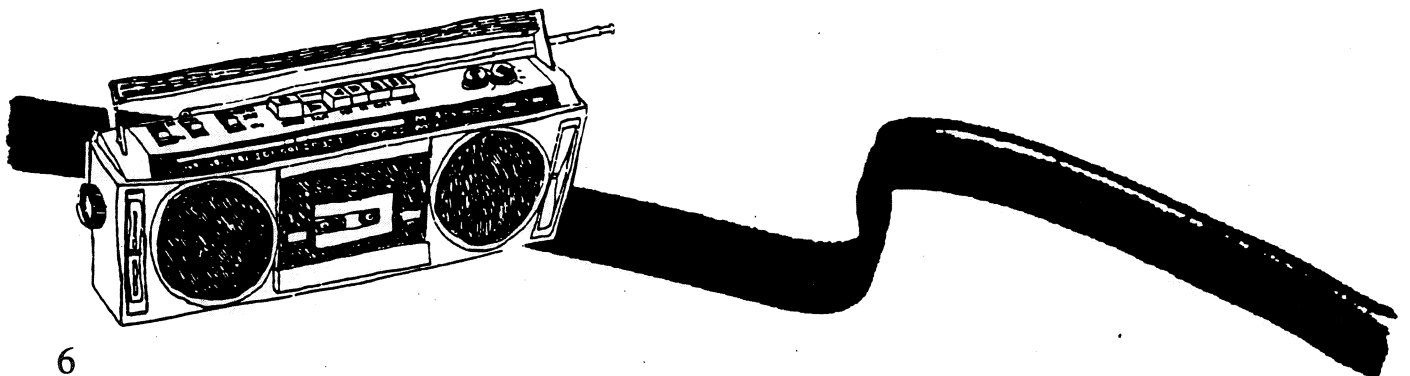
MENTAL HEALTH

- ✓ A Pasadena psychologist indicates that childhood stress and depression are recent diagnoses for young people and are on the increase. The stress created by economic hardship, two-income families, single parenting and lack of child care resources can compromise the functioning of children and families.
- ✓ The national suicide rate among young people has tripled in the last 25 years and is increasing faster than the rate for any other age group. Among Santa Monica high-school students, 18% of girls and 6% of boys reported that they had attempted suicide, while 35% of girls and 21% of boys admitted having suicidal thoughts.
- ✓ Although self-esteem problems are evident for both boys and girls in Santa Monica, there appears to be a heightened vulnerability among females. Nearly 70% of high-school girls and 51% of boys say they don't feel good about themselves. Feeling hopeless about the future affects 55% of girls and 47% of boys.
- ✓ Youth and family service providers in Santa Monica indicate that their client populations increasingly show evidence of emotional disturbance, mental health problems and family dysfunction. Such families require aggressive and creative outreach efforts.
- ✓ School officials report that they are distracted from their primary task of educating young people by the need to address students' emotional and behavior problems. Principals universally identified counseling services as their students' top priority needs, despite the large number of organizations already involved in delivering such services on campus.
- ✓ Latino parents in particular expressed difficulty providing guidance to their children, especially teenagers. Cultural conflict complicates the struggle all parents experience relating to adolescents, especially for immigrant families whose children are born here.



The Committee Recommends...

- ◆ An additional professional mental health worker to serve Santa Monica High School.
- ◆ Enhancement of school-based counseling services by community organizations, to include additional resources and more consolidated services. Counseling should encompass advocacy: personal follow-up with young people and families to ensure that their needs are met.
- ◆ A “warm line” to offer immediate support to parents and children under stress.
- ◆ Additional resources for parent education which contain features (meals, child care, transportation) designed to encourage participation. Expanded resources should include culturally-sensitive services offered in Spanish and targeted toward immigrant families, as well as affordable services for parents of pre-school children.
- ◆ Advocacy at the State and County levels for additional mental health services for children, youth and families.

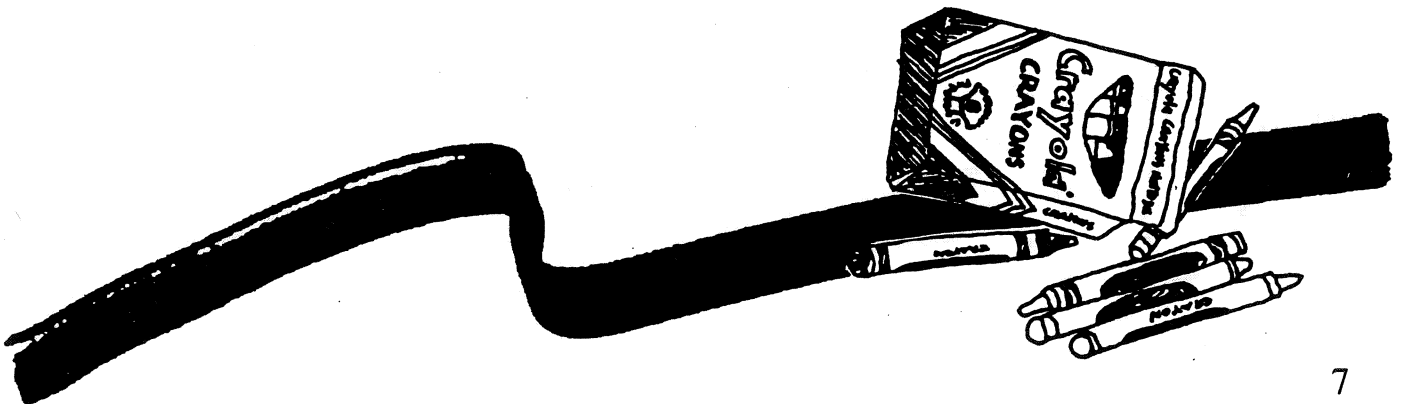


YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

- ✓ Three out of ten Santa Monica students (middle- and high-school) responding to the Committee's survey have a job, 92% of which are paid positions. Of those not working, 86% want paying jobs and 23% are interested in volunteer opportunities.
- ✓ Assistance finding jobs was one of the top three requests for services among young people interviewed by S.M.P.D. at Virginia Park.
- ✓ A local provider of youth employment services reports that clients (14 - 15 years old) enter the program with little understanding of the world of work and what it entails. Young people often have high standards for the kind of job they want without parallel appreciation for the preparation necessary to secure such positions.
- ✓ Parents and educators indicate that young people need opportunities to feel like important and contributing members of the community.
- ✓ Latino parents spoke to the need for jobs which teach marketable skills, for young people from middle-income as well as disadvantaged families.

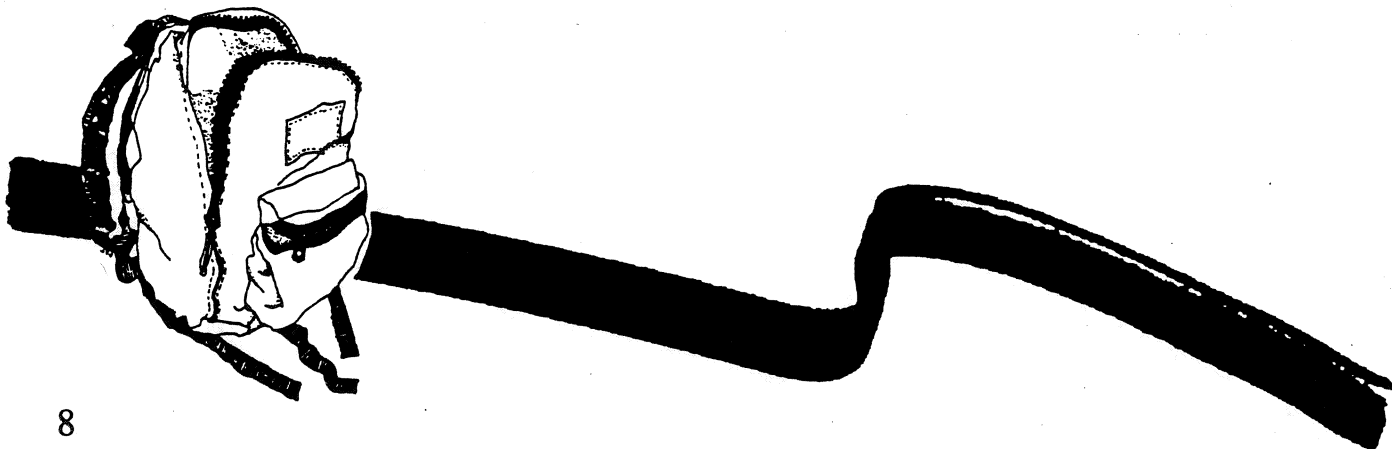
The Committee Recommends...

- ◆ Joint efforts by City government and private industry to develop youth employment strategies and entrepreneurial opportunities.
- ◆ Support for the proposal by the Community Health Advisory Committee to the School Board for a community service requirement for high-school students.
- ◆ A vocational guidance program, particularly for high-risk students who are likely to drop out of school without concrete plans for meaningful employment.
- ◆ Additional job training and placement resources for those 18 - 21.
- ◆ Examining the extent to which young people can be hired by the City in entry-level and "as-needed" positions.
- ◆ Inclusion of vocational development features into the proposed Youth Center, such as earning membership through donated work and youth-operated business ventures.



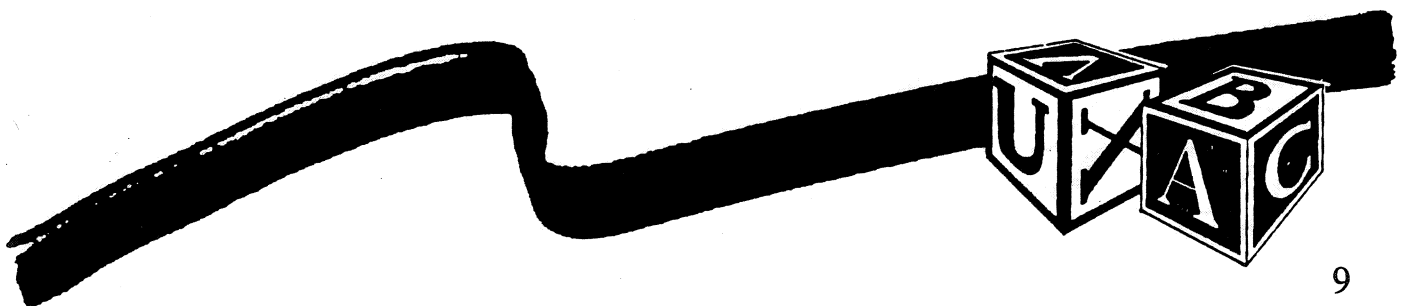
RECREATION

- ✓ Students, educators and parents expressed the need for more positive activities, for young people of all ages, especially programs before and after school. Non-competitive and non-athletic programs were specified. Students suggested that their peers become involved in substance abuse and gang activity because they have nothing better to do.
- ✓ Young people and families want cleaner, better-maintained recreational facilities. The presence of homeless persons arouses fear.
- ✓ Existing and new programs compete for limited recreation space.
- ✓ Parents and school personnel questioned the experience and training requirements for City recreation staff. Both are reluctant to promote participation in programs which they feel are inadequately supervised.
- ✓ Teenagers lack safe, supervised places to congregate, hear music and dance. Both young people and parents want an atmosphere which is free of drugs and alcohol.
- ✓ Transportation to recreational activities is a problem for children and parents.
- ✓ Many children are involved in formal recreation programs, but there is no active outreach to those who are not. Parents may not be aware of the options available. Latino families feel particularly overlooked.



The Committee Recommends...

- ◆ A Youth Center, owned and operated directly by the City. Specific activities, however, should be selected by young people themselves. The Center should offer employment programs, such as youth-operated businesses (e.g., a snack bar or retail store), vocational guidance and training and a job bank. It should house full-time counseling services and incorporate a variety of recreation options (dance classes, drama, special interest clubs, etc.).
- ◆ Regular dances for young people in various age groups, sponsored by a coalition of City and community agencies, with rotating sites to maximize access. Rules of conduct should be established, publicized and enforced, including a ban on alcohol and drugs.
- ◆ A park where young people can freely use skateboards and roller skates, offering supervision and instruction.
- ◆ More programs with greater variety under the auspices of Recreation and Parks, operating before school and with extended hours after school. Activities should be consistently available to all neighborhoods, either by decentralized services or offering transportation, and should include active outreach.
- ◆ Services should be determined by the consumers. Each park should have a “users’ advisory committee”, including young people and parents. Programs should be rigorously monitored and evaluated for responsiveness to the needs of consumers.
- ◆ Standards and training for recreation workers should be reviewed (with community input) to upgrade staff and improve the quality of supervision.
- ◆ A centralized source of information and referrals for recreation activities should be established.



CHILD ABUSE

- ✓ Available statistics and anecdotal information suggest that child abuse and neglect may be under reported in Santa Monica.
- ✓ According to results of the SMMUSD Health Questionnaire, 18% of high-school girls and 7% of boys admit to being physically or sexually abused.
- ✓ In response to the Committee's Youth Survey, 55% of high-school and 46% of middle-school students identified family violence as a problem for their peers. A total of 6% see this issue as the "worst" problem, surpassing substance abuse, gang violence and teenage pregnancy.
- ✓ Three quarters of school principals surveyed mentioned the need for outreach to families to address issues of neglect and inadequate parenting skills.
- ✓ There is only one, limited program locally specifically designed for child abuse treatment.

The Committee Recommends...

- ◆ A thorough study to determine whether children in danger of child abuse are being identified to the fullest extent possible.
- ◆ Additional community education and training for professionals and other youth service personnel.
- ◆ Increased treatment resources, particularly comprehensive services which are offered by home visit and are free of charge.

