

Youth Work Snapshots

AFTER-SCHOOL

Local Organizations Outreach Program (LOOP)

Visalia, Calif.
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Objective: Provide at-risk youth with free transportation to activities that connect them to mentoring and gang prevention programs throughout Tulare County, Calif.

Nutshell: Tulare County's Local Organizations Outreach Program (LOOP) is available to community- and faith-based organizations, school districts and local government entities. Since LOOP's creation, the Tulare County Board of Supervisors has hosted several workshops to inform and encourage providers to utilize the bus program. At a meeting last month, more than 40 providers attended a LOOP Bus Program workshop to learn how to participate. Applications can be found online and must be submitted two weeks before the requested service date.

Where It Happens: The program is based in Tulare County, and its buses transport resident youth to and from such places as community centers. Tulare is in the heart of the San Joaquin Valley, between San Francisco and Los Angeles.

When It Began: November 2006.

Who Started It and Who Runs It: The program was developed in response to requests from local leaders, law enforcement officials and community center advocates. They said that children feared walking on the streets in some parts of the com-



LOOP

Hard to miss: This bus offers free transportation for youths to attend after-school activities.

munity to get access to community recreation centers. In response, the LOOP Bus Program was developed as a safe and free alternative to walking. The program is administered by the Tulare County Board of Supervisors and the Tulare County Resource Management Agency.

Obstacles: Two obstacles have emerged during the past two years: marketing the program and the stigma of public transportation.

How They Overcame Them: With a diverse and rural population, not all providers knew about the LOOP Bus Program. To solve the

marketing problem, a series of informative workshops were held and program information was posted on the Internet, printed in local newsletters and distributed by e-mail. Ninety-one percent of Tulare County residents use personal transportation to travel to work. Less than 1 percent use public transportation. Teaching residents the benefits of using public transportation has been a challenge for the county.

Cost: LOOP operates on \$125,000 per year.

Who Pays: The Tulare County Board of Supervisors and Measure R,

a half-cent transportation sales tax that voters approved in November 2006.

Who Else Has Kicked In: Reaching Youth, a local faith-based organization, provided in-kind support by providing two bus wraps (decorations that are adhered to the vehicles) at a cost of \$9,000. The bus wrap made the LOOP Bus more appealing to youth in need of program services.

Youth Served: The LOOP Bus Program targets K-12 students who do not have access to or money to pay to use traditional public transportation. Youth have been transported from the unincorporated areas of the county to summer swim programs, youth centers, after-school programs, athletic games and public outreach activities. Tulare County is home to more than 426,000 residents. Thirty-five percent of the population lives in the rural, unincorporated areas of the county. Forty percent of all county residents are between the ages of 1 and 24.

Youth Turn-On: Youth find that a free, safe form of transportation is beneficial. Taking them into cities and activities gives them opportunities to participate in programs traditionally available only to inner-city children.

Youth Turn-Off: Youth, at times, do not like using any form of public transportation.

Research Shows: The LOOP Bus Program's ridership increased 22 percent between 2007 and 2008.

What Still Gets in the Way: Marketing the program and changing the attitudes of utilizing public transportation are always challenges.

— Sharon Choi

MY JOB

LaGina R. Harris

Extension Club Director
Boys & Girls Club of the
Austin Area
Austin, Texas
(512) 983-8606
www.besomebodytosomebody.org

Age: 24.

Salary: Under \$40,000 a year.

My Organization: Bedichek Middle School (sixth through eighth grades) is the site of a non-traditional Boys & Girls Club, located in South Austin. "We serve anywhere from 60 to 100 students every day after school (Monday through Friday)," Harris said. "[We] have 220 kids registered in the program. During two lunches a day, we run

open gym and serve another 100 to 150 daily (members and nonmembers of the club). Our members range from the ages of 10 to 14; most members are 11, 12 and 13."

My Job: As extension club director, Harris spends her time maintaining and creating positive relationships with staff, the school and parents. She plans and implements programming while directing full- and part-time staffs. She is also responsible for maintaining the club budget and ensuring that the club meets its grant requirements.

How I Got Here: Harris received her bachelor's degree in health and physical education with a concentration in adolescent psychology from Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, Ala.

Best Part of My Job: For Harris, working with the children is the best part of her job. "The kids make me laugh so hard, I cry. I smile when I see the lights turn on in their heads, and [it] makes me a



LaGina R. Harris

better person." The positive influence the Boys & Girls Club has on the children and the atmosphere of the place make working at the club a joyful experience for Harris.

Worst Part of My Job: Paperwork. "Paperwork and I are not friends," Harris said, "but I manage to get it done. Anything I can do to keep our grant-based program running for our club kids, I will do with a smile on my face."

Memorable Moment: "I have a lot of memorable moments!" Harris said. "Every day is a memory. Working with kids is an emotional rollercoaster. At the end of every day, I always think two things: that I love kids and that I'm at the right place in my life, doing my calling from God."

What Could Make My Job Better: "The only thing that could make my job any better is more money," Harris said, "but I get paid in smiles, love, and laughter from the children."

"I know it sounds corny but it is true."

— Briana Boyington