

OFCY Support for Oakland Parks, Recreation & Youth Development

When the Oakland Fund for Children and Youth (OFCY) was first established in 1996 with the passage of Measure K – Oakland Kids First! by over 75% of voters, it established that the City of Oakland be required to maintain existing levels of support for children and youth programming in the city. The fund was created to add and enhance support for children and youth in the city, and the City Charter states that monies from the Fund shall not be appropriated for services that substitute for or replace services that were supported by the city's general purpose fund. **Section 1306** of the legislation requires that the city have a **base spending requirement**, so city funding for children and youth services are maintained at a level as funded in 1995-1996 and not reduced. This requirement was developed to ensure that city funding for children and youth through the Oakland Public Library, Oakland Parks and Recreation, and other city departments be maintained.

Over the past twenty years, OFCY has provided numerous grants to city agencies that have applied for funding through an open and fair application process, including both the Oakland Public Library and the Oakland Parks, Recreation, and Youth Development (OPRYD) department. **Since the first OFCY grants were given out in 1998, OFCY has provided OPRYD with 55 program grants totaling over \$7.3 million dollars.**

OPRYD has received funding for programs supporting young children and their parents, including **Sandboxes to Empowerment** and the **Community Adventure Pre-K Playgroups**; programs for youth with disabilities through **Inclusion Centers**; science programming through **Discovery Centers**, programs for older youth through **TOOLS: Transforming Ordinary Obstacles into Life Skills**, and summer programs through the **Summer Camp Explosion** and **Oakland Fine Art Summer School**, which is provided by OPRYD at Oakland Unified School District school sites.

In addition to the direct funding provided to OPRYD, OFCY provides grants to many programs that base programming at parks and recreation sites, bringing vital community programming into OPRYD spaces. Current programs include **AYPAL: Building API Community Power** at Lincoln Park and Recreation and San Antonio Park; **Bay Area Outreach & Recreation Program's** Sports & Recreation for Youth with Disabilities at the Oakland Ice Center, **Dimension Dance Theater's** Rites of Passage program at Malonga Casquelourd Center for the Arts; **Brothers on the Rise's** Brothers UNITE! Programming at Allendale, Arroyo Viejo, Carmen Flores, Dimond, Manzanita, and Rainbow Recreation Centers; and **Girls Inc.'s** Concordia Summer program at Concordia Park.



OFCY supported the **Oakland Parks, Recreation, and Youth Development Department's Discovery Centers** since the first round of OFCY grants in 1998. The program declined to reapply for grant support in 2019. The Program Manager provided this letter to OFCY at the conclusion of last year's program.

To OFCY Staff,

It is with a touch of sadness that we at the Oakland Discovery Centers are bringing our program to a close with OFCY. With the help of OFCY we have touched and improved the lives of thousands of low income Oakland youth for close to a quarter of a century. When we began on this important mission, there were almost no after school programs in Oakland. Driving through the streets of East and West Oakland one would see vulnerable children and youth sitting on street corners watching drug deals and learning the violent culture of the street life, in the absence of more positive alternatives.

With the help of the many caring individuals involved in OFCY and a succession of very insightful evaluation teams, we brought a program with the positive alternatives of youth development, skill development, and social & personal growth as an alternative to the mean streets of Oakland. OFCY remains a valuable and viable model for focusing youth development services in strategic directions. It is an essential part of filling the gaps in services left by our education and social services agencies in addressing the needs of our youth.

“LET US PROMOTE AND REPLICATE THIS OFCY MODEL TO BE USED IN OTHER CITIES, WITH THE BEST FACETS OF ITS PROCESS TO BE UTILIZED BY OUR CITY AND COUNTY AGENCIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT, DIRECTION, AND FUNDING OF THEIR SERVICE PROGRAMS”

environment by our political and economic systems, let us continue to seek efficiency, but in adopting new mass accounting and service measuring mechanisms, let's be careful not to move our programs so far in the direction of mass programming that we develop the same kind of market (in-)efficiency that pushes individual providers to overlook the undeserved... those most in need, in favor of reaching greater numbers of the already more adequately served population.

Second, let us promote and replicate this OFCY model to be used in other cities, with the best facets of its process to be utilized by our city and county agencies in the development, direction, and funding of their service programs.

And thirdly, let's see that efforts are made, perhaps a committee formed, to approach philanthropy organizations, particularly family trusts, community trust foundations, and possibly corporate donors, to seek additional funding for OFCY and other OFCY model youth service funding organizations.

Sincerely,

Rich Bolecek

for

The Oakland Discovery Centers

I thank you all for allowing me to have had this valuable opportunity to participate in this exciting and beneficial community improvement project. As I leave in retirement I humbly offer a few suggestions in the spirit of keeping this beneficial OFCY project the superb and ever improving project that it has come to be:

First, while we are largely trying to fill the gaps left in our community



Rich Bolecek watching as a youth turns a discarded frame into a terrarium for a pet reptile at the Brookdale Discovery Center site.