

CITY OF LOS ANGELES RECREATION AND PARKS

CLASS PARKS

WHO WE ARE

"CLASS Parks...connecting youth with their communities."

CLASS Parks is an international, national, state, and local award winning division of the City of Los Angeles Recreation and Parks Department. Our continuing mission, as a community youth development program, is to build strong resilient youth who have a healthy vision of their future.

As a leader in energizing local community youth development efforts, CLASS Parks mobilizes staff, allocates resources, and, by working with public and private organizations, coordinates, improves, and avoids duplication of City sponsored youth programs and services.

The CLASS Parks Program is based on a youth development model that is founded on addressing teen problems, including isolation, substance abuse, educational failures, gang involvement, and criminal activity, as symptoms of a crumbling youth development infrastructure.

The CLASS Parks Program operates 37 youth development sites within the City's 175 Recreation Centers. These selected Recreation Centers provide safe, supervised after school and weekend enrichment, as well as educational, vocational, recreational, and adventure-based programs for youth 11 to 17 years of age.

HOW WE BEGAN

In the fall of 2000, City officials determined that a major contributing factor to the problems of some of their communities was depressed neighborhood morale, which was due in part to the lack of a safe central gathering place where positive community activity could be fostered.

In November of that same year, officials launched a new program aptly named CLASS (Clean and Safe Spaces) Parks, a revolutionary division of the Department of Recreation and Parks. CLASS Parks' challenge was clear: breathe new life into parks and communities, thereby sparking a renewal of the pride and vitality once celebrated. In this way, the spirit of an entire neighborhood could be dramatically lifted.

The brand-new CLASS Parks Program was granted \$8.6 million to begin the renewal of 37 parks in selected communities. The plan was to transform troubled neighborhood Recreation Centers into clean and vibrant local community resources equipped with new playgrounds, additional staffing, and expanded programming, particularly for young teens.

After deliberation, 37 original facilities were selected on the basis of low economic status, facility degeneration, and the perception of crime and other problems. Ten additional facilities have since been added.

THREE PILLARS

The three founding pillars help shape CLASS Parks' facilities, programs, and ideals for building healthy communities. These pillars form a foundation from which all activities are built. From here, ideas on park safety, facility improvements, and models of youth development are implemented to provide youth with a complete CLASS Parks experience. The three founding pillars are fully explained below.

Youth Development: CLASS Parks is committed to youth development - the ongoing growth process that all young people go through on the way to adulthood in attempting to: (1) meet their basic, personal, and social needs to be safe, feel cared for, be valued, be useful, and (2) build skills and competencies that allow them to function and contribute in their daily lives. This journey involves all of the people around each youth - family and community - and requires their valuable support along the way. The anchor of CLASS Parks youth development efforts are the Teen Clubs which keep at-risk youth, between the ages of 11 and 17, off the streets by engaging them in exciting park activities and other healthy alternatives to juvenile crime. The major components of this pillar are the Teen Clubs, the CLASS Parks Adventure Programs and the Youth Employment Internship Program (YEIP).

Park Safety: CLASS Parks has been at the forefront of facilitating park improvements, developing positive programming, and concentrating on programs related to park safety in a variety of ways. Dark, dangerous areas are transformed into clean and safe family environments with new and upgraded lighting, and the installation of security systems. In partnership with the LAPD, CLASS Parks has adopted two programs: The Safe House Program and Stop-In Centers. The Safe House Program converts parks into safe havens for neighborhood children who feel they might be in danger. Stop-In Centers are established at every CLASS Parks site to serve as another link between LAPD and the communities they protect. Office space is provided for police officers to utilize in each park. Each area includes a telephone, a desk, and supplies. Regular visits to the centers make police officers more accessible, approachable, and dependable---bolstering the trust between communities and the LAPD, and instilling a sense of security in both the park and the neighborhood. It is vital for the parks to become safe havens for community members.

Facility Improvement: The CLASS Parks facility improvement component is crucial to meeting the Department's goal to provide top quality facilities and services to its patrons. Improvements and repairs performed at CLASS Parks facilities promote a strong sense of community pride through maintaining attractive and safe facilities. Safety related improvements such as additional lighting, security systems, improved fencing and concrete repairs encourage everyday family use of parks. Aesthetic improvements such as planting trees, landscaping flower beds and laying sod also increase community pride. CLASS Parks is steadfast in its commitment to work efficiently and with minimal inconvenience to the community by coordinating the efforts of its workforce, supplies, and vendors. Set schedules are enforced by Facility Repair and Maintenance Supervisors, who clearly communicate the goals of each project to their team. Progress at each facility is carefully monitored for quality control, targeted completion dates, and cost of resources and supplies. Upon completion of each project, monthly evaluations ensure that each park is held up to CLASS Parks standards.

PROGRAM GOALS: CLASS Parks is convinced that the key to creating a truly great, effective organization is an intense focus on the values that guide its actions and their outcomes. CLASS Parks believes in the potential of youth to become essential resources of the community, given the positive influences of a powerful youth development program. With this in mind, CLASS Parks diligently subscribes to an intrinsic set of principles that transcends cultural barriers and is the framework of every programming decision made. Every member of the CLASS Parks family commits to apply these standards every day in its continued quest of creating a physical and social environment that nurtures strong families, safe communities and healthy neighborhoods. CLASS Parks is likewise committed that each participant be able to embrace and apply these principles in their daily lives.

VISION STATEMENT: Resilient, responsible youth make communities stronger.

MISSION STATEMENT: CLASS Parks builds strong, resilient, responsible youth who have a healthy vision of their future. We are catalysts for positive change in communities, and leaders in offering quality opportunities for youth, their families, and the neighborhoods in which they live.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES: These principles guide every decision made by the CLASS Parks Program and its employees.

- Adopt an asset building model
- Commitment to learning
- Create positive images of youth within communities and the media
- Develop community partnerships
- Focus on youth strengths rather than weaknesses and failings
- Incorporate youth in designing programs and activities
- Involve committed and knowledgeable adults

CORE VALUES: The following values are instilled in youth through the CLASS Parks Youth Development Programs.

- **Compromise:** Considering external ideas and utilizing them to achieve goals.
- **Confidence:** The self-assurance of one's ability to perform and succeed in any given task.
- **Honesty:** Truthful expression of personal judgment and action.
- **Integrity:** Strict adherence to good morals and proper conduct.
- **Perseverance:** Persisting on an idea, purpose, or task despite obstacles.
- **Resourcefulness:** Creativity in utilizing available materials, support, and/or circumstances to achieve results.
- **Respect:** Showing deferential regard for one's self, peers, and environment.
- **Responsibility:** Being productive and able to account for one's actions.
- **Safety:** Working to protect one's self and others from harm and potential danger.
- **Sportsmanship:** Observing the rules of fair play and winning or losing with grace.