



## Apprenticeship Programs Give Chicago Teens Skills and Job Opportunities (Chicago)

With 29 miles of lakefront and about 250 pools, the Chicago Park District (Park District) needed about 1,000 lifeguards in 2000—more than any other city in the United States. But many young people in Chicago had never learned to swim and lifeguards were in short supply, especially in minority communities. The Park District had to restrict swimming hours to stretch the available lifeguards across the city's neighborhoods.

That all began to change in 2001, when *After School Matters* added lifeguarding to Sports37, one of its apprenticeship programs. Participating teens learned how to swim, and then trained to qualify as lifeguards.

Apprentices who completed lifeguard training and earned their American Red Cross certification had a shot at a summer job with the Park District. From 2002 to 2006, the Park District hired 522 apprentices as lifeguards. That's "most, if not all" of the apprentices who earned their waterfront lifeguard certification, according to Charlie Tribe, program manager of Sports37 for the Park District. In 2006, lifeguards earned \$11.04 per hour.

"This program has given us the ability to have young people from these communities, most of whom learn to swim for the first time, become lifeguards with us," said Tribe. "They are able to give back and guard in the communities they've grown up in."

The lifeguard apprenticeship is one of the most difficult to complete, noted Tribe. "To be able to become a lifeguard just shows the dedication of these young people. It requires a lot of commitment from them."

Teens participating in Sports37 can also train for other opportunities with the Park District:

- In Park District day camps, apprentices (14-year-olds), interns (15-year-olds) and recreation leaders (who are 16 and older) work in teams of five or six, each with an adult, leading sports activities, including baseball, basketball, soccer and volleyball.
- In two stadiums managed by the Park District, teens can learn how to run concessions, keep score, maintain the grounds and more.

- In the bicycle ambassador program, teens train other young people—in day camps and on Chicago's lakefront trails—in bike repair, maintenance, first aid and safety.

### Other Skill-Building Opportunities

Like Sports37, apprenticeship programs in technology (Tech37), communications (Words37) and the arts (Gallery37) engage teens, instill confidence and help prepare them for the future. "Our teenagers are engaged with something that is important to them," said Maggie Daley, Chicago's first lady and chair of *After School Matters*. "Otherwise they wouldn't be there."

- **Tech37:** In Tech37, teens work with technology professionals to create Web sites, edit digital videos, produce music, program robots and more. In one apprenticeship program, teens at Kelvyn Park High School's Digital Video Production Program create a short documentary film about their experiences growing up on Chicago's Northwest Side. They learn the history of film, biography, video production skills, lighting and scripting. When they complete the film, they have a showing for parents, families and community members.
- **Words37:** Teens who are interested in communications can express themselves in Words37, where apprenticeships include journalism, theater, performance poetry and creative writing. For example, teens from Chicago's South Side write, edit, illustrate and design a newspaper in the computer labs at the South Shore Community Academy. The newspaper includes illustrations and interviews of celebrities, such as the recording star Mario. Teens also take field trips to the *Chicago Tribune* and Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism.
- **Gallery37:** Arts-oriented teens can learn about—and participate in—the visual, performing, culinary and media arts through Gallery37. Teens in the mural painting apprenticeship create murals related to Chicago's immigrants and their art and customs. Activities include visual research, visits to ethnic neighborhoods, and sketching murals, architecture and streets that capture the character of community life.

"These teenagers have hidden talents. The program has permitted them to bring these talents out," said Maggie Daley. "It's a gift that they give themselves."

The key to the apprenticeship program is its authenticity, according to David Sinski, executive director of *After School Matters*. "Teens like things that are hands on and can apply to their world outside of school," he said. "They tell us that they don't want more school after school. They also want to develop skills that will prepare them for adulthood."