

Inspiration



WINTER 2011

R.O.C.K. Reaches \$1 Million

by Curt Yagi, Executive Director

As R.O.C.K. celebrates its 17th year of providing the best programs for children and youth in San Francisco's Visitacion Valley, I am amazed at how far this once tiny organization has come. Back in the spring of 1998, I first got involved as a volunteer in Skill Drills, the organization's Saturday sports clinic program. I remember the instant gratification of working with the kids and thinking that R.O.C.K. was something special. During this time, the organization was operating on a shoestring budget and had only one full-time staff member, Michelle Groe, R.O.C.K.'s Founder and Executive Director. I was impressed with how the organization could do so much with so little, all because of Michelle's vision, passion and the wonderful volunteers surrounding her. It is the memory of the positive vibe and energy of R.O.C.K.'s programs that has stuck with me over the years.

Fast forward to the present day, and I find myself still at R.O.C.K. I am proud to have the best staff in the industry (at least I believe so) and know our team has done a great job to preserve that special positive feeling that I remember so well when I first stumbled upon R.O.C.K. Many things have changed for the better since the beginning, especially in the past year. R.O.C.K. is no longer the small organization it once was, and I am happy to report that we are now running a \$1 million program comprised of 45 staff members (44 who are responsible for programming while I am still the lone administrator) serving over 500 children and youth. In the nonprofit world, this is a significant number that indicates our value and importance to our community.

Thank you for all of your support. I hope you enjoy reading some of the stories that make R.O.C.K. such a great community.

A Place to Call Home

by Naticia Massod-Smith, Elementary School Dance Lead

R.O.C.K...Real Options for City Kids...These five words alone mean a great deal to a vast amount of people. To some it means love, to others it means safety, but to me it means family. I came to R.O.C.K. over a year ago after moving to the city to study Sociology at San Francisco State University. After settling in, I knew that I wanted to work with youth and it was just a matter of finding the right organization to work for. Following much research, I came across a bright orange website with images of beaming children flashing throughout the page and I KNEW that R.O.C.K. was an organization that I could see myself working for. R.O.C.K.'s programs were unlike any other I had ever seen, in that youth enter as kindergarteners and stay until they graduate from high school. "WOW, here is a program that really cares and stays with today's youth during the most crucial time of development" was all I could think! It was official. I made up my mind that R.O.C.K. was the organization I was going to work for. I went ahead and searched for an opening, applied and received an interview with Teodora, the Director of Programs.

Once I was hired on as an official R.O.C.K. team member, my positive image of the organization only soared. R.O.C.K. not only cares deeply for their youth, but for their staff as well. This in turn helps to fulfill a very nurturing and healthy learning environment for the youth, which is what we are all here for! The youth are our future and as Hubert H. Humphrey said, "Each child is an adventure into a better life -- an opportunity to change the

old pattern and make it new." This is what makes R.O.C.K. and its family of staff so vital. They take youth of Visitacion Valley and give them opportunities that may have never been possible. All it takes is for one person to have a positive impact on one youth and the outcome of a brighter future is created.

I know how important this matter is because I myself am a product of an encouraging program like R.O.C.K.. Although I grew up in a different city than Visitacion Valley, my conditions were very similar. I was raised in a very low-income neighborhood surrounded by violence with a mother who had an addiction problem. Had it not been for the people and programs in my life like R.O.C.K., I may not be the successful, hardworking college student that I am today. R.O.C.K. gives me the opportunity to go to work every day happy and thankful to love what I'm doing. Real Options for City Kids is a genuine program that strives to be the difference in as many lives of today's youth as possible, and I am proud to call myself a R.O.C.K. staff member.



Naticia (center) and friends during the after school program

Interview with Zuber Hussain

by Curt Yagi, Executive Director

One of the most fulfilling parts of my job is being around long enough to see the long-term results of our program. I recently had the privilege of sitting down with Zuber Hussain, a past R.O.C.K. participant who now as an adult has been doing some great work in our after school program.

Curt: What is it you do for R.O.C.K. today?

Zuber: I currently work for R.O.C.K. as the Recreation Lead at Visitacion Valley Middle School. It is my second year as a staff member.

Curt: Do you enjoy your work?

Zuber: I do enjoy my work because I feel like I have an important role in these kids' lives. I feel like I can relate to them and always look to build positive relationships so they know I am right there motivating them in whatever it is they do.

Curt: How did you get involved with R.O.C.K.?

Zuber: I joined R.O.C.K. when I was 13, so it has been 6 years now. Two of my best friends were a part of R.O.C.K. for many years and they encouraged me to be a part of it.

Curt: Any good memories you want to share?

Zuber: During my junior year of high school, I went on an eight-day backpacking trip where our goal was to hike up a mountain. During the trip, it was the participants' responsibility to lead the way; however, nobody knew how to read a map. I didn't want to get lost so I took ownership to learn how to read the map and led the group. I gained everyone's trust and respect which gave me a lot of self-confidence, something I never really had in my life. I owe R.O.C.K. for giving me that learning experience.

Curt: What has life been like since you have gone from participant to staff member at R.O.C.K.?

Zuber: I have had many learning experiences since working with R.O.C.K. Last year, adjusting to the kids was the most challenging part because they weren't very disciplined. While it took a while, I finally earned the respect of the boys' flag football team I was coaching because we were doing something we all loved. It's always great to see how my past participants are doing in high school.

Curt: What do you want to do as a career down the road?

Zuber: My work with R.O.C.K. has had an impact on what I want to do with my career. I would like to get a kinesiology degree and continue to coach and work with youth. It's something I have a lot of passion for and enjoy doing.

Curt: Do you have any role models in your life?

Zuber: My role model has always been my dad. We have a great, solid relationship and he supports me in everything I do.



Zuber having a good time at R.O.C.K."

One Person Matters

by Jen Gannon, Board Member

Three years ago when I transferred with my job from New York City to San Francisco, I set a goal and made a commitment to myself to get involved in non-profit volunteering, something involving helping kids.

I had wanted to volunteer while in New York, but the choices were overwhelming; I was paralyzed by the number of causes and organizations. I randomly met Executive Director Curt Yagi and learned that he worked with kids. We got to talking about R.O.C.K. and what the organization does to help enrich lives of kids who live in Visitacion Valley, one of San Francisco's most dangerous neighborhoods. Curt told me all I needed to hear.

I immediately began volunteering on Saturday mornings with R.O.C.K.'s Skill Drills program which helps 1st-5th grade children learn the basics of soccer, volleyball and basketball. Wow! I had no idea how enriched I would feel participating and getting to know the kids, their siblings and families. As I got to know the kids, they got to know and trust me and I found I could not wait for Saturday mornings to come around. I might hear about Farima's week at school or listen to her brother Zuhair excitedly tell me the details of the Avatar movie he just saw.



Jen helping a participant at Sleepover Camp

A few months later, I was approached to join the Board of Directors for R.O.C.K. I had never participated on a board and thought this would be great way to help R.O.C.K. in another meaningful way. Being a volunteer, I had an even greater passion to help the organization reach the financial goals it needed in order to support the ever growing population of kids. I didn't realize how difficult this task would be, especially with so much competition for fundraising combined with the economic downturn. While challenging, it has been such a great learning experience.

The most important thing I've learned from volunteering and my board experience is that I can make a difference in not only one, but many children's lives so they can have a bright future.

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