



**One East Palo Alto Neighborhood Improvement Initiative**  
*One community where residents are celebrated for their diversity and are engaged, informed and empowered to attain ...and maintain a good quality of life.*

---

**About the Sponsored Employment Program (SEP)**

The Sponsored Employment Program is a successful, grassroots, summer youth jobs initiative in East Palo Alto (EPA), CA. One East Palo Alto (OEPA) has spearheaded this groundbreaking initiative since 2005 through its role as convener of the East Palo Alto Crime Reduction Task Force (EPACRTF) and agency lead of EPACRTF's Prevention and Alternatives Committee, which oversees SEP's annual implementation. EPACRTF was established in 2004 by San Mateo County 4<sup>th</sup> District Supervisor Rose Jacobs Gibson, who continued to co-convene the work until her term as Supervisor ended in January 2013. Supervisor Warren Slocum, who currently serves as 4<sup>th</sup> District representative, took on the role of EPACRTF co-convenor in February 2013.

**Goal.** SEP's goal is to help EPA youth and young adult (YYA) residents, ages 14-24, find the jobs they want—and need—to stay productive in the summer, learn valuable employment skills, help support themselves and their families, and develop productive relationships with caring adults. Overall, SEP is designed to provide positive income-earning alternatives and mentoring for EPA YYAs at highest risk, a population that is alarmingly vulnerable to involvement in crime and violence, either as perpetrators or victims or both. As an important part of this design, SEP targets YYAs with multiple barriers to employment.

**History and Call to Action.** In 2005, OEPA partnered with local agencies and residents to pilot SEP, initially called the Sponsored Employment Project, as an action-oriented community-wide response to then increasing incidents of crime and violence, especially those involving EPA YYAs. That response catalyzed a grassroots movement to reconnect with EPA YYAs, show them that we care, bring summer jobs back to the community and create positive income earning opportunities for those evidencing the greatest need to work. In its pilot phase, SEP established jobs in local nonprofits and public agencies and mentoring relationships for 30 YYAs ages 14-24 with multiple challenges to employment. In 2009, SEP partners added a Program Coordinator to be hosted by OEPA annually as a dedicated staff position to lead communication across all operational components as well as implement other major duties in collaboration with partners. OEPA, in turn, also launched its role of Employer of Record in 2009, which has also continued annually. In 2010, SEP partners added a Peer Mentor/Program Assistant component offering jobs for EPA college students home for the summer. **SEP has served 1054 EPA YYAs since 2005.**

**SEP as a Model of Collaboration and Partnerships.** Collaboration and partnerships are essentially the way that OEPA conducts all of its operations. As such, year round planning and implementation of SEP is led by OEPA and its partners. Initially, three local organizations served as lead implementing partners that collaborated with OEPA to launch and sustain the SEP initiative -- JobTrain (formerly OICW), which has served as SEP's employer of record, El Concilio of San Mateo County, which has coordinated SEP's community mentoring component and College Track, which recruited the first set of job placements and has continued to assist with outreach, community service training and overall program monitoring. In 2011, SEP implementing partners expanded to include Live In Peace, which has supported recruitment and fundraising efforts. OEPA also enjoys relationships with several major partners who also address quality of life issues in EPA, especially as they impact youth and families. The first is EPACRTF and PAC organizational partners. The second is Youth Empowerment Strategies for Success, a network of 41 youth-serving groups convened by OEPA who collaborate to achieve a vision of creating *a thriving community where all children, youth, families and residents are engaged, connected, healthy and economically self-sufficient.* These collaborators not only make substantive contributions to planned SEP outcomes but contribute extensively to program operations as volunteers and donors.

**SEP Today.** Summer 2016 marks the 12th anniversary of SEP operations in which employment, mentoring relationships and community connectedness opportunities will be provided to EPA YYAs at highest risk and peer mentoring opportunities will be provided to EPA college students home for the summer. SEP jobs place EPA YYAs with Employer-Sponsors in nonprofit and public sector job sites as well as in a growing number of private sector organizations. All of the job placements give participants supportive, supervised work experiences. For mentoring relationships, OEPA partners with El Concilio of San Mateo County to deliver SEP's Victor Lopez Community Mentor Project, which will connect YYA participants with an adult mentor who will provide them with a positive adult relationship, help facilitate their successful on-the-job experiences and encourage and aid them in becoming productive members of both the community and the labor force. The actual number of jobs offered through SEP depends on the success of OEPA-led efforts to raise the program's annual budget, which is based on a cost per participant of \$3,000. The total budget covers costs of participant salary stipends, which constitute the largest expenditure (approximately 67%) as well as programmatic supports of mentoring, employment training and skills workshops and kickoff and graduation ceremonies.

**The SEP-SWAG Partnership.** A special component of Summer 2016 SEP operations is a partnership with the County of San Mateo's Students with Amazing Goals (SWAG) initiative. Launched during Summer 2015 operations, the SEP-SWAG partnership offers 20 EPA young people at highest risk the entire SEP experience of pre-employment orientation and soft skills training, mentoring, community connectedness and part-time employment paying \$9/hour for 30 hours/week for six weeks. SEP-SWAG YYAs' part-time employment placement will be hosted by SWAG's coordinating nonprofit, Live In Peace.

One thing is certain... it takes a village to embrace East Palo Alto youth in need and raise winners and SEP definitely has been and is "the place to be" when it comes to doing just that!