



The THINK Together Story

The THINK Together story began in the Shalimar neighborhood in Westside Costa Mesa in 1994. After a gang shooting in the neighborhood, mothers organized to take the neighborhood back from the gangs. Their efforts caught the attention of a local businessman named Randy Barth. Barth and several leaders from local churches met with the mothers to see how they could help.

The Shalimar mothers told these leaders that what they needed was a safe, quiet place in the neighborhood for their children to go to after school, where they could get tutoring, help with English, and academic support. Barth organized two churches and a community group in the area, in order to provide funding to rent several apartments in the Shalimar neighborhood, fund a staff position, and provide a small army of volunteer tutors.

Thanks mostly to the volunteers, the program became wildly successful. Student grades improved, teen pregnancies dropped (Shalimar's zip code had the highest teen pregnancy rate in Orange County), and crime rates in the neighborhood dropped. Suddenly there was hope for residents where there once was none. The Shalimar Learning Center became a catalyst for change in the entire neighborhood. The city redoubled their policing efforts to help reduce crime on Shalimar Drive. Code Enforcement began efforts to clean up the apartments. An apartment complex was razed and in its place a pocket park was established. In the process, a neighborhood was transformed.

Word spread of this transformation in the Shalimar neighborhood creating demand for a replication of these efforts in other neighborhoods. Many people learned from the Shalimar model and sought to re-create something similar in their own areas. Barth worked with another church to establish a learning center in the Minnie Street neighborhood in Santa Ana in 1996, and met with similar success.

In 1997, Barth started THINK Together to take the after school learning center concept into a broader community environment. Nearly half of Southern California students are English learners and/or are from families living below the federal poverty level. Most of these students can benefit from being involved in academically-oriented after school programs. To make significant inroads into helping this group of students achieve academic success, Barth envisioned the whole community coming together –

corporations, foundations, individuals, schools, colleges, government at all levels, along with communities of faith – to achieve this vision.

Soon THINK Together had a dozen after school learning centers located in Costa Mesa, Santa Ana, Tustin and Orange, serving more than 1,000 students every day. These centers were located in the midst of high-need neighborhoods in various settings including public schools, apartments and churches. THINK Together raised more than \$1 million per year in private funding to hire staff and recruited more than 500 volunteer tutors to help its students.

In the late 1990's and early 2000's, both the federal and California state government began to fund school-based after school programs. These public funds required private sector matching funds in order to make these school-based programs viable. Since THINK Together's vision was to serve as many students as possible, it seemed to make sense to partner with the schools to achieve this goal. THINK Together created partnerships with several school districts in order to serve more students, and to build academic support systems which were more closely aligned with each student's school. In these partnerships, THINK Together combines matching funds, volunteers, staff, and significant managerial expertise to run some of the best after school programs in the country.

The program itself looks like this: Students come to the program each and every school day. They receive a healthy snack and then participate in a rotation of activities. Students receive an additional hour of instruction often delivered by teachers from that same school. Students receive help with their homework for about an hour, through a combination of paid staff and volunteer tutors. Students then get an hour of exercise through a combination of structured activities and free play. A typical site will serve between 90 and 250 students per day. At the middle school level, more student choice is available and more academic enrichment activities are offered, helping the program achieve more of a "club" feel while still aiming to boost academic achievement.

THINK Together programs have won numerous awards and have shown outstanding results. More than 100 students from the Shalimar neighborhood alone have gone on to college, all the first in their families to do so. The twenty or so of these students have now graduated from college.

In 2006, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger announced that Proposition 49 the After School Education and Safety (ASES) Initiative passed by voters in 2002 would be fully funded. The State published a list of 1400 schools that would be High Priority to receive these funds. More than 600 of these schools were in either the eastern portion of Los Angeles County or along the corridor encompassing the 60 Freeway and the 10 Freeway east of Los Angeles and out through the Inland Empire (San Bernardino and Riverside Counties).

THINK Together expanded out of Orange County and established three regional offices to serve many of these high-need schools. Today, THINK Together operates comprehensive after school programs at more than 170 school and community sites across 19 different school districts. THINK Together has more than 1,000 employees serving more than 20,000 students per year.

In addition, THINK Together is creating a High School Division to meet the needs of high school students in these same communities. It is well documented that urban high schools are struggling to properly prepare students for college and the workforce. We believe it is imperative for communities to partner with schools to provide additional supports for their students, and THINK Together is creating the vehicle to do just that.

THINK Together has also created a division to provide what we see as the next-generation of school-age care and enrichment programs on a fee-basis in more affluent communities. School-age care is designed to meet the childcare needs of working parents while providing school-based academic support, enrichment, and physical fitness for each student. Supplemental enrichment programs are designed to meet the needs of students whose parents don't necessarily need childcare, but who want their children to be exposed to learning opportunities that may not be available during the regular school day. These opportunities might include art, music, math, science, writing, foreign language, and targeted reading support. These fee-based programs are a social enterprise, meaning the earned-income they generate provides matching funds for THINK Together's low income programs.

THINK Together is non-profit 501 (c) 3 public benefit corporation. It combines business and education professionals into a unique social enterprise that partners with schools and the private sector to provide extended learning days and expanded learning opportunities for students regardless of race, creed or socio-economic condition.

Regardless of whether your child has remedial academic needs, is looking for an innovative academic boost to keep them on that Ivy-League track, or just looking for summer fun, THINK Together has a high quality program to meet your child's needs.