

Rising Expectations

THE ISLA VISTA TEEN CENTER'S RISING STARS

PROGRAM GUIDES STUDENTS ON THE PATH TO LIFETIME SUCCESS

By DAVID DOWNS

South Coast Beacon

Getting good grades, showing up on time, staying out of gangs and away from drugs — traditionally it's parents who teach these lessons to their teen-agers.

In the case of Isla Vista, however, a new program called Rising Stars is stepping in.

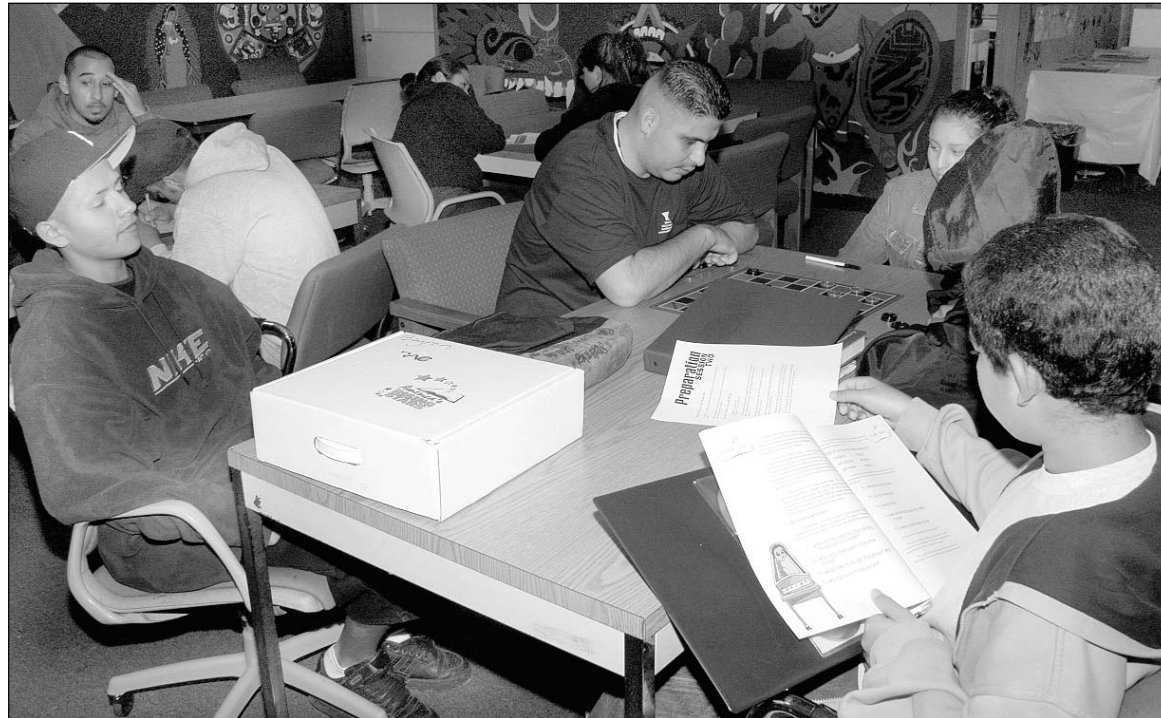
Most of Isla Vista's 1,300 children are low-income Latinos with working parents living among 14,000 college students. Rising Stars facilitator Brian Siever said the town's cost of living and lack of wholesome activities hinder teens' ability to succeed.

"You've got parents who are working two or three jobs just to get by and kids who don't have the home life or family support or interest to help them," he said.

The Rising Stars leadership program takes 10 teens and meets once a week to discuss the habits, attitudes, and techniques necessary to achieve a wide variety of short- and long-term goals.

The 12-week course costs \$500 per student — a fee paid for with donations from Raytheon. Students and a facilitator meet two hours a week at the Isla Vista Teen Center to cover topics such as healthy mistakes, procrastination and empathy. Instead of being lectured, students involve themselves in every aspect of the learning process.

"The goal is to plant some seeds that over time can be tilled, watered and fertilized so these kids can make some different life choices down the line," Siever said.



Nahid Khaki photo

STUDY TIME: *Byron Lara, right, peruses his Rising Stars work book. Lara and nine of his friends at the teen center will spend 12 weeks developing successful personal attitudes in the program.*

All the youths in Rising Stars are friends through the Teen Center — one of the few Isla Vista teen outlets that isn't a park or the television, said Dos Pueblos High freshman Byron Lara, who comes to the center every day.

"Sometimes in I.V. it's kind of boring. You join this and you have something to do other than staying home," said Byron.

Sixteen-year old Jose Mosqueda agreed there's not much to do in town. He doesn't mind extra homework every week because the Rising Stars course is different.

"It's not like normal, boring classes," he said. "It's fun. There's great stories. There's this one about the ancient Greeks that says everyone has to find their own happiness that's hidden from people sometimes."

Teen Center director Marya Torrez said Rising Stars excited the 25-30 teen center regulars and applications exceeded the available spaces.

Siever intends to capitalize on that excitement with wholesome rewards and opportunities, not to mention instant gratification like trips to Six Flags Magic Mountain, music CDs, free food and drinks, and books.