

East Bay Public Safety Corridor Partnership

**Safe Passage Home –
Lockwood/Coliseum Gardens Oakland,
California**

**Summary of Community Focus Groups
& Key Informant Interviews**

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**Prepared by:
Resource Development Associates**

478 Santa Clara Ave.
Oakland, California 94610
510 433-0204

Interviewers:

Anthony G. Leach,
Community Development Specialist
Community Health Academy

Sandra V. Sanders-West, Community
Liaison, Oakland Police Department

Sovandy Hang, Community Liaison,
Asian Community Mental Health

William Quan, Community Liaison,
Asian Community Mental Health

Background of Safe Passage Home - Oakland

In September of 1995, The East Bay Public Corridor Partnership conducted a comprehensive needs assessment of the conditions associated with youth violence within the East Bay region of the San Francisco bay area of California¹. One of the innovative aspects of this needs assessment was the publication of charts and maps showing the time of day that youth were most often victimized and specific “hot spots”² in neighborhoods where a disproportionately high number of youth assaults were occurring.

The analysis of the data taken directly from 3 years of individual arrest and incident reports from the Oakland Police Department revealed that the time of day that youth were most often victimized was between 3:00 PM and 6:00 PM. A second but less dramatic peak time for youth assaults was revealed to be between 8:00 AM and 9:00 AM.

The city block addresses where youth assaults were occurring were then mapped revealing that youth were being assaulted, or involved in physical altercations, on the way to and from school.

The East Bay Public Safety Corridor then submitted an application to the Department of Justice requesting funding to further study and, in partnership with the community and the Oakland Police Department, develop solutions that would reduce the number of youth assaults. The community of Lockwood/Coliseum Gardens in East Oakland was chosen as a focal point for this endeavor due to the high number of “hot spots” identified. This geographically small community which represents only two census tracks accounted for 11 of the 109 hot spots in the entire city of Oakland in 1994.

Purpose of Focus Groups and Interviews

The purpose of conducting focus groups and key informant interviews was to;

1. Listen to the impressions, feelings, and experiences of people who live and work in the neighborhood regarding the safety of children and youth within the community;
2. Discover what people saw to be the assets or strengths of their community which could be used to find solutions to the problem;
3. Discover what people believe are the causes of children and youth being unsafe;
4. Discover what people believe is needed to create a safer community for children and youth with a particular interest in identifying program needs, resources or activities;
5. Gauge the readiness of individuals willing to commit to participating in community activities around the subject of safety for children;
6. Obtain the names of individuals or organizations who might be useful in describing or addressing the problem, and;

¹ The needs assessment included the cities of West Contra Costa county down through the western most cities that parallel the San Francisco Bay in Alameda County and include the major cities of Oakland, Richmond, Berkeley and Union City.

² A “hot spot” is defined as a block on which three or more assaults occurred in a single year.

7. Gauge the impressions of people in the community regarding the role of the police in addressing the issues.

Who We Talked With

From October 1998 through the first week of January 1999 we talked with a total of 204 people. The following charts break down the demographics of participants.

	Adults	Children & Youth	Total
Males	56	39	95
Females	72	37	109
Total	128	76	204

The interviewers reported the following demographic breakdown:

	Adults	Children & Youth	Total
African American	59	20	79
Latino	18	4	22
White	6	1	7
Asian	17	9	26
Unknown	28	42	70
Total	128	76	204

The interviewers reported the following ethnic and racial breakdown³:

Race/Ethnicity	Total Number of Participants
African American	112
Asian	29
Latino	36
White	13
Unknown	14
Total	204

How People Were Chosen for Focus Groups or Interviews

³ Unfortunately we did not record the correlation of age/race/gender in focus groups. Therefore we can only provide numbers that reflect the total racial/ethnic breakdown of all participants.

The group of interviewers decided early on in the planning stages that we should aim to speak with a cross section of the community. We brainstormed a list of categories of individuals and groups who we wanted to include. The list included:

- Business Owners
- Community Leaders
- Community Service Organizations
- Elected Officials
- Housing Authority Police
- Ministers or People from the Faith Community
- Oakland Police
- Parents
- School Officials
- Teachers
- Tenants of Public Housing
- Youth
- Youthful Offenders

We agreed that everyone we spoke with would either live or work in the community of Lockwood/Coliseum Gardens.

Some of the Key Informant interviews were chosen because of the individual's important role in the adoption and implementation of policy in the community. Examples include:

- The Chief of Police of Oakland
- City Council Member
- Principals of schools

MAJOR REOCCURRING THEMES:

The following topics are presented in the order that they were most often mentioned. They are also presented in the order in which there was the most consensus among participants.

Assets and Strengths of the Community

Diversity

When asked to describe an asset or strength of the community, the majority of participants listed diversity first and foremost. The diversity of the different cultures and races of people living in the community was seen as a plus.

It is important to note however, that a need for multicultural activities and cross cultural awareness training for parents and youth was noted. When participants described stories of fights among youth the different races and ethnicity in the disturbances were noted. This was especially true of youth that described fights where other youth were physically hurt. A need for parents being able to model cultural awareness so that youth would be better equipped to live in a diverse community was expressed.

A Strong Sense of a Caring Community

The sense that people cared about their community, were willing to participate in efforts to make it better and looked out for one another surfaced again and again. This was particularly true of participants who lived in public housing and for others who owned their own homes. Participants indicated that people who owned their homes in the community had lived there for a long time and knew each other by their first names.

The overwhelming majority of participants stated that they would be willing to become involved in addressing the problem of safety for children and youth. A large number of participants reported that they were already involved.

The Schools, Teachers and Principals

Participants saw the schools, the teachers and principals as an asset in the community because they believed that the teachers and principals cared about the community. They saw the schools as places to build programs and a place for people, both students and adults, to learn and come together. Programs to help address problems in the community and meet needs that had been established at school were remembered. People would often talk about the schools as being the place where programs could or should happen.

This isn't to say that people found the schools without faults. The majority believed that children and youth were not safe at school. Many people sited the need for improved education, more teachers and other resources as being very necessary to insure the safety of children. However, there seems to be a high level of faith in the institution itself and the people who work in the schools.

Police

There were two major categories of comments regarding the police. People wanted them to do more and people wanted them to do things differently.

The “More” Category

The largest number of participants wanted “more police presence”. This was expressed in many ways including using the words visibility, more police officers, and more police contact with the community outside of the role of “chasing and catching the bad guys”. There were a fewer number of participants that stated they wanted more law enforcement activities from the police including arresting more drug dealers. Generally speaking people felt that having police more present and visible would be a deterrent and would help make children and youth safer. Many participants expressed a need for police presence on school grounds and around schools especially when students get out of school. The removal of school police officers from schools in the community was seen as a set back for insuring safety in and around the schools.

There were some participants, mostly youth, who did not want more police in the community because they saw the police as part of the problem of making children and youth unsafe. They described times when they felt harassed by the police and they felt that the police were too quick to respond with guns and violence.

The “Different” Category

Many people who stated that they wanted to see more police presence also stated that they wanted to see police more involved with the community and particularly with youth. They spoke of wanting to see police officers get to know the people in the community, particularly the kids in the community. They expressed a desire for police officers to allow the community to get to know them. They spoke of a need for dialogue between police officers and community members to develop trust and a need for the community and the police to work together. One participant described the police as being “men with no legs” because they were seldom seen out of their patrol cars. The concern about the lack of foot patrol in the neighborhood was frequently mentioned.

Police Response and Response Time

Overwhelmingly, the police were seen as being unresponsive to the needs of the community. This was expressed in several ways, however, the largest number of participants complained about the response time of police. They felt that once called, it simply took too long for the police to come to the scene of an incident or problem. In some cases, people recounted that the police did not show up at all. A few other participants described situations where the police were present but did not intervene in a fight or in illegal activities such as drug trafficking.

Participants expressed feelings ranging from bewilderment to anger and cynicism as to why the police seemed unable to better insure the safety of children and youth. They described what they regularly witnessed – drug dealing and prostitution- in specific sites in the community and could not understand why the police did not intervene. Certain spots in the community were described as “circuses” of criminal activity that went on all the time without police intervention. People could not understand why, if it was so obvious to them, the police had not converged on a well-known drug trafficking scene.

□ After School Programs/ Recreation Centers

Sited time after time by participants was the need for after school programs and safe places for kids to go and have adult supervised structured, positive activities. People felt this was necessary for many reasons including the fact that children and youth were at risk because of the lack of parental or adult supervision after school. Others saw the need rising out of a lack of opportunity for meaningful activities for youth in the neighborhood such as sports, jobs, art programs etc. Many participants believe that youth have nothing positive to do so they get into trouble.

People expressed the need for a safe, drug free place or places that would be inviting to youth.

□ Conflict Resolution/Anger Management/Esteem Building/Empowerment

The need to teach children and youth how to handle conflicts and anger without resorting to violence was mentioned very frequently. This was seen as necessary for children and youth as well as for adults in the community. It was often mentioned that children and youth needed adult role models that could handle conflict and anger in non-violent ways. Participants expressed a desire to see these skills taught in school and in the community.

Kids getting into verbal disagreements at school that spilled out into the streets after school and erupted into physical violence and kids who now have access to or carry weapons was noted as a major causal factor in assaults and batteries. Participants felt that

children and youth needed to be taught other ways of settling their differences so that they did not resort to violence.

Important in this category is the repetition of the importance of children and youth, and even adults who seem to believe that they have to protect themselves from slurs or insults by resorting to violence. Saving face, responding to being “dissed” or protecting the reputation of self or others, particularly family and friends is seen as very important. Many believed that this is related to issues of self-esteem as well as demonstrating a need for anger management and conflict resolution. One youth determined that the best way to avoid physical violence was to “never look at anyone” because a look would be interpreted as aggression.

□ Traffic Safety

A surprising finding was that people felt that one cause of children and youth being unsafe had to do with automobiles. Speeding cars, lack of traffic signals and stop signs and the need for crossing guards at schools were mentioned so many times that a plan for increasing the safety of children and youth in the community should take this issue into account.

There was ample belief among participants that some of the traffic safety problems were a result of people driving under the influence or having a disregard or lack of understanding of traffic laws. One police officer stated that out of every five young drivers that he stopped, only one had a driver’s license. When questioned as to why these young drivers did not have a license, the most common response was that they could not read and knew that they would fail the written part of the driving test.

□ Drugs and Drug Trafficking

“ You can’t walk home from school without having someone offer you drugs” was reported by one youth.

While some people reported that the neighborhood environment had improved in this regard, people agreed that there was still too much blatant drug trafficking and drug use on the streets. This added to the fear of children walking to and from school as they often witnessed drug trafficking activities, were asked to purchase drugs or were recruited by adults to sell or carry drugs. Many people, both youth and adults recounted situations where children were invited to get into cars by strangers who appeared to be under the influence of drugs.

Many people described the violence that was occurring in the neighborhood as having to do with drugs and the protection of drug selling turf. Several people mentioned the lack of jobs or the poor economic conditions of families in the community as fueling drug trafficking and the surrounding violence in the community. Liquor stores were noted as being hangouts for people who were under the influence of drugs and as places where violence often erupted.

□ Parents and the Community

The problems associated with single parent families, two parents working, grandparents raising children, children raising children and parents using drugs were all sited as

reasons for lack of parental control of children and youth. People expressed a need for parents to be more involved in the lives of children and youth. At the same time, it was noted that parent participation in the schools was an asset.

The need for parenting education, support groups and activities that would help parents find support among each other was often sited. Participants felt strongly that parents need to learn skills that would assist them in raising their children. They felt that many parents unknowing modeled behavior and language that fueled violence in the community.

Interestingly, the most often repeated response to the question of what would make children and youth feel safer was the increased involvement of parents and the community in addressing the problems of violence. Concerned and involved parents were also seen as one of the primary assets of the community. Hard working people were also named as an asset. It was noted that while there were many problems for families that impeded their ability to parent and provide strong role models for children and youth, there were many families who maintained strong families in the face of these impediments.

□ A Need for Cross Cultural Understanding

The need for people to obtain a better understanding and ease with people of different cultures, ethnicity's and races within the community was viewed as a way to increase the safety of children. As mentioned earlier, diversity was seen as an asset. People spoke of the changes that were taking place in the racial and ethnical composition of the community. Once a predominately African American community, Lockwood/Coliseum Gardens is now comprised of Asians, Hispanics and African Americans. Disagreements and hostility erupt between individuals from these different groups as a result of misunderstandings about cultures.

A participant who had attended a public housing tenant meeting in one of the public housing projects in the community sited an example of this type of misunderstanding. This public housing meeting was attended by several African American long-time residents as well as some newly immigrated Asians. The African Americans accusingly questioned the Asian tenants how it was possible for them to be driving a brand new car. The Asian tenants responded by explaining that the car was jointly owned and paid for by five families.

Language is often a barrier for neighbors communicating and getting to know each other. These misunderstandings are also reflected in many of the fights that break out at school and are carried over into the streets. Name-calling, stereotyping and mistrust because of a lack of understanding were recounted in stories of fights among children and youth. A sense of protecting turf from outsiders was also viewed as causal.

Focus Group and Key Informant Questions and Answers

The following numbered questions were used for all 204 participants in the focus groups and interviews. We have listed responses noting how many times the response was given with a *. We have condensed the responses only when the same idea or concept was presented in different words.

1. What do you feel are the strengths of your community?

- Diversity *****
- The principal, teachers and the schools*****
- Good neighbors who get along, know each other, watch out for each other and help each other*****
- Dedicated & involved parents ****
- Hard working people*****
- Lots of concerned families and citizens willing to get involved***
- The community is safer than it used to be*****
- People are passionate about their community and feel a sense of ownership***
- Boys & Girls Club****
- Active churches****
- Homework center at Havenscourt**
- Martin Luther King Library**
- Homeowners who have lived here a long time and are active in community**
- Federal money to revitalize community**
- Boy & Girl Scouts*
- Children are the greatest asset *
- Americorp *
- Lockwood Residents Council*
- Strong family orientation
- Officer Jerry Williams*
- Housing Authority Police*
- Friendly firehouse crew
- Community Centers in Projects
- Florist in community is supportive
- Neighborhood Watch
- Babe Ruth baseball field
- The community is centrally located

2. What types of supports or services would you like to see in your community that would make things safer?

- After school programs*****
- Places where kids can go/drug free/structured activities*****
- More parental involvement/community involvement/police/everyone working together*****
- More attention from the city*
- We need a uniformed police officer at 66th Ave. and E.14th
- Attention needs to be given to a criminal enterprise on 71st Ave.
- Need for longer traffic lights/crossing guards so kids can cross safely***
- Addressing the drug trafficking of a certain family***
- Kids need anger management skills/conflict resolution skills/empowerment self esteem*****

- Police need to be friendlier and relate to the kids/community on a personal level/break down mistrust*****
- Stop the drug trafficking**
- Safe-Houses for kids around the school
- Stop cars from speeding
- More playground supervision
- Programs and curriculum to build self-esteem of youth
- More visibility & activity enforcement of police/especially after school/at library*****
- Quicker response time of police**
- Parent Education/Support Groups/ programs*****
- More multi-ethnic community activities/cross cultural awareness education*****
- Put school police back at Havenscourt**
- Improve the housing conditions/how the community looks**
- Businesses permitting youth to come in if they feel unsafe**
- Truancy sweeps/keep kids in school*
- Substance abuse services/drug prevention*
- Job Center/Jobs/economic opportunities*
- Homeless Shelter/Housing referrals*
- Jobs for youth
- Programs for expelled students
- Adults should pick up students after school
- Get ride of guns on the street
- Parents need to get along with other parents of different ethnic backgrounds
- Curfew for youth
- Teen Pregnancy Prevention
- Community patrols

3. *Do you feel that children and youth are safe in this neighborhood as they walk to and from school?*

- No *****
- Yes**** (all live in public housing or get picked up from school)
- Children are safer than they have been but needs improvement**
- Children are not safe because of
 - Drug dealing/drug users*****
 - Speeding /Traffic*****
 - Lots of fights between youth “Hecka fights” **
 - Lack of communication/understanding between cultures and races**

Gang Affiliation/Gang rivalry****
Lack of adult/parental supervision*****
Youth being kidnapped *
Sense of helplessness/hopelessness in community
Truancy

- Bomb threats at school
- Robberies*
- Disagreements that start between kids at school**
- Youth being exposed to crime activity in the neighborhood*
- Lack of positive things for kids to do**
- Guns/Gun fire***
- Youth followed by adults after school/invited into cars***
- Youth not knowing how to keep themselves safe
- Youth fighting to protect younger siblings
- Youth protecting their turf/ Outsiders coming in**
- Stray dogs
- Fights around the liquor store
- Bullying among kids*
- People in community are prone to violence
- Youth are jacked at knife point /or fight over clothes*
- Taking the school bus
- Adults threaten youth on their way to school
- Lack of police presence
- Children are not safe as they walk to and from school**
- Children are not safe no matter where you live
- I believe the neighborhood (Lockwood Housing) is safe but you have to be careful

4. *Are there particular services that you would like from the police?*

- **Police should**
 - Be more visible/have more presence*****
 - Work with community/be more community focused****
 - Do more positive things with people instead of punishing or catching bad guys****
 - Teach people how to be safer**
 - Be more friendly/show more respect**
 - Get to know the people in the community/let community get to know police*
 - Receive more training on how to work with people
- Community & Police should join forces to address a certain family
- Assaults and batteries are not getting reported at Havenscourt
- Police response time must be improved*****
- Beat officers should drive through school yard
- After-school patrols**
- Community Policing should be visible/implemented*
- More police officers*
- More bilingual police
- Police on school grounds/more presence**
- Police should be less violent*
- Police only increase the tension/Police are bad/make us unsafe***
- People don't trust the police
- It's not enough just to drive around

- Police need to listen to children/develop relationships with them**
- Police officers need to be on bikes or foot patrol**
- Help school get working phone numbers for parents
- Be Peace officers not Police Officers
- Police need to understand that they are seen as the problem not the solution.

5. *Can you think of incidents where children and youth were frightened or hurt in your community? When did it happen? Where?*

- International Blvd. – drug sales, auto traffic*****
- On the way home from school/after school***
- The library***
- On school campus**
- All over the neighborhood*
- Liquor stores *
- The summer
- Brentford street
- “69th street Village”
- Havencourt and 69th -traffic
- 66th and e 14th
- 66th & 67th Ave.
- At night
- 66th & Eastlawn
- Greenman Field - drugs

6. What do you think should be done to insure that children and youth are safe in your community?

- More police protection/presence *****
- After school activities/recreation centers/more constructive things to do*****
- We need better parenting /parenting education/parenting accountability/parent involvement****
- Have more multi-ethnic /education community activities****
- Parents should teach children to get along with others from different cultures and races ***
- Police on school campus/after school patrols***
- Conflict resolution training/self-esteem building/anger management/in schools***
- Police should stop harassing students and youth *
- Jobs for kids/better economic opportunities for all*
- Return to the church/more church involvement in community*
- Need more love and support from parents and the police
- Metal detectors at school
- More consequences for children and adults
- Stop anyone hanging around after 11:00 at night
- Traffic lights should be installed

- Pick up trash in neighborhood
- More cross guards in front of school
- Enforce rules in school
- Stop cars from speeding through neighborhood
- Parents should walk children to school and pick them up
- Pick up kids for truancy
- Get school police back into middle schools
- Create safe houses in the community for kids
- Adults being good role models
- Police should respond quicker
- Crack down on drug dealing
- More stop signs
- More communication between parents and school
- More foot patrols
- Students should walk in twos
- Parents should form carpools
- Continued rehab of housing and neighborhood
- Community patrols
- Community empowerment

7. *How about the schools in your community - do the children and youth feel safe in their schools?*

- No*****
 - Not enough teachers
 - There are bullies at school
 - Racial tension/ethnic conflict*
 - People get jumped at school*
 - Schools are boring
 - Kids cuss out the teacher
 - It's like a war zone
 - Chinese get beat up
 - Some kids have guns
 - Lunch lines are too long –cause problems
 - Younger kids get beat up on playground
 - Verbal fights in classrooms
 - Some students are afraid to go out at recess
 - Fights after school
 - Fights in the community spill over into the school
- Yes****
 - Somewhat
 - Teachers talk to the kids about getting along
- Unsure**

8. What would help children and youth feel safer in schools or going to and from schools?

- Community involvement and parental involvement ****

- Police presence/Visible police officers/before and after school*****
- More parental contact and supervision*
- More law enforcement of truancy, speeding
- Counseling/mentoring by the police
- Parents could wail for a group of kids to walk with them
- Adult supervision on school yard**
- Carpooling
- Have a listen to our children day
- Get rid of drug heads at liquor store
- Police officer near MLK library
- Parents helping to patrol the school*
- Better role models so they don't see adults fighting and selling drugs
- After school programs/school recreation programs**
- Older kids walking with younger kids
- Parents walking their children to school

9. Do you know of any efforts going on in your community to address these issues?
What are they?

- No*
- Village Centers*
- Safe Passage****
- Neighborhood watch**
- Boys & Girls Club****
- West Oakland Health Center's Conflict Resolution Training
- Youth Together
- AYPAL
- Neighborhood Crime Prevention Council**
- D.A.R.E
- City wide Safe Passage
- Community Policing*
- East Bay Public Safety Corridor
- Acts Full Gospel
- At the library they are working on safety
- We have more campus supervisors now
- Havenscourt homework center
- Parent Patrol & Safe Passage
- Allen Temple
- West Oakland Health Council-Adolescence Substance Abuse Program
- Officer Jerry Williams*
- Bay Area Urban League
- Private Industry Council
- Asian Community Mental Health
- Headstart
- Parent Empowerment

- OHA Community Outreach*

10. Are you willing to be involved with others to work on this problem?

- Yes*****
- I'm afraid to be involved
- No*
- I don't think they like us

Responses from Focus Groups and Key Informant Interviews
By Intervention

	Economic	Environmental	Social
INDIVIDUAL	Jobs		Conflict Resolution, anger management/self esteem building
FAMILY	Jobs	Continued rehabilitation of housing units and neighborhood Pick up trash Get rid of abandoned cars	Parenting Education/Support Groups/Empowerment
SCHOOLS		Crossing guards on E. 14 th , stop signs traffic lights	
PEER GROUP		Drug Free, safe, supervised environment after school	Cross Cultural Education
COMMUNITY		Eliminate hot spots for drug trafficking and people under the influence	Community Policing