



**EAST BAY PUBLIC SAFETY
CORRIDOR PARTNERSHIP**

Safe Passage Home—Richmond, California

Summary of Community Focus Groups
& Key Informant Interviews

December 1999

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Results of Focus Groups and Key Informant Interviews December 1999

BACKGROUND OF SAFE PASSAGE HOME - RICHMOND

In September of 1996, 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 5 years of individual arrest and incident reports from the Richmond 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 Richmond Police Department, develop solutions that would reduce the number of youth assaults. The community of south central Richmond was chosen as a focal point for this endeavor due to the high number of “hot spots” identified. This community, which represents six census tracks and contains less than 30% of the city’s population, was the scene of nearly 60% of all assaults against youthful victims. This community, also known as the Iron Triangle, accounted for 17 of the 21 hot spots in the entire city of Richmond in 1995.³

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, particularly youth, who live and work and attend school in the neighborhood regarding the problems of violence and 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 solution to the problem;
3. Discover what people believed were the causes of children and youth being unsafe particularly related to assault and battery;
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;

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 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.

³ Total number of juvenile assaults reported in the city of Richmond in 1995 were 62.

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

WHO WE TALKED WITH

From the first week of January 1999 through the last week of September 1999 we talked with 492 people. The following charts break down the demographics of participants.

Males	251
Females	241
Total Participants	492

Children & Youth	188
Adults	294
Total Participants	492

The interviewers reported the following ethnic and racial breakdown⁴:

Race/Ethnicity	Total Number of Participants
African American	314
Asian	32
Latino	108
White	37
Unknown	1
Total	492

⁴ 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.

HOW PEOPLE WERE CHOSEN FOR FOCUS GROUPS OR INTERVIEWS

The group of interviewers decided in the planning stages that we should aim to speak with a cross section of the community. However, because the original data indicated a correlation between youth violence and going to and from school, there was an initial emphasis placed on speaking with youth and school personnel. We held focus groups and conducted key informant interviews at the following schools located in the targeted community;

- Adams Middle School
- Coronado Elementary School
- Harbour Way Community Day School
- Helms Middle School
- Lincoln Elementary School
- Nystrom Elementary School
- Portola Middle School
- Richmond High School

In addition, we brainstormed a list of categories of individuals and groups who we wanted to include. The list included:

- Community Leaders
- Community Service Organizations
- Elected Officials
- Ministers or People from the Faith Community
- Richmond Police
- Parents
- Tenants of Public Housing
- Youthful Offenders

We agreed that everyone we spoke with would either live or work in the community of the six census tracks.

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 Richmond
- City of Richmond Community Services Coordinators
- WCCUSD Administrators
- Directors of Community Based Organizations
- Direct Service Providers

We also held focus groups with several neighborhood associations including:

- Crescent Park Resident Council
- Richmond Downtown Business Association
- Coronado Neighborhood Council
- Iron Triangle Neighborhood Council
- Park View Neighborhood Council
- The Southeast Neighborhood Coordinating Council
- Santa Fe Neighborhood Council

- The Cortez/Stege Neighborhood Council
- El Pueblo Neighborhood Council
- Belding/Woods Neighborhood Council

DO THE CHILDREN FEEL SAFE?

When asked if they felt safe going to and from school the majority of children and youth responded that they felt safe because:

1. They were not alone; they were either accompanied by an adult, got a ride from an adult, or they walked with others;
2. They lived in close proximity to their school and felt safe in their immediate neighborhood.

Other children and youth stated that they did not feel safe because of the fear of being “jumped” or that having to ride public transportation to and from schools was not safe.

While the majority of children and youth initially stated that they felt safe they also readily described scenes of violence and situations that made them afraid:

- An 18 year old was killed at 4:30 PM on 15th Street
- A young person was shot in front of Kennedy High School
- Drive by shootings at Richmond High School
- A girl came to school with a gun to show it off to her friends
- Lots of fights happen over the color of clothing *
- I’m afraid of being harassed by gang members and robbed by older students
- In the neighborhood people sell drugs all-day and beat up people that they don’t know.
- I am afraid that people will take my money
- A boy feels unsafe because he got hit by a car
- I saw two adults fighting in the school yard; one had a bat and one had a knife
- People carry guns and knives *
- My group home was “shot up”
- I’m afraid of being jumped by a group of Mexican girls
- My school is safe but the area it is in is not safe
- My cousin beat up her friend for not buying something she wanted
- I stabbed my father in the back for hitting my mother
- My mother abandoned me. That’s why my father beats her
- I stayed home from school because a boy said I owed him a yo-yo and he was going to beat me up
- I was hit by a car and had to go to the hospital
- Two ladies were fighting outside my house and another lady came to stop it and they threw the lady on a car and broke the windshield
- Somebody pulled a gun on my uncle and shot him five times
- Somebody ran over my daddy’s foot
- I feel unsafe sometimes because of bullies *
- My brother had to stay home because there was a big fight at school
- I saw a man dead at the gas station near my home
- My cousin got shot

- I saw domestic violence *
- I feel unsafe because I see drug dealers and drug users *
- There are crazy people walking around *
- I stayed home from school because I had a fight and broke a boy's nose
- I saw a friend and my cousin shot to death in Easter Hill
- I hit somebody with a bat
- I saw a cat get run over
- I saw a drive-by shooting
- I hear a lot of shooting* and a lot of bad things happening
- I saw a dead person in an alley
- I saw kids throwing rocks at a person's car and the person tried to run over them
- I saw someone bust a boy's head on a chalkboard
- There are loose dogs around the school and strangers walking in the neighborhood *
- There are too many drunk drivers
- There are drug dealers selling drugs near our home
- There are people speeding down the street in their cars
- There were adults fighting on the playground with weapons while children were on the playground
- I feel unsafe because I have a long distance to walk home
- I'm afraid someone will be following me (walking home from school)
- I saw two guys shooting guns in the air
- I saw two gangs shooting at each other
- There was shooting in front of my house and my cousin went outside and someone killed him
- I was playing baseball and hit the ball in a man's yard and he shot at me.
- I feel unsafe because I almost got jumped on the way home one evening.
- There was a guy masturbating outside of school. We reported it to the police but they didn't do anything;
- I have had a fight every year in high school;
- I feel unsafe walking from school with men walking behind me; *
- While leaving school I heard some noise and turned and saw that a couple had been gunned down by someone in a speeding car. They asked me for help;
- I was followed by a man on my way home from school and had to take a detour;
- If you have a boyfriend and he likes another girl you cut the other girl so he can't like her no more
- The school police don't do nothing to stop fights. *

Please note that the responses that have an * after them indicate that we heard this response more than once.

Where is the Violence Occuring?

People mentioned the following locations as being the sites of violence and being unsafe.:

- 1014 Roosevelt
- 15th St.

- 24th & Mariposa St. (near Richmond High School)
- 2919 Mullins St. (group home)
- 5th St. near Pennsylvania
- 800 Block of 6th St.
- A bar at Cutting and 40th
- Berkeley St. (behind Kennedy High)
- Crescent Park
- Drive by shootings in North Richmond *****
- Easter Hill **
- El Cerrito Del Norte Bart Station *
- Fleming St.
- Iron Triangle
- Kennedy High School
- Kennedy Manor
- Kennedy Park (across from Kennedy High School)
- La Chiem School (Corner of Groom and Belfast)
- Liquor Store on Wall Ave. near 39th St.
- Lucas Park
- Parchester Village and Atchison Village
- Richmond High *
- So. 47th St. near Potrero
- St. John's apartment area
- Strip mall in El Cerrito
- Wall St. in South Richmond
- West San Pablo

Historically, there has been a great concern in Richmond for the problem of violence, particularly youth-on-youth violence. The East Bay Public Safety Corridor Partnership was itself born after one horrible weekend in 1993 in which there were 23 drive-by shootings in the area of Richmond and it's neighboring cities. Certainly, the focus group participant responses listed above testify to this history of violence. However, it does not just speak to the existence of violence between youth, but violence or the fear of it that is readily observed and experienced among adults, youth, and children. From our discussions with children, youth, and adults we learned that violence permeates the day to day life of people in this community. It takes the following forms:

❑ **Gangs and gang violence** – The fear of being caught in the crossfire of gang fights and retaliation was mentioned in almost every focus group and interview. Many children and youth expressed fear of being attacked by gang members “wearing the wrong colors”. While children and youth were not disclosing their own involvement in gangs, it was readily admitted that gangs existed. The fear of being outside one’s neighborhood was often related to fear of gangs and having to cross gang territory. Some of the children and youth that had to travel a distance to attend school expressed this fear factor.

Adults talked about the violence between gangs of different races⁵ while others spoke of the existence of gangs as substitutes for family, sport teams, and a sense of belonging. However, the majority of participants agreed that the prevalence of gangs and gang activities in the community was a major factor contributing to youth violence.

Related to the problems of gangs and gang turf was the mention of the lack of existence of a public middle school in Richmond. Children of middle school age in Richmond must travel by public transportation, not only outside of their neighborhood but also outside of their city to attend middle school. This was seen as adding to youth violence and the fear of violence as middle school children had to cross gang territory.

- ❑ **Use of and presence of guns.** “ *I know this boy who carried a gun just because he was scared. He did not use it. It was just in case.*” In almost every focus group that we held, the presence of guns was mentioned as a large contributing factor to children and youth feeling unsafe. By and large, people expressed the belief that guns were carried to school because children and youth felt that it would make them safer. For some, guns were seen as an equalizer. Since others had guns, children and youth felt they needed to have a gun too. An equal number of children and youth expressed the idea that guns were carried to school because kids wanted to impress their friends. The removal of guns and other weapons from schools and the neighborhood was seen as a primary way to help make children and youth safer. Many people felt that kids were exposed to random gunfire and that their neighborhoods were seen as war zones between rival gangs. People, both youth and adults, expressed the idea that everyone would be safer if the guns were removed.
- ❑ **Domestic Violence** – Many children readily disclosed that they have witnessed violence in their homes between their parents or other family members. Some children and youth indicated the presence of family violence indirectly by talking about grown ups fighting in their neighborhoods.
- ❑ **Speeding cars and loose dogs** – While we were looking for issues related to youth violence, the fear and results of speeding automobiles and dog bites were mentioned enough times that we need to list these factors. Children and youth described seeing others hit by cars, being hit by cars themselves. They talked about drunk drivers. Drive by shootings was mentioned many times. Children who walked to and from schools also talked about seeing dogs loose and expressed fear of being attacked by dogs.
- ❑ **Violence, bullying and other problems at school** - While it was generally acknowledged that children and youth were safer in school than out of school, there

⁵ A recent data analysis conducted by SafeFutures of gang violent crime reveals that the victims of gang crimes are almost always from the same race or ethnicity as the perpetrator of the crime.

were several issues mentioned in relationship to the fear of violence and violence in school. Conflicts between children and youth that occur in schools are often carried over into the streets and escalate into violence.

- Security Guards stationed at schools were viewed as ineffective because of their lack of intervention in situations where fights broke out or children and youth were behaving in intimidating ways;
- There is a belief that if security guards did intervene that school administrators would not take action to discipline children;
- It was widely acknowledged that weapons are brought to school
- There were reports of teachers not intervening, not caring, or simply not understanding issues affecting children and youth.

ASSETS AND STRENGTHS OF THE COMMUNITY

1. Families & Caring Individuals – It is widely believed that families are a great strength in the community. Participants expressed the idea that families wanted to help but are lacking the skills to effectively contribute to solutions of youth violence. Others mentioned the idea that there were many non-traditional families that needed to be recognized as an asset and involved in the process of problem solving. Children and youth participants often listed their cousin's house or some other family member's house as a good or positive influence in their community.

Individuals who lived or worked in the community were also mentioned as a community asset. People stated that there were many concerned citizens who are willing to become involved.

2. Community Organizations - Many community based organizations were mentioned by name. Those mentioned by name or place included:

- After school programs*****
- Black Firefighters
- DARE *
- Familias Unidas*
- Families First
- Healthy Start
- LEAP
- Library
- Martin Luther King Center
- Booker T. Anderson Community Center, (formerly Eastshore Community Center)
- Neighborhood playgrounds & parks **
- Nevin Center*
- Omega Boys Club*
- Opportunity West*
- Police Academy
- Police Activities League*
- Reclaiming Our Children and Families * *

- Richmond Youth Academy
 - TECHS Teaching Excellence in the Community, Home and Schools
 - The East Bay Center for the Performing Arts
 - Tutoring Programs
 - Urban Training Center
 - YMCA**
 - Youth Services Bureau*
 - Youth Together
 - Youthbuild
3. **Faith Community** – the presence and commitment of churches to addressing the issues of youth violence was mentioned several times. Several people felt that the faith community stood ready to become involved with others in the community, particularly the schools, but was under utilized. Many of the children and youth participants listed churches as a community asset.
4. **The Police** - The police were mentioned throughout the focus groups and interviews as being an asset of the community. However, many people, particularly youth, described police as people who did not care and were often seen as adding to the problem of violence. One youth who was self identified as a gang member stated that putting more police on the streets increased the violence.

The establishment of the police substations and particular community police officers, were mentioned several times as being of great help to the community. The activities of individual police officers, and police organizations such as PAL were seen as contributing to addressing needs in the community. Appreciation was expressed about having police officers make an effort to come to the schools and interact with students.

When participants of focus groups and interviews were asked how police can keep children and youth safer at and around neighborhood schools the majority of respondents stated that they needed more police presence, more police patrols and quicker police response time. The majority of respondents stated that more police presence was needed before and after school hours. People spoke to the need to increase the number of police around schools, in schools, and in school neighborhoods before and after school.

Some participants, particularly youth, felt that the police need to change their perception of what a gang member was and to demonstrate more respect for youth. Both adults and youth pointed out that just because a youth dressed in baggy pants doesn't mean that they belong to a gang. Other participants indicated that some youth that had been involved with gangs were getting out of them but the police did not believe or recognize that kids can change. Still others spoke of the need to have police work with ex-gang members who can be an asset in reducing youth violence. Youth felt that their race and their location or home address, **not their behavior**, determined how they were treated by the police.

FOCUS GROUP AND KEY INFORMANT QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The following numbered questions were some of the questions used for all 492 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 are the good or positive things in your community that help prevent youth violence?*

- Police ***
- Permitting children to attend neighborhood schools
- Community based programs *****
- Sports programs ***
- Probation officers on site at schools
- Conflict resolution & mediation training programs for youth**
- After school programs
- Parents taking and picking up kids to and from school *

2. *Are children and youth safe in this community?*

The majority of adults stated that children were not safe.

About 50% of the youth and children answered that they were safe but went on to qualify their answers and to describe times when they felt unsafe.

3. *What are some of the causes of youth violence problems in this community?*

- Gangs *****
- The poor economic situation of the community
- Lack of positive role models *
- High unemployment rate *
- Intergenerational gangs and lifestyles of crime
- High level of accessibility to weapons
- In accessibility to after school programs
- Drug use and drug sales ***
- Re-education on how people respond to conflict
- Adults modeling violence
- Abused children
- Inadequate or inappropriate parental guidance
- Prevalence of guns and drugs
- Drive-by shootings

4. *What do you think needs to happen to make children feel safer in the community?*

- Parents need to get involved
- Parenting education
- School crossing guards
- A public education campaign of safety
- Working on the lack of literacy skills
- Addressing lack of economic opportunity and economic development***
- Establishment of Safe Houses and Safe havens for kids to and from school
- Forming a neighborhood escort service for kids
- Addressing the gang mentality
- Schools need to be open from 3:00 PM to 6:00 PM

- Gang Prevention Programs
- Providing free transportation for kids to participate in activities and programs
- Extra patrols before and after school ***
- Better training for teachers and school police to prevent conflicts and intervention
- Community members need to appreciate and value youth
- Teach youth social skills through youth development and youth leadership programs
- Place more adults on school campus
- Expand and develop effective conflict resolution & mediation training programs for youth, neighbors, and families
- Family Counseling and more mental health services
- More effort for the elimination of guns and drugs on the street
- Provide technical assistance to provide community development and leadership skills for residents and youth in public housing and in family developments such as Easter Hill, Crescent Park, Kennedy Manor, St. John's Apartments, and the Richmond Townhouses

5. *What age group has the most critical need for direct services?*

The majority of adult respondents indicated that the need was greatest for middle school children. However children and youth did not indicate a greater need in one age group or another.

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

The majority of participants indicated that they were willing to be involved.

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

1. A number of youth expressed disdain and anger that the media only reported bad things that happened at their schools. They felt upset that their school had a bad reputation and blamed it on the media.
2. The incident and arrest data indicate a spike in youth violence at 1:00 PM. There is speculation that this is as result of truancy, or alternative schools that dismiss their students at the noon hour.
3. When directly asked if children and youth ever stayed home because they feared violence the majority answered that they did not. However, a significant number of students sited times that they had stayed home to avoid conflict.
4. Many people, particularly adults expressed the idea that the problems of youth violence are rooted in the families from which these youth and children come. Youth described domestic violence as a frequent experience. Many youth also had cousins, uncles or other family members who had been murdered or who were serving time in prison.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During the time of this study there have been many killings in Richmond. In 1999 there were at total of 30 homicides as compared to 18 in 1998. While violent crime is decreasing in all other cities of the East Bay Area, it is increasing in Richmond. Many of the groups of people that we spoke with had recently experienced a drive-by shooting or resulting death in their

neighborhood. In one sub-community, Crescent Park there were two murders within a 10 day period.

The level of violence in Richmond is at an epidemic stage. Clearly the solutions to reducing this violence and stemming the tide of this epidemic are multifaceted and complex. It will require resources over a long period of time to make the changes necessary to insure a safe community. Unlike a contagious disease that has grown to epidemic proportions, the causes of violence in Richmond seem more varied and complex than one single infectious disease. No single program, intervention or technique will be adequate to reverse the escalating violence. Instead the following root causes of this epidemic must be taken into account and simultaneously addressed:

- **Economic Development for At-Risk Youth and their Families** – For many of the youth that we spoke with, the chances of obtaining gainful employment within their community seemed hopeless. Many of these young people had not been successful in school. Many others had criminal records. Many of their families were struggling to exist on welfare. Poverty is pervasive and illegal activities such as drug dealing seems to present the only form of economic gain. A young person who can make \$1,000.00 per day illegally is not very interested in obtaining a minimal wage job.
- **Violence as a way of settling conflicts must be confronted and changed.** When asked why there is so much violence in their community youth and children expressed the idea that “that’s the way it is everywhere”. Violence seems to just be a normal way of life. Youth and children observe violence in their families. Many have had close friends or family members that have been murdered. Settling disagreements or addressing insults easily escalates into violence. While the problems of youth violence are not unique to the community of Richmond, other communities throughout the nation are making use of the best practice research that has been conducted to implement programs and practices that change violent behavior. An example of such a program is a K-12 conflict mediation program called *Resolving Conflict Peacefully*. The important aspect of this nationally recognized program is that it is **mandated** throughout the school district and must be systemically carried out.
- **Gang Violence creates a lack of safety for all people in the community.** As one focus group participant stated, “bullets don’t have names on them.” Random or misdirected gunfire has been responsible for a number of deaths and fosters fear in the neighborhoods. Addressing gang violence can not just be the responsibility of the police but must involve all institutions and organizations. An example of best practice in addressing gang violence is the San Jose B.E.S.T program which is a comprehensive gang prevention and intervention program. This citywide effort has resulted in a large decrease in gang violence in San Jose. It is also important to note that a cornerstone of the program's success has been the collaboration among participating community-based organizations.

- **Youth and children are safer in school than out of school.** Every effort must be made to insure that children are in school and that they stay there. Several promising best practice projects should be examined for use in Richmond:
 1. Reading Recovery – Identification of young children at risk due to reading below grade average, this program provides remedial services and has demonstrated positive results that increase reading skills and prevent children from falling behind in school.
 2. Reclaiming Our Children and Families – Located in Richmond, CA. this three year pilot program was recently featured by the Federal Government (OJJDP) as having great potential for addressing the problems of truant youth who are involved in the juvenile justice system

- **Extended Day and After School programs should be made available to all families in Richmond.** The need for programs during after school hours was reiterated time and time again in our focus groups and interviews. In addition, the police data indicates that the hours between 3:00 PM to 6:00 PM are one of the times of day that youth and children are most at risk for being victimized. It is important to note however, that creating programs that older youth will participate in will require that we provide them with activities that are attractive to them.

- **Domestic Violence must be addressed in conjunction with stemming the tide of youth violence.** Domestic violence includes violence against adults and children by family members. An analysis of the correlation of domestic violence and youth violence should be undertaken. The information from our focus groups and interviews regarding the frequency of domestic violence should be confirmed by analyzing the reports from the police and CPS.

- **Many people shared their hopes, dreams and needs for this community of Richmond.** They spoke of the need for the following:
 - Youth Leadership Training and Youth Development
 - Culturally Appropriate Effective Parenting Skill Building Workshops
 - Community Leadership Development for residents, including youth of Public Housing and other family housing developments