

Chinatown Youth Center Initiative OVERVIEW

YOUTH CENTER Planning Committee (2009-10)

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Challenges Facing API Youth in Oakland

A common misconception about Asian/Pacific Islander (API) youth is that they do not face academic and social challenges and are not in need of social services. However, this myth masks the true situation of many API youth in our community.

- Southeast Asian youth make up about 38% of Oakland's total Asian youth population (age 5-17 years) of approximately 12,181. For a number of reasons, Southeast Asian youth often face more challenges than youth of other Asian ethnicities, in areas such as language access and academic performance.¹
- Of all races/ethnicities in Oakland, Samoan youth have the second highest arrest rate, while Cambodian youth and Laotian youth have the third and fourth highest rates, respectively.²
- Pacific Islander students (grades 7-12) in Oakland Unified School District have the highest dropout rate, compared to other ethnicities.³
- Among API youth in Oakland schools, youth reporting the most alcohol consumption are Cambodian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and Laotian youth.⁴
- In a national youth survey, Asian youth had the highest percentage of respondents who felt they had no one to talk to about their serious problems.⁵

History of the Youth Center Project

In 2001, the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD), an Oakland-based research agency, began convening meetings of community based organizations (CBOs) serving API youth and families in Oakland. This collaboration, called the API Community Response Plan (CRP) group, brings together organizations concerned with youth violence prevention to:

- educate the community about the needs and issues facing Oakland's diverse API youth population and
- identify and advocate for specific mobilization of resources and policy changes.

From 2001-2005, the CRP was part of the API Youth Violence Prevention Center, a collaboration of NCCD and the University of Hawaii funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In 2005 the API Center evolved into the Center on Culture, Immigration and Youth Violence Prevention (www.yvpcenter.org), a CDC-funded project of NCCD, UC Berkeley, UC San Francisco, many CBOs, and other partners.

The CRP was instrumental in the publication of *Under the Microscope* (2003; 2nd ed. 2007), an NCCD report that examined education, juvenile justice, and behavioral health data relevant to API youth in Oakland. Over 20 CBOs and governmental agencies helped determine the report's content and recommendations. One key recommendation was to start youth centers at schools where API students and families could access services.

This recommendation took on new urgency in 2006, when conflicts among Mongolian youth and youth of other API ethnicities occurred in Oakland. Such conflicts typically pit the newest immigrant groups against previous new immigrants or more well established groups.

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History of the Youth Center Project (continued)

These events - as well as the CRP's growing awareness of Burmese, Tibetan, and other newly arrived immigrant groups - highlighted the need to create a setting where API youth and others feel safe, and the CRP decided to focus on advocating for a youth center.

The Youth Center Planning Process

BACKGROUND: In spring 2007, CRP members began fleshing out ideas for a youth center. This center, which will target API youth and be open to all youth, will provide comprehensive and coordinated youth development and youth violence prevention services. In fall 2007, NCCD hired consultant Jidan Koon to guide the CRP in planning a youth center. Jidan has over 15 years of experience in youth development, education reform, and organizing.

Since fall 2007, the CRP has been actively engaged in a youth center planning process, known as the Chinatown Youth Center Initiative. A Planning Committee - with representation from CBOs, elected officials, and public agencies - meets regularly to guide the process. The CRP membership, including Planning Committee members, also meets monthly to give input. In addition, a Youth Advisory Council (YAC) provides direction on key planning decisions.

In 2008, the CRP led a community assessment process to gather input on what local youth and parents would like to see in a youth center. Over 500 youth and 45 parents completed surveys; four focus groups were also held. The data collected from this process helped the CRP and YAC develop the youth center's vision, mission, goals and core program areas.

SITE/LOCATION: The CRP is focusing on Oakland's Chinatown neighborhood as a location for a youth center, due to reasons including:

- Proximity to a high density of families of various API ethnicities
- Availability of many CBOs that could maximize service delivery to API youth if a central space were available
- The unmet need for comprehensive youth programming and services in this neighborhood

To date there is not a specific site for the center. The CRP is exploring various options, including the idea of partnering with East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation in a building that would include affordable housing and social services space. In the meantime, programming - such as a "midnight basketball" program - is being incubated at Lincoln Square Recreation Center in Chinatown, and will eventually be located at the youth center.

CURRENT ACTIVITIES: In 2009-10, CRP members will work in teams on three key projects:

- *Supporting the Youth Advisory Council (YAC).* The 2009-10 YAC is comprised of about 15 youth, representing a diverse range of ages and races/ethnicities. YAC members participate in youth programs at CRP-affiliated organizations. The YAC's projects include engaging in action research in order to inform aspects of the planning process.
- *Developing a business plan and fundraising strategy for the youth center.* Based on a competitive application process, the CRP was selected to work with a student team from UC Berkeley's Haas School of Business to develop these tools.
- *Planning a career fair for youth.* This project grew out of survey data indicating that employment-related programming is a priority for youth. The fair will take place in spring 2010.

Participation by youth is a critical part of the youth center planning process. A Youth Advisory Council gives direction on key planning decisions.



Youth Center VISION

The Youth Center fosters:

- A safe and empowering environment for youth and young adults to realize their full potential
- Opportunities for youth and young adults to experience and strengthen their communities
- A culture of unity, diversity, and collaboration against social injustices

Youth Center MISSION

The Youth Center supports the success of youth and young adults by fostering their emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual health through holistic, coordinated, youth-driven resources and opportunities.

How You Can Get Involved

The Chinatown Youth Center Initiative is a multiyear project and other local organizations are encouraged to participate. Various levels of participation and decisionmaking are available.

For More Information

For more details or to learn how your organization can get involved, please contact Caroline Glesmann of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency at cglesmann@sf.nccd-crc.org or (510) 208-0500, ext. 307.

References

1. U.S. Census 2000 data, cited in *Under the Microscope: Asian and Pacific Islander Youth in Oakland*, 2nd ed. (National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 2007), p. 28.
2. Alameda County Probation Department (2006) and U.S. Census data, cited in *Under the Microscope*, p. 56.
3. Oakland Unified School District data for 2004-05, cited in *Under the Microscope*, p. 20.
4. California Healthy Kids Survey (OUSD) data for 2006, cited in *Under the Microscope*, p. 56.
5. National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2005, administered through SAMSHA, Office of Applied Studies, cited in *Under the Microscope*, p. 109.