



Fighting Drugs and Alcohol in Oakland Starts with Youth

Fighting Back: Community Initiatives to Reduce Demand for Illegal Drugs and Alcohol

SUMMARY

The [Alameda County](#) (Calif.), Castlemont Corridor Coordinating Council initiated a project in March 1990 to reduce the demand for alcohol and drugs and the harm they cause in East Oakland.

The area is characterized by poverty, high rates of unemployment, crime, violence and drug and alcohol abuse.

The project was part of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's (RWJF) national program, *Fighting Back®: Community Initiatives to Reduce Demand for Illegal Drugs and Alcohol*.

Key Results

Among the activities completed during the project, the *Fighting Back* program in East Oakland:

- Established Grandparents as Second Parents, a support and advocacy program for grandparents and other relatives who are raising their second generation of children due to family problems caused primarily by substance abuse. (See the [Program Results Report](#) on ID# 024619.)
- Established the first two outpatient treatment centers for adolescents in Oakland.
- Helped establish 25 new after-school homework centers and developed two substance abuse curriculums for these and existing after-school programs.
- Published a comprehensive report on key substance abuse indicators, *A Sobering Discussion of the Impact of Drugs & Alcohol on Oakland: The Changing Face of Substance Abuse*.
- Provided technical assistance to the Oakland Police Department in developing an automated system to map the locations of arrests, drug "hot spots" and liquor stores in order to focus enforcement efforts.

Funding

RWJF provided five grants totaling \$3,477,358 between March 1990 and June 1998 to support the project.

THE PROBLEM

East Oakland, Calif., encompasses 34.8 square miles and had 121,000 residents in 1990. It is one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse communities in the San Francisco Bay area, with 43 percent of its citizens African American, 22 percent Latino, 19 percent white, 15 percent Asian-Pacific Islander and .5 percent Native American.

In the late 1980s, East Oakland was characterized by poverty, high rates of unemployment, crime, violence and drug and alcohol abuse. In 1989, welfare assistance was six times the county average and average household income (\$24,000) was the lowest in the county and the state. Residents and external observers viewed East Oakland as a "drug war zone." Some 65 percent of all calls to the police and 55 percent of all drug "hot spots" in the city were in East Oakland, according to the Oakland police department.

The Castlemont Corridor, the initial target area of the *Fighting Back*® project, with approximately 63,000 residents, had one of the highest concentrations of drug and drug-related problems in Oakland. In 1986, the Castlemont Corridor Coordinating Council, composed of 29 city and county agencies, community-based organizations, health care providers and other organizations, developed a substance abuse prevention project.

Project staff sought to reduce drug use and its attendant problems by mobilizing the community and coordinating available services. It focused on children, their families and the community within the Castlemont High School attendance area (schools, playgrounds and neighborhoods). The Council designed the *Fighting Back* program in East Oakland to build upon this substance abuse prevention project.

THE PROJECT

The *Fighting Back* project in East Oakland began in 1990 under the auspices of the County of Alameda's Castlemont Corridor Coordinating Council. The overall objective of the project was to reduce the demand for drugs and alcohol and the harm that they cause by mobilizing the entire community and by coordinating available services. Initially, the program focused on early intervention with children and adolescents, primarily through community organizing. Later, the focus changed to working with key policy-makers, community leaders and other organizations to enhance existing alcohol and other drug services and foster systems change, drug education, structured prevention and treatment.

During the first grant (ID# 016517), coordinating council staff established a Citizens Task Force to develop an implementation proposal, a Consortium of Agencies to discuss

issues and review the grant writing process and planning teams to organize the community and develop strategies in specific areas, including the schools, police, juvenile justice, economic development, clergy and public awareness. The coordinating council hired a consultant to conduct a needs assessment, which suggested that neighborhood and community action could play a significant role in diminishing sales and use of drugs.

During the second grant (ID#019765), coordinating council staff working on Fighting Back focused on prevention and intervention activities, increasing public awareness and promoting economic development through coordination of substance abuse prevention and treatment services. Staff hired a media consultant; organized public forums on creating links between the judicial system, probation and service providers who work with youth, and on multiculturalism, successful collaboration, and community organizing; and implemented several projects for youth and young adults, including a toy weapon exchange and an evening basketball league.

During the third grant (ID# 021712), the project was expanded beyond the Castlemont High School area to East Oakland and the East Oakland Youth Development Center, a community-based, public-benefit, nonprofit corporation, took over the project. During this period, project staff focused on challenging street-level drug dealing, public nuisance issues and violence in the streets, home and school; irresponsible selling of and advertising for alcohol; and reducing the recidivism rate of juvenile offenders.

In 1995, work on the project was halted when it became clear that management turnover at the East Oakland Youth Development Center had contributed to the project's lack of structure and direction. The Urban Strategies Council, an Oakland nonprofit organization, worked with the mayor's office and others to restructure the program. The East Bay Community Recovery Project, a comprehensive substance abuse treatment service in Oakland, was chosen as the new lead agency for the project, which was re-named Project Emerge.

During the fourth grant (ID# 024536), staff at Project Emerge focused on prevention and treatment programs for youth. Additionally, the staff conducted outreach to the faith community, provided technical assistance to the police about data analysis and sponsored a monthly television program and other activities to promote substance abuse awareness.

During the fifth grant (ID# 028484), staff at Project Emerge created fact sheets and other communications tools to increase public awareness on local substance abuse issues; created a working group to develop a comprehensive report on key substance abuse indicators; increased the number of structured after-school and sports programs for youth; and conducted street-level outreach among intravenous drug users to promote methadone treatment.

Over the course of the project, staff collaborated with public schools, local universities, churches, police, media, the bar association, the health care system, community-based organizations, government and private citizens. Major partners included: Alameda County, East Bay Community Foundation, California State University at Hayward, Community Assessment Research and Evaluation, In DEPTH, KSBT-TV, Oakland Mayor's Office on Drugs and Crime, Oakland Police Department, Oakland Unified School District, Urban Strategies Council, Summit Medical Center, University of California Berkeley's School of Public Health and Watson Wellness Center.

East Oakland Fighting Back received no additional financial support, except for some small in-kind donations for office space, professional services, paint, utensils and so forth. Project Emerge received \$28,800 per year from the East Bay Community Foundation for rent and many in-kind donations.

Len Saxe at Brandeis University completed no formal evaluation of the project.

RESULTS

Over the course of these five grants, East Oakland Fighting Back and Project Emerge:

- **Established Grandparents as Second Parents, a support and advocacy program for grandparents and other relatives who are raising their second generation of children due to family problems caused primarily by substance abuse.** A telephone "warmline" provided callers with information on food, clothing, guardianship, custody and city social services and agencies that could help them. In addition, the program included support group meetings, parenting classes and a speaker's bureau. The program became a model that was adopted locally and nationally, including in six other areas of Oakland.
- **Established the first two outpatient treatment centers for adolescents in Oakland.** Thunder Road EAST opened in 1996 and was run by Thunder Road, a residential adolescent treatment center, in collaboration with Project Emerge and Summit Hospital. The second center opened in 1997; it was a collaboration between Project Emerge and the West Oakland Health Council.
- **Helped establish 25 new after-school homework centers and developed two substance abuse curriculums for these and existing after-school programs.** Staff at Project Emerge helped 31 faith-based congregations establish 25 new after-school homework centers, which were staffed by church volunteers. In addition to tutoring and homework help, these centers used a faith-based substance abuse curriculum developed by Project Emerge. They served 700 youth each month. Staff at Project Emerge developed a general substance abuse curriculum, which was implemented in all major after-school programs in Oakland and offered to smaller programs.

- **Published a comprehensive report on key substance abuse indicators.** The report, entitled *A Sobering Discussion of the Impact of Drugs and Alcohol on Oakland: The Changing Face of Substance Abuse*, included quantitative data on the extent of substance abuse in the city, as well as information from focus groups of local experts, observations of street-level drug activity in East Oakland and personal interviews with key informants. Among the report's key findings:
 - The number of people on the waiting list for drug or alcohol treatment was reduced from fiscal year 1995 to 1996, even as funding for treatment declined.
 - Heroin deaths increased 570 percent, from 1989 (10 deaths) to 1995 (67 deaths).
 - Cocaine-related hospitalizations rose and crack-related violence continued even as crack use declined.
- **Provided technical assistance to the Oakland Police Department in developing an automated system to map the locations of arrests, drug "hot spots" and liquor stores.** The system allowed police to correlate arrest records with citizen-reported "hot spots" in order to focus enforcement efforts.
- **Produced a television program, fact sheets, "action kits" and other communications materials to raise awareness on substance abuse issues.** The monthly, hour-long television program showcased local drug and alcohol experts in a call-in format. The weekly fact sheets were disseminated to more than 300 local policy-makers and key organizations. The action kits, how-to guides on making changes and/or creating substance abuse public policy, were faxed (in a distilled form) to about 500 organizations and individuals; full action kits were mailed or hand delivered to partners and the press and were available upon request. A substance abuse resource guide was developed; more than 10,000 copies were distributed.
- **Sponsored Oakland Freedom Schools, a summer program for youth ages 8 to 16.** The program, which was delivered by college-age student interns, provided academic and cultural enrichment activities, a substance abuse curriculum and healthy snacks and lunches. Project staff served about 300 youth over three years. Some 75 percent of participants improved their reading skills and 69 percent improved their school attendance and grade point average, according to staff at Project Emerge.
- **Established a "midnight basketball" program for males 18 to 25 years of age.** Participants in this evening sports program received mandatory training on issues such as wellness, substance abuse, job readiness, violence prevention and parenting. The program was conducted in collaboration with the Oakland mayor's office, the school system, the firefighters' union and others.
- **Organized a program that encouraged children to turn in their toy guns and other toy weapons in exchange for nonviolent gifts such as books and t-shirts.** The program was held in four elementary schools, and received extensive coverage by local media.

- **Conducted street-level outreach among intravenous drug users to promote methadone treatment.** Approximately 1,550 intravenous drug users were referred to 21-day methadone treatment programs.
- **Worked to reduce the large number of liquor stores in East Oakland.** East Oakland Fighting Back worked alongside a coalition of neighborhood groups to promote a city ordinance establishing a \$600 permit fee for liquor outlets. Although the courts later struck down this ordinance on technical grounds, it focused attention on the issue of alcohol outlets and their disproportionate impact on low-income communities.

Communications

Project staff published a needs assessment and a report detailing key substance abuse indicators. They distributed the substance abuse indicators report to 3,500 policy-makers and other stakeholders in the City of Oakland. The monthly television show reached a total potential audience of 100,000 families. A public service announcement was broadcast to an estimated 100,000 viewers. They distributed more than 10,000 copies of the substance abuse resource guide and sent the weekly fact sheets and monthly action kits to several hundred local policy-makers and key organizations. Local media outlets, including the *Oakland Tribune*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and television (KGO-TV, the ABC affiliate) and radio stations, covered project initiatives.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. **Cultivating relationships with agencies that collect data could help facilitate the collection and analysis of data for program planning.** (Project Director)
2. **Data and research are crucial in designing, planning and sustaining substance abuse (and other) programs.** Data collection in the planning phase allows a better understanding of the community and the nature of the programs that might be effective in making a meaningful difference. Project Emerge expected that data for its substance abuse indicators report would be readily available from public agencies, but some agencies were reluctant to share data, while others provided data sets that were raw, unsorted and unanalyzed. Cultivating relationships with police departments, hospitals and behavioral health care agencies would facilitate the collection and analysis of data for program planning. (Project Director)

Prepared by: William Digges LaTouche and Antonia Sunderland

Reviewed by: Marian Bass and Molly McKaughan

Program Officer: Floyd Morris

Grant ID# 16517, 19765, 21712, 24536, 28484

Program area: Addiction Prevention & Treatment

BIBLIOGRAPHY

(Current as of date of the report; as provided by the grantee organization; not verified by RWJF; items not available from RWJF.)

Reports

A Sobering Discussion of the Impact of Drugs and Alcohol on Oakland: The Changing Face of Substance Abuse. Oakland, CA: Project Emerge, 1998.

Bowser BP. *A Description of the East Oakland Fighting Back Needs Assessment Study Area.* Hayward, CA: California State University at Hayward, 1992.

Seventy-nine fact sheets on substance abuse issues. Oakland, CA: Project Emerge, 1997 to 1998.

Twelve action kits on substance abuse issues. Oakland, CA: Project Emerge, 1997 to 1978.

Urban Strategies Council and Youth Development Initiative Work Group. *Call to Action (An Oakland Blueprint for Youth Development).* Oakland, CA: Urban Strategies Council, 1996.

Urban Strategies Council. *A Chance for Every Child 2.* Oakland, CA: Urban Strategies Council, 1995.

Audio-Visual Materials

HealthBeat. Fourteen 60-minute television shows on substance abuse issues. East Oakland, CA: Project Emerge, 1997–1998. Broadcast on KSBT-TV.