

Enhancing Community Planning Capacity in West Sacramento
Phase I: Community Empowerment in Bryte and Broderick

Executive Summary

Each year, the Community Development Graduate Group at the University of California, Davis, provides hands-on graduate education by working on real-world community development projects for its capstone 440 course, Professional Skills in Community Development. In winter 2005, in collaboration with the Department of Parks and Recreation at the City of West Sacramento, the Bryte and Broderick community of the city was chosen as a field work site for the 440 class. According to the city officials, the community faced many challenges in light of the rapid change and development in the city and needed new ideas to help revitalize the neighborhood.

Over ten weeks in January-March 2006, student researchers identified and interviewed community leaders, local stakeholders, and residents in the community. An inventory of available services, community-based organizations, and activities for local youth was compiled to lay out available services and identify gaps in services.

This report presents an asset-based community assessment and recommends steps to utilize existing community resources, alleviate threats and improve the quality of life in the community. The key findings are as follows:

The Bryte and Broderick community reveals many strengths and assets, including:

People

- Diversity – remarkable diversity in culture, language, and age, as well as income and educational level.
- Social capital – strong bonds from multi-generational families, school and church-based communities, and rich cultural identities of the immigrant population.
- Volunteerism – high levels reported at schools, churches, and community organizations.
- Family-oriented – dedicated school staff, multi-generational family life, ethnic pride, hard-working parents and grandparents, informal cultural & immigrant networks.

Place

- Relative “walkability” of most necessary services and schools
- Active street life -- increases safety and small-town feel while promoting health
- Location – proximity to downtown Sacramento, freeways, Sacramento River, downtown West Sacramento
- Affordable housing – range of rental prices from subsidized public housing to regular apartments and single-unit homes. Affordable homes for sale.
- Underutilized resources – vacant lots and buildings, empty commercial storefronts.

Institutions

- Locally-based services – dedicated (if overstretched) local elementary & middle schools, strong Healthy Start program, well-utilized youth centers, one-stop social services hub at County Services Building.
- Willingness by social service providers to work with community organizations for improvement of services.
- Strong recreational programs and parks offered by the city.
- Diverse business and economic development from multiple independent “Mom and Pop” stores to the new mega-chain IKEA.

However, a number of community concerns, needs and threats must be addressed:

Mistrust

- Between police and residents – based on gang injunction, alleged police brutality, and slow response to domestic violence reports.
- Between local government and residents – government viewed as unresponsive to residents concerns and uninterested in public participation.

Barriers to Community Cohesiveness

- No central, community-wide meeting place.
- Repressive law -- gang injunction prevents people from gathering in public places and living normal life, increases profiling of Latino residents, and reduces police-resident trust.
- Geographic isolation – walls (including gated community, railroad, and freeways) separate other neighborhoods & services. Single-car families, inadequate bus service, and pedestrian and bike-unfriendly thoroughfares restrict mobility.
- Cultural isolation, including racism, linguistic barriers, and profiling.
- Inadequate opportunities for volunteerism within the community.

Negative Image

- Internal – fear of gentrification, perceived stigma, low expectations
- External – stigma as blighted neighborhood, media vilification of gang problem.

Underserved

- Inadequate youth services -- especially for girls and English-language learners.
- Schools poorly supported – reduced federal funding, lack of university and business partnerships, inadequate affordable preschools, and inadequate parent outreach about after-school programs and financial aid.
- Food insecurity – inaccessibility to affordable fruits and vegetables, poor nutrition awareness, and limited school food options.
- Underemployed -- need for community-based career training, supplemental educational programs, and job development for youth and adults.
- “Rich get richer and poor get poorer” – new services are centered in wealthier and more central neighborhoods, public participation is targeted at English-language speakers and home-owners, leaving Bryte and Broderick to become increasingly marginalized.

Based on this evaluation, the research team recommends the following steps:

Foster connections inside the community:

Create a central community center

- Provide a gathering place for residents to connect with each other.
- Create hub for educational, recreational, and cultural activities.
- Utilize one of the open land spaces or old Fire Station.
- Link social service providers to these centers to increase utilization of services.
- Utilize development mitigation fees to improve parks and facilities.

Create youth-led community food security program

- Combat food insecurity by assisting residents in growing healthy foods.
 - Foster science, leadership, and entrepreneurship skills in youth
- Provide gardens and markets for relaxation, socialization, and education for all ages

Create community art program

- Improve neighborhood image with public art
- Celebrate multicultural heritage while providing arts education
- Provide opportunities for volunteerism and visioning

Strengthen community identity

- Build gateway signs, banners, and murals identifying special places
- Hold cultural celebrations to honor the diversity of residents.
- Create neighborhood associations to identify and pursue common goals

Foster relationships outside the community:

Create visioning process for neighborhoods

- Hold a series of town hall meetings between the City and residents
- Use professional facilitator and translation services to ensure successful process.
- Establish community priorities and create a plan to get there.

Restore police-community relations in the neighborhoods

- Hire a mediator to facilitate dialogue between residents and police department
- End or alter gang injunction to eliminate repressive restrictions
- Encourage community policing through police community service
- Build resident trust through youth participation programs

Create West Sacramento Youth Council to help provide youth a voice in civic affairs

- Create structural link between youth and government
- Give council the power to propose, plan, and lead projects that improve the lives of youth
- Create a transparent process that ensures adequate representation from all neighborhoods, schools, and ethnic communities

Increase low-cost transportation options

- Improve bus service to basic services (shopping, health care, schools).
- Create van or minibus service to supplement major routes
- Improve bicycle and pedestrian safety through bike lanes, sidewalks, and street lights.

Improve housing options for low-income people

- Create homeownership programs for local, long-time residents
- Work with Sacramento to improve shelters and services to the homeless

Conclusion

This community assessment forms the first phase of a 3-year partnership between the Community Development Graduate Group at UC Davis and the neighborhoods of Bryte and Broderick. While this report forms a basis for future community development projects in Bryte and Broderick, success in proposed actions is dependent upon a process of active community engagement, participation, and ownership.