



**a
better
LA**

"Helping to Change
Communities from Within"



WELCOME

DEAR FRIENDS

It has been an amazing past few months at A Better LA. So much is happening that we couldn't begin to fit it all in to this newsletter.

What has become so clear is that the work we are doing is filling an important void in Los Angeles. It is saving lives and having an important impact on LA's approach to violence and the challenges of life in the inner city. Whether it is partnering with the Mayor's Office and its Summer Night Lights project; continuing our groundbreaking pilot project in West Athens with the help of County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas; or graduating individuals from our innovative training institute for gang intervention workers; the result was the same: success and great hope for our future.

People from all walks of life are coming together around a common vision like never before, and we are helping lead a County-wide effort. Homicides in LA are at historic lows and, if we do things right, that trend should continue.

Enjoy the newsletter, and we will see you soon.

BRIAN CENTER Executive Director

Unity One's New Structure and Success

Unity One Overview

A majority of inner city violence can be attributed to a lack of relationships, understanding, respect, and communication amongst residents. Too often, trivial disputes result in devastating violence. A Better LA continues its commitment to reducing violent activity by increasing its funding of gang intervention "outreach" workers. One of the most important organization that employs outreach workers is called Unity One.

2 The overwhelming presence and strategy implemented by Unity One workers has proven to be successful in South LA. Cornell Ward, the new Executive Director of Unity One, has played an integral role in leading these efforts. Some of Unity One's activities include: the Mayor's Summer Night Lights Project, leading cease fire efforts, and helping build community peace across Los Angeles. They also promote positive lifestyles by bringing people together around food, sports, and other activities, in efforts to create a shared understanding and respect throughout the community. Unity One is a unique organization as its structure unites South LA residents with former rival gang members, working together to establish peace and acceptance.

In every area that Unity One has worked, homicides and shootings are on the decline. Unity One is dedicated to cleaning up the community, which can be seen in its role in transforming one of the neighborhood parks from being violence and drug infested into a thriving community space, filled with children and families.



A family interacting with the Easter Bunny at Queen Anne's Recreation Center on Easter Sunday



Cornell Ward hosting Unity One's Easter Sunday Celebration

Easter Sunday with A Better LA and Unity One

On Easter Sunday 2009, A Better LA helped sponsor Easter in the Park at Queen Anne's Recreation Center. Approximately 1,000 people came to the event hosted by hardworking volunteers from A Better LA and Unity One and the Los Angeles Parks and Recreation Department.

Guests were treated to carnival snacks and listened to a live band while the kids hunted for Easter eggs, enjoyed a puppet show, and received an Easter basket upon leaving the park. The Park itself looked beautiful. The facilities were tremendous, and the Parks and Recreation staff was friendly and helpful, as the kids in attendance all seemed to know and gravitate towards the park director. The event really highlighted the possibilities of a community when it invests in itself.

A Better LA partnered with A Foundation For Kids who provided the food, games, crafts, and bounce houses. This incredible event was made possible by A Better LA volunteers who carry and are committed to Pete Carroll's philosophy of doing things better than they have ever been done before, looking to improve all facets of the event, constantly ensuring a positive and enjoyable experience for community families.



A Better LA volunteer and a friend having a good time at the Easter Egg Hunt

For More Information about Unity One

Call (323) 930-2512

Or visit their website

www.unityonenow.com

CURE and The West Athens Project



West Athens Christmas Party

The Holiday party and toy giveaway at Helen Keller Park in South Los Angeles was a huge success. An estimated 2,000 people attended the event, hosted by A Better LA and other volunteers. Guests were treated to a hot turkey lunch served by United States Veterans, played carnival games, indulged in cotton candy and popcorn, had face painting, visited with Santa Claus, and received toys.

Besides the throng of volunteers, guests included former Trojans LeVar Burton, Darrell Rideaux, and Curtis Conway. Brief speeches were given by Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas, A Better LA's own Executive Director Brian Center and members from CURE and BAFTA/LA.

Pete Carroll was the most popular guest, receiving overwhelming cheers upon arrival. He briefly addressed the crowd before mingling with guests and throwing the ball with some children.

The event was the third annual holiday event held at the park, and the first one that A Better LA contributed to. The event the year prior drew an estimated 350 individuals, demonstrating that by keeping with the Trojan mantra of doing things better than they have ever been done before, this year's event exceeded the wildest dreams of those involved.

Thanks to Mark Chow and A Foundation for Kids for supplying the carnival games and a trailer full of toys and shoes given to attendees. There were a lot of happy kids carrying Trojan dolls, footballs, and basketballs on Saturday. A joyous sight, as the constructive transformation of this once gang infested park was once again, truly visible at the Holiday Party.



Children celebrating Christmas with Santa Claus in Helen Keller Park

The West Athens Project

The unincorporated area of West Athens has been plagued by violence for years. This small area experiences approximately 20 homicides a year. However, the extraordinary group CURE (Common Unity Reaching Everyone) is actively combating these unfortunate circumstances. In one part of West Athens, surrounding Helen Keller Park, CURE has transformed the area, dramatically reducing violence.

CURE and A Better LA

Recently, A Better LA is working to help CURE expand upon its success by reaching out to all of West Athens. The project received an initial \$400,000 funding from supervisor Yvonne Burke. A Better LA is also funding CURE's football teams, to bring desperately needed activity to the area.

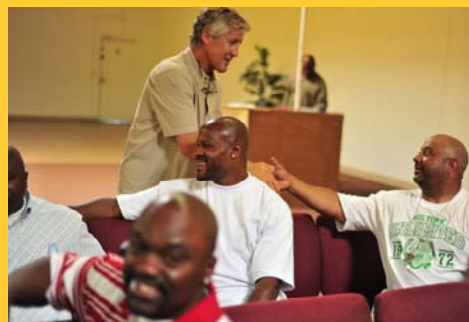
At first, the idea of changing a park widely known for gang activity such as initiations, murders, and recruiting seemed improbable. But through CURE's efforts the park has been transformed into a peaceful gathering place for neighborhood families. In an LA Times article, Robinson stated, "I saw a place where kids could breathe, a place where we could help turn the kids into responsible adults....I want these kids to have what we never had."

In 2006, enough money was raised to provide 40 kids with football gear, giving birth to the California Cowboys, a team that played its first season in the Snoop Youth Football League.

A Better LA's involvement has increased notoriety and financial support. Robinson has ac-

knowledged that football is expanding, as interest from neighborhood children has skyrocketed with an estimated 150 participants. Cheerleading has also been added to the activities in the park as young girls too, wish to get involved. The football team has also paved the way for more activities including the Powerful Conditioning and Football Camps, Appreciation Day for Chapter Parents and Kids and The Fathers Day 3v3 Basketball Tournament.

The Summit of Honor



In their most recent efforts to establish peace, CURE hosted the Summit of Honor on May 23, 2009. This was a historic gathering, as leaders from 14 different gangs in South LA came together for breakfast to discuss peaceful resolutions.

This is the first time many of these individuals have ever met face to face and worked at opening the lines of communication. At this event there was a call to action where all participants were asked to sign a peace treaty called the No Child Harmed Act. This agreement was drafted to recenter our focus on keeping our kids safe.

**For More Information about CURE call
(310) 765-7520
or visit their website
www.cure4ourcommunities.org**

The Professional Community Intervention Training Institute (PCITI)



(left) Outreach Workers engage in an exercise in the initial course of PCITI.



One of our proud graduating classes!

One of A Better LA's most innovative tactics is to fund intervention or "outreach" workers to combat violence in Los Angeles. Outreach workers prove to be effective as they are residents in the communities in which they work, and have a passion for bringing much needed stability to the neighborhood.

The outreach workers improve communication which is vital to stopping fights, preventing violent retaliation, creating peace resolutions, and building respect and unity in their neighborhoods.

These workers are unique as many are former gang members who have turned their lives around and are committed to helping others do the same. However, most outreach workers have never received formal training in gang intervention. To address this need A Better LA launched the Professional Community Intervention Training Institute (PCITI), an inventive preparation and development training center.

PCITI provides comprehensive hands-on exercises, operational procedures and standards of behavior in order to ensure safety, interact with law enforcement and paramedics, track outcomes, and abide by ethics and accountability standards.

PCITI was designed and implemented by Aquil Basheer, a nationally celebrated abatement specialist and crisis deterrent expert. Members from A Better LA, CURE, the LAPD, members of the Sheriffs Department, and the LA County Department of Probation have all contributed to the training.

The first 16 week course started in May 2008. 25 Latino and Black outreach workers, both male and female, from all over Los Angeles county enrolled in the program. More than 17 diverse neighborhoods were represented in the first PCITI graduating class.

In 2008 PCITI received a \$30,000 grant from The Orfalea Foundation, and a waiting list was developed as there is an overwhelming amount of individuals who wish to enroll.

In May, 2009 the second certified class of PCITI graduated. Leaders representing local law enforcement, fire departments, and community stakeholders came to celebrate the 50 individuals graduating under the theme "40 Neighborhoods Working Together to Save Lives: Providing Protocols for Peace."

The founder of PCITI Aquil Basheer explained, "These men and women have sacrificed much, accomplishing a feat that very few felt was attainable. They accomplished their goal and achieved their mission and they should be celebrated with dignity."

Basheer also took the time to recognize A Better LA who has supported the PCITI from its inception and plays an integral role in equipping these "peace ambassadors" with the tools necessary to improve all of the neighborhoods in Los Angeles.



Aquil Basheer, founder of the Professional Community Intervention Training Institute (PCITI)



Brian Center, Pete Carroll, Aquil Basheer, Toni Guinyard, and LAPD Commander Mike Williams

**For more information about PCITI
call (323) 295-1904
or email
takechargeinc@aol.com**

A Better LA Working with Summer Night Lights



Although research has consistently shown that youth are most likely to commit violent crimes between the hours of 4pm and midnight, few youth-centered public programs currently exist during these peak hours. Consequently, the Mayor's Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development piloted "Summer Night Lights 2008," a 10-week highly targeted program that served nearly 50,000 youth and family members at eight (8) park facilities within the Mayor's Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD) Zones in South Los Angeles, Central/East Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley.

The guiding philosophy of Summer Night Lights (SNL) is to provide programming for entire communities, both potential victims and potential perpetrators of violence. These areas were selected for three shared characteristics: high concentrations of youth, four times more gang violence relative to the average for Los Angeles, and high percentages of families living below the poverty line.

To accomplish the goal of reducing violence, SNL 2008 expanded the hours of eight Recreation and Park Facilities ("Park") until midnight, four nights a week, (Wednesday – Saturday) and empowered each Park to plan and implement individualized activities for its community.

SNL 2008 provided positive alternatives for youth during non-traditional hours and contributed to the safest summer Los Angeles has enjoyed since 1967. Impressive crime statistics in the neighborhoods surrounding each park include a 17% reduction in violent gang related crime, a 23% decrease in aggravated assaults, and an 86% reduction in gang related homicides (only 1 versus 7 in 2007).

A Better LA serves as the fiscal sponsor of SNL so that private dollars raised by the mayor's office can be spent with flexibility.

Given the immense success of SNL 2008, the Mayor's Office will expand SNL to an additional seven sites in 2009, including four housing developments and one pilot school-based program. The following is a list of our 16 SNL 2009 facilities by community:

- South Los Angeles: Jim Gilliam Park, Harvard Park, Mt. Carmel Park, Denker Park, Nickerson Gardens Housing Development, Jordan Downs Housing Development, Imperial Courts Housing Development
- Central/East Los Angeles: Ramon Garcia Park, Cypress Park, Glassell Park, Ross Snyder Park, Edward R. Roybal Learning Center, Lemon Grove Park, Ramona Garden Housing Development
- San Fernando Valley: Hubert Humphrey Park, Sepulveda Park

WHAT WE DO

- Extended Hours & Programming: From July 8 – September 5, all fifteen facilities will extend their hours until midnight, four nights a week (Wednesday – Saturday).
- Youth Squad: Ten (10) Youth Squad members will be hired at each site (150 city-wide) to create and staff the extended programs and hours. These community coordinators will be at-risk youth, ages 17-20, and will receive stipends for their work. Training for the Youth Squad will be provided by The Pacific Institute, two weeks prior to kick-off.
- Cease-Fire: Interventionists will maintain cease-fires and be prepared to interrupt violence throughout the summer, both on-site and in the surrounding community.

A Program Coordination Team will oversee the program in each designated Zone. The Team will ensure that local stakeholders – Los Angeles Police Department, Los Angeles Unified School District, community and faith-based organizations, business leaders and Neighborhood Councils – are involved in the planning and implementation process.

Youth in each community will be able to register and participate in numerous activities free of charge. Numerous sports clinics will be offered for tennis, softball, baseball, roller skating, flag football, boxing, skateboarding, and golf. Additionally, the Department of Cultural Affairs will offer "Cultural Unit Art Teams," which consists of master

artists of color who will provide consistent, engaging, youth-arts activities at each site.

Workshops will include acting, dance, hip-hop, fashion design, t-shirt printing, make-up design & special effects, music, drumming, spoken word, and sound engineering. These creative-skill-building programs will empower youth and inspire collaboration and unity through the arts.

BUILDING ON EXCELLENCE

The SNL 2008 pilot was truly a public-private partnership. To adequately service all 16 sites within the Gang Reduction and Youth Development Zones in 2009, we have expanded this year's Summer Night Lights budget to \$2.8 million. The Mayor's Office is seeking a \$1.4 million commitment from private sources which will be matched dollar-for-dollar by public funds. Private funds will be managed by our non-profit partner, A Better LA.

SNL will continue to be critical to the safety of our communities. At this time, all adolescents throughout the City of Los Angeles will be out of school during the summer months, searching for activities to cure restlessness and boredom. Over the next three years, we must strategically plan to fill these gaps in services during the summer months – and the SNL model is ideal to engage high numbers of youth in at-risk communities. As one neighborhood youth said, "You cannot stabilize our communities by reducing violence; you reduce violence by stabilizing our communities."



Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, USC's Pete Carroll, and GRYD's Jeff Carr

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Sharmeen Malik Premjee
Resource Development Officer
Gang Reduction and Youth Development
(213) 473-7799
Sharmeen.premjee@lacity.org

ABLA COMMUNITY EVENTS And FUNDRAISING EFFORTS



6

Marshall Madness Basketball Tournament

The Marshall Graduate School of Business held their 3rd annual "Marshall Madness" tournament on Saturday, May 22nd, at the North Gym, on the USC campus. The "Madness" is a 3 on 3 basketball tournament for students in the Marshall School of Business Graduate Program.

There was great competition amongst all of the teams that battled in the double elimination format.

The real winner of the day did not make one basket. That is because the net proceeds in excess of \$1,000, contributed by the tournament players and friends, were donated to A Better LA.

There were some great raffle prizes for the donors, including Pete Carroll autographed t-shirts and footballs, football game tickets for the USC home opener against San Jose State, and food certificates from some local restraints. Even after 3 hours of basketball, the players were still enthusiastic about the prizes and interested in learning and becoming more active contributors to A Better LA.

It is exciting to receive support and understanding from the great business leaders of the future, and consider how they can continue to make a difference in their efforts of collaboration with A Better LA.



A Better LA volunteers at the Marshall Madness 3 on 3 Basketball Tournament



USC's Trojan Knights and A Better LA volunteers at Family Day in Athens Park

Athens Park Party

A Better LA, with help from the Trojan Knights, hosted a Family Day in Athens Park in South Los Angeles on February 28, 2009. More than 1,000 community members attended the first annual event. There was live music, carnival games, bounce houses, cotton candy, and popcorn for all to enjoy. The day was filled with peace and fun, in a park that in previous years has been known mostly for the gang violence that occurred there.

The Trojan Knights helped run the games and serve food throughout the day. A special thanks to Mark Chow and A Foundation for Kids who supplied all of the games, food, and equipment to make the day possible. Local partner for inner city peace, CURE, also provided a great group of volunteers.

The day was a celebration of the neighborhoods' ability to peacefully enjoy time together, regardless of geographical boundaries. The boundaries that sometimes created separation and opposition amongst people were non-existent in the park on this gorgeous afternoon.

Former Trojan football star Darrell Rideaux, an advocate for peaceful communities, was a welcomed guest. He willingly participated in all of the activities, and did not hesitate to engage the rival gang members, who were working together, to unload a truck packed with care packages full of food and clothing that were handed out to families in attendance.

It was a tremendous example of community individuals setting aside differences and working together to help the people of the neighborhood, ultimately, to make A Better L.A.



Pete Carroll performing "Make it Better" with Kelley James and John West

www.abetterla.org .

Pacific Institute Classes



One of the tools that A Better LA uses to catalyze change in the community is an innovative curriculum that teaches people how to create dramatic breakthroughs in all areas of their lives using simple proven techniques.

In response to repeated reports of violence in LA's inner city, Pete Carroll called upon old friend and mentor, Lou Tice, founder of The Pacific Institute, which is an educational and management consulting group based in Seattle. Pete asked Lou to help him figure out how to make a difference in the lives of children in Los Angeles and stop the cycle of violence. Together they launched the spread of a curriculum that changes attitudes and creates a language of hope and possibility. This curriculum served as the foundation for A Better LA. It was developed by the Pacific Institute and is based on new approaches in cognitive psychology. Major corporations worldwide spend millions of dollars to send their top staff through these classes but the curriculum has been generously donated to A Better LA by the Pacific Institute and is offered to the community for free.

Adult Classes

It has been a busy 9 months for us at A Better LA with the spread of this exciting empowerment curriculum. Approximately 225 adults have completed our classes, generously housed at the EXPO Center, which is run by Los Angeles Parks and Recreation Department. Drawing from the community as well as civic based organizations throughout Los Angeles, our four-day class, offered every month, has encouraged people to be the best they can be.

Youth Classes

In addition to our adult classes at the EXPO Center, we have begun teaching youth in Los Angeles schools. Two Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) schools, Jonas Salk and Destiny Girls Academy, have classes in place, presently reaching up to 100 students. We are also in preliminary discussion with Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) about an approach to implementing the curriculum in the LAUSD schools. Furthermore, this last semester saw our partners at CURE work with the West Athens area schools: West Athens Elementary School, Henry Clay Middle School and Washington Prep High School. At these West Athens area schools, our youth curriculum functions as a foundation piece, preparing students for follow-on classes offered by the CURE staff.

Special Project

We also completed a twelve-week course teaching a youth version of our curriculum at the Jordan Downs Housing Project in Watts. Approximately 45 young people "graduated" from our class at Jordan Downs in May. These youth also participated in a field trip to "Trojan Huddle," the last day of spring practice at USC, followed by a specially arranged IMAX screening of Monsters vs. Aliens. A Better LA proudly continues to offer these exclusive opportunities to our community of Los Angeles.

Extending Our Reach

It is exciting for us to continue to extend our reach into the communities and schools of Los Angeles with this innovative curriculum that helps people change their thinking, take charge of their lives and realize their dreams. We are looking forward to another very inspiring and productive year ahead.

The class is being offered free of charge and is open to everyone. The class schedule for the remainder of the year can be accessed on our website at:

www.abetterla.org/Schedule

For more information please call

(213) 749-0405

THE PACIFIC INSTITUTE

Class Schedule 2009

July 9, 10, 14, 15
August 4, 5, 11, 12
(Call for location)

September 15, 16, 22, 23
October 5, 6, 13, 14
November 17, 18, 24, 25
December 8, 9, 15, 16
(at Expo Center on Menlo Avenue)

Celebration of the Heart

USC School of Social Work presented Coach Pete Carroll with its "Crystal Heart," the school's highest honor for community service, at "A Celebration of the Heart," a scholarship gala on March 8, 2009 at USC Town & Gown. The event honors individual contributions to social work practice and research in the community and throughout the world. USC President Steven Sample, who introduced Carroll said Carroll is far more than a football coach and his impact is felt throughout the city, saying "he is a role model, a hero, a celebrity; and to the young men in this community, he is an influential person who listens, who understands and most important, who cares."

Proceeds from the evening helped establish the "Pete Carroll Scholarship" for students pursuing graduate study at the USC School of Social Work.



Pete Carroll receiving the Crystal Heart at USC's School of Social Work

I'M IN!

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New Leadership

We're thrilled to take this opportunity to introduce exciting new leadership at our ABLA Projects.

- **Gary Robinson** is the Director of CURE and President of the California Cowboys, a youth football program. He has been a driving force in reducing violence in West Athens, transforming Helen Keller Park, engaging hundreds of young people with positive activities and life skills classes, and reaching out to other neighborhoods to create peace.
- **Reynaldo Reaser** is the new President and CEO of CURE. Reynaldo provides the critical function of developing and maintaining relationships with the neighborhoods and communities.
- **Theron Wiggins**, Supervisor Gang Interventions. He acts as a liaison between gang intervention workers and law enforcement, and as a peacekeeper between rival gangs.
- **Loren Hill**, our Project Director, identifies, cultivates, and manages personal development, social and mental health programs for the sites as well as conducting qualitative and quantitative research for our West Athens Project.
- **Marc Calloway** specializes in job development. He provides career and educational guidance to individuals ages 14 and up. Marc also assists with referrals to partners like Los Angeles Conservation Corps, Employment Development Department, and various Work source Centers for our West Athens Project.



Gary "Nugget" Robinson (left)



Reynaldo Reaser (right)

UPCOMING EVENTS

June 20th, 2009

3 on 3 Father's Day Basketball Tournament at Helen Keller Park presented by CURE

July 4th, 2009

Community Day Concert and Firework Show at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum presented by A Better LA, Councilman Bernard Parks and KJLH

If you want to volunteer with A Better LA please e-mail patrick.dodge@gmail.com