

**Building Neighborhoods through Community Gardens: A Needs Assessment
Study of the Jonah and Langston Neighborhood**

**A Proposal Submitted to the Graduate Center
California State University, Bakersfield**

By

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TITLE OF THE PROJECT

Building Neighborhoods through Community Gardens: A Needs Assessment Study of the Jonah and Langston Neighborhood

PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSED ACTIVITY

Project Description: In the face of increasing poverty and high food insecurity rates experienced by millions of individuals and families, communities around the nation are focusing their attention toward sustainable, self-reliant and growth promoting activities that can promote community participation and solve these problems. Building communities through community gardens is a creative project to engage the community. Such activities have attracted the attention of community builders, activists, politicians, civic leaders and helping professionals. These community gardens have become an effective intervention tool for community building, neighborhood interaction, crime reduction, neighborhood pride, and neighborhood beautification. Several studies have documented the effectiveness and advantages of community gardens (Correia, 2005; & Cotel, 2005). Recent experiments in New York and Oakland specifically have shown several positive outcomes (Correia, 2005; & Cotel, 2005). The New York garden project donates more than 700 pounds of food to local soup kitchens and sells close to \$4,000 worth of food to nearby farmers' markets. The Oakland garden has grown to become an alternate for vegetable shops and provides access to fresh produce and at affordable prices. These studies show that community gardens are assets to the communities that they are created in. ***The proposed project will focus on conducting a needs assessment study and creating a community garden on the cornering streets of Langston and Jonah.*** It is our hope that Jonah/Langston community garden can serve as a model for future gardens, and may have the potential to demonstrate the effectiveness of community gardens in neighborhood beautification, crime reduction, and community cohesion.

The Proposed Activity: The proposed activity will consist of two phases: ***Phase one will include a Needs Assessment study of the neighborhood around the Jonah and Langston streets and phase two will include building a community garden*** in partnership with the main sponsoring agency, Keep Bakersfield Beautiful, nonprofit organization associated with City of Bakersfield Solid Waste Division (***Please see a copy of the support letter attached***). There are also other community agencies partnering with this project such as Bakersfield Police Department Neighborhood Watch, The Giving Tree Project Benefit Corporation, The Center On Race, Poverty and the Environment, the Greenfield Family Resource Center, and the Greenfield Walking Group. The needs assessment will be conducted by administering a survey to the residents in the Langston and Jonah neighborhood. The survey will be completed by an adult, 18 years of age or older, going door-to-door in the neighborhood within a mile radius of the corner of Langston and Jonah in Bakersfield. MSW students will collect the data for this study. All responses will be reviewed, summarized, and presented to the sponsoring agencies. The proposed study aims to: (1) Assess the need of a community garden in the Jonah/Langston

neighborhood; (2) Promote interagency cooperation in building community gardens by providing information to the collaborating agencies; (3) Promote education and awareness of community gardens in the neighborhood surrounding Jonah and Langston. In order to conduct the study, ***an IRB protocol was submitted and it was approved by the IRB (Please see the authorization letter attached).***

Phase two of this project will include the establishment of the community garden. Stephanie Aguirre and Nicholas Siewell, Master of Social Work (MSW) students at California State University, Bakersfield (CSUB), will be collaborating with Keep Bakersfield Beautiful, nonprofit organization associated with City of Bakersfield Solid Waste Division, Greenfield Family Resource Center, the Greenfield Walking Group, Bakersfield Police Department Crime Prevention Unit, The Giving Tree Project Benefit Corporation, The Center On Race, Poverty, and the Environment, and members of the Jonah/Langston community. Nicholas and Stephanie will be working on this project in partnership with these agencies on a voluntary basis. Establishment of the garden will require increased neighborhood and agency involvement and collaboration. The site of the garden has been donated by the City of Bakersfield and adopted by the Greenfield Walking Group. This group has agreed to manage and maintain the garden on behalf of the community. There will be several stages in the development and building of the garden, including building a fence around the garden, installing irrigation, planting the garden, and the creation of a mural around the perimeter of the garden. There have been in-kind.

OUTCOMES

A Needs Assessment study report will be an immediate outcome of this project. The information collected from the needs assessment study will be shared with all collaborating agencies: City of Bakersfield Solid Waste Division, Keep Bakersfield Beautiful, Bakersfield Police Department Neighborhood Watch, The Giving Tree Project Benefit Corporation, The Center On Race, Poverty and the Environment, the Greenfield Family Resource Center, and the Greenfield Walking Group. Additionally, the findings of the study may also be presented in conferences and may even be published in journals. Also, information about this project will be published in local publications, i.e., The Bakersfield Californian and The Runner Newspaper. Finally, the needs assessment study and the community and agency collaboration will result in the establishment of a community garden in the Jonah/Langston neighborhood. The anticipated long term outcome for the Jonah/Langston Community garden will include:

- ***Neighborhood development by promoting positive interaction between residents.***
- ***Enhancement of neighborhood pride through helping to develop a sense of community ownership and stewardship.***
- ***Access to organic fruits and vegetables by people who grow food in the garden.***
- ***Education about obesity prevention, benefits of organic gardening, and healthy life style choices through monthly workshops conducted by local farmers at the garden site.***

- ***Reduction of neighborhood crime as a result of community unification and development of a local Neighborhood Watch Program.***

SIGNIFICANCE AND JUSTIFICATION

This project is significant in many ways. The site selected for the Jonah/Langston community garden has been used as an illegal dumping ground, and has also been the site of illegal yard sales. This project will utilize the land and prevent potential future criminal activity. Also, the garden will beautify the neighborhood, which will increase neighborhood pride among residents and reduce crime. This project will help relieve food insecurity in the neighborhood by providing garden participants with healthy, organic produce for consumption. Much of the food that could potentially be provided by the garden is not readily available in the Jonah/Langston community due to lack of grocery stores and poverty that is pervasive in the area. Community gardens provide an alternate and unique way to deal with food insecurity. Community garden participants will likely be provided with a skill set in producing their own food for themselves and their families. This can also provide individuals with increased confidence and self-esteem. Through education and community awareness through the community garden, it is also anticipated that adult and childhood obesity, an issue that is increasingly impacting numerous US citizens, will be reduced in the impacted community.

Through increasing the community participation in the project and educating the community about the garden, it is expected that this garden project can prove to be an effective and creative way toward building healthy and sustainable communities in the long run. In this way, ***we hope that the Jonah/Langston community can serve as a model for future gardens, and has the potential to demonstrate the effectiveness of community gardens in beautifying neighborhoods, increasing neighborhood pride, reducing crime, and contributing to community cohesion.***

References

Correia, M. (2005). Harvest in the City. *Earth Island Journal*, 20(3), 34-36.

Cotel O. (2005). A Moveable Feast. *Sierra*, 90(6), 8-8.