

The Oakland POWER Projects

Policing is failing Oakland.

The Oakland Power Projects helps Oakland residents invest in practices, relationships, and resources that build community power and wellbeing.

By identifying current harms, amplifying existing resources, and developing new practices that do not rely on policing solutions, the projects remind us that we can make our families and neighborhoods safe and healthy without relying on the cops.

Critical Resistance's Oakland chapter spent more than two years fighting a successful campaign against gang injunctions in Oakland as part of the Stop the Injunctions Coalition. In the spring of 2013, as the city abandoned its two temporary injunctions (in North Oakland and the Fruitvale) and moved on to other policing schemes that continue to fail the people of Oakland, Critical Resistance began to consider taking up new work.

Through a steady and intentional process, Critical Resistance members talked to close allies from the Stop the Injunctions Coalition to get a sense of the perception and experience of the current policing landscape in Oakland.

We asked:

- * **How does the work your organization is doing or following right now come into contact with policing in Oakland?**
- * **What do you think are the most pressing issues/greatest opportunities in fighting policing right now in Oakland?**

What we heard:

- * **Anti-policing work needs to offer pragmatic and strategic opportunities that offer real strategies for safety and protection.**
- * **Anti-policing work needs both strategy and grassroots leadership.**
- * **Meeting people where they are at is a challenge and a necessity.**
- * **Lots of folks have their own stories to tell and we should be listening to them and having a conversation with the community in order to inform our praxis.**
- * **CR should look at work that is beyond fighting the institutional or city generated policing schemes.**
- * **CR is good at creating media that reframes popular understandings of the logic of policing.**
- * **Cops are the "first responders" which increases people's interactions with police and means more arrests for more vulnerable people including in instances of domestic violence and migrants without legal documentation.**

With this information and a rigorous analysis of the Oakland political landscape the group developed the Oakland Power Projects.



Organized into short, medium and long-term steps, the Oakland Power Projects work to make our families and neighborhoods stable and healthy without relying on the cops. CR members spent the last year talking with allies, friends, neighbors, and community members.

They asked:

- * **Do you live in Oakland?**
- * **How long have you lived in Oakland?**
- * **Where do you like to spend time? Why?**
- * **Do you feel safe there? Why?**
- * **Where do you feel most safe? When and why?**
- * **Have you ever called the cops?**
- * **Why did you call?**
- * **What made you feel like they were the best option?**
- * **What happened as a result of the call?**
- * **Did that solve the problem?**
- * **Can you think of something that might have?**
- * **What do you wish would have happened?**
- * **What would have prevented you from calling the cops in the first place?**
- * **What would like to see in Oakland that would make it a better?**

The group then listened collectively to the interviews and drew out themes. Some of the themes that emerged included:

- * **Feelings of safety comes from knowing and being known by neighbors.**
- * **Feelings of safety hinges on being around people.**

- * **Several people referenced that when they did call the cops and the incident ended in a satisfactory way, the cop that responded was a friend or family member. They elaborated that it was both that person's position of authority as well as their status as a trusted person that was helpful.**
- * **People tend to think of their home as the place where they feel the most safe.**
- * **Nine people referenced community centers as something that would make Oakland better.**
- * **Time of day and the businesses in an area affect how safe people feel.**
- * **People talked about infrastructure (like street lights) and transportation (whether they are walking, biking or talking public transportation) as things that affect safety.**
- * **Nearly all the people we interviewed had ideas or had actively used resources that created safety without using the cops.**
- * **Having access to resources around health and wellness, from mental health support to healthy food to care in instances of extreme violence, is important for people's safety.**

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The Oakland Power Projects was conceived to build capacity for Oakland to reject police and policing as the default response to harm and to highlight or create alternatives that actually work. As the Oakland Power Projects moves forward, Critical Resistance will continue to work in collaboration with political and community allies as well as those who have contributed their voices to the project's development.

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Here are some excerpts:

“I think that it is in so many ways safer to be able to have people that are going to be there not only when crisis occurs because then they’ve built relationships with people around and can engage with folks in the neighborhood to address things when they happen.”

“If someone were in complete distress, like having been physically harmed or shot or something like that, I would call 911 to get health response. I would call and I would know that police invariably might show up for that. That would be something that I would just know—it wouldn’t be necessarily a call directly to them. But they might be the people who come on the scene first.”

“When you get a lot of Black people together, the police just come. And it’s like they can’t have any fun... They took the bowling alley away—it’s only one in Alameda now... My whole point is that they took all these recreational things away. The Parks and Rec—I don’t even know if that still exists anymore.”

“People automatically call the cops. It would be great if there were a mobile assistance program... where you call a number and it’s a van that comes out with a licensed social worker who can do an assessment and offer the person a bed and a shelter, some therapy, and access to services. That, to me, would solve a lot of the street issues.”

“For me as far as those two times [that I called the cops], I wanted them to get the message that you not gonna just run over me, my sons. Just because I’m your mama and I’m smaller than you I got some authority. And I’m gonna show you that I can’t muscle you—I know somebody that can muscle you. That was my reasoning for doing that because I wanted them to get the message that you just can’t do what you want to do here. And if you don’t want to respect my authority as your parent well I know this police officer can put you in handcuffs and make you think you have no authority. That was my reasoning.”

“I feel like folks nowadays don’t feel comfortable being able to build with their neighbors and there isn’t necessarily spaces, or places within our community where folks can come together... On 55th and Ignacio we do sunrise ceremonies there and that’s a little plot of land where neighbors come together without any sort of institution or anything. People just know that at a certain time, certain days, they can come together and build with each other and they’re doing something positive. Those neighbors know each other—they know the names of the kids that are walking by. They know what people do for a living and they know each other. They’ve been able to build.”

“In Cuba they have doctors that are in charge of an area – a certain number of blocks and there’s a community health center. It’s not big – not a community health center for a big part of the city. It’s smaller than that. It’s that kind of idea - every area should have something accessible and available like that.”

Health emerged as a broad theme in terms of resources that people needed but didn’t feel they had access to in Oakland without police involvement.

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Following that theme, Critical Resistance decided to draw on the expertise of people and organizations involved with health and healthcare practices that are conscious and critical of the relationship with health and policing, to see what resources already exist or what resources they could imagine building that would address some of the things that had come up in people's stories. CR members spoke with people from Mission Neighborhood Resource Center, Berkeley Free Clinic, Street Level Health Center, Highland Hospital Emergency Medicine, Curanderas Sin Fronteras and an ally who is trained as a street medic and Wilderness First Responder. We asked them some questions about what they think people need to know as basic information to keep healthy and what resources they would like to see. What community health workers said:

Direct Resources

- * Resources on traditional healing.
- * Process to get care after sexual assault that doesn't mandate calling the cops
- * ID cards, particularly for day laborers and migrants without legal documentation.
- * Create a health resource/services map, including non-institutional resources.
- * Prisoner Support
- * Someone highly skilled in mental health counseling and substance use issues who could immediately respond to crisis calls.
- * Free transportation to the emergency room.
- * First responders that do not involve calling 911/the police.
- * Bolstering the People's Community Medics.

Practitioner Education

- * Training in prison industrial complex-related issues for health care practitioners.
- * Better language access, health care practitioners who have language skills, or translators for patients including indigenous languages.
- * De-escalation practice guidelines for clinics
- * Better connection between clinics and healthcare providers throughout the city, particularly those that are intentional about not turning toward cops.
- * Create a health resource/services map, including non-institutional resources.

Community Education

- * Training in preventative and emergent care skills for common issues like diabetes, high blood pressure, first aid, and CPR.
- * Training in treating gun shot wounds or stabbing wounds on the streets.
- * Medical kits with materials to treat gunshot wounds
- * Medical supply distribution of kits/materials, or a medical supply library of some kind
- * Other proposed workshops

In early November, CR Oakland's Anti-Policing group brought people together who in interviews raised health and well-being as areas that overlap with policing in Oakland and others doing community-based and radical health care. Our goal was to build this knowledge into an anti-policing resource that will increase Oaklanders' access to well-being without reliance on the police. We also hoped to build connections and relationships for moving forward.

We worked together to begin making three possible resources for emergent and preventative health needs for people in Oakland: medical kits that people can use for first-response emergencies or for everyday use to help prevent calls to 911; a workshop that combines basic information about the prison industrial complex (PIC) with critical health care information for overall health and chronic health problems; and a digital app or other system for up-to-date health resource information that can be quality-controlled, help to bridge gaps between institutional and community-based knowledge, and even provide basic how-to information. We also saw the fantastic links possible between these project ideas.

We'll be working to move one or more of these project ahead in the coming months with interviewees and ally health workers. This will be the first of many in The Oakland Power Projects.

One goal of The Oakland Power Projects is to make the police obsolete by building tools and resources to meet people's needs in other ways, and by building connections and relationships to keep those resources going and accessible to Oaklanders throughout the city.

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