

“You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity and in as many ways as possible that you were a worthless human being. You were not expected to aspire to excellence. You were expected to make peace with mediocrity. You gain a strange perspective on time and human pain and effort... This innocent country set you down in a ghetto in which, in fact, it intended that you should perish.....It is the innocence which constitutes the crime.” - *A Letter to My Nephew*

In, James Baldwin's, *A Letter to My Nephew*, life and racism are characterized in a Harlem ghetto in the early 1960's. As portrayed by this letter, many aspects remain true to destitute American neighborhoods specifically, Oakland, California. Think back to when you were a child. Walking to school, did you feel your life was at risk, petrified, just by walking to school? As you were turning the corner, did you wonder whether there was a person waiting to kill, or grasping illicit substances around that corner? This idea that your life could end- just by walking to school, is indescribably mortifying. Oakland, California is a city immersed with poverty, violence, illicit substances, homelessness. In the midst of ruinous violence, and a poverty stricken community, Oakland continues to be filled with passionate and ambitious people desiring to pursue careers which would allow them to express themselves through the struggles they face in an urban, brutal, and impoverished environment. This brings us to answer a perpetual question: How can a new multi-dimensional institution affect the quality of life and economy, in Oakland, California?

With significant and ever-growing problems in the Oakland area, we see people in unsafe and impoverished environments causing malnutrition, poor education, and health complications. These situations create a need for not just shelters, soup kitchens, free clinics, or even just an adult educational center- there is a need for a six dimensional company to solve the evolving problems the community faces. These six dimensions include: a place for artists to showcase their work, a place to be housed, to learn, to obtain nourishment, health services and clothing. When you combine non-traditional education formats, nourishment, mental and physical health services, and a safe housing environment; we see a glimpse of a better tomorrow.

California is a state known for exploding with passion, artistry, and dreams. However, California also has some of the highest homeless and gang populations in the country; with an estimated six plus gang members per one thousand people, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Oakland is the fourth most violent city in the nation according to American City and County Exclusive Insight's assistant editor, Derek Prall. When comparing crime statistics provided by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) with surrounding cities, Oakland has a higher rate of people committing murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, burglary, motor vehicle theft and crime overall (FBI). Oakland has also become a major hub for gang-related drug activity (FBI). With Oakland booming with crime and violence, we need to act now and create an institution that not only rehabilitates people for health but also, offering varying services to convicts to help keep them from returning from a life of crime. Through the six dimensions, there's a surplus of

opportunities for convicts and citizens to not only receive education and rehabilitation but also, a career in something they are passionate about.

With poverty comes problematic crime and violence issues. Oakland, when compared to Alameda County (Oakland is in Alameda County), San Francisco, the California state average, and the national average, Oakland has the highest unemployment percentage, the highest percentage of people generating the lowest incomes, and the greatest percentage of public health care coverage according to the United States Census Bureau. With stress coming from economic strain identified in explicit detail the documentaries *Effects of Violence Among Urban Youth* and *Football In Oakland's Kill Zone*, the pressure to join gangs and partake in illegal actions in Oakland such as theft, manslaughter, and illicit selling to gain basic life necessities; we have a large-scale problem. To combat these issues, an institution with higher wages and more employment opportunities available is a must. By having all of the institution open twenty-four hours, this creates a need for three, eight hour shifts per position. This institution would positively impact not just the economy but, Oakland as a whole. Paying all entry-level employees seventeen dollars an hour, will help decrease the level of economic strain in Oakland which can decrease the level of violence and will help improve the community for the better.

“Keep Oakland Beautiful” (KOB), is a nonprofit organization that strives to better the community and doing so, tells known facts about the homelessness in Oakland and how it can be prevented. More than 1% of Alameda County’s population is homeless (KOB), with approximately half of the homeless in the county, living in Oakland. According to a shelter in

Alameda County, the Covenant House, they are the only shelter serving 18-21 year olds. With this comes an estimated 10,000 homeless youth living in the Bay Area. Alameda County, remains in the top ten least affordable housing markets in the nation with 6% of households are at severe risk of homelessness (KOB). California has the highest estimates of various homeless groups including: individuals, unaccompanied youth, and veterans. California also has the second highest estimate of family homelessness in the nation, as indicated by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Providing free housing in exchange for employment or providing housing at an immensely affordable cost can help not only bring down the extreme prices of the housing market but, also house more people while employing and educating them. Additionally, offering free housing to those who are homeless adolescents or young adults can help drastically reduce gang formations and crime rates due to providing a safe space with resources such as clothing, food, health advocacy and a place to work and be educated along with shelter.

In the documentary *Effects of Violence Among Urban Youth in Oakland*, it is stated that adolescents have post-traumatic stress disorder due to the mass amounts of gun violence and few services are available for treatment within the community. The East Oakland Community Project (EOCP), recently conducted a study stating that single adults are more likely to live on the streets, experiencing elongated periods of homelessness. Homeless adults tend to suffer from chronic health conditions such as tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, diabetes and hypertension at an alarming rate compared to housed individuals, and treatment is difficult to attain without a stable

environment. Thus, we see the need for an absolutely free health clinic that has not only a variety of physical health services but, also mental health services available to all people.

With poverty, we see people growing hungry. Coach Washington, a coach at an Oakland high school, sympathizes with students and other members of the Oakland community as the people in Oakland (including children) discuss times where the basic needs of life are not met, including thriving without adequate sustenance. Without this our bodies are not able to properly function which can cause privation, leading to adolescents having a limited selection of options when it comes to basic life necessities. To combat this, we need a free or reduced priced kitchen that is made available to all people within the Oakland community. This kitchen would thrive on donations and support from the Oakland community itself, and surrounding communities including corporate businesses that are based in San Francisco. By reaching out on modern social media platforms and gaining more support from not only individuals but also other various charitable establishments, we can combat this issue of hunger, so that people in Oakland no longer have to resort to stealing, illicit selling, joining gangs, prostituting or even resorting to killing for the sake of obtaining nourishment as detailed in the documentaries, *Effects of Violence Among Urban Youth* and *Football In Oakland's Kill Zone*.

When comparing Oakland high schools to San Francisco high schools, a random sample helped us conclude that based on the school's accountability report cards demonstrate that the schools in Oakland had a larger average class size, less post-secondary transition and support staff, more suspensions and expulsions, and a significantly higher dropout rate. As discussed in the

documentaries, *Football in Oakland's Kill Zone* and *Effects of Violence Among Urban Youth*, truancy and significantly low grades are common problems with the children of Oakland. Also, discussed in both documentaries, children are afraid to walk to school and even their bus stops, due to the ruinous amounts of violence thriving in the streets. Approximately one-fifth of homeless children have to repeat at least one grade level in school and 16% are enrolled in special education classes – rates significantly higher than housed children (EOCP). These problems create a perceptible need for more homeschooling options and more direct transportation to students' homes to and from schools along with a different approach to education that explicitly discusses the issues in Oakland. When creating a different education approach, a specialized education is a must. This helps students desire to truly learn because they will have the option to learn what they are passionate about, while leading to potential careers within the company: such as clothing design, culinary management, business management, culinary arts, health practitioner, apparel merchandising and manufacturing, marketing, public relations, lawyers, psychiatrist, internal relations director, chief financial officer, professor, singer, visual artist, stage manager, theatrical costumes manager, playwright, art historian, transition counselor, hospitality management- the options are endless. By educating people on specializations within the company, we are developing the future of our company through those that wish to be apart of it and become educated to create a better tomorrow. Furthermore, partnering with local high schools and becoming a dual enrollment option, we will keep everyone from youth to adults off the streets of Oakland and in an education center that helps fulfill their passions and ambitions to create not only a safer Oakland but a more radiant Oakland.

Self expression is vital to our psyches as clinical coordinator of Horizons Behavioral Health, Ashley Nield explains. A major self expressive form is clothing. However, when in poverty, people don't have the ability to choose garments that help express themselves as more affluent people do. With mass amounts of people below the poverty line in Oakland, we can correlate that there is a manifestation of mental disturbances due to not being able to self express. Violence is being used as a form of declaration to proclaim who an individual is rather than clothing or careers. To combat this issue, developing a clothing line that is an androgynous, all inclusive, activist inspired, and is an original street wear brand with an intended audience of youth to young adults. To assist in ameliorating the economy of Oakland: producing, manufacturing, and sales of all clothing will be based in Oakland. An apparel company that works towards constantly improving to help a community self express whilst creating clothing that brings attention to social change is a must for the penurious community.

Similar to the Self Portrait Between the Borderline of Mexico and the United States, by Frida Kahlo in 1932; we see mass amounts of art all around Oakland that capture the importance of social and political issues. This art comes in a variety of forms: from murals painted all around buildings to rhythmic poetry performed by Oakland based artists- Oakland has a surplus of art. Oakland artists tend to emphasize their struggle of growing up in a ruthless, indigent environment. Daveed Diggs, is an Oakland based musician and in Diggs's music, he demonstrates life in Oakland, through discussion of the violence, homelessness, economic situations, crime, gangs, illicit substances, and hope for the community of Oakland. Diggs characterizes the ambitions and passions of Oakland residents as well. Art has been the initiation

for change in Oakland and by allowing artists to have a safe place to create and showcase their art, we have a chance to not only create additional art, but to also give activists a voice. Through giving people a platform, we can change what youth resort to through education, shelter, nourishment, health, art, clothing, and most of all- expression.

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