



FALL 2008

THE STATE OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD:
A COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUP REPORT
BY
STUDENTS FOR A SAFER SOUTHSIDE

Introduction and Purpose

Students for a Safer Southside (SFSS), a group that works to reduce high risk drinking among UC Berkeley students, recently conducted a community focus group to assess the issues of student alcohol use in the Southside neighborhood and its effect on neighbors. The purpose of the focus group was to gain an understanding of the attitudes and experiences that Berkeley residents in the Southside have with students in order to more efficiently address these issues in our work and make necessary recommendations to City and Community Agencies. Specifically, we wanted to evaluate those experiences that involved student alcohol use and its associated consequences on the community.

Methodology

The community focus group was composed of 6 residents of the Willard Neighborhood located on the Southside of the UC Berkeley Campus. The Southside is an area notorious for its problems with student parties and noise. The participants met at the Tang Center at 6pm on Thursday, October 16th, 2008. The participants were first asked to introduce themselves and explain why they agreed to participate. Then they were posed four questions, which can be found on the attached agenda from the night, and each participant was allotted time to answer each question and were urged to give examples. Willa Dong, a longtime SFSS member facilitated the questions while Sarah Rodriguez, the SFSS Program Coordinator moderated. It took an hour to go through all of the questions. The focus group ended with closing remarks from SFSS thanking participants for coming and sharing their experiences. All participants received a Peet's gift card for taking part in the focus group.

Recruitment Process

A list of interested participants was generated from a community survey that was distributed by SFSS during a Willard Neighborhood Association meeting in the summer of 2008 and online via survey monkey. A total of 8 respondents reported they were interested in participating in the focus group and their contact information was collected. All 8 were contacted via phone and email to determine their availability. Once the date and time was determined, follow up reminder emails were sent to all participants.

Participants

All of the participants were residents of the Willard Neighborhood a resulting factor of surveying at the Willard Neighborhood Association meeting. Two participants were male and three participants were female. One participant was between the age of 31-40, two between 51-60 and two over 60. Four participants had reached a master's degree level of education and one had received a doctoral degree. All had a household income of 120,000 dollars or more and all were white and married. Two participants had been living in Berkeley between 2-5 years, one between 5-10 years, one between 10-15 years, and one more than 15 years. One participant lived in a neighborhood composed of mostly families with some students, but four lived in a neighborhood split about half families and half students.

Curriculum Development Process

Based upon the criteria given by Applied Survey Research of San Jose (SFSS Program Evaluators) for conducting focus groups, SFSS students met twice to determine the specific goals for the group. The questions were developed based on specific themes

from the community survey developed prior and SFSS' knowledge of current conditions in the Southside neighborhood from regular stakeholder meetings. The categories selected were enforcement, satisfaction with the University actions around alcohol, the general quality of life in the Southside, and the general experiences long-term residents have with students.

Summary of Session

Repetitive Themes and Issues

All of the participants could easily describe a positive interaction that they had with a student in the past year. These ranged from casual neighborly gatherings to interactions with students professionally. Most of the participants said that students stop by and let the neighbors know before they are having a party, leaving their contact information to call if there are any problems. The majority of participants noted that overall students are good neighbors.

All of the neighbors have also had negative encounters with students. There are various problems involving student alcohol use and other problems that do not involve alcohol. The two main problems not involving alcohol are that students tend to leave their trash out in the streets when they move out and that they drive recklessly through the neighborhood. There were two types of alcohol-related parties that were problematic: "roving" parties and house parties. Roving parties are where students walk around with open bottles, drinking heavily, urinating on the street, throwing their trash around, and generally being very loud late at night. The problem with these parties is that, because students are moving around, calling the police is ineffective; the police arrive 30 minutes later and the students have already moved on to another area. The second type of

problematic party is house parties, where students invite friends to their homes and have parties, often lasting until the early morning. This is problematic due to the noise because of the music and people talking outside, oftentimes until 3am. Neighbors have been very resourceful in dealing with these situations, with solutions ranging from calling the police, talking directly to the students and calling their landlords.

For most neighbors, the frequency of alcohol-related student activities that interfered with their daily life was two to three nights a week. Neighbors said that Thursdays, Fridays, and nights following football games were usually the most problematic and noisy. The majority of participants stated that they were awoken in the night regularly by loud students returning home after hours and from student parties within close proximity.

Effectiveness of Enforcement and Policies

The majority (4/6) of the neighbors noted disappointment and frustration with the current level of enforcement by the BPD and UCPD. They said that BPD and UCPD do not coordinate their efforts when responding to calls—sometimes they both respond to a call and sometimes neither agency responds. They also said that police never use the Second Response Ordinance to write students up even though they have the power to do so; there was no formal training on it and there are various interpretations of it so police generally do not use it. Neighbors said that they have seen the bicycle police officers enforce the law and write citations, but that UCPD cars are seldom seen in the neighborhood. Neighbors also said that on personal level police officers seem very eager to help the situation, but as a whole not a lot of action is taken.

Limitations

Participants

One main limitation of the results of the focus group is that participants were all from the same Willard area, and there were not Le Conte neighbors present. The participants were also from similar demographic categories. This does not give a complete view of the student alcohol situation in the Southside. While it does assess the Willard neighborhood issues with student alcohol use, the lack of diversity in income, education, race, etc. possibly excludes other worldviews and groups on the Southside with regard to student alcohol use. Also, because participants were from the Willard neighborhood they were well acquainted with each other and had similar experiences. They spent some time discussing issues that did not always pertain to student alcohol use.

Time

The time allotted to the focus group was not enough to gather thorough responses from participants. There was constant pressure to move on to the next question and sometimes, participants were very adamant about one issue meaning that too much time was spent discussing one topic. It was hard to transition to the next topic.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Future Focus Groups

Before organizing any further focus groups SFSS must take several factors into consideration. First and foremost recruitment must be organized in order to gather a more accurate sample of the Southside demographics. There must be a larger range of voices and worldviews present at the next focus group in order to generalize from the data. To do this, SFSS can contact the various neighborhood associations in Berkeley (e.g. LeConte, Willard, etc) to comprise the group as well as look to other outlets such as,

adults working with students on campus. Taking the aforementioned steps in recruitment might bring in a better sample of participants.

Recommendations to Community Agencies

Judging from the general unhappiness and dissatisfaction on behalf of the community with BPD and UCPD regarding enforcement of the SHO and SRO there is an obvious need for a forum in which neighbors can address their concerns with the Police Agencies responsible for enforcement other than the University's Student Neighbor Task Force. Preferably this forum should be held in the format of a community roundtable and scheduled after traditional work hours since most neighbors work regularly until 5 p.m.

As a whole the participants in the focus group were very engaged in neighborhood meetings and events but there is a need to engage more neighbors with the University and its staff. Some participants stated that they would like to attend the SNTF Meetings but that the time at which meetings are held are during working hours. Should the University be inclined to hear from an increased number of neighbors it is our recommendation that meetings be held after working hours and be held on a regular basis.

Conclusion

As a group working to reduce high risk drinking among UC Berkeley students SFSS is always concerned with what neighbors experiences are regarding student alcohol use. We want to provide a medium in which neighbors and community members can voice their concerns about student alcohol use and its effects on the quality of life in the Southside community. This focus group has allowed for SFSS to increase its understanding of community experiences and has given us some clear recommendations

to be considered by many different agencies and stakeholders. We will use this report as a tool in evaluating current policies and their effectiveness on reducing the harms associated with student alcohol use. We will also share this report with all stakeholders, including but not limited to, UCPD, BPD, the University's Student Neighbor Task Force and Associate Chancellor Williams, UCB Students, community groups and coalitions, community members and neighbors, and finally the participants. And on a final note we would like to thank all of the 6 participants who took the time to share with us your experiences and we greatly appreciate your willingness to remain engaged.

SFSS Community Focus Group Questions and Agenda

6:00 PM-6:10 PM

Part I. Introductions:

Please introduce yourself and briefly explain why you agreed to participate in this focus group? (Prompt to get participants thinking of their experiences and desired outcome of the future.)

6:10 PM- 7:05 PM

Part II. Questions:

1. Please describe a positive interaction you have had with a student in the past year.
2. Please describe a negative interaction you have had with a student in the past year.
3. Please explain the frequency of alcohol-related student activities that interfere with your daily life and give a brief example.
4. Are you satisfied with the current level of enforcement on behalf of the BPD and UCPD? Please explain.

7:05 PM-7:15PM

Part III. Closing Remarks, Evaluations, and Gift Cards

Record of Session

Question 1:

Please describe a positive interaction you have had with a student in the past year.

(Please be advised these statements are not verbatim, they have been reconstructed from notes and audio recordings of the session)

Participant 1:

Some law students came over and gave us brownies and their cell phone number before they held a party one evening. We were major complainers about them because they've been problematic before. Some of these students are sensitive and smart; we tell them we appreciate them telling us and giving us cell phone numbers but it doesn't get them off the hook, because sometimes they think that's enough. Would call them first to give them an opportunity to quiet down and then the police.

Participant 2:

I have been taking studio arts courses through the University so I have had a lot of positive interactions. Students come to ask me to help them out with building things, such as shelves, etc. because I have a studio in my garage. Generally speaking, 95% of the time interactions are positive and they're good neighbors.

Participant 3:

For the last 3 years, I have been involved with Community Relations office at the University, and I have helped students trying to establish connections with the Greek Associations and Student Residence Halls. I also work for the University of California so I am very associated with community affairs, residence hall organizations on and of campus, and I attempted to work with student relations to establish a watch group on campus and attempted to integrate police department into it. Trying to get universal integrated approach between community, UCPD, and BPD. Most recently, members of law students knocked on my door and said "we're going to have a party if you have any problems give us a call". (Same students as participant 1).

Participant 4:

I have had tons of positive interactions with students. I am part of a research project on ageing, and I meet with graduated students regularly. I met with one student last spring during 3.5 hours of testing and talked to him about what he was going to do after he was graduating, etc. Usually I don't meet students in the context that they're drinking.

Participant 5:

A bunch of kids that live down the street from me have organized some really fun block parties. They set up everything, had food, and let neighbors know and it was a lot of fun. We have some good students on the street, too.

Question 2:

Please describe a negative interaction you have had with a student in the past year.

Participant 1:

A lot of the parties are involving minors. Two issues. One is of roving parties, students walking around with open bottles, drinking heavily, urinating on the street and throwing their trash around. Very concerned about Halloween, which seems to be a night that fosters that behavior, every year it's quite noisy and a lot of drinking. Most recent negative interaction was with a group of students in a home that has previously been unoccupied. They have a big trash problem. Deal with it through the landlord and Jim Hynes, from the City Manager's office. It took threats of action and fines from the city to solve the problem. Last weekend, they were being noisy until 11 and people were outside just screaming. Went outside and looked for somebody to talk to but nobody was available. Called the police, who got there around 12:30 am, by that time most people had already left and there was no action necessary. After the police left, they continued to talk on the porch until 3:30 am. The next morning, woke them up at 10am and spoke to one of them and said that the behavior was totally unacceptable and will not be tolerated. The excuse was that soccer players can only party one night a week but I said that it's not an excuse. Called the landlord, who turned out to be extremely co-operative. He's contacting their coach, the city, and sending them a letter indicating that action will be taken if this continues. We've had fistfights after parties, and a lot of other problems. For instance there have been deaths at the university recently which concern me as a neighbor. And the noise from students disrupts our lives.

Participant 2:

We're in a noisy corner. We're assaulted by the debris and it's worse during move-in and move-out, it's there year-round. We've had many instances of being disturbed up to 3 or 4 am whether by parties or roving crowds of students on the streets. Voices echo at night, especially when inebriated/high. A particular one—graduate students had switched from beer to hard alcohol and would have parties that went on all night long and into the wee hours of the morning. After conversations with them, one man said "I'm smart, I work hard, this is my neighborhood, and F you." Calling the police is a waste of time because these kids have money to pay the ordinance fines. Talked to Pollard on the taskforce who had a neighbor chat with him, as well as with the landlord. Took all those avenues to shut them down. Still have gatherings but now much more respectful of the neighborhood.

Participant 3:

Specific to ASUC, worked with 2 individuals and other people from community groups to form watch groups. No follow-up, after they get the support they need they just move on. Have a shining face but nothing happens with that. The Law students that came to knock on the door—I went and knocked on their door and they didn't answer and they were screaming and jumping up and down... looked like they were on drugs and I ended up calling the police on them.

Participant 4:

Not that many personal negative interactions with students because my part of the neighborhood doesn't have that many students anymore. A lot of families and grad students on the block. Negative interaction would be that last spring, while taking a walk, I saw a ton of trash left out on the streets when students move out even though there's been a large effort on behalf of the City and University to organize large trashcans. Makes the neighborhood unsightly and it's a function of people who don't have ties to Berkeley or feel proud about where they live.

Participant 5:

I am in a heavily student populated part of the neighborhood, historically it was a total student neighborhood but now it's about ½ and ½. A lot of trouble, constantly. Unbelievable filth, throwing things on the ground, debris, moving out means 2 months of filth. Very notorious landlord—Reeza. A bad interaction is having little kids play outside of the house and having students whiz by with their car. I followed one girl down the street to confront her and she was very snobby. All of my children had their first alcohol experiences with Berkeley students at college parties. What I don't like about the University is that nothing comes out of meetings or any other attempt; the kids go on and on getting more entitled. I don't like the constant noise, abusiveness, and filth.

Participant 6:

Haven't had many negative interactions with students. Main negative is the garbage at the end of the school year. The disrespect of the students in the neighborhood is appalling.

Question 3:

Please explain the frequency of alcohol-related student activities that interfere with your daily life and give a brief example.

Participant 1:

Same as issues as others, but it's something that cycles. Issue of houses that have parties migrate depending on who has the next location. I believe that the majority of students are good, respectful citizens and it's a minority of students who are the problem.

Participant 2:

Every Thursday and Friday nights, most weeks except in the summer. Every time people move in, we have to reeducate them. Last year there was nobody new so it was really great. Thursday is the worst night.

Participant 3:

Question implies that it's an alcohol-related party. Mall party is a party that migrates and it's been a problem in the neighborhood for 5 years but is getting worse. By the time the police get there, the party is gone. People speak very loudly between midnight and 5 am; not sure if it's alcohol-related or not. Student-related problems happen 3 nights a week, whether it's alcohol-related or not, can't say.

Participant 4:

Certainly not daily interactions. It's worst during the football games. People from out of town park in the neighborhood, get drunk, and come back. Not very happy with the attention by the University on the football team.

Participant 5:

Definitely weekly. We have different methods of dealing with it, police, husband goes to talk to them at 6am. Don't hesitate to call the police. Best method is when the students move in, invite them over for a block meeting to talk to them. Usually during the weekend and Thursday night is the worst.

Participant 6:

Don't have high frequency of the issue.

Question 4:

Are you satisfied with the current level of enforcement on behalf of the BPD and UCPD? Please explain.

Participant 1:

Completely and totally disappointed. UCPD has completely relegated responsibility, which means that BPD and the University hasn't given them the tools to deal with it. Other universities have more power to write ordinances, find students in roaming parties and write them up and deal with them. There is some competition with the two police departments. UCPD have the power to write Second Response but they never do. Should be able to call UCPD if BPD is taking too long to take care of the problem. Failure for UCPD to give directions to own police, to coordinate efforts with city police, and to

legislate new legislature that would allow them to take some action to mediate the problem. Until they do that there will be drunk students in the street and the students and neighbors will be at great risk.

Participant 2:

Individually, when speaking with a cop, intentions are to support the concerns but systemically there's a very large problem. Became more evident after the new Ordinance—no training about it occurred or they have different interpretations of it. Their sensibility seemed more sensitive to kids having a good time than neighbors having a peaceful neighborhood. Many of them are not very sympathetic to the issue. Serving on the Task Force, there's a lot of verbal support but not much substance behind it.

Participant 3:

The BOX, where campus police have control, goes to Parker Street, asking UCPD and BPD to have ride-alongs and co-developing and responding to problems. BPD has bike cops that work within the BOX, and I have seen them enforce the law, write citations—pleased with that experience. I have not seen a UCPD car in my neighborhood but in the beginning of the year there is a big representation of them in the neighborhood. Confusion because there's a lack of communication between UCPD and BPD—completely separate communication systems, when calling one you're not communicating with the other. Sometimes they both come in and sometimes they're both expecting others to take care of the problem.

Participant 4:

Don't have enough experience with UCPD, haven't figured out what they actually are doing. BPD—have personal contact with them through the neighbors, generally very happy with them. Current level of satisfaction with UCPD is “what the hell do they do?”

Participant 5:

Have never seen the UCPD at the block because live past Derby. Never seen a student ticketed in this town, they do whatever they want. As far as I'm concerned there's no program because I've never seen it and I've called the police many times.

Participant 6:

Don't want to comment either positive or negative because I haven't had this experience.

Session Ended here due to time. Participants were thanked for their participation and given their gift cards.

If you would like more information about this report please contact:

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