

# Community Development in Ashland

You may have seen the headlines that say your zip code can predict your health, your age at death, or whether your child will meet their educational goals and earn median income in their lifetime. The studies behind those headlines pushed us to consider the best way to build strong communities. The result was a strategy that became *Stronger Places, Stronger Lives*, our community development initiative that moves beyond the footprint of our buildings into the surrounding neighborhoods to help residents transform their communities into places of greater opportunity.

While *Stronger Places, Stronger Lives* is informing our work in housing development and resident services, strategies in zip code 94578 in Ashland take a deeper dive to address common disparities there.

Ashland is home to about 22,000 people and surrounds our recent development at Ashland Place. It's a high poverty pocket of Alameda County between Highways 580, 280 and 238, near San Leandro. Individual income is around \$19,000 a year and median household income has hovered under \$50,000 for years. Over 60% of the kids are not kindergarten-ready when they start school. All the schools are within walking distance of an alcohol vendor, while there are few healthy food retailers. Mortality from all causes is the highest in Alameda County.

**Unless we continue to invest expertise and resources now, there's reason to believe that people living in this zip code will continue to have poor health outcomes, inadequate income, less education, and fewer opportunities than people in other parts of Alameda County.**

Here's the short list of what residents in Ashland have been telling us since 2016 about their priorities:

- Strengthen literacy among youth and financial literacy among adults
- Increase access to full-time, living wage jobs
- Increase traffic safety and create safer walkways along the E.14<sup>th</sup> Street corridor
- Increase healthy food choices
- Create more space for recreation and physical activity
- And, build more affordable housing.

**Resident engagement is the magic ingredient in successful neighborhood transformation.** Our focus on building resident leadership skills in combination with civic improvement projects in 2017 has helped lay the foundation for further community development.

- With other community partners, RCD organized events and meetings that **bring people together to look at the big picture**. This included a voter registration drive and community discussion of ballot issues, community listening sessions and community organizing training.
- We have helped strengthen local institutions, including the Ashland Community Association and its newly formed Neighborhood Makeover Team. They've created a social media presence at



“I love being involved in my community and being able to contribute in any capacity. In addition to having stable housing, resources like parent education, job placement help and access to child development resources are key elements for Ashland community residents...”

**Katrina H., Ashland Place resident & community leader**

#AshlandMatters and a logo for the Ashland Community Association. Recently, over 40 people turned out to pick up trash on Ashland's Fall Clean-up Day. **Each gathering offers residents a way to engage in the process of community development.**

- **A community-wide effort led to approval for the Eden Municipal Advisory Council.** Residents met, organized, went door to door, and spoke at public meetings to advocate with the Board of Supervisors to create community representation at the county level. Alameda County surveyed residents on the idea and over 1,600 people responded. With 53% in favor, the county will now create this new form of governance for the area. This is **a huge step forward in giving residents a voice in policies** that affect their lives. It creates a legacy for greater civic participation in the future.
- There's another sign of change you can see when you drive through Ashland. RCD collaborated with the Deputy Sheriffs' Activities League, young artists learning under Joaquin Newman at the REACH Ashland Youth Center, and the Neighborhood Makeover Team leaders to commission **a storefront improvement with a new mural** at La Raza Market on E. 14<sup>th</sup> Street. The team is already planning to provide another local business with a creative sign and mural—adding color to a gray corridor while boosting community business. **Community spirit is growing** and showing!



We look forward to continued leadership development and neighborhood transformation as we expand community outreach programming to address childcare and kindergarten readiness issues, expand access to preventive health services and help set up the Eden Municipal Advisory Council. These ambitious, **long-term efforts will help improve the outcomes for residents** of Ashland and model how RCD can foster impact like this in other communities.