

## **Extremes of Age: Children and Adolescents / Alison Blake**

Meeting the needs of children and teens within the urban environment is a critical task. Many parents, both currently and historically, choose to move from cities to suburbs and outlying areas because they believe these areas will be better for their children. A variety of factors, such as educational opportunities, tend to weigh into this decision, but key among them are perceptions that cities are both more dangerous and offer fewer opportunities to connect with nature. In order for cities to densify, they must be desirable places to live; in order for families to want to live in cities, the needs of their children must be met.

The challenges and opportunities for open space to meet kids' needs within the urban environment are substantial. As children age, they pass through many stages of development. Interests change with age, territories often expand, new skills and abilities are developed. It is important to recognize, account and design for children at all stages of development within a city's open space system because individual open spaces may not be able to accommodate the needs of all children at many different stages of development and they certainly can't with a single traditional playground.

Open spaces should provide areas for play, both for groups and individuals, both undirected as well as for organized sports. Play is a mode of learning and the activity of exploring one's environment is a type of play. Connections to nature and environmental learning can and should occur within open spaces. Open spaces can also serve an important role for children as places for family-time and for community gathering and socializing with a more diverse population than they are typically exposed to.

Access to open space is a major issue for children that must be addressed. Younger children require spaces much closer (they must be within eye and earshot of parents) to the home, before parents will allow their children to play there. Older children may often travel farther, but might not be allowed to cross major thoroughfares. Thus, appropriate placement and frequency of open space is important. Perceived safety is also a major criterion as parents will generally not take, or allow their children to go to unsafe areas.

### **Elderly**

The elderly have their own issues and needs relating to open space. Access to open space as well as comfort and safety within open space are key issues for the elderly population. As people age, they tend to be less mobile, both physically and because they may lose the privilege of driving. Thus, open spaces should be accessible by foot from homes, or should be easily accessible via public transportation. Inside of open spaces, it is important that paths are accessible and that sufficient seating be provided for those who either need or want to sit and rest.

Open spaces serve a variety of functions for the elderly; they are places for meeting friends, for conversation, and being part of a community; they are places for both exercise and relaxation, and places to appreciate and connect with nature or natural elements. Studies show that the elderly tend to be comfortable directly adjacent to children's play areas, but not next to those of adolescents and young adults, who may be perceived as noisy, less fun to watch, or even as threats. These preferences should be addressed within open space designs and care should also be taken to site seating in climatically comfortable areas where other activities or pleasing views can be observed.

## Resources

Mayor Royer - document re: design w/ children

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RWJ or CDC on community health/ environment

ADA Information- ADA Technical Assistance CD-Rom US Dept. of Justice Civil Rights Division - PH 800 514-0301 - updates [www.ada.gov](http://www.ada.gov)

Sommer, R. and F. Becker. 1969. The Old Men in Plaza Park. *Landscape Architecture* 59: 111-113

[http://www.cala.umn.edu/design\\_center/reference\\_ctr/publications/designbriefs/pdfs/db4.pdf](http://www.cala.umn.edu/design_center/reference_ctr/publications/designbriefs/pdfs/db4.pdf)

## Disability / Noelle Higgins

### **What are the reasons to create inclusive design in public open space?**

The issues associated with disability affect all cultures, colors, age-groups, sexes. In this country, there are millions of citizens with disabilities, as well as foreign visitors with disabilities whose needs also need to be addressed. Adopting inclusive design strategies discourages discrimination and promotes equality. Inclusive design “acknowledges that everyone has the right to participate in community and public life.” Inclusive design sustains self-determination and minimizes physical and/or psychological dependence on others. Disability access is also regulated by the following laws here in the United States.

- Americans with Disabilities Act
- Telecommunications Act
- Fair Housing Act
- Air Carrier Access Act
- Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act
- Individuals with Disabilities Act
- Rehabilitation Act
- Architectural Barriers Act

### **Who are we designing for?**

- Physically challenged or disabled adults and children.
  - Visual
  - Hearing
  - Walking and motor control
- Mentally ill or challenged, adults and children.
  - spatial cognition
  - wayfinding
  - language comprehension
  - written word comprehension
- All ages, all colors, both sex, everyone.

### **What elements are available to address these users' needs?**

- *Wayfinding Tools* Not language-based, but technology based, using Braille, material change cues, sensory cues, hearing or visually impaired.
- *Accessibility* Properly lit, accessible grade or stairs.
- *Safety* Create accessible spaces incorporated into design.
- *Inclusive and welcoming* Design these issues into the design not add as an afterthought.

## Resources

<http://www.gag.org/resources/das.php>

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## Homeless / Tauschia Copeland

Homeless in Seattle could be the group of people most affected by open space and the changes made to open space for it is in fact their home. In 2005, 4,355 individual homeless were counted in the Seattle area breaking into 1,870 emergency sheltered homeless, 1,155 transitional and 1,330 unsheltered. (City of Seattle) Understanding and accepting that this is a group of people who need be considered is the first step for there have been designs specifically created to exclude the homeless, but the homeless population has adapted and therefore, perhaps the approach of considering their needs in open space design rather than finding ways of excluding homeless is could be a new was of looking toward a brighter, more infused future. The homeless needs are different from any other group because space is their home, but also open space serves the same function as it does for others, a place to read, meditate, gather, etc.

One of the main issues that city dwelling homeless face is safety. Those that sleep out on the streets rather than in shelters sleep out in the open or under lights in order to feel safe and protected from and by city activities (George). The other most important aspect of open space for the homeless is protection from the elements. If these two things can be organized into open space in a safe manor where others can coexists, then, people forced into homelessness will not be forces to freeze to death or put themselves into immediate danger. For whatever reason any individual is marginalized into homelessness, there are those who cannot find shelter and those who wish to remain anonymous, and choose not to use the available resources for homeless that Seattle offers (Freeman), and safe open space is their answer to remain nameless and protected.

## Resources

City of Seattle. "Homeless Population and Subpopulation Chart." 2005:  
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Freeman, Anita. 1999: <http://aspin.asu.edu/hpn/archives/Oct99/0147.html>

George, Kathy. "Homeless Face Violent life on Streets." Seattle P.I., 2003:  
[http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/125753\\_homeless09.html](http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/125753_homeless09.html)

## **Ethnic Groups and Immigrants / Vanessa Lee**

### **Introduction**

In general there are differences in use and perception between ethnic groups, center city versus suburban residents, women versus men, people with different educational backgrounds, those with environmental training and those without, and people doing different activities in open space (e.g. dog walking versus jogging).

The following is merely a summary of past research and by no means indicative of all members of the following ethnicities.

According to Schroeder, African Americans are more inclined to use urban environments for recreation than Anglo Americans. They are also less interested in nature, the outdoors, and environmental concerns (Schroeder 1989, 103-104). This is also a pattern similar to center city residents in general, so these observations could be due to both ethnicity and location. More recent work by Gobster and Delgado (1993, 78) in Chicago has shown variation among African Americans depending on their history. Although their sample size was small, those with southern roots visited parks more than those from the North. They also did so more frequently on foot. This demonstrates some of the differences between people in one ethnic group.

Mexican Americans may have a pattern of park use revolving around large multifamily groups. They partake in more stationary and group sports activities than Anglo-Americans (Schroeder 1989, 104; Loukaitou-Sideris 1995). In urban parks Puerto Ricans have preferences for certain activities such as dominoes, and for a design palette that includes paving, shrubs, and bright colors rather than grass (Forsyth et al. 2001, 75).

Studies in the US have found that groups of Asian descent are very varied in their use of open space, partly because the population comes from so many different backgrounds. However, there may also be large multifamily groups that require spaces for picnicking and gathering together, family walks, or group exercises (i.e.: tai-chi). This requires a mix of both lawn and paving areas. Other recreational opportunities could also be derived from native countries (such as cricket or badminton).

As food is an important component to many ethnicities, places for food preparation or accessibility to vendors should also be provided. Community gardens can provide places for groups to come together, share traditional farming practices, and grow ethnically-appropriate food at an affordable cost.

Immigrant groups may also require signage in their own language.

The correlation between ethnic groups and low economic status is also an explanation for inaccessibility to open space. The large open spaces of Seattle are most accessible to the wealthier neighborhoods. That is, housing is so much more expensive near Sand Point Magnuson, Discovery Park, Greenlake, Seward Park, Gasworks Park, etc. These great parks are not within walking distance for many ethnic groups, and may also be difficult to reach through transit. If it is connected via an urban trail, such as the Burke-Gilman, residents may not have bikes, roller blades, or the resources to rent them.

### **Women**

In urban areas women use parks more in the middle of the day, and for activities such as sitting and reading rather than sports. Women fear crime in parks more than men (Schroeder 1989, 105). Many ethnic groups have gender segregated patterns of open space use.

## Resources

Forsyth, Ann. People and Urban Green Areas: Perception and Use. University of Minnesota -- Center for American Urban Landscape. Design Brief, Number 4/ June 2003.

[http://www.cala.umn.edu/design\\_center/reference\\_ctr/publications/designbriefs/pdfs/db4.pdf](http://www.cala.umn.edu/design_center/reference_ctr/publications/designbriefs/pdfs/db4.pdf)

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San Francisco Foundation Diversity Network Project Diversity Network Project  
<http://www.sff.org/initiatives/dnpgrantees.html>

## Open Space Barriers and Needs in Low-Income Communities / Elizabeth Umbanhowar

### Introduction

Historically, low-income communities have faced a tremendous dearth of available and safe open space in densely populated and/or economically desolated urban cores. As a result, low-income residents, particularly children, are prevented from participating in recreational, restorative and educational activities.

### Obstacles

Low income communities face a number of significant issues regarding accessing and utilizing open space, particularly in urban areas. While brownfields have been touted as the solution to addressing the critical lack of parks in dense urban cores, historic and contemporary economic discrimination, or “brownlining” persist. Despite the efforts of administrators at a number of agencies to promote environmental cleanup and economic redevelopment, brownfield redevelopment, launched in 1995 under the Clinton administration, has not significantly impacted low-income neighborhoods. Funding has been concentrated in more affluent communities, particularly through “Greenfield” development at suburban peripheries and as a result polluted and abandoned sites pose a health and safety threat to community members.

The New York City Environmental Justice Association, a city-wide network that links grass roots organizations, low-income neighborhoods and communities of color in their struggle for environmental justice, reports that the city has one of the lowest standards of open space access (acres per 1000 residents) in the United States. These neighborhoods, too, are characterized by substantial numbers of brownfields, left from past industrial endeavors, as well as lead-contaminated buildings, bus depots and major highway corridors, all of which plague the community members and landscape and limit the number of healthy green open spaces and access to waterfronts.<sup>1</sup>

On a different, but related note, recent health studies also reveal that a disproportionate number of low-income youth suffer from chronic and often debilitating illnesses as a result of lack of exercise. These includes: Type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, hypertension, colon cancer and osteoporosis. It is also associated with decreased mental alertness, lower academic achievement, higher levels of stress, higher rates of disability, depression and diminished quality of life.<sup>2</sup>

### Needs and Solutions

As has been suggested by the researchers of health and open space, there is a significant correlation to increasing available park space, and community well being. The example of the Fruitvale community in Oakland, California provides an understanding of the way in which community-based activism and planning can positively impact the way people both shape and use open space (see case study).

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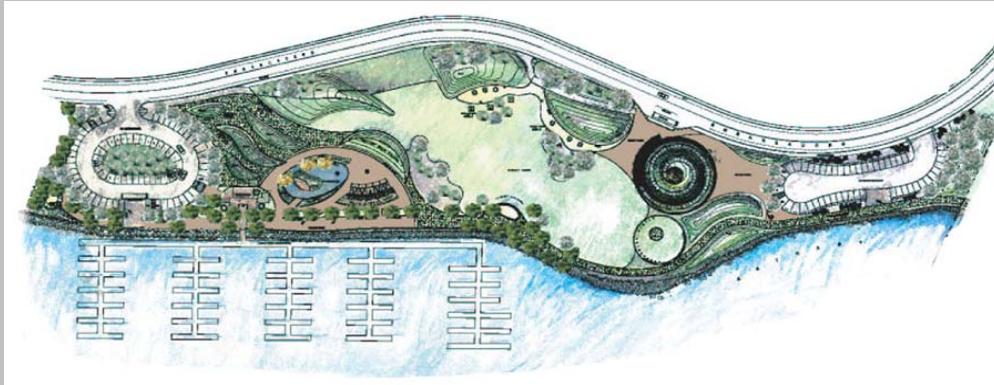
<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nyceja.org/campaigns.html>

<sup>2</sup> “Teens from low-income families are less active than more affluent teens (Exhibit 3). The rate of physical inactivity is nearly twice as high among teens with family incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL) as among teens with family incomes at or above 300% FPL. The proportion of teens getting no physical activity tended to increase slightly from 2001, however the increase is significant only for teens with family incomes at or above 300% FPL.” (3)



**CASE STUDY: Union Point Park, Fruitvale Community, Oakland CA**

The Fruitvale district is the most densely populated district in the City of Oakland, with one of the highest concentrations of children, but with the least amount of parks and open space. The Fruitvale Recreation and Open Space Initiative (FROSI) was established to address the lack of park and recreational assets, and to develop a community stewardship model to sustain new and improved assets for the future. Development has been completed at the premier 9-acre waterfront park at Union Point on the Oakland estuary, and plans for improvements to Foothill Meadows Park, recently renamed in honor of César E. Chávez through a community youth-driven effort, are currently underway.



Other studies indicate the critical need for active-friendly recreational spaces, as well as safe places for low-income youth and suggest this is not only a matter of community organizing, but broader policy implementation.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, organizations like the Corporation for National and Community Service observe the need to provide garden open space in order to ensure low-income families are able to access nutritional food sources and opportunities to interact with other families and children.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Susan H. Babey, Allison L. Diamant, E. Richard Brown and Theresa Hastert. "California Adolescents Increasingly Inactive." *UCLA Health Policy Research Brief*. April 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Greg Donovan *Effective Practice: Developing community gardening spaces for low-income families* AmeriCorps Child and Family Support Team. [http://epicenter.nationalserviceresources.org/index.taf?\\_function=practice&show=summary&Layout\\_0\\_uid1=33338](http://epicenter.nationalserviceresources.org/index.taf?_function=practice&show=summary&Layout_0_uid1=33338)

## Resources

*Bronx River Alliance* <http://www.bronxriver.org/whoWeAre.cfm>

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Crompton, John L. 2001. "The Impact of Parks on Property Values: A Review of the Empirical Evidence." *Journal of Leisure Research* 33(1): 1-31.

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*The Ecological Cities Project* University of Massachusetts Amherst  
<http://www.umass.edu/ecologicalcities/about/index.htm>

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[http://www.joburg.org.za/2003/jan/jan20\\_moss.stm](http://www.joburg.org.za/2003/jan/jan20_moss.stm)

*San Francisco Foundation--Diversity Network Project* <http://www.sff.org/initiatives/dnpgrantees.html>

Urban Habitat. *Cracking the Code, A Handbook for Community Participation in Land Use Planning in the San Francisco Bay Area* (Pub-C001)

UHP has published this report in support of communities as they engage in the regional planning processes. This handbook provides a user-friendly introduction to community participation in land use planning, and as such is a new tool in the region.

Urban Habitat. *Building Upon Our Strengths: A Community Guide to Brownfields Redevelopment in the San Francisco Bay Area* (Pub-B001)

A working handbook on community based brownfields redevelopment from initial site selection through project implementations. With general overview articles on urban planning, transportation and toxics as well as hands-on advice on legal, scientific, and policy issues, including directories of Bay Area stakeholders, and other useful tools.

Urban Habitat. *Mapping for Social Change* (Pub-M001)

A 20-minute video on computer generated mapping as a tool for environmental justice analysis. With maps from community groups in Los Angeles, Minneapolis, and San Francisco.

Urban Habitat. *Brownfields Policy Paper* Second People of Color Environment Summit  
October 23-27, 2002

Van Gelder, Sarah. "Cities For All: An Interview with Angela Glover Blackwell." *Yes! Magazine* Summer 2005.