

# How to Be Heard and Make a Difference!

**A WORKBOOK** by students for students



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Adult learners put this workbook together to show other students how they can get involved in their communities and make a difference.

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If you like this workbook, check out our other one: *How to Vote!* It was also written for students by students.

## Credits

This workbook was created with Oakland's Second Start Students as part of the Key to Community Voter Involvement Project. Thanks to all of the Oakland team members: Resonja Bell, Esperanza Cruz, Luella Edmonds, Reginald Hogan, Floyd Lee, Edgar O'Neill, Estella Rodriguez, Meuy Saeteurn, and Equilla Taylor plus Ramona Chacon. Special thanks to Heather Ellis for her leadership on this project.

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## INTRODUCTION

Are there things in your neighborhood you would like to change? Many people are worried about things like crime, trash, drugs, gangs or traffic problems.

- ❖ Do you sometimes feel like the problems are too big to tackle? Are you not sure where to start?
- ❖ Did you know that *you* may be able to help change these problems or get rid of them?

There is a way to take action and make your neighborhood better. This workbook will show you four steps that can help you solve a problem.



A team of students at the Second Start Adult Literacy Program in Oakland took on the problem of trash in their neighborhood and got results. Check it out!



**Before**



**After**

**They made a difference. You can too!**

## Step 1: PICKING A PROBLEM

The first step is to pick just one problem to work on. There may be a lot of problems in your neighborhood, but you will get the best results if you work on one at a time.

To get started, think about some things that have been bothering you in your neighborhood. What do you want to see changed? Talk to friends or look at the news to get ideas.



### 1. What:

Describe the problem clearly. For instance, if the problem is crime, what kind of crime is it? Is it drug selling or robbery? If you picked traffic, do you want to slow down speeding cars or get streets repaired? The clearer you are, the easier the problem will be to solve.

### 2. Where:

Say where the problem is. For instance, if you need a stop sign, what corner should it go on? If kids need a place to go after school, what part of the neighborhood are they hanging out in?

The team from Oakland picked trash as their problem. They saw lots of trash and broken glass near a liquor store. So they picked that street corner to focus on.

### 3. Why:

Think about why this problem is important to you. This will help you convince other people to help you solve the problem.

The team from Oakland was worried about the broken glass on the street. They felt it was unsafe for small children.



#### *Tip from another learner:*

*"For your first problem, start small. Be realistic so you can get results. And choose something that is safe to work on."*

*Use the worksheet on the next page to pick a problem.*

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## What do you want to change in your neighborhood?

*Fill in these 3 questions:*

❖ 1. The problem I want to solve in my neighborhood is \_\_\_\_\_

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❖ 2. Where is the problem? (street/address) \_\_\_\_\_

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❖ 3. This problem is important to me because \_\_\_\_\_

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## Step 2: WHO CAN HELP YOU?

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The second step in solving a problem is to find out who can help you. You may not know who that person or group is. It may be a neighbor, a community group or a church leader. It could be a person in your local government.

### **There are people in government who work for you.**

In your local government, there are two types of people.

First, there are people elected to represent you. For instance, your town has a mayor and a city council. Their job is to make sure the community gets what it needs. They work for everyone in the area they represent.

There are also people who work in local government departments. Their job is to help different parts of the city run well. For instance, there is a police department and a fire department. Most cities have a department of Public Works that takes care of street repairs. While the names may be different from one city to another, most cities have the same kind of departments.



To find out who to call, look in your phone book. There is a section called the "government pages" near the front of the book. Or you can call the operator to ask for a number.

The Oakland team found out they could get help from their city council person. They also called the Department of Public Works because it is in charge of garbage.













*Use the worksheet to see who you can contact for help*

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## Where to get help in your town

My city or town \_\_\_\_\_

My county \_\_\_\_\_

Who is elected to represent me	City and County Departments
Mayor _____  _____  _____	City Manager _____  _____  _____
City Council _____  _____  _____	<p><b>Departments:</b> Where to call if you have a question about:</p> <p><b>Child Care</b> - call your school district or Parks and Recreation Dept. _____</p> <p><b>Crime</b> - call Police _____</p> <p><b>Drugs</b> - call Police _____</p> <p><b>Fire Department</b> _____</p> <p><b>Graffiti</b> - ask information _____</p> <p><b>Housing Authority</b> _____</p> <p><b>Library</b> _____</p> <p><b>Potholes</b> - call Public Works _____</p> <p><b>Parks &amp; Recreations</b> _____</p> <p><b>Seniors</b> - ask information _____</p> <p><b>Stop Signs</b> - call Public Works _____</p> <p><b>Trash</b> - call Public Works _____</p> <p><b>Other</b> _____</p>
County Supervisors _____  _____  _____	
Other _____  _____  _____	

Other people I can call: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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## **Other types of people may be able to help you.**

It is good to get support from other people in your neighborhood. Maybe there is a tenants association where you live or another type of neighborhood group. Talk to your neighbors. How do they feel about the problem? Do they want to change it?

Who else has worked on the same problem? You can ask people at your church, community center or local school. Your public library has people who can help you find answers to your questions. Go to the "reference desk".

As you talk to different people, try using questions like these. Write down what you find out right here.

- ❖ 1. What has been tried in the past to solve this problem?

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- ❖ 2. What are some ideas about what should be done now?

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- ❖ 3. Who else can I contact?

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**The more information you have, the more power you have!**



## Step 3: MAKING A PHONE CALL

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The third step is to call the people that may be able to help you. Phone calls can be important. This is a way for you to say, "There is a problem in my neighborhood and I need help!"

Making a phone call can be scary. We may not think we know how to talk to someone in government or someone who sounds important. We may feel like we may not say the right thing. But do not let this keep you from being heard.

### Getting Ready to Call:

Before you call, it helps to plan what you will say. You will be less nervous if you are prepared.

❖ 1. What are you calling about? (one sentence about the problem and where it is)

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❖ 2. Who are you? (your name and how you are related to the problem)

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❖ 3. Why are you calling? (a short statement about the problem)

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❖ 4. What would you like done or what are you trying to find out?

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### Tips

Here is a list of phone tips that the Oakland team came up with:

- Do not have loud noise in the room when you are calling
- Be polite
- Ask the person you talk to how to spell their name
- If they say they cannot help you, ask who can
- Keep your cool
- Do not talk fast
- Speak clearly



❖ *What are your phone tips?*

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## Making a phone call

Here is an example of a phone call made by one of the Oakland students. She called the Department of Public Works.



1. "Hello. My name is Teresa Jones and I am a resident of West Oakland. I am calling about the trash in my neighborhood."



2. "Yes. What location are you calling about?"



3. "The trash is at 12th and Peralta, at a bus stop, next to a liquor store. There is a lot of broken glass on the street."



4. "That is a residential neighborhood. We do not usually put city trash cans in that type of neighborhood."



5. "I would like to find out who makes that decision. The glass is unsafe and the trash makes the neighborhood look bad."



6. "You can write a letter to your city councilperson to ask them to help you. You can also write the Department of Public Works and explain the situation."

Teresa asked who to write to at the Department of Public Works and got the address. She asked the city worker for her name and thanked her. Teresa put this information in her phone log.

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## Phone Log

It is important to keep track of who you call, the phone number, the date you make the call and what is talked about. You can use this worksheet or make your own.

You can also visit city offices in person. They are open to the public. You can also use this log to keep track of what you find out.

Today's Date	Number Called	Who I talked to:
_____	_____	_____

What I found out \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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Today's Date	Number Called	Who I talked to:
_____	_____	_____

What I found out \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

---

Today's Date	Number Called	Who I talked to:
_____	_____	_____

What I found out \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

---

Today's Date	Number Called	Who I talked to:
_____	_____	_____

What I found out \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Step 4: WRITING A LETTER

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The fourth step is writing a letter. The phone call tells them there is a problem. A letter shows that you mean business. When you write a letter, you are likely to get an answer.

The Oakland team wrote a letter about their problem with trash. They wrote their city councilperson. They took photos of the trash and sent them with the letter. They asked for trash cans to be put at the bus stop outside of the liquor store. Two weeks later there were two new trash cans placed at the bus stop!



Writing a letter can also be scary. You may feel like you do not know how to say the things you would like to say. But all you need to know are six easy parts.

The six parts of a letter:

**1 Who are you writing to?**

In the top left hand corner of your letter, write the name and address of the person you are writing to. Make sure you spell their name right.

**2 What is the problem?**

Write a sentence telling what the problem is.

**3 Where is the problem?**

Write the street or address where the problem is.

**4 What do you want done?**

Write a sentence about what you want to be done to change the problem.

**5 Ask for a written response to your letter.**

Write a sentence telling them that you would like a written response to your letter within 2 weeks.

**6 Who is sending the letter?**

Sign your name. Then write your name, address and phone number under where you sign.

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## Sample Letter

May 18, 1995

**1** Councilwoman Natalie Bayton  
505 14th Street, Suite 601  
Oakland, CA 94612

Dear Councilwoman Bayton,

**2** I am writing to you as a concerned citizen about the trash in my community.

**3** There is a lot of trash at the corner of 12th and Peralta Streets. This trash is unsafe and really makes the neighborhood look bad.

**4** I would like your help in getting trash cans at this location.

**5** I will be looking for your written response to this request within two weeks.

Thank you for taking the time to answer this letter.

Sincerely,

**6** Teresa Jones  
153 12th Street, #5  
Oakland, CA 94612  
(510) 238-3432

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### Letter Writing Tips:

- ❖ Practice on scratch paper to decide what you want to say.
- ❖ You can type or neatly hand write the letter.
- ❖ Make a copy of the letter to keep.
- ❖ Call if you do not hear anything in one or two weeks.

## OTHER WAYS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

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Depending on the kind of problem you picked, there may be other things you want to do:

- ❖ Get people together to talk about the problem
- ❖ Call your radio station
- ❖ Write a letter to the paper
- ❖ Speak up at a public meeting

Every town has city council meetings. Anyone can go to these meetings. You can go to just watch or sign up to speak. Call your city clerk to find out when and where they are.

There may be other groups you want to talk to. For instance, there are neighborhood watch groups, school groups and groups for many different causes. Or, you may want to start a group of your own.

You can make a difference in your neighborhood. The Oakland team did! It takes work. Things can be changed when you know what you want to say and speak up. You can be heard and make a difference.

**These are the four steps that worked for us:**

1. Pick a Problem
2. Find Out Who Can Help You
3. Make Phone Calls
4. Write a Letter

**We hope they work for you too. Good Luck!!**



## **How to Make a Difference in Your Community**

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### **Step 1 Pick a problem**

- ❖ What do you want to change in your community?
- ❖ Where is it?

### **Step 2 Find out who can help you**

- ❖ Who is elected to represent you?
- ❖ What city departments work on your concern?

### **Step 3 Make a phone call**

- ❖ What did you find out?
- ❖ Who else did they tell you to call?

Keep a phone log!

### **Step 4 Write a letter**

- ❖ Say what you want to have changed.
- ❖ Is your letter clear and to the point?

Call one or two weeks after you send your letter.

*Be cool and keep trying.*

**Use these steps and we hope you get results just like we did!**

Key to Community Voter Involvement Workbook Series:

*How to Vote!*

*How to Be Heard and Make a Difference!*

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