transforming lives by transforming public space

Annual Report
2014
**MISSION:** Transforming lives by transforming public space.

**BACKGROUND:** Founded in 2007, Pogo Park is an entrepreneurial 501(c)3 nonprofit organization based in Richmond, California.

**WHAT WE DO:** We transform little-used and abandoned city parks into safe and vibrant places for children to play. We hire, train, and empower local residents (those who know their neighborhood best) to design, build, and now manage these community parks themselves.

**WHERE WE WORK:** We work in Richmond, California’s one-square mile Iron Triangle, a tough, inner-city neighborhood that is home to some of this country’s most vulnerable children and their families.

**WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO:** We are piloting a replicable model for how to unleash the power of parks™ in neighborhoods where communities need great parks and playgrounds the most.

**IMPACT:** We aim to provide children with rich play opportunities that are designed to spark and foster their healthy development. We use the transformation of city parks and public spaces as vehicles to transform the surrounding neighborhood.
Message from Pogo Park’s Executive Director

Dear Friends of Pogo Park,

Let me tell you about Ashanti.

Ashanti is six. She lives across the street from Elm Playlot, our first “Pogo Park” that lies in the heart of Richmond’s Iron Triangle neighborhood. Before Elm Playlot was transformed, Ashanti rarely played outside. There was nowhere to go! The streets and park were too scary. But in the last year, Ashanti’s life has changed.

Now, when she comes home from kindergarten at noon, she goes straight to Pogo Park and plays there until dinner. After dinner she goes back outside and plays at Elm Playlot until dark. For six or more hours most days, instead of being locked inside because there’s “nowhere to go, nothing to do,” (a common phrase from local residents) Ashanti is playing outside with all the other neighborhood kids.

The change in Ashanti is striking. Her speech is clearer. Her confidence has bloomed. The joy of imaginative, creative play in a beautiful, green, safe haven has made her stronger, healthier, more focused, and more aware of the world around her.

Ashanti is just one of more than 3,500 children, ages 0-11, who live within a seven-minute walk of Elm Playlot. Empty of children until Pogo Park went to work there, today the park rings with the sounds of kids playing soccer and chess, speeding down the zip line, building forts, and inventing stories and characters in the play houses of the Global Village. Over in the Chill Zone, kids work on art projects or homework, or just talk with friends and the Pogo Park staff members who watch over and care for this magical children’s play space.

Deep bonds are forming here. The Pogo All-Stars, young teenagers who helped their elders design and build the park, are role models for the younger children. Through play, they are learning to work out differences, work together as a team, and take care of each other. Indeed, for these children, play is serious work, opening up visions of futures they had not imagined.

This is what Pogo Park is all about—igniting the potential of these children and of an entire community.

We call 2014 our game-changing year, because so much of our vision for Pogo Park has come to be. To all who have contributed, we thank you deeply. This report tells more of our story. We hope you will pass it on to your friends and colleagues. And we invite you to come to the park and see for yourself what is happening here, not only for Ashanti - but also for thousands of other children and their families.

Toody Maher
Founder, Executive Director
After seven years of neighborhood mobilization, design, and construction, we’re open for play! Every day, dozens of kids who did not have a safe outdoor haven come to the park to ride the zip line and swings, invent group games, do their homework, or sit quietly and enjoy nature. Moms, dads and caregivers are becoming acquainted with neighbors they have never known. Sometimes, play and community gathering time extends into the evening under the glow of our five magnificent and now beautifully lit sycamore trees. Elm Playlot has become a vibrant hub of community life.

Building on the experience and confidence gained from completing Elm Playlot on time and on budget, Pogo Park’s local resident team designed and built Harbour-8 Park in six months! Supported by a “Rapid Park Activation” grant from the Trust for Public Land, and with help from the city of Richmond and guidance from our friends at Scientific Art Studio, Pogo Park’s team designed and built (by hand) a large sandbox with a water feature, a 300-foot decorative perimeter fence, four benches carved, sanded and stained from re-claimed wood, and a massive spiderweb. Located two blocks from five schools, Harbour-8 Park on the Richmond Greenway, is the second “Pogo Park” in Richmond’s Iron Triangle neighborhood. The park expands our reach into this neighborhood - and has become an instant hit!
In a 2008 summer youth program, a group of teenagers from the Iron Triangle neighborhood were given this task: think of a project that would improve their neighborhood. They came up with a brilliantly simple idea: the Yellow Brick Road.

They envisioned stenciling yellow bricks on sidewalks and roads to create “safe, green, and clean” routes to walk and bike. The Yellow Brick Road would connect key community assets (schools, parks, transportation, shopping etc.) together.

Over two days in October, Pogo Park organized the “Living Preview” – a full-scale, 3-D, mock-up of the proposed Yellow Brick Road street improvements. Pogo Park’s team designed and built mock-ups of the traffic circles, bike lanes, green islands, and bulb-outs that will transform the route between Elm Playlot and Peres School into a walkable, bikeable path. Community members, city staff, firemen and fire engines all walked and drove through the proposed new streetscapes. This innovative process electrified the neighborhood while troubleshooting for any problems in the design.
Of nearly 1,000 Bay Area non-profit organizations that submitted proposals, Pogo Park was selected as 1 of 10 finalists in Google’s 2014 Bay Area Impact Challenge grant. Our Pogo Park team then took the campaign to the streets with mobile voting-sites at Elm Playlot, all over Richmond, and beyond. The publicity surrounding the Challenge included full-page ads in Bay Area newspapers and interviews and public service announcements on local radio stations - all of which introduced our work to a wide audience beyond Richmond. The result: A $250,000 grant from Google and recognition that Pogo Park as one of the Bay Area’s most innovative and impactful nonprofits.
Impact—A Stellar Year for Pogo Park

The year 2014 was a game-changer for Pogo Park, as the people of Richmond experienced the benefits of our work in unprecedented ways.

Iron Triangle Children and Families

The opening of two new Iron Triangle parks in 2014—the redesigned Elm Playlot and new Harbour-8 Park—provided roughly 7,500 local children, youth and their families safe and inviting outdoor spaces to play and experience nature. These two now heavily used parks are filling a desperate need for exercise and for the social and emotional development that play alone affords children. Pogo Park’s staff provides supervised activities including arts and crafts and homework help after school and create a safe and nurturing environment for children’s imaginative play and exploration. The Pogo Park All-Stars program for the second year offered constructive summer work and leadership training for boys and girls (ages 11-14) at a critical stage of their lives.

Public Safety

The opening of Elm Playlot and Harbour-8 Park has changed the neighborhoods surrounding them, which were among the Bay Area’s most dangerous. The presence of Pogo Park staff and local families every day creates a bubble of security in which neighbors look out for each other and discourage illicit activity. Pogo Park works with the Richmond Police and code enforcement officers to clean up the surrounding streets, report violations, and keep lines of communication open. The police are enthusiastic partners in these efforts, which all agree have dramatically reduced violent crime, drug dealing, and vandalism in the surrounding neighborhood.

Health and Well-Being

Pogo Park staff and volunteers, who include many local parents and grandparents, are learning about the principles of healthy child development in workshops with our partners at the Habitot Children’s Museum and other organizations. In addition to the healthful effects of outdoor play and exercise, neighborhood children are benefitting from the drinking fountains at Elm Playlot and from Pogo Park staff’s encouragement to drink water instead of sugar-sweetened drinks. The community kitchen at Elm is also one of the top distribution points for the school district’s free summer meals program in the Iron Triangle neighborhood. (During the summer, we served 5,090 meals to hungry children.)
Economic Development
Over the past five years Pogo Park has employed more than 60 local residents who face serious barriers to employment and directed more than $1 million in wages (paying $17-$20/hour) back into the Iron Triangle neighborhood. Through our partnerships with local businesses like Scientific Art Studio, Lawrence Construction, Big Chief Tree Service, VanDommelen Colorworks, and Laster Landscape, we enable residents to learn valuable skills in construction, design, woodworking, landscape management, and fabrication. Pogo Park received a $40,000 Community Development Block Grant in 2014 from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development to train our local resident staff.

Environment
Pogo Park collaborated with local nonprofit The Watershed Project to build a rain garden of native plants at the 9th Street entrance to the Richmond Greenway so that storm water is cleaned of toxins before it drains into San Francisco Bay. We were instrumental in organizing Richmond’s largest day ever of community service on the Greenway, signing in 624 volunteers to clean up trash and to plant and mulch trees on MLK Day of Service. The beautification of the Greenway at Harbour-8 Park included the completion of its striking murals as part of the city’s Neighborhood Public Art program.

Local, Regional, and National Recognition
Our successes in 2014 won awards and recognition at every level: the national MetLife Community-Police Partnership Award; the Google Bay Area Impact Challenge; selection by the Trust for Public Land as a pilot site for its Rapid Park Activation project; selection by the California Department of Parks and Recreation as a model of community engagement in its forthcoming Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan; recognition and site visits by the boards of the national Rails to Trails Conservancy, The Trust for Public Land, and The California Endowment. Our reputation in the Richmond city government as a local organization that gets things done was firmly cemented this year. Pogo Park was featured in the San Francisco Chronicle, the Huffington Post, KQED public radio, CBS TV and radio, and many other news outlets.

Most important, the people who live in our community, Richmond’s Iron Triangle, stop by every day to say, “Thanks for what you’re doing for the community—keep up the good work!”
**Board of Directors**

**Galen Hoskin, President**, is an investment analyst and senior vice president of Capital World Investors, a division of Capital Research and Management Company, focusing on semiconductor and consumer electronic companies in Asia. He is also a vice president of the New Perspective Fund. Galen received an M.B.A. from Columbia Business School.

**Denise Yamamoto, Chief Financial Officer**, began working in the field of social entrepreneurship soon after receiving her master’s degree in business administration from U.C. Berkeley. Denise was a Farber Fellow and business director at CVE, Inc., a San Francisco nonprofit that provides jobs and job training to people with mental health disabilities. Prior to business school, she worked for six years in San Francisco for Barclays Global Investors, most recently as the international equity portfolio manager in the firm’s Alpha Strategies Group. Currently Denise serves on Bay Area Regional Board for BUILD.

**Toody Maher, Secretary**, is an artist, inventor, and entrepreneur. She graduated from U.C. Berkeley in 1983 and secured the distribution rights to Swatch Watch in the 11 Western states. Afterward, she started another company, Fun Products, which created the world’s first clear telephone with lights (named Fortune Magazine’s Product of the Year in 1990). In 1990, Toody was named Inc. Magazine’s Entrepreneur of the Year.

Later, she became the Business Director at Juma Ventures, a San Francisco nonprofit that provides jobs and job training to youth at risk.

Working on a project at UCLA to translate scientific research into formats that people can actually use to increase overall health and well being in communities, she realized how invaluable well-designed and managed parks could be to children, families, and their communities. This realization led her to found Pogo Park in 2007.

**Gus Newport, Board Member**, is a social justice activist and community/economic development consultant who has worked for several foundations and served on the faculties of M.I.T., Yale University, the University of California Santa Cruz, the University of Massachusetts Boston, and Portland State University. Gus served as the mayor of Berkeley, California from 1979 to 1986. During his tenure, he served on the advisory board of the U.S. Conference of Mayors and chaired its subcommittee on education and employment. In addition, he was the vice president of the U.S. delegation to the World Peace Council. He is currently on the leadership committee of the National Council of Elders, an organization made up of persons over 65 who played major roles in the pivotal movements of the 20th century, including civil rights, women’s rights, environmental rights, farm workers’ rights, and gay and lesbian rights.
Staff

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF
Toody Maher: Founder and Executive Director
Laura Congdon: Chief of Operations
Debbie Polito: Operations Manager
Kirsten Negus: Director of Special Projects, Development
Sundiata Sidibe: Communications Manager

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Karina Guadalupe
Carmen Lee
Tonie Lee
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East Bay Community Foundation
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Donors

Over $10,000
Hoskin Family
Denise Yamamoto and Josh Hannah

Earned Income

City of Richmond
Laster Landscape
The Trust for Public Land
Building Blocks for Kids

Under $10,000
“For so many years we worried about this community, we lamented, we didn’t pay attention, we didn’t empower people. We came in and out, in and out, but we never created stability and growth. Nothing has moved me like being a small part of this project and seeing the growth that has happened in this community. It’s a magnificent gift that this neighborhood gave to itself. Pogo Park is the best investment we’ve made in the neighborhoods in a long, long time. It’s the best thing I have participated in in my 40 years in Congress. It’s just that simple.”

— U.S. Congressman George Miller, 11th District of California

“Pogo Park is the new Richmond—the Richmond that doesn’t wait for someone else to come and do something for us. This is the Richmond that rolls up our sleeves and we do it for ourselves. I’ll look for this to be replicated all over town.”

— Richmond Mayor Tom Butt

“As Pogo Park staff worked on the redesign and renovation of the park, the character of the neighborhood changed significantly. The presence of responsible adults at the park made local parents feel comfortable in bringing their children to the park to play and exercise. Pogo Park staff maintained regular communication with the Richmond Police so that residents could report suspicious activity to park workers, knowing the police would be informed. As a result, the reduction in incidents of violent crime, drug dealing, and vandalism in the immediate neighborhood of Elm Playlot has been dramatic.”

— Richmond Police Chief Chris Magnus

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