

Uniting youth and families with magic

by [Martha Vallejo](#), staff writer

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At the Mo'MAGIC offices in the Fillmore, high school students mingle with each other as they paint and decorate big plastic spheres with bright colors that will adorn the Davies Symphony Hall christmas tree. This is a small activity out of many that Mo'MAGIC organizes to help and unite Western Addition youth and families.

The Fillmore/Western Addition Mobilization of Adolescent Growth In our Communities, or Mo'MAGIC, is a convener institution that coordinates projects and complimentary activities community-wide by getting service providers within organizations like the police department, city agencies, nonprofit and community-based organizations, merchants and community members to bring different services to children, youth and families.

Some services Mo'MAGIC offers include help obtaining public housing, mental health assistance, help with employment or school, advocacy to maintain public safety and a violence prevention program.

Impressed with the results at the Bayview-Hunters Point Mobilization for Adolescent Growth in our Communities program started by Public Defender Jeff Adachi in 2004, Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi brought the program to the Western Addition in November 2006. The area was called "the mo" -- a nickname given to the Fillmore -- and the community picked the name Mo'MAGIC, according to Sheryl Davis, Mo'MAGIC program director.

Through different activities and projects, the organization serves around 1,500 participants between kids, youth and families. Initially, Mo'MAGIC participants were mostly African American, but the

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project grew to also serve about 10-20 percent members of Asian, Latino and Russian backgrounds. Typically, the youth programs focus their resources on adolescents ages five to 18.

"The core is children and youth, but you can't help them without supporting the family," Davis said.

Meetings twice a month help groups identify the issues and challenges in the neighborhood, and develop strategies to address them.

"The area had been resource-thin and neglected by the city. I worked to implement and infuse resources in new programs," Mirkarimi said. Some of the challenges faced were getting Mayor Gavin Newsom's office to redirect resources into new programs, and convincing the community and different organizations to accept a new program and collaborate, he added.

To some, Mo'MAGIC has been a cohesive force in the community, as well as an influential factor in decreasing violence in the Western Addition.

"It has helped to get our groups together and get rid of the destructive kind of competitiveness," Rev. Arnold Townsend, a volunteer since 2006 who counsels youth through different workshops, said. "Our community has changed for the better," he added.

"We are stronger because we work together," said London Breed, executive director of the African American Art and Culture Complex where many of Mo'MAGIC programs and events occur.

Having the organizations working comprehensively to help kids with academic, social and recreational activities through different programs like helping them with homework, artistic activities and sports has made a huge difference, Davis said. "Kids get to know kids from the other side of the street and they don't view each other as enemies," she added.

A variety of events and activities are offered at different facilities. During the summer, centers for literacy and youth development programs work on keeping the young engaged as well as preparing them for jobs.

With respect to the crime reduction during the last years, Townsend said, "I'm convinced Mo'MAGIC has a lot to do with that."



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"2007, 2008, and 2009 have been really good summers," Davis said. "We have seen a huge drop in teen violence and homicides."

To Davis, the collaboration and partnership between the community, the police department and all organizations working together instead of independently, has helped keep the neighborhood safer.

"When you look, a good portion of these crimes were happening in this community," Davis said. "Because it has decreased, the whole numbers in the city has decreased," she said of crime in the Western Addition.

In the future, Davis hopes to implement early childhood programs and create projects to work with preschoolers, as well as projects to work with older kids who get out of high school and need help with getting a job and becoming self-sufficient.

Mirkarimi added that he wants to make sure "our families and our youth are getting the resources they need on their behalf and also teach them how they can stand by themselves."

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