We might not be able to change the world, but WE can change our block. By beginning to focus deeply in a place, we can develop a comprehensive investment place-people-based approach that prioritizes community economic development and sustainable wealth building strategies.

Our Community
Generations of private sector retrenchment and uncoordinated government programs focused on “services” have yielded increasingly diminishing returns for East Oakland. Despite spending millions annually on Social Services, the Oakland Unified School District, and Probation for our community, startling statistics persist in all major social indicators – homicide is the leading cause of death among youth, a third or more of the population live in food insecure households, nearly 50% are overweight or obese, rates of type II diabetes are soaring, and the life expectancy of residents in our census tract is 10 years shorter than that of people living just 1.3 miles away.

Yet, East Oakland has a long, proud history of activism and has served as an incubator of political and social justice movements. The conflating forces of social and economic exclusion, however, have consigned this once thriving “industrial garden” middle-class community into a case study of system failure.

In the 1940’s, Oakland was one of the fastest growing industrial cities on the West Coast. In the decades following World War II, global economic trends and technological advances eliminated domestic industrial /manufacturing jobs creating massive disinvestment and employment losses in industrial-based cities such as Oakland. East Oakland, the seat of much of the city’s industry, was particularly impacted. The transition from a manufacturing-based to a service-based economy and regional planning that incentivized suburban growth and increased racial inequalities, debased the economic foundation of the community.

The mass exodus of national manufacturers resulted in the loss of thousands of high-wage, low-skilled jobs. The onslaught of the crack cocaine epidemic in the 1980’s exacerbated the rapid economic and social decline. Where banks, grocery stores, and restaurants once lined the streets, now liquor stores, check-cashing businesses, and fast food establishments have since taken residence. The ability of residents to lead healthy and productive lives is greatly affected by a lack of access to neighborhood resources, such as financial institutions and healthy food. The resultant inequity accumulates and conspires to diminish the quality of life for community residents.
Despite the entrenched poverty that exists within the community, East Oakland residents spend $338 million outside of East Oakland each year. The lack of local retailers diminishes the community’s ability to support neighborhood jobs and commercial growth, and perpetuates misperceptions about the community’s purchasing power. The consequential disinvestment and consumer leakage preserves poverty through the lack of both economic and social opportunity; blight continues and capital and commercial investment into the community remains close to nonexistent.

**Youth UpRising**

Youth UpRising (YU) is a community transformation organization located in the Castlemont community in East Oakland. YU has been an anchor in the community for seven years. Our model holds personal transformation, systems change, and community economic development as the path to community transformation. We understand that services alone will not move a community out of poverty. Intentional efforts to develop the local economy are necessary to yield significant tangible results.

We see community economic development as a community transformation vehicle, guided by and viewed through social determinants of health and life course frameworks.

We envision a healthy and economically vibrant neighborhood where wealth building rather than service delivery is the focus of public and private dollars. We envision a fundamental shift from spending to investment that ensures individual and collective growth and financial security through quality education, housing, healthy food, community serving assets, and sustainable career opportunities. We envision an equitable community that addresses social determinants of health by ensuring that all residents have access to:

- High achieving schools
- Diverse range of economic opportunities
- Safe public space
- Quality affordable housing
- Developmental child care
- Reliable public transportation
- Healthy food options
- Community-serving financial institutions
- Quality cultural competent health care

**Our Future: Castlemont Gateway Project**

East Oakland has rapidly descended down a spiral of social and economic decline. Yet, we remain mindful of economic cycles of boom and bust and know that new capital will eventually return and flow into our community. In preparation for its return, we plan on nurturing and supporting the powerful agents of change - the people, especially our youth - so they are prepared to
direct this flow of capital to ensure that it benefits them, improves their lives and revitalizes their community without displacing them.

We believe the time is right to launch a coordinated community economic development strategy for our census tract (4097) to address the needs of our community in the upcoming decade. In partnership with the strong leadership of youth, community residents, private partnerships, and key systems, all committed to social equity and place-peopel-based interventions, we envision a healthy and economically robust community where the indigenous residents are the leaders of their community and work together to improve the systems that impact their lives. This will create the conditions necessary to attract and direct new capital investments in the community, which will generate social and economic benefits the current residents.

This summer we are beginning our work to create a healthy and economically robust community that does not displace its residents. This work will consist of four phases:

**Phase I: Community engagement powered by youth**

Our work is guided by the voices of the community. Overall, we envision smart growth powered by the indigenous power of community. In the summer of 2012, we will embark on a large-scale community engagement survey. A group of 20 youth (hired through the federal program Title IV) will collect necessary data to develop community priorities for local economic growth.

We plan on leveraging the best thinking available to design and implement sustainable plans of action that engage and empower the change agents in the neighborhood, its residents, especially its youth. We plan to take advantage of the plethora of esteemed world-renowned centers of learning in the area - UC Berkeley, UC San Francisco, Stanford, etc. In partnership with these entities host an urban planning and community revitalization laboratory sited in the Castlemont community.

The objectives of the community assessment are:

1. To learn from our census tract residents the top priorities for economic development.
2. To engage the community in designing smart growth of the Castlemont community.
3. To start holding house meetings to engage residents in starting conversations around priorities.
4. To start holding community meetings with large group of community residents to engage them starting the problem solution efforts.
5. To utilize photo-voice as a way to engage the community members through photography and video to create grassroots social action.
Phase II: Engaging investors and developing social impact investment strategies

Our economic development plans include the design and development of the Castlemont Gateway, a multi-use development project that will signal the entry to the Castlemont neighborhood, and will signal the readiness of the neighborhood for new capital investments, a rebirth of the MacArthur commercial corridor and a reinvigoration of neighborhood at large.

It will be a pilot effort demonstrating our acquired skills in building the financial and organizational capacities and structures to complete such a critically needed catalyzing project initiated with a robust community engagement strategy. In order to complete such a project, we will need community buy-in as well as capital investments from the private and public sector.

Our road to smart growth includes the following steps to create the conditions necessary to make the neighborhood attractive to new investments:

- Establishing a sense of control—Disorder is both a cause and symptom of disinvestment. Neighborhood blight control and beautification efforts communicate a sense of control, a mitigation of disorder.
- Marketing the neighborhood as a place of opportunity
- Assist potential funders including community lending such as CDFI’s and private equity investors in understanding how to calculate and appropriately value community development outcomes that historically have not been leveraged in this way significant outcomes that can be monetized include savings in health costs and incarceration and probation expense
- Researching and promoting commercial growth opportunities by analyzing the leakage of consumer dollars from the neighborhood and prioritizing attracting enterprises to provide those goods and services in the neighborhood to rebuild the local economy.

Phase III: Bringing the community and the investors together to jointly develop the Castlemont Gateway

In order for smart growth to occur without displacing current residents there needs to be an explicit & exerted effort to include community members at every stage of the planning process. Once we are able to attract investors to the community, we want the community and investors to jointly create a unified vision of East Oakland’s Castlemont neighborhood. This work will:

- Rewrite and retell the narrative of the neighborhood—Changing the narrative is critical to changing conditions. By changing the stories we
tell of ourselves and our place, we change how we see ourselves and our environment, allowing for the creativity needed to envision and take advantage of our opportunities and potentials. Through story a people and a community discovers and recreates themselves and their future.

• Strengthen social connections by finding ways of bringing community residents, in all their diversity, together to claim a stake in the self-determination of and responsibility for their environment, and quality of life

• Help community members & private investors prepare to shape and direct what new investment brings to the community so that it promotes the well-being of residents and their environment first and foremost.

**Phase IV: Implementation of Castlemont Gateway**

We will leverage its position as the anchor institution in the neighborhood to take on the work of community economic development and the rehabilitation of the physical environment using all the financing tools, and complete community input at our disposal.