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“Where there is no vision the people will perish...” Proverbs 29:18

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Working together to refurbish bikes are (L to R) Cycles of Change staffer Isaac Rodriquez; Kashif Asaad, a student at Met West High School; staff member Grey Kolevzon; and summer employee San Saechao

Youth in Summer Jobs Repair Bikes, Harvest Fruit

By [admin](#) on August 31, 2009

By Post Staff
Part 4 of Series

Kashif Asaad, 15, a student at Met West High School in Oakland is enthusiastic about his summer job helping to repair bikes at Cycles of Change, an East Bay youth bicycle program. “I’ve learned the basics – I’d like to keep working here because I like the coworkers and that I can help people with their bikes,” said Kashif, who hopes one day to find a profession that combines his interest in oceanography and working with his hands as a mechanic.

Cycles of Change has partnered this summer with the Urban Youth Harvest program at People United for a Better Oakland (PUEBLO) to provide jobs to 31 young people, ages 14 to 24, utilizing federal stimulus funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and overseen by the Workforce Investment Board (WIB).

The citywide goal of this year’s summer jobs program has been to find work for 1,100 Oakland youth. Thirteen organizations were selected to be part of the program by the WIB, which is composed of local, business, labor, education and community leaders. The Oakland Private Industry Council has administered the program on behalf of the WIB.

As Cycles of Change taught teams of Oakland youth to refurbish discarded bikes and how to run a bicycle business, other teams of young people rode the bikes to sites where they maintained community gardens and harvested excess produce from backyards, with owners permission, delivering the fruit to Oakland's low income seniors, many of whom lack access to healthy produce.

Besides learning bicycle maintenance and repair at Cycles of Change, "We discussed what a community bicycle shop should be like. We visited some shops in the area to see what other people are doing, what is possible," said Isaac Rodriguez, a staff member at Cycles. "They also learn what can be expected in a job, any job. They learn more professional behavior," he said.

Cycles began in 1998 at Roosevelt Middle School in East Oakland – the Roosevelt Village Center, which is a collection of after school programs administered by East Bay Asian Youth Center (EBAYC). "It was like a little community center for bikes. We'd go on camping trips, all-day trips. It started growing, and in 2000 we began opening programs at other schools," said Grey Kolevzon, a member of the staff at Cycles.

Cycles now operates at eight Oakland middle and high schools, mostly in the Fruitvale District and San Antonio area. The group also has a countywide safe routes to school program, an eight-hour orientation that teaches students how use bikes as transportation in their neighborhoods. The group restores bicycles that have been discarded, abandoned or donated by public agencies such as parks, Waste Management and the police department.

Cycles has a shop at the Alameda Point Collaborative and in June opened a new storefront at 2889 International Blvd in Oakland. There are almost no local places where someone in East Oakland can buy a bike, said Kolevzon. "Our bikes are recycled but they will last forever. Our mission to provide young people and low income communities with affordable but sustainable transportation," he said.

While there are a few urban harvesting programs around the country, they are mostly based on volunteer labor. What makes the Urban Youth Harvest program unique is that "young people are earning a paycheck while harvesting from people's backyards and delivering the fruit to low-income seniors, said Rashida Grinage, Director of PUEBLO.

"Most of what is grown on people's trees generally goes to waste," she said. "The young people picked 1,500 pounds of fruit this summer. We had upwardly of 60 to 80 donors." "Not only have we been able to create jobs for youth this summer, we're promoting fitness and teaching the connection between nutrition and health."

Cycles of Change is holding a bicycle sale this Saturday, Aug. 29, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., at 2289 International Blvd. in Oakland. For information, go to www.cyclesofchange.org. For information on PUEBLO and Urban Youth Harvest, go to www.peopleunited.org.