

Seniors Taking *Timely Action* in Alhambra

with

Scripps Kensington Senior Residents

A California WALKS Network Case Study

Introduction

Older adults are vulnerable pedestrians, and have the highest fatality rates nationwide. Street, neighborhood and community design have a huge impact on older adult's walking safety. As the older adult population grows to an unprecedented proportion of our population, transportation, access and mobility are critical concerns to health and quality of life.



Crossing West Valley Blvd.

Photo credit: Michael Fiumefreddo

Background and Need

Alhambra, California with four-lane roads, long distances between destinations and poorly maintained sidewalks and crosswalks, is an example of an urban landscape that was built for cars and not people - especially not older pedestrians. Alhambra ranks the worst in California for senior pedestrian safety with over 17 senior deaths and severe injuries in 2009.¹

Process and Actions

Residents of Scripps Kensington (a senior residential program) were soberly aware of the pedestrian safety and access issues they had at their door step, and they wanted to take action rather than become victims to a car-centered neighborhood and culture. Concerned residents had not yet articulated their pedestrian safety concerns, but they knew that it felt unsafe to be an older pedestrian living along West Valley Boulevard. The first priority action for residents was to ask for help to improve the pedestrian safety in their neighborhood. Residents partnered with California WALKS to provide a workshop on pedestrian safety. The workshop's goal was to empower residents through knowledge, applied group work, and creating an action plan to improve pedestrian safety around Scripps Kensington.

The resident leadership team conducted extensive outreach to residents of Scripps Kensington, neighbors and several nearby retirement communities in Alhambra and Pasadena to ensure there was a robust turnout at the workshop. Media publicity and outreach resulted in news articles in the *Pasadena Star*² on April 30, 2010 and *Around Alhambra*³ May 2010 edition. Prior to the workshop, the resident leadership team took many preparation steps including:

- *Writing a letter to Supervisor Michael Antonovich asking for support.* This letter resulted in a Proclamation sent from Supervisor Antonovich, congratulating the group on their efforts in pedestrian safety.
- *Reaching out to the local Chamber of Commerce asking for their support.* This resulted in the Chamber of Commerce running an advertisement of the upcoming event in their paper and a representative from the Chamber of Commerce attending the workshop.

¹ California Office of Traffic Safety. Collision Rankings. http://www.ots.ca.gov/Media_and_Research/Rankings/default.asp

² Pasadena Star – News. <http://www.pasadenastarnews.com/>

³ Around Alhambra. Alhambra Chamber of Commerce. <http://www.alhambrachamber.org/aroundalh/default.asp>

- *Collecting photo data on existing conditions.* Prior to the workshop, an organizing resident, Mr. Fiumefreddo, assessed walking conditions around the Scripps Kensington and took pictures of known local pedestrian safety concerns. He presented these existing conditions at the beginning of the workshop illustrating many of the issues that the older residents face on a daily basis.

The pre-workshop commitment and work created tangible energy and motivation for residents to *continue* a growing movement. Prior to the workshop and the action plan, the leadership team had already secured political backing, support from the Chamber of Commerce, media allies, and had preliminary data on existing conditions. This pre-workshop work set the stage to articulate group priorities, next steps and actions, and then take action!



*Residents of Scripps Kensington Photo
credit: Rhianna Babka*

Results and Outcomes

With over 35 residents and community members, the workshop resulted in a concrete list of priorities and next steps which led to the ultimate success of ***longer crossing times to cross West Valley Boulevard.***

Two action-oriented next steps for action that led to longer crossing times were:

- *Community collected traffic counts.* After the workshop, community members took to the streets to collect their own traffic, pedestrian and bicycle counts around Scripps Kensington to help advocate for their cause.
- *Advocating at City Council meetings.* Residents presented their data (photos and traffic counts) and self-identified priorities to the next city council meeting to demand safer crossing. This action was the trigger for the increased signal timing to cross West Valley Boulevard.

Six months after the workshop, residents had improved neighborhood pedestrian safety by achieving longer crossing times to cross West Valley Boulevard. The core of the movement was the people power and resident commitment shown by Scripps Kensington senior residents.

Conclusion and Looking Forward

Documenting the existing conditions using photographs and traffic counts was a critical component to the success of this project as it provided the necessary evidence to decision makers to make the desired change. Having longer crossing times is significant to residents of Scripps Kensington because many now feel they can safely walk in their neighborhood. Results also empowered residents by showing them that they have the ability to create meaningful change in their community. This experience has benefited all the individuals involved by educating, engaging and empowering them to make a difference, and has also made a meaningful environmental change for all residents of the neighborhood. A message to other communities looking to take similar action is to “strike while the iron is hot” in order to take advantage of community and resident momentum, energy and civic engagement opportunities.



This case study is part of California WALKS’s effort to share information and best practices from around California. We are highlighting the work of our network members and groups we have worked with to show the depth and breadth of pedestrian safety efforts in the state. Please contact Rhianna Babka (Rhianna@californiawalks.org) for more information or to share a case study from your community.