



# Oral History: Zadia Saunders

Excerpted from:

*Measuring What Matters: Neighborhood Research for Economic and Environmental Health and Justice in Richmond, North Richmond, and San Pablo*



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In partnership with West County Toxics Coalition, Neighborhood House of North Richmond, Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting Community Organization, Historic Triangle Neighborhood Council, Morada de Mujeres del Milenio, North Richmond Shoreline Open Space Alliance, and Richmond Progressive Alliance

With support from The California Wellness Foundation, The San Francisco Foundation, East Bay Community Foundation, The Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation, Y & H Soda Foundation, Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment, California Environmental Protection Agency, Firedoll Foundation, Robert & Patricia Switzer Foundation, and The California Endowment

The full report is available at [http://www.pacinst.org/reports/measuring\\_what\\_matters/](http://www.pacinst.org/reports/measuring_what_matters/)



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# ZADIA SAUNDERS

**I** used to go to the park all the time when I was younger, in elementary school. I really enjoyed playing baseball, just being out there having fun and doing what I liked to do. Just being healthy. When I was out there with my team in the zone, doing a specific activity, I did not think about what was around me. But once the game was over, I would see that there was no water, no place to use the bathroom, it smelled, there were holes in the ground and trash that kids could trip on.

On the field I didn't really think about what surrounded me; I just thought that was how parks were supposed to look like and smell like. But as I got older and saw other neighborhoods I was like, "Oh my gosh; this is what other parks are like; this is where other kids play ball." Then you realize, well I don't want to go to my park anymore.

I always remember our school field trips. When we would go to Marina Bay Park we always had so much fun, but when the field trips were to parks in our neighborhoods, everyone was always depressed; everyone would ask, "Can't we just go back to Marina Bay." But then, of course, in our parks the swing sets are broken and rusted, the basketball courts are a mess of cracked concrete, there are no soccer fields—just an area of dead grass with a lot of holes. Nothing looks safe. Graffiti is all over the play-sets and on all the walls. The sandbox is full of trash and feces is scattered all across.

Today, I don't spend time at parks anymore. There are so many parks across Richmond, more than fifty, but all I see is abandoned and wasted space.



There is so much that could be done with these spaces and so many people that need it. We want to do something about our parks, but who is going to listen to us? To talk about solutions we have to feel that people in charge care. And I don't feel like they think it is important.

Parks are good for our community. They can offer youth a safe space to be physically active, to play ball, hang out with friends. In parks, little kids can use the slides and swings—oh, and swings are so much fun! And if the grass is freshly cut, you breathe in the outside air, you feel healthy. All that brings in a good feeling of "I am here!" It is sad to think that some people have that opportunity and some don't. All I want is a place where I can have a good time, enjoy myself, be healthy and play with friends and family, outside, in my own neighborhood."