

# A PLACE OF HOPE AND DREAMS

## The Oakland Community Learning Center

My personal journey to the learning center began in Sacramento California. I joined the Black Panther Party around April of 1968. I had graduated from Luther Burbank High School and had enrolled in classes at Sacramento City College. My inspiration to join the party came from being downtown when Bobby Seal, Big Man, Emory Douglas and a host of brothers stormed the Capital when Ronald Reagan was Governor demanding our right of self-defense and because of the death of Little Bobby Hutton. I made up my mind to serve the people "body and soul." Shortly after our office was raided on Fathers Day June 15<sup>th</sup> 1969, I was reassigned to the Bay Area, first in Richmond then to the West Oakland Center and subsequently to Central Headquarters on Peralta St. I was Officer of the Day, part of the Lumpen singing group, sold Party newspapers, provided security for Central Committee members, escorted the parents of Huey P. Newton and worked with the Liberation School on Shattuck Ave in Berkeley, which was comprised of party members children. After the party moved Central Headquarters to 82<sup>nd</sup> and East 14<sup>th</sup> We began planning for Bobby Seale's run for Mayor of Oakland. During that same period we acquired the building at 6118 east 14<sup>th</sup> St. The building became the Oakland Community Learning Center. Within those walls the Oakland Community School was born. Because of my educational experiences I was Chosen to "teach " at the Oakland Community School. The range of children was from pre-school to the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. The classes I taught were Science, Music and Performing Arts. Many of my students have gone on to have great careers in life including Kelita Smith who stars as Bernie Mack's wife in his series and has appeared in numerous movies. I am proud and honored to have been a part of many children's lives who attended the Oakland Community School. I had no idea of the impact I would have on so many lives, and the lasting Love and respect many of them have expressed towards me. In 1974 Amar Casey, Huey P. Newton, myself and two bus loads of students from the Oakland Community School traveled to Sacramento California to receive an award for "Educational Excellence". It was an amazing experience watching Democrats and Republicans give the students a standing ovation for setting an educational standard that has not been duplicated since. At the time I didn't have a B.A. Masters, or a PhD. I also was learning and studying to be the best instructor I could be. My favorite class was the Performing Arts. The children presented over 20 Plays and Presentations reflecting their views on education, the community and the world. People from the community, the Bay Area and the world would come to see these performances. The children always performed to a packed house. I was assigned to help raise money for the Oakland Community

School. We put on several radiothons where people would call in and make a pledge to the school. After my classes, I would spend long hours recruiting performers for these events. We had every venue of music represented. Some of the performers included Bobby Hutchison, Pete and Sheila Escavedo, Edwin and Trumain Hawkins and Don Cornelius of Soul Train fame just to name a few of the performers who appreciated and respected the work I and others at the school were engaged in. I want to thank all the parents who put their faith and trust in me by allowing me to help shape the live of their children. I will carry that love in my heart and mind as long as I shall live

Warmest Regards  
James Mott