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Trying to replace fear with trust

Cities • Oak View residents air their concerns in the aftermath of a fatal Huntington Beach police shooting.

By **OLIVIA HAWKINSON**
The Orange County Register

HUNTINGTON BEACH

Community officials Thursday started trying to mend a rift between police and Oak View residents emotionally torn after the May 5 shooting death of 18-year-old Antonio Saldivar.

The city's Human Relations Task Force and the Orange County Human Relations Commission organized an emergency meeting to allow Oak View residents to air their feelings. The group met at St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church.

About 40 residents, task-force members and commissioners met for two hours



ALFONSO CLARKE of the Orange County Human Relations Commission leads a meeting for residents of Huntington Beach's Oak View neighborhood to discuss a recent fatal police shooting • Photo: Leonard Ortiz / The Register

to speak openly for the first time about miscommunication, confusion and fear. Residents said the crucial issue they face is fear of police.

Officials and community service workers pledged to invite an Oak View resident—possibly a teen-ager—to join the city's task force, and they said they'll discuss residents'

fears with police.

"How can we live in a community where we don't trust the police?" Paula Paredes, a friend of Saldivar's family, asked rhetorically. "Not all of us have papers, a 'green card' or whatever.

"There's a lot of people who didn't want to come tonight because they're afraid to

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talk," said Paredes, 32.

Police say Saldivar, also known as Rafael Campos Huertero, ran when officers confronted him about why he had been peering into a truck. An officer said he opened fire when Saldivar aimed a rifle—later identified as a toy gun—at him.

The shooting ignited a week of demonstrations by neighborhood residents and threatened a decade-long effort to improve community-police relations in Oak View, Huntington Beach's poorest neighborhood.

Police and community leaders say they have worked to avoid this rift in the six-block area, which is 85 percent Hispanic and one of the most densely populated neighborhoods in Orange County.

At Thursday evening's 10-

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rum, Oak View youths complained that they are stopped and searched at random, or that officers use excessive force. Police have said they've never seen evidence of widespread abuse by officers, and they believe the bulk of residents still support police.

"We understand there's a need for police and protection," said Oak View resident Alicia Torres. "Most of these abuse cases are not reported.

There's a fear of the police because as a Hispanic living here, there's a fear of being deported. We are not equal."

Meeting organizers urged the residents to work with the city's Human Relations Task Force and to encourage their neighbors to speak out.

"I know the majority of people in Huntington Beach really care about Oak View because they put so much money in for mentorships and other programs," said Max Madrid, director of gang pre-

vention for the nonprofit group Community Service Programs.

"The power you have is to join the task force and other groups," Madrid said. "We can't just leave this meeting and go back to the same old thing."

• Register staff writers Jeff Collins and Valeria Godines contributed to this report.

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