The West Athens community is often described as part of the broader South LA region. Within this region more resources and infrastructure are typically found in communities to the north of the region. West Athens, in the south of the region, is less well served, but does share some regional service providers, capacity and infrastructure. Within West Athens, and in the South LA region overall, community leaders have come together around issues such as child welfare reform and public safety. There are also several active collaboratives working to improve services for pregnant women, financial literacy skills for residents, and resources for families with young children. The South LA region has significant resident participation in these collaborative efforts and developing local leadership is seen as a priority.

Community leadership in the South LA region, which includes West Athens, is described as “dedicated,” “passionate,” “hardworking,” “grassroots,” “invigorated against all odds” and “strength-based.”

**Why West Athens**

According to 2008 California Department of Public Health data, West Athens had a high rate of low-birthweight babies. Compared to LA County, West Athens also has a high percentage of households with children who are headed by a single mother and also of families with children who are living in poverty.

Given the total number of zero-to-five year olds in the community, West Athens has received relatively high levels of funding. These investment comes from both First 5 LA and other organizations who focus on young children. The South LA region, to include West Athens, has a fairly high number of nonprofits serving the population and also a relatively high percentage of child care seats. West Athens also has some open spaces and parks.

**West Athens Ethnicity/Race 2009**

- Hispanic: 1%
- White: 47%
- African American or Black: 49%
- Asian & Pacific Islander: 1%
- Other: 2%

Nielsen Claritas, Inc., 2009

**Key Areas of High-Need**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>W. Athens</th>
<th>L.A. County</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low birthweight rate</td>
<td>2.1 per 1,000</td>
<td>1.1 per 1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA Dept. of Public Health, 2008</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of households with children headed by a single mother</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nielsen Claritas, Inc., 2009</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of families with children in poverty</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nielsen Claritas, Inc., 2009</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The West Athens community includes West Athens, Westmont and part of Hawthorne
Engaging Leadership
“The South LA collaborative brought together people from the schools, parks and recreation, WIC, homeless programs, and the healthcare sector to talk about local issues and develop action plans.”

Community leaders in South LA and the West Athens community can be characterized as committed and are seen to be very active in their communities. These leaders often find out about emerging issues directly through working with residents. The broader South LA region also has a large number of collaboratives and organizing groups that serve the West Athens community. These collaboratives are known to be effective in terms of “bringing people together” as well as creative in their outreach, especially when funding is a limiting factor. The South LA region’s overall declaration to fight for health and human rights has “engaged a lot of people and created a lot of energy.” This is also true of the Empowerment Congress formed by Supervisor Ridley-Thomas which draws on resident leaders to organize around community issues but also includes participation from the local faith-based community, local agencies and local law enforcement.

Engaging Multiple Sectors
Organizations are “really working hard to make strong bridges and strengthen connections.”

Focus group participants shared that the South LA region has developing engagement across multiple sectors, although this is proving to be more challenging for the business sector. The County Supervisor’s office has a focus on school-based health which is seen to be creating positive impacts across South Los Angeles. The Community Development Technologies Center has also been working with local business partners on the issue of broadband inclusion throughout South Los Angeles. Additionally, the Public Private Partnership is working to add mental health services as part of their clinic expansion within South Los Angeles schools.

Infrastructure
“We continue to provide services even on an in-kind basis because, although we are under-resourced, we believe in the community and we believe in the residents.”

The South Los Angeles region, including West Athens, is home to some of the more established and sophisticated nonprofits in Los Angeles County. The faith-based community was described as “an essential core of the community.” WorkSource, OneSource and FamilySource centers were given as examples of places residents routinely go to “find out what’s available in their community, what social things are going on - from getting health insurance to knowing how to get on social security.” Other service providers in the area include the food banks, which often provide information about housing, shelter, immigration rights and health insurance, WIC offices, and legal aid. Parks and recreation were also mentioned during focus groups as being part of the local infrastructure for services.

Investments
“I was impressed that they’re [Safe Schools Initiative partnership] not just working with the school but also convening the residents. It’s pretty ambitious.”

The South LA region has seen various investments made into improving conditions of the community. There is a relatively high amount of investment from First 5 LA, particularly the Partnerships for Families initiative in West Athens, and from other funders serving young children. Within West Athens itself, Washington High School, has received joint funding from the County and Los Angeles Unified School District for the Public Private Partnership Expanded School-based Health Center. In addition, the school has received $8.5 million in federal funding for the Safe Schools Initiative, which will focus primarily on community mental health and probation. According to focus group participants, Washington High School is well placed as it serves as a hub for several nearby elementary and middle schools and has begun outreaching to nonprofits and residents.

*Unless otherwise noted, this profile was informed by community focus groups and interviews.*