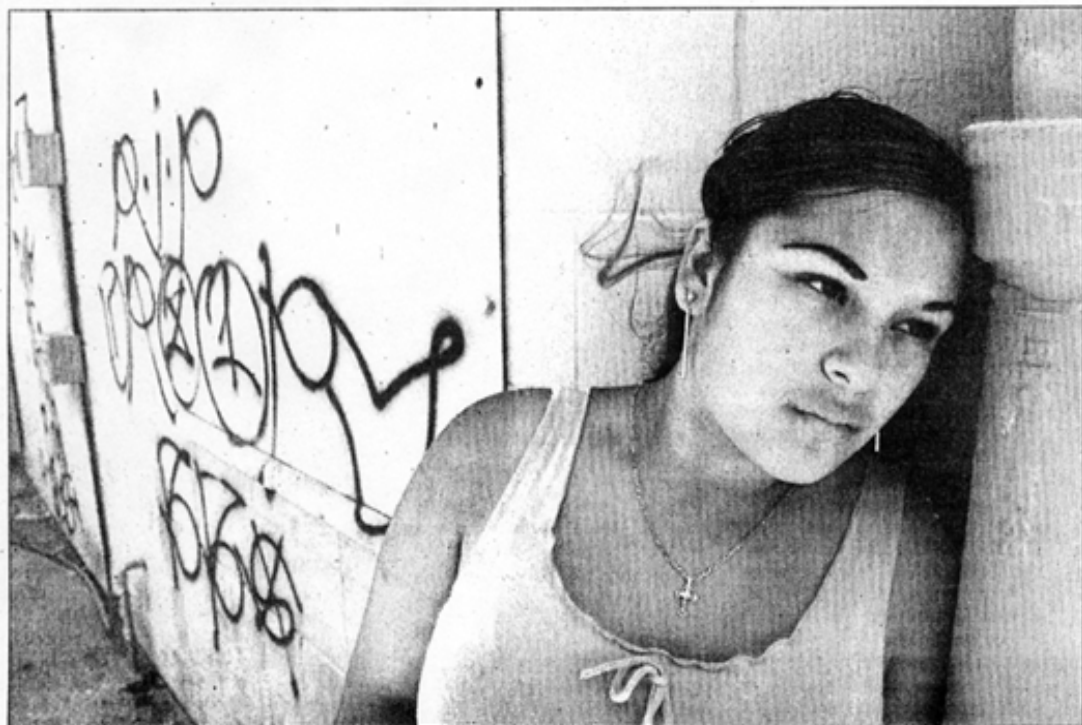


DISEASE

LOOK what we do about drinking and driving. But what do we do about alcohol and handguns?

CALLED MURDER

— Lori Dorfman
co-founder of
Berkeley Media Studies



NICK LAMMERS — Staff

A **GRAFFITI SIGN** saying "RIP Droopy" is on the wall of the East Oakland building where Karina Najera's friend was killed a year ago. Najera, who was shot in both legs, turned her life around with the help of Youth Alive.

Oakland group focuses on cause of rising problem

By William Brand
STAFF WRITER

OAKLAND — Following an argument during a gang party on East Oakland's E Street, a man returned to the warehouse armed with a high-powered hunting rifle and started firing.

Two bullets struck 17-year-old Karina Najera in the legs. To her surprise, they didn't hurt. "My feet were numb. I couldn't feel the bullets," she said.

Her friend, Rene "Droopy" Castillo, 25, was shot in the heart and tried to flee. But he collapsed and died in surgery at Highland Hospital Oakland.

Days later, still in her hospital bed, Najera received a visitor: a counselor for Youth Alive, an Oakland non-profit organization. He offered her a chance at a new life. She took it.



Today, at 18, she works two jobs, is studying for her high school diploma, and has her own place far from her old turf.

"I thought about it for maybe five

months," Najera said. "Then, I'd been kicked out of my house. I needed money to pay bills. I decided I could trust them."

Counselor Veronica Martinez dropped by.

"She helped me get a job with the East Bay Conservation Corps last December, then she helped me get on at United Parcel Service," Najera said.

Youth Alive is one of a handful of groups that approach Oakland street violence from a public-health perspective, treating it like a disease and looking for root causes such as alcohol, drugs, joblessness and hopelessness.

They're the medics of the streets — scratching away at the problems be-

Please see **Crime**, NEWS-7