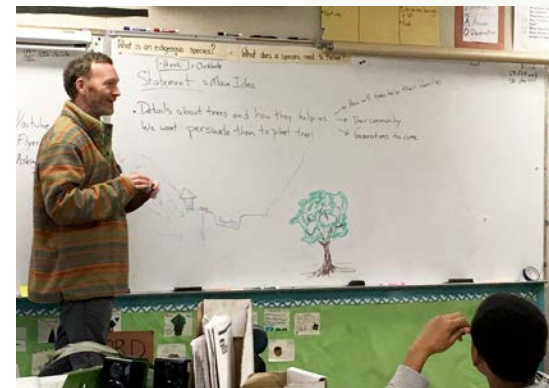




# California Climate Investments in Urban Forestry

CAP AND TRADE DOLLARS AT WORK FOR ENVIRONMENTAL  
JUSTICE AND CALIFORNIA'S URBAN FORESTS



**URBAN FORESTS PLAY A CRITICAL ROLE IN CREATING CLIMATE-RESILIENT COMMUNITIES.** They make neighborhoods cooler, safer, and more beautiful, while also cleaning the air, sequestering carbon and mitigating environmental hazards. Through a grant from CAL FIRE’s Urban and Community Forestry Program, California ReLeaf joined numerous other state and local entities in distributing the first funds allocation from the California Climate Investments Program back in 2015 to underserved areas across California. California ReLeaf’s mission is to empower grassroots efforts and build strategic partnerships that preserve, protect, and enhance California’s urban and community forests. We were proud to partner exclusively with community benefit organizations in disadvantaged communities in Stockton, Oakland, Pomona, Claremont, San Bernardino and Sacramento to support projects that planted trees, created community gardens, provided environmental education and engaged community stewards of the urban forest.

With 95% of Californians living in urban areas, trees and green spaces are needed now more than ever. The areas most in need of trees and greening are often in disadvantaged communities, where low canopy is one indicator of larger environmental justice concerns. Low-income communities and people of color frequently suffer disproportionate effects of environmental problems. In turn, these populations are often on the front lines of environmental hazards, and the health risks they exacerbate or cause. These same communities also have less access to environmental benefits, such as fresh produce and a healthy tree canopy, and are often left out of the decision-making process that affects their communities. The Environmental Justice movement asserts that living in a clean and healthy environment is a basic right all should be afforded.

The California Climate Investments Program intent is to put “Cap-and-Trade dollars to work reducing greenhouse gas emissions, strengthening the economy and improving public health and the environment — particularly in disadvantaged communities.” These are the stories of California ReLeaf grants that did just that. **Across the state, communities made their neighborhoods greener and healthier, engaged and educated school children about the environment, created local nutritional food sources, helped young adults gain workforce skills, brought about healing in the aftermath of gun violence, and reduced greenhouse gas emissions, all using one simple tool: urban trees.**

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# Clean and Green Pomona

POMONA, CALIFORNIA

**Imagine a 4th grader**, anxious to play outside on the jungle gym during a highly-anticipated fifteen minute recess. She's been waiting all morning to expend her excess energy after being confined to the classroom. Unfortunately, it's not easy or fun to play outside. Scorching heat beats down on the metal and plastic play equipment, threatening to burn her skin. Her desire to get some much-needed exercise is diminished, which will likely impact her learning for the rest of the school day. But the heat is not the only thing to blame. Children in Pomona, a city of 150,000 in East LA County, suffer from some of the worst air quality in the state. Pomona's score within CalEnviroScreen 3.0 confirms that the city of Pomona is in the top 10% for worst air quality in California. Rumbling diesel trucks and East LA commuter traffic cause congestion and pollution — not just on the roads — but also in the chests of vulnerable children, often exacerbating asthma because many schools reside in close proximity to at least two major freeways. Luckily, the nonprofit Clean and Green Pomona (CGP) forayed into its first urban forestry effort with a Green Innovations grant to help renew the urban forest by planting shade trees at 10 elementary schools and assisting Pomona City Council to revive a commitment to renewing their tree canopy.

Children in Pomona, a city of 150,000 in East LA County, suffer from some of the worst air quality in the state

Rumbling diesel trucks and East LA commuter traffic cause congestion and pollution — not just on the roads — but also in the chests of vulnerable children, often exacerbating asthma.

The city of Pomona has the lowest percentage of land protected by tree canopy in the Pomona Valley, making it difficult for children and families to find places to play or recreate outdoors. There is little access to shady parks or private lawns; therefore, schoolyards and playgrounds play a major role in physical and the mental health and well-being of children. Clean and Green Pomona partnered with Pomona Unified School District (PUSD) to help mitigate the heat island effect and improve the overall health and educational well-being of children by planting 425 shade trees amongst ten school campuses. These 10 schools represent 34% of PUSD's elementary students, impacting approximately 5,300 students. Each school averaged 34 new trees, increasing shade trees by 517% within the school district overall. Educational outcomes were improved along with air quality through carbon sequestration and a reduction of greenhouse gases.

A significant partner in the work was California State Polytechnic University — Pomona's Lyle Center, an Interdisciplinary Regenerative Studies program. Graduate students developed and piloted new educational materials for 4th-6th grade students using a project-based learning approach to help the children understand the benefits and challenges associated with urban forests in Southern California. Topics included: Urban Heat Island Effect,



Each school averaged 34 new trees, increasing shade trees by 517% within the school district overall.

community participation was lauded as a vital resource in this effort. Over 1,100 volunteer hours were logged, bringing together many community constituents, including: parents, teachers, graduate students, business owners, and city council members. School plantings were coordinated to coincide with Saturday School, where kids planted alongside caring adult volunteers as a way to seed ownership and appreciation about the new trees.

Planting shade trees and teaching children and school district staff to care for trees is important, but receiving institutional support from the City of Pomona is paramount to the success of renewing the urban forest and mitigating the compounding effects of poor air quality in its disadvantaged neighborhoods. Pomona City has witnessed a steep decline

Wildland Fires, Tree Droppings, and Forest Impacts on Urban Runoff. Teachers were trained in the curricula and given tools and strategies to implement in the classroom.

Beyond the environmental and scientific impact of shade-tree planting,

in street and park trees over the past ten years due to the drought and other evaporating resources. Fortunately, four city council members participated in the tree planting days, elevating the concern for reforesting the city and renewing interest in the benefits of a better tree canopy. Clean and Green Pomona was able to provide insight, expertise, and technical training to city council and staff to assist with this renewal effort. They engaged city council to advocate for more funding in the city budget to provide ongoing urban forestry efforts, such as watering and maintenance. Clean and Green Pomona became a consultant on the Pomona City Tree Plan, providing valuable input that will advance urban forest policies at the city level.

Lastly, the project built capacity for Clean and Green Pomona, which was an informal collective of environmental activists. The Green Innovations grant provided the agency the confidence necessary to solidify itself as a 501(c)(3) and take on more partnerships, grants, and projects. ●

# Fathers and Families of San Joaquin County and PUENTES

STOCKTON, CALIFORNIA

**Stockton is a city struggling with excessive violence in the streets**, and lack of access to healthy food and active living. The City’s charter states 15% of the land should be dedicated to parks and green spaces, but less than 6% has been allocated. In past years, the City also declared a moratorium on tree planting on city-owned property, making it difficult to bridge the gap between those two numbers. However, advocating for a better tree canopy and way of life in neighborhoods affected by “The Green Divide” in Stockton is paramount to residents’ overall health and livelihood. Environmental burdens in too many Stockton-based zip codes register in the top 10% on the CalEnviroScreen 3.0. Two nonprofits, PUENTES and Fathers and Families of San Joaquin County secured Green Innovations grants and partnered with landowners to figure out ways to increase Stockton’s tree canopy, improve air quality, and begin healing racial and social injustices.

Father and Families’ program, Healing Roots, offers a sense of social justice as it pertains to violence and the environment. Stockton residents, like Beatriz Barajas who lost her 24 year-old daughter in 2016 to gun violence,

wish to find peace. She was able to plant a beautiful tree in honor of her lost child through Healing Roots, a program of Father and Families. The program focuses on transforming pain from losing loved ones to violence by creating tree memorials and dedications at Brandon Harrison Memorial Garden and sometimes where the violent act occurred. “A lot of the time, people go to the park and there’s always violence or they go to a family’s house and there’s violence, this is a place where we want people to come and feel peace and feel love and honor,” said Raymond Aguilar of Brandon Harrison Memorial Park, who works in the youth and justice department at Fathers and Families.

The garden is also culturally relevant, as it is home to indigenous healing plants and is a place dedicated to holding healing ceremonies, community workshops, and rites of passage events for youth. It’s where Beatriz was able to

*“It’s as if I’m watching her grow again,”  
Beatriz said of her daughter.*



further her healing process by honoring her daughter with a planted tree. Seven other mothers followed suit, beginning the healing process, and together they have vowed to care for the trees and visit them often in the future. “It’s as if I’m watching her grow again,” Beatriz said of her daughter.

When vandals threatened the long-term care of those trees, Fathers and Families empowered a small but mighty transient population to protect them. Along with Beatriz and many others, this population also learned about the environmental and health impact of shade trees and why they deserve extra care and attention.

Another Fathers and Families program, Seeds in Concrete, is an environmental justice and stewardship program that helps the formerly incarcerated and youth gain valuable leadership, interpersonal, and workforce skills to care for themselves, the environment, and their communities through tree planting. This education effort showcases how disadvantaged communities suffer from The Green Divide, fueling citizens to take action and reverse compounding damages to their health and neighborhoods. They hired three full-time environmental justice organizers to assist with creating “a constituency of green thumbs in impacted communities to take back parks and green spaces.”

*Knocking on doors, volunteers educated residents on the importance of shade trees versus fruit trees, engaging them in rebuilding the tree canopy.*

As an advocacy partner, they worked in South Stockton over the course of three weekends with County Supervisor Miguel Villapuda to plant 100 trees. They also partnered with San Joaquin County Recovery House to plant trees to help the healing process for those battling addiction. Knocking on doors, volunteers educated residents on the importance of shade trees versus fruit trees, engaging them in rebuilding the tree canopy. Essentially, through environmental design, Fathers and Families was able to offset crime, recidivism, and addiction by greening these spaces, resulting in higher social capital, workforce and leadership development, and cultivating community pride.

Puente means bridge in Spanish, and through food advocacy and urban farming, Promotores Unidas para la Educacion Tecnologias Sostinibles (PUENTES) builds metaphorical bridges of transformation, turning disadvantaged neighborhoods into sustainable and vibrant places for people to live. PUENTES knew the challenge of planting



trees on city property because of The City of Stockton’s tree planting moratorium. As an innovative solution, PUENTES partnered with the bustling Port of Stockton and Stockton Unified School District to plant 200 trees on their private properties. In addition, PUENTES worked in the disadvantaged community of Bogg’s Tract to establish an urban community farm on five private acres. This effort not only greened the neighborhood, but also increased access to healthy foods (one of the only places to purchase groceries is a nearby liquor store). To promote healthy living, PUENTES also gave away free fruit trees to residents who attended their Arboranza event where they taught residents how to invest personally in improving Stockton’s lack of trees. As a step toward sustainability, PUENTES started a tree nursery at the farm to store trees for future planting, educate residents on urban forestry, create a revenue stream from sales for the organization, and provide valuable training and assistance to residents about caring for trees and plants.

Overall, these two nonprofits worked diligently to find innovative ways to increase urban forests in Stockton while also producing many co-benefits via its focus on addressing racial and social inequities that affect residents. ●

# Sustainable Claremont

CLAREMONT, CALIFORNIA

## In Los Angeles County,

Claremont is known as a “City of Trees and PhDs;” but the urban forest has been affected by an over-mature aging tree canopy, ongoing drought, and city growth. A recent assessment found that approximately two out of every three trees (16,000/24,000)

are threatened by drought, disease, and pests. The most at-risk trees exist in two disadvantaged communities, according to CalEnviroScreen 2.0. These neighborhoods in south Claremont are gridlocked by the busy city of Pomona and Interstate 10 and lack sufficient shade trees to filter dangerous air particles that negatively impact the health of residents. In particular, the unforgiving sun in this desert-like region of Southern California threatens the elderly, children, and pedestrians who suffer in the outdoors. Yet, with help from Sustainable Claremont’s Green Innovations’ grant, two low-income neighborhoods will feel both the short-term and long-term healthy co-benefits of replacing and adding shade trees and mitigating the urban heat island effect.

A major focus of Sustainable Claremont exists within the organization’s name — sustainability. Planting trees is an actionable and accessible sustainability solution for increasing and seeding environmental efforts. Another co-benefit, often overlooked as an outcome of grant-based



The unforgiving sun in this desert-like region of Southern California threatens the elderly, children, and commuters who suffer in the outdoors.

investments, is the sustainability of the organization itself. Sustainable Claremont leveraged their Green Innovations grant to build capacity within their Urban Forestry program, “Green Crew,” to help strengthen the overall foundation and strategic direction of the organization. Originally, Green Crew was an all-volunteer cohort of dedicated citizens who desired to ease Claremont’s environmental burdens via sustainable greening efforts, but they struggled to strategically expand operations because of limited resources. By deepening ongoing partnerships within their Green Innovations grant, Green Crew was able to hire a full-time paid program manager and intern. Now, Sustainable Claremont can better mobilize and support their volunteers, helping them expand their reach within the city and beyond in a more sustainable fashion.

For example, when they first partnered with the City of Claremont, Green Crew piloted one planting day with city council members, city employees, and 17 community volunteers... now this effort has blossomed into a fully fledged and resourced program with nine annual city-sponsored planting days with an average of 90 volunteers giving time and energy to plant much-needed shade trees and educate the populace about the importance and care of them. Claremont City Council Member, Jennifer Stark, remarked, “I have so many good things to say about Green Crew. I have participated in tree plantings with my own teenagers and active octogenarians. Green Crew offers the community the joyful experience of working together to

Green Crew offers the community the joyful experience of working together to create positive lasting outcomes and to learn more about our green infrastructure while improving it.

create positive lasting outcomes and to learn more about our green infrastructure while improving it. They have tapped into a wonderful opportunity inherent in gardening and planting that highlights the value of community service that appeals to volunteers of all ages. I am proud to be part of the Green Crew and so grateful for the positive impact that they have had on the Claremont community.”



Organizing, mobilizing, training, and supporting volunteers is a full time job... especially when you consider that Green Crew’s volunteer base is now 1,589 members strong! Volunteer Christine Broussard said “With all the bad news about climate change, it’s nice to have the opportunity to do some good! Planting trees in the park is concrete action to help the planet and teach my child how to be part of the solution.”

Impact can be quantified and felt with the Green Crew’s initiative “Walk the Streets.” Volunteers spoke with 2,468 residents about the city’s planting plan and offered free trees to residents. Prior to the initiative, residents only adopted 27% of the free trees offered to them. Despite having an educated population, many residents were unaware of the impact of urban forestry and the deteriorating state of trees in a city where signs proudly announce that Claremont is a “City of Trees.” Many residents had never been asked to provide input or feedback about such a plan, but were eager to participate and become involved once they became aware of both the environmental and health rewards of planting

and maintaining shade trees. Due to the popularity and reach of the Walk the Town initiative, residents adopted 76% of trees offered! To better support residents in properly caring for and watering their trees, Green Crew developed an email/text application with computer science students at Harvey Mudd College. Residents are both educated in person upon receiving their tree, and sent reminders to care for their tree at critical times in its growth and maturity based on weather data.

Throughout the Green Innovations’ grant period, Green Crew planted 1,257 shade trees with help from 1,737 volunteers. Because of Sustainable Claremont’s successful impact on the city’s tree canopy, they have become the defacto experts and point people for residents who have concerns regarding the city on Claremont’s community forest. This comes at a time when the City experienced a half million dollar structural deficit and was in great need of support for urban forestry activities.

Sustainable Claremont helped fill the gap, leveraging its expertise and volunteers to better support the city in their renewed commitment to the urban forest and sustainability practices.

Just like trees, nonprofits can grow, too, and expand their reach to help shade other cities from the ongoing effects of a large carbon footprint and climate changes.

Sustainable Claremont is now in talks with the City of Rancho Cucamonga to implement a Green Crew in their city. Just like trees, nonprofits can grow, too, and expand their reach to help shade other cities from the ongoing effects of a large carbon footprint and climate changes. ●

# Growing Together

OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

**It's a concrete jungle in some of Oakland's poorest neighborhoods.** Many schools, homes, and businesses sit in close proximity to freeways. It's hard to breathe, heat wafts off stinky concrete, and water can't return to the ground and recharge. People suffer. The nonprofit, Growing Together, wanted to change the environmental and human impact of choosing concrete over dirt. With its Root to Rise program, they removed over 10,000 square feet of asphalt, creating conditions where trees and people can flourish while

With its Root to Rise program, they removed over 10,000 square feet of asphalt, creating conditions where trees and people can flourish.

reducing pollution, beautifying learning spaces, and educating the next generation on the importance of trees.

Collaborating with Oakland Unified School District, Trust

for Public Land, and over 20 school communities, Growing Together has been a founding leader in Oakland's Living Schoolyard Initiative, which mitigates the environmental burden felt at five public schools flanked by congested Bay Area freeways and traffic. Two schools had absolutely zero green space, but all that changed with an investment from a Green Innovations grant from California ReLeaf. For example, Prescott Elementary is situated by a nearby BART station, a busy transit area for commuters. They engaged the entire school campus to redesign and install two new outdoor learning areas by removing 8,000 pounds of concrete. Students, educators, parents, and volunteers created a new garden-based classroom, planting sixteen fruit and 25 native trees, and installing irrigation to keep them growing. The school district also invested in hiring a garden and nutrition teacher to oversee the new space and its corresponding classes. School staff were also taught how to care for the trees and improve their maintenance and irrigation strategies to support the new growth.

Three other schools also received "urban forests and orchards," and again the school district invested in sustaining these efforts by providing outdoor plumbing, irrigation systems, and full-time garden and nutrition teachers to regularly hold outdoor learning classes. Collaborating closely with school staff, volunteers, and allied CBO's,

Growing Together hosted ecological classes, tree planting education events in Spanish and English, and presented on food justice issues to students and volunteers. They trained over 370 elementary students on urban forestry, and 25 adults in how to support schoolyards, gardens, supplemental environmental education curricula, and site-based stewardship practices. One student, Aurora, reported to her teacher: "I can't wait until my tree gets nice and big so that I can bring my family here and tell them that I did this."

All in all, Growing Together not only reduced greenhouse gases by sequestering carbon, they impacted the overall health of students by increasing access to healthy food, improving outdoor conditions for exercise and play, and offering vital education programs that prioritizes hands-on, project-based learning. Approximately 850 students will benefit annually from Growing Together's efforts. By collaborating in the design phase with Oakland Unified School District, Growing Together strategically ensured that the co-benefits felt by this grant will be sustainable and replicable because they heavily focused on the infrastructure needed to support the Living Schoolyard Initiative. ●

*"I can't wait until my tree gets nice and big so that I can bring my family here and tell them that I did this."*



# Episcopal Impact Fund

OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA



**Most people don't like to share space,** especially in dense urban areas. Neighbors of varying socioeconomic circumstances often squabble with each other-- or simply ignore one another. In a place like Oakland, communities can easily be parceled into the "haves," and the "have-nots." So, how might planting shade trees, creating a community garden, and greening a neighborhood build bridges and foster better cultural understanding between residents? The Episcopal Impact Fund sought to do just that... strengthen fragile social ties between a congregation in Oakland and nearby residents with its "Greening Santiago" project.

One of the many beautiful things about the garden at Santiago is that it rises out of the asphalt to attract all manner of creatures from around the neighborhood.

Santiago Episcopal Church's congregation is largely comprised of immigrants, minorities, and children. They were able to positively impact their disadvantaged community by planting shade and fruit trees and other vibrant vegetation. Ripping up dirty concrete from a dilapidated parking lot, volunteers

were able to transform unsightly blight into a community garden "oasis" which helped transform residents into "real" neighbors. Vicar Liz Munoz, stated, "One of the many beautiful things about the garden at Santiago is that it rises out of the asphalt to attract all manner of creatures from around the neighborhood. The two-legged and no-leggeds, winged creatures and crawly ones, too, come to feast on the beauty and bounty of our garden. It is a salve for our present wounds and a hope for our future that offers restoration and renewal." Beautifying the neighborhood almost always fosters a spirit of pride and renews relationships amongst people.

Garden-based events and classes seeded cross-cultural connections, celebrated diversity, and helped neighbors better "belong" to one another. A Summer Solstice celebration brought together neighbors in celebration instead of in conflict. Children and youth learned how to "grow a pizza" and felt the health benefits of plunging fingers into soil to create something new. A nonprofit partner, Indigenous Permaculture, provided a "Green Environmental Leadership Training" where residents learned about food deserts, sustainability, pathways out of poverty, and cultural well-being.

Garden-based events and classes seeded cross-cultural connections, celebrated diversity, and helped neighbors better "belong" to one another.

Another co-benefit of their work was improving access to healthy food for vulnerable populations while also providing education to the broader community about the importance of urban forestry. In the community garden, residents grew "culturally appropriate produce," and donated any surplus to the Alameda Food Bank, which helped offset the transportation footprint of outside food. As a partner of the food bank, the church was able to connect with Southeast Asian and Latino immigrant populations through bilingual urban forestry classes to better engage residents in the greening effort, turning some into volunteers. Over 300 pieces of bilingual educational materials were disseminated about the importance of caring for a community forest, which assisted in planting shade trees along sidewalks and at Stonehurst elementary school with 4th graders. ●

# Incredible Edible Community Garden

SAN BERNARDINO, CALIFORNIA

**Historic Route 66, especially the two-way highway stretch in Southern California,** harkens back to America's love of family vacations, classic cars, and stopping at roadside attractions to share a picnic and meet fellow Americans. During WWII, Route 66 became the main highway to move military trucks and machines. The military, Veterans, and Route 66 have always been closely associated, so it's only fitting that the world's largest living tree memorial to Veterans in the United States is being planted along Route 66. Often referred to as the "Mother Road of America," Route 66 doesn't formally exist today-- it's

more a memory stitched together by patches of road. Some patches have been beautifully memorialized, while some have "gone the way of the buffalo." However, Incredible Edible Community Garden, a Green Innovations grantee,

At Uplands Memorial Park, some of the shade trees planted have a dog tag cemented into a small plaque, commemorating the service of a soldier.

desires to beautify and unify 400 miles of Route 66 through its mission of strengthening neighborhoods with urban forestry projects.

In particular, this ambitious project aims to plant 3200 shade trees on what has been deemed "Route 66 Veterans' Route Memorial Corridor project." With assistance from a Green Innovations grant, this all-volunteer organization partnered with Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), cities, and small businesses to organize planting days that help memorialize Veterans while also improving environmental conditions. Plantings at VFW Post 8737, Maple Hill Apartments, and along busy road street medians help filter dirty air particles from busy two-way traffic along the old stretch of highway. At Uplands Memorial Park, some of the shade trees planted have a dog tag cemented into a small plaque, commemorating the service of a soldier. The Veteran's name, military branch, and years of service are engraved. A duplicate tag is given to families after the planting.

Angelina Guevara was one volunteer who participated in the planting, memorializing her dad with one of the sponsored trees. "(He) was a WWII Veteran who was wounded in action. He received a Purple Heart... he was born in San Bernardino and also lived on West 5th street (Route 66) in San Bernardino during his early years. He was a lifelong resident. It (is)

*"The action of having the trees planted with a marker inscribed with our names and branch of service gave the service members a strong sense of communal bond, signifying that our individual initiative would grow like a tree and give shade to the generation of tomorrow."*



appropriate for his tree to be planted somewhere near." Incredible Edible Community Garden has been able to monetize these efforts to help provide valuable funding to their organization by asking for \$25 donations for dog-tag memorial plantings. The program is a success and also furthers their mission of providing awareness and education about planting shade trees, helping the environment, and maintaining the tree canopy.

In step with celebrating Americana, the nonprofit coordinated its efforts to engage citizens and turn them into volunteers and tree caregivers at public events such as county fairs, VFW events, Fourth of July celebrations, Earth Day, and other specialized-events-turned-planting-days. For example, Vietnam Vets and families held their own planting day, with many volunteers showing up to provide labor and support. Sergeant Matthew Louie, a Combat Medic in the United States Army Reserve said, "The event gave every Veteran a sense of being part of a collective engaged in a project that promoted well-being. The action of having the trees planted with a marker inscribed with our names and branch of service gave the service members a strong sense of communal bond, signifying that our individual initiative would grow like a tree and give shade to the generation of tomorrow."

All in all, Incredible Edible Community Garden and its army of volunteers planted 338 carbon-sequestration trees in the top 25% of disadvantaged communities in San Bernardino County as identified by the Cal EnviroScreen 3.0. Yet, the actions of Incredible Edible Community Garden has had a domino effect in these disadvantaged communities. The planted shade trees have inspired residents and other local nonprofits to begin seeding the installation of a walking and bike path along parts of historical Route 66. Healthy and active living, civic pride, community and volunteer engagement, and honoring Veterans who fought for freedom are all co-benefits of their Green Innovations work. ●

The actions of Incredible Edible Community Garden has had a domino effect in these disadvantaged communities. The planted shade trees have inspired residents and other local nonprofits to begin seeding the installation of a walking and bike path along parts of historical Route 66.

# Pacific Housing

## SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

**On a recent visit to Nuevo Park in the disadvantaged neighborhood of Del Paso Heights,** north of the bustling capitol in Sacramento, Jesus Munoz, an arborist with the City of Sacramento, shared that we all need to have a big picture mentality to see the value of growing an urban forest. Unfortunately, most do not. Some people steal trees, especially the more “valuable looking” ones, such as ginkgos and crabapples. Jesus went on to speak about how the children in the neighborhood notice the trees more than the adults do. The kids are highly annoyed about the thieves.

*“They are eager to talk to me about the trees, and they don’t like it when someone rips them up.”*

“Since we planted the trees together, they remember me and rush out to say hi and talk about them. They are eager to talk to me about the trees, and they don’t like it when someone rips them up.”

While Sacramento proudly displays its “Sterling Tree City USA” distinction throughout the city and overall ranks as one of the top ten tree canopies in the nation, it is not reflected in Del Paso Heights. Decades of poverty and violence plus

a lack of stable housing, civic infrastructure and amenities, and after-school opportunities make it less desirable for investors and developers to connect to this community. However, one unique housing developer sees the rewards in greening the neighborhood as a way for residents to achieve upward mobility and improve overall community conditions. Pacific Housing served as the backbone for a Green Innovations grant to support the work and impact of the Del Paso Heights Growers’ Alliance, a collective of environmental and food justice nonprofits. By planting shade trees at two local parks and along streets, educating residents about the importance of trees, and investing in a community garden with a youth-based workforce development program, Pacific Housing actively advanced equity for many Del Paso Heights’ residents.

One unique housing developer sees the rewards in greening the neighborhood as a way for residents to achieve upward mobility and improve overall community conditions.



Pacific Housing mobilized youth and children as volunteers throughout the work with help from many partners. Green Tech, a member of the collective, is a nonprofit dedicated to providing vulnerable youth with the necessary and applicable skills to obtain high-wage employment in green industries. They provided stipends to more than 45 youth interns to learn about and work in this urban forestry effort. They collaborated with the Sacramento Tree Foundation to host tree pruning and education clinics. Youth were provided education on basic construction, tool identification, safety, basic urban farming, aquaponics, sustainability, residential weatherization, basic soil science, microbiology, and ecological literacy, furthering their overall job skills. In addition, youth built a business plan for the long-term sustainability of a much needed community garden which is situated in the center of a food desert. Teens were able to sell produce from the garden at the Firehouse Community Center, cementing their business and employment skills while adding much needed cash in their wallets. Lastly, the collective worked to receive funding from Alliance for Strong Families and Community, a nonprofit arm of Aramark food services, to sustain the ongoing needs of the garden.

It’s atypical for a housing developer to see the benefits of doing environmental or social justice work. Traditional development can too often use green infrastructure as a way to “window-dress” the neighborhood for potential buyers. The environmental benefits of greening urban spaces is rarely considered. The good news? The tide is changing. More affordable housing developers are partnering with organizations like California ReLeaf to improve environmental conditions. Pacific Housing’s approach reduced greenhouse gases, but also resulted in many co-benefits such as job creation and workforce development for youth and small business owners. Pacific Housing proves that they have that big picture mentality that Jesus Munoz spoke of, and with collaborative and innovative approaches to urban forestry they can help improve overall neighborhood conditions that seeds future economic prosperity. ●



Pacific Housing’s approach reduced greenhouse gases, but also resulted in many co-benefits such as job creation and workforce development for youth and small business owners.



# Parent Pioneers

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

## Parents are often a forgotten and under-utilized resource in the realm of education...

especially those parents who work full time and struggle to pay the bills. However, “The Future is in Our Hands” is the slogan of the nonprofit, Parent Pioneers, a group of mostly Latina mothers working hard to combat stereotypes while improving health and education outcomes for children in the San Fernando valley. With a focus on STEAM education, Parent Pioneers found an innovative way to make science come alive for elementary students with a grant from California’s Climate Investment funds. Parent Pioneers differed from most of the Social Equity grantees because they focused exclusively on parent buy-in, participation, and training for tree plantings at San Fernando Elementary School, which is located in a disadvantaged community that ranks in the

Parents are a critical element in embedding pro-environmental values into the next generation.

top 10% according to CalEnviroScreen 3.0. Parents are a critical element in embedding pro-environmental values into the next generation of would-be urban forest workers and stewards.

Rosa, a volunteer with Parent Pioneers and professor at California State University- Northridge, became passionate about transforming the school’s abysmal landscape when she saw that there were no shade trees for children in the heart of the campus. Often trees are relegated to the fringes of a school campus where children are not allowed to play. Unfortunately, Rosa and her team ran into a problem when they discovered the high cost of ripping up asphalt and the required soil testing after removal. Eager to solve this challenge, Rosa and parents organized to approach the Los Angeles Unified School District board and the nonprofit TreePeople for help. TreePeople were able to show Parent Pioneers how to affordably remove enough asphalt to encourage shade tree growth and which species of shade trees were able to naturally thrive despite heat reflecting off the hardscape. Their hard work paid off. A dedicated board member was able to find funding for some of the asphalt removal and all the soil testing, which was upwards of \$15,650. Once these elements were completed,



Often trees are relegated to the fringes of a school campus where children are not allowed to play.

the tree planting and student volunteer engagement move forward quickly, transforming the barren and unforgiving playground into an inviting recreation space with large shade trees built right into these places to play.

This determined parent organization also partnered with California State University- Northridge (CSUN) to design and implement an enviro-literacy elementary curriculum that could be delivered in after-school settings.

The Chicana/o Studies department hosted the team and brought in graduate students who were learning to become future teachers. Together, they designed an eight-week program for 3rd graders and their siblings that focused on culturally-relevant children’s literature and theatre as a way to engage youth (and their families) in talking about environmental issues. For example, the team prepared a theatre production of Dr. Seuss’ *The Lorax* to talk about the importance of speaking up for trees. Over 200 students were impacted in the program, learning about pine cones, soil, the importance of watering and maintaining a tree canopy, and conservation. Sixty-six undergraduate students of CSUN engaged in hands-on learning as they prepared to become teachers. Twenty parent leaders were trained and earned academic certificates from CSUN for their efforts. These volunteers provided 5,290 hours of their time to the

Social Equity grant, and it paid off. Pre and post data stated that 100% of parents indicated that their student showed more interest in science after the tree plantings and curricula. Parents also 100% strongly agreed with the phrase “What I learned in the program helped me to feel like I can support my child’s interest in science.”

Lastly, this innovative collaboration of Parent Pioneers is being recognized more broadly than expected. Parent leaders will be featured in an exhibit at the Humanities Action Lab’s international museum about the role of immigrants in addressing environmental issues. This same exhibit will be featured at the Los Angeles Natural History Museum in 2021 and hopefully this will inspire more parents to take the lead on environmental practices and education. ●



TreePeople was able to show Parent Pioneers how to affordably remove enough asphalt to encourage shade tree growth.



# North East Trees

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

**Most low-income housing communities exist to provide stable and affordable housing to residents who live at or below the federal poverty line. HACLA, also known as the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles, oversees fourteen communities where 40% of families (2-4 people) earn less than \$25,000 a year. In HACLA communities, high obesity rates, poor air quality, and inequitable access to parks and outdoor spaces are also a problem. Covering 459 acres, there is little landscaping and few shade trees. Additional stresses make it difficult to plant a large number of shade trees in housing communities. For instance, caring for an urban forest is expensive and funds are diverted to more urgent “priorities” in low-income housing communities. Limited maintenance staff are often overwhelmed by their more traditional tasks of maintaining units. Renters often do not feel empowered to advocate for— or plant— green spaces or trees. Managers of the properties are deterred from planting new trees due to complying with complex regulation laws. Contracted tree trimmers are inappropriately told to excessively trim trees for safety reasons. Local police fear that trees will obstruct safety cameras and lights. Lastly, many low-income residents are left out of environmental conversations because stereotypes and misperceptions taint the landscape. A pervasive misconception exists**

A pervasive misconception exists that embracing environmentalism is expensive and elitist.

that embracing environmentalism is expensive and elitist. This is simply not true. The majority of residents care about the environment and its positive health benefits.

Motivated to address health inequities, North East Trees (NET) stepped in with its Social Equity grant to help bridge this gap, reduce stereotypes, and re-engage a distraught community to better advocate for and embrace shade trees. Since their inception, they’ve planted over 100,000 trees and a part of their “secret sauce” is the art of transforming “at-promise” youth into urban forestry workers who are skilled and employable in green industries. HACLA has a high population of disenfranchised youth (over 30%), and its young people are in danger of dropping out of high school, turning toward gangs to find ways to make money and

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belong, therefore repeating a violent cycle of poverty. Luckily, NET gave HACLA youth a robust training program with hands-on learning, and amplified the powerful voice and skills of young people as “influencers” to gain support from HACLA residents for 250 tree plantings. Approximately 100 people were trained to care about — and for — trees within the 14 communities. NET was able to successfully impact both the short-term and long-term health of 21,500 residents, and the environmental benefits of reducing greenhouse gases and improving air quality that will be felt for decades. ●

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# Industrial District Green

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

**Downtown Los Angeles’ Industrial District (DTLA) has many residents, but none of the infrastructure that is afforded to most neighborhoods. In this amenity-barren section of Los Angeles, mass homelessness reign supreme. This disadvantaged community of LA is home to the famous “Skid Row,” where too many impoverished Californians are experiencing homelessness. In 2018, Los Angeles County estimated that nearly 58,000 unhomed residents were without shelter and on the streets, making it the city with the largest outdoor homeless population in the nation. Approximately 8% of them, 4,640 people, live here and call it “home.” There are no trees. There is no green. Finding shade and shelter from the sun is a joke. These residents suffer from the poorest air quality in California due to the close proximity of rail freight traffic and heavy commercial trucking.**

These residents suffer from the poorest air quality in California due to the close proximity of rail freight traffic and heavy commercial trucking.

The nonprofit, Industrial District Green (IDG), desired to improve these conditions by leading and planting the first urban forest effort in this community. However, it came with contention. The City of Los Angeles requires landowners to provide all care for the new trees three-years post planting. Unfortunately, most commercial landowners did not want to take on this responsibility and were mostly unavailable to even listen to the social and environmental benefits of caring for trees. And the largest commercial owner refused to allow any trees to be planted on his property. But, entrenched in the desire to green the neighborhood, which would help attract a new way of life in the district, IDG turned toward embracing “bottom up” community leaders — small business owners and the homeless — to help get the job done.

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embracing “bottom up” community leaders — small business owners and the homeless — to help get the job done. An important figure in earning the trust



of the homeless population was Bobby Buck, a former Skid Row resident, who managed to get stable housing and become a board member and leader within the nonprofit and surrounding community. With his “Street Tree Team,” Buck and volunteers provided monthly walks with the homeless to inspire them to care for the nascent trees and foliage. This level of hands-on relationship building is one strategy to protect the long-term viability of the trees.

Hands-on relationship building is one strategy to protect the long-term viability of the trees.

Relationship building also proved crucial in getting buy-in from small business owners to abide by the city’s code requirement for tree care. The adjacent arts-district was a supportive partner in helping gain support for tree plantings along sidewalks. IDG’s first public planting was warmly received with 25 volunteers showing up to help re-envision the streets. Providing beauty to the neighborhood has a ripple effect and has been proven as an effective strategy for business owners to feel more pride and deepen their investment in that neighborhood, which in turn helps bring in new funding and leverage opportunities for all residents. Luckily, new business owners in DTLA have embraced this greening effort, working alongside the nonprofit and Bobby and his team to support 100 tree plantings. ●

# Madera Coalition for Community Justice

MADERA, CALIFORNIA

*“I have seen the dangers of pollution. I have family and friends who have asthma. I want to be able to walk in the park and enjoy the fresh air. Without improving the air quality or working on bettering the environment, it won’t be possible.”*



Erika Vasquez, a college freshman and resident of California’s Central Valley, decided in her senior year of high school to pursue a degree in Environmental Sciences after becoming a youth leader with the nonprofit, Madera Coalition for Community Justice. She says, “I have seen the dangers of pollution. I have family and friends who have asthma. I want to be able to walk in the park and enjoy the fresh air. Without improving the air quality or working on bettering the environment, it won’t be possible.” Erika is unlike the typical young person living in Madera County, where nearly 65% of teens eschew any kind of outdoor exercise or activity (according to a recent study by California State University-Fresno). Also consider that one in four newborns in Madera County suffer from asthma. This data coupled with ongoing socio-economic struggles, a depressed economy, and a historic drought have negatively impacted this region. While California’s Central Valley is supposed to be the agricultural “Eden” of flora and food that feeds a nation... it’s suffering from environmental burdens, and young people are growing apathetic to the needs of both the residents and the Earth.

One in four newborns in Madera County suffer from asthma.

While this “Eden” is becoming lost, there are nonprofits fighting to keep it alive. The Madera Coalition for Community Justice (MCCJ) is a grantee making their first foray into urban forestry with a Social Equity grant, combining youth development practices with environmentalism. Focusing on elevating the voices of young people to become involved in tree plantings, MCCJ was successful in turning apathy into passion, as witnessed by Erika’s choice to make the environment a priority in her college career. Eighty-nine volunteers, which included twelve youth paid-interns, volunteered 178 hours to remove 60 dead trees and plant

120 greenhouse gas-reducing ones.

Youth leaders eventually became empowered community trainers and lead awareness and education sessions in the larger community to help create tree stewards. When they planted at schools and parks, these youth

leaders also tailored brochures and disseminated tree-care materials specifically for the neighborhood and in different languages in an effort to be inclusive and relevant. Also, youth brought important environmental justice issues to the forefront at a well attended Earth Day celebration in coordination with the City of Madera and other nonprofit entities. This led a local woman to reach out to MCCJ and ask if they are “going to be able to plant more trees in my community? We could really use more on the streets. Is there anything we can do to help?” Luckily, MCCJ and their teen leaders were able to answer the call and say “yes.”

After a successful implementation of the Social Equity grant, MCCJ began a deeper relationship with the local school district and parks and recreation department. They are already hatching plans to seed a better tree canopy for all in Madera and beyond. ●

Youth leaders eventually became empowered community trainers and lead awareness and education sessions in the larger community to help create tree stewards.



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STORIES WRITTEN BY KATIE MCCLEARY

*Empowering grassroots efforts and building strategic partnerships that preserve, protect and enhance California’s urban and community forests.*

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