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— **SAVING** —

New Markets Tax Credits

*Charter schools, health centers
and a refuge from urban violence*



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Using NMTCs to Combat Urban Violence

A Place of Safety and Healing for California Youth By Mark Fogarty



The RYSE Commons will be a campus designed as an oasis of healing for young people in Richmond, CA.

The urban violence that RYSE Commons is being designed to give its young members refuge from is very real. Some of its early members have not lived to see the Richmond, CA complex completed. There may be memorials or rooms named for some of them in the finished facility, or even a legacy exhibit for all of them, those lost to violence. But there will be thousands of others who will frequent a place of safety and healing that New Markets Tax Credits helped build.

An \$11.5 million financing of NMTC equity, loans, grants and a capital campaign is building a huge expansion of the current RYSE Center in Richmond, a Bay Area community north of Oakland. According to NMTC consultant Equity Building Partners, the money will be used to expand the present building, new construction and creating outdoor spaces.

Opportunity Fund's NMTC program, along with Raza Development Corp. and Community Vision, closed the loan for the project July 1 of this year, with U.S. Bank Community Development Corp. providing \$3.7 million in equity.

Construction began soon after, in September, according to Dan Reilly, innovation director at RYSE Center.

The 6,600 square foot existing structure will be renovated and there will be new construction totaling 11,000 square

feet plus site work on around 20,000 square feet of outdoor space, he says. With the acquisition of another building, the campus eventually will encompass 45,000 square feet. The work will take about 18 months, Reilly says.

Resiliency, Passion and Love

Richmond, a city of 110,000 people, is "seeing a lot of changes" both from gentrification and persistent challenges of violence and trauma and disinvestment, Reilly says. But city youth are "full of resiliency, passion and love for their community," he says. "They need a space to shape the future of the city they see. The young folks see a different side of Richmond."

The Center has a core membership of 700 to 800 unique 13 to 21-year olds, with 5,000 youth in its database, he says. The Commons will expand eligibility to 11 to 24 years old, and Reilly expects membership to double and triple.

Construction is just starting to "go vertical," he says.

The new campus "will expand the scope and depth of our core areas," Reilly says.

Plans also call for a new theater, a larger convening space, expanded media facilities and many other things.

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Voices from the RYSE Center

GREG OLLANO: *"The Black community here in Richmond, the Southeast Asian community – doesn't have a voice. In a sense, we helped create that voice for everyone."*

KRIS MEJIA: *"I was probably around 17. I went to school and then after school I'd come straight over here to organize. We didn't even have furniture in the building. We were organizing on the floor. Little by little every day it just progressed. This is a place where you hear about issues in the community. This is where you get informed. Coming here is an actual way to be involved. I knew the effect it was gonna have on the city was gonna be positive."*

ANGIE GODINEZ: *"Nowhere else did we have a say in how things are set up and how things are gonna be run. I needed that. After school I wasn't allowed to go anywhere else but home. My youth center, Familias Unidas, closed when I was like 16. So the director saw I was really distraught. She heard about RYSE and she said, 'You should be one of the youth that start it.'"*

GEMIKIA HENDERSON: *"When I came into RYSE I didn't really know what I was getting myself into. I didn't know nobody and it was a little uncomfortable. I was placed here; I didn't have a choice. And also in that moment a lot of killings was happening with my generation. My best friend got killed."*

Source: www.rysecenter.org

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Getting Commerce Started

Reilly is also looking to develop the creation of onsite rent-free enterprises by the youth for economic redevelopment as well, as well as longer-term plans like partnering with a credit union for microlending. He thinks there is potential to have a business incubator there as well that will build commercial projects that move out into the community.

According to an annual member survey RYSE does, its young people feel a strong connection to the Center. "They consistently write that RYSE feels like a place that is safe, like home," he says. An overwhelming majority—95 to 97 percent—feel the Center is as safe or safer than any other place in their lives.

"They look at it as an oasis," he says.

A health clinic is also on the drawing board, as members are frequently victims of violent crimes, including gunshot wounds. While a "notable population" of its youth is marginally housed, the Center is not directly involved in housing at this time.

The new Commons has a breathtaking scope. The RYSE Center wants it to include sanctuary and healing space for members, counseling and peer support rooms, an art studio and exhibition space, outdoor free play and learning spaces, hangout spaces, computer labs, media production facilities and an innovation and business center.

And that's just half of the envisioned components. Others are a makerspace and popup shop, study spaces staffed by adults, resources for diversion and re-entry, a teaching kitchen, a garden space, a convening space for youth organizing and a community partner space.

Replacing the Sounds of Gunshots

The RYSE Center has a complicated history, one that takes a full 20 pages to report on its website. It was co-founded by Kimberly Aceves-Iñiguez and Kanwarpal Dhaliwal more than ten years ago and was fed by the visions of the young people of a community described as both glorious and hurting. (They are now executive director and associate director, respectively). More than 95 percent of its members are people of color, and 25 percent identify as LGBTQ.

Key to its core missions of education and justice, career support, youth organizing, media, arts and culture and community health is a needs assessment that was done by youth interviewing 1,500 of the city's youth themselves on how they could feel safe, providing a vision that has helped shape the program ever since. Therapy and case management are a part of the mix as well.

If you have to boil its history and mission down to a couple of sentences, though, maybe these would do:

"We envision a community that inspires youth to live with pride and purpose, where the sounds of gunshots have been replaced by the sounds of organizing, song, collaboration, laughter and learning."

"In everything we do, we work to ensure RYSE remains a consistent sanctuary of safety, compassion and justice for all youth." **TCA**

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