

Community Services Unlimited draws support in South Central L.A.

Making a difference

Community Services Unlimited (CSU) works in the neighborhoods of South Central Los Angeles, where, for decades, social and economic policies have severely limited residents' opportunities to live healthy lives. CSU's mission is to break down systemic inequalities and barriers to thriving, self-reliant communities—including the absence of markets that provide healthy food.

CSU initiated the Village Market Place (VMP) program to operate weekly pop-up produce stands, distribute organic produce from urban mini-farms, and provide meaningful jobs for youth and adults where they live. Two FreshWorks Fund grants are helping CSU to build capacity and extend the reach of the VMP.

A \$10,000 grant allowed CSU to purchase a fleet of 13 bicycles for produce delivery and to develop a branding initiative and marketing materials for its pop-up produce stands (see photos below). An additional \$40,000 is helping CSU to prepare for renovation of the Paul Robeson Community Center, as well as funding architectural design, permits, and planning for urban corridor beautification.

Consistent branding enhances CSU's visibility in the community.



Leveraging the FreshWorks Fund

The ability to use FreshWorks grant funds on branding and design of marketing and promotional materials has had a tremendous impact on CSU's visibility in the community. Grant funding for this type of activity is rare, and it has given CSU a graphic presence that is easily recognized by area residents and community leaders.

The consistent branding increases awareness among community members and others of CSU's work across various sites and platforms, which helps to generate goodwill. CSU has gone from serving 15 families in 2007 to more than 9,000 families who currently access fresh produce through CSU programs, and it is now easier for those families to recognize all the points throughout the community touched by CSU's work.

The increased goodwill for CSU contributes to improved community cohesion and social capital, both of which are documented factors in enabling societies to function more smoothly.



CSU's success in leveraging the FreshWorks grant to attract other resources has allowed the organization to move forward with a bold initiative to renovate the Paul Robeson Center (PRC) in South Central L.A., which they purchased in 2015.

Before the FreshWorks pre-development grant, banks weren't even noticing us with regard to getting a loan. Now, we have a building. We have assets. We have plans and an architectural model. We can be very specific and tell them this is what we need, this is what the PRC is going to look like, these are the jobs it will create, these are the long-term benefit to the community.

– CSU finance director Dyane Pascall

Community impact

Once completed, the PRC will support around 15 new jobs and serve as a business incubator and community focal point for wellness. It will feature a commercial kitchen, education and nutrition classes, exercise classes, a café, a rooftop garden, an outdoor courtyard, and many other opportunities for community members to participate in creating their own wellness.

What's next?

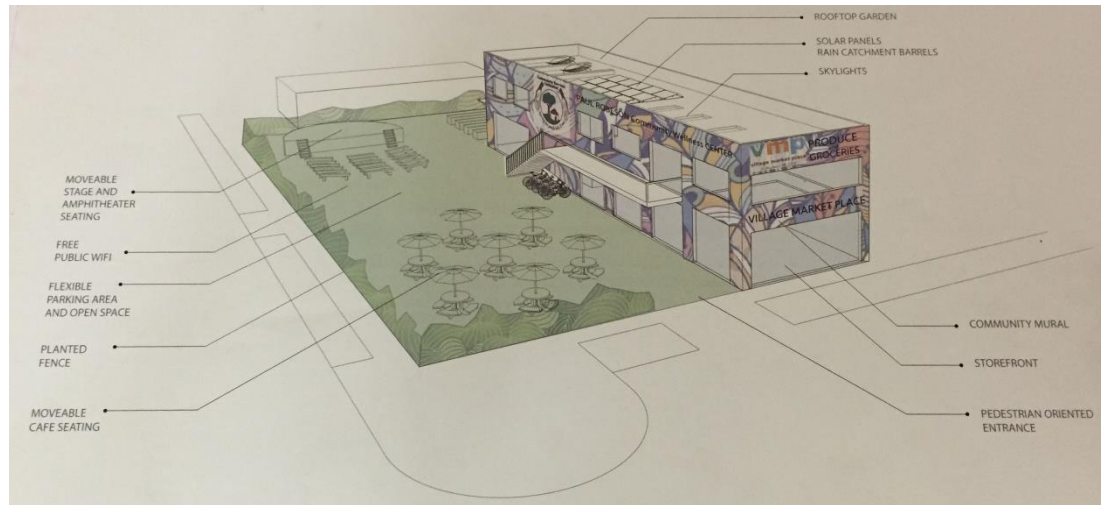
CSU plans to continue expanding the Village Market Place program – adding produce stands, increasing produce bag subscriptions, and opening the permanent marketplace and café that will be housed in the PRC. They plan to break ground in August 2016.

*Transformation under way:
The current and future Paul Robeson Center*



After an expected eight-month renovation, the new Paul Robeson Center should open for business in early summer 2017. Longer-term plans include acquiring other nearby buildings nearby to develop more CSU facilities. CSU will continue to use food access and food knowledge as ways to mobilize and empower the community.

For more information about these programs, please visit csuinc.org



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How is the FreshWorks Fund Small Grants Program having an impact in California?

We surveyed 52 other FreshWorks Fund grantees. Among the 30 who responded, the majority reported sustaining, expanding, or growing their program beyond the grant funding. Of those, 13 were able to leverage their grant to secure additional grants or other financing; three other projects are now financially self-sufficient.

Survey responses suggest that small grants support business development and planning, and have helped scale up projects through marketing, outreach, and purchasing additional equipment or space.

FreshWorks is a public-private partnership loan fund created to bring grocery stores, markets that offer fresh produce, and other innovative forms of healthy food retail and distribution to communities where they are currently lacking.

Relatively small investments from the FreshWorks Fund Small Grants Program enable local social entrepreneurs to innovate, leverage assets, and scale their programs in an effort to increase access to healthy food and to contribute to their community's economic and social health.

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