

Executive Summary

Overview – Once upon a time, in a crowded Los Angeles neighborhood without parks, there lived a lonely little library. Until Parks heroes came to the rescue.

Challenge –The 2016 Los Angeles County Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment rated this community as “Very High Park Need.” The severe lack of park space urgently needed attention as the community was heavily burdened by unsafe conditions and adverse health outcomes: high crime levels; lack of trees; high freeway emissions; high childhood obesity levels; high risk of death from diabetes; and the County’s highest premature mortality rate from cardiovascular disease. Indeed, the idea of a park in this South Los Angeles neighborhood seemed like a fairy tale.

Solution – The Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation (LA County Parks) rose to the challenge by creating a play park on the grounds of the existing Woodcrest Library.

Innovation – As the first-of-its-kind partnership with LA County Library, the foundation of the project was LA County Parks’ inclusive approach to collaboration and community engagement, which included extensive door-to-door canvassing, evening design meetings, school and library outreach, and utilizing the LA Conservation Corps. From that invaluable community feedback, LA County Parks then designed and constructed the innovative, interactive park along the 1,800-square-foot apron around the existing library building. Due to the size constraints, a creative design was critical to maximize the recreational opportunities without impacting – rather, enhancing – the library’s operation. The design and construction of the park involved the following elements: new play structure and play panels; book-themed elements; musical play units for creative development; 1,500 new drought-tolerant plants; multi-generational

space with USB and laptop charging stations; fitness zone with exercise machines; ADA access improvements; cloud-based security cameras (another first for LA County Parks); Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED), a crime prevention philosophy that emphasizes understanding and changing the physical environment in order to reduce crime.

Results – The park provides a vital resource in a very high park need neighborhood, maximizing limited space in a dense, urban environment. LA County Parks transformed an underutilized area into a lively, beautiful space for rest, play, socializing, and learning that allows for continued collaboration and the opportunity to expand recreational and physical activities. Within a 10-minute walk, the park directly impacts over 14,000 people (including 4,000 youth), over a third of whom live below the federal poverty line. Additionally, library patronage has risen significantly while area crime has declined. Sometimes fairy tales do come true.

Replicability - The LA Countywide Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment is designed to identify high park need and inform park projects for years to come. The successful partnership between and funding strategy used by LA County Parks and LA County Library, including the first allocation of Measure A funding from the Los Angeles County Regional Parks and Open Space District, can be replicated for future projects. Additionally, the use of the Los Angeles Conservation Corps' program for local community underserved youth and job training is now considered for all LA County Parks projects.

Project or Program Contact – Dora Nuñez, Special Assistant, Head of Communications
1000 S. Fremont Ave., Unit # 40
Building A-9 West, 3rd Floor
Alhambra, CA 91803
Phone: 626-588-5355
Email: dhnuñez@parks.lacounty.gov

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