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Hayward Area Leaders Unite for Vulnerable Youth

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What takes three years, a caste of thousands, and millions of dollars to launch? Answer: a 30-bed shelter for transitional age youth in Hayward.

“This Q&A sounds like a riddle, but it’s no joke to immigrant youth and teens aging out of the foster care system,” says the Rev. Dr. Arlene K. Nehring, Senior Minister at Eden United Church of Christ in Hayward. “These youth need a roof over their heads and the accompaniment of caring community members to complete their schooling, find gainful employment, and form healthy families,” she added.

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021, the Hayward City Council will consider a request from Covenant House CA to approve a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) which would allow the organization to build modular Transitional Age Youth housing on land leased from the Hayward Unified School District at 27211 Tyrrell Avenue, Hayward. The site is known as SIAC: the Student Information & Assessment Center.

According to several parties involved, if the CUP fails, the project fails, because federal funding identified for the project must be used (or lost) in this fiscal year.

Plans for the shelter grew from a vision articulated by the South Alameda County Unaccompanied Immigrant Youth (UIY) & Children in Migrant Families (CMF) Collaborative. This group composed of 75 school, social service, religious, and elected leaders addresses the needs of 1500+ immigrant youth residing in South Alameda County who have fled civil wars, collapsing economies, and the illegal drug trade.

When asked about the back story, Rev. Nehring explained that she and Aaron Ortiz, La Familia’s CEO, brought the Collaborative’s awareness of UIY housing needs to the Board of Supervisors’ attention at their June 2018 budget hearings. Budget Committee Chair, Supervisor Richard Valle, asked Health Care Services and Social Services leaders to meet with the Collaborative to study the concerns and develop solutions.

At that follow up meeting, agency leaders shared their hope of creating housing solutions for a wide range of youth and agreed that the particular needs of UIYs should be incorporated into the County’s plans.

“Once the County chose the vendor,” Nehring explained, “Collaborative leaders helped Covenant House CA identify the shelter site, and provided introductions to City and HUSD leaders who contributed to the site plan and settled the 10-year ground lease on a portion of the SIAC site.”

In reflecting on the project, Nehring observed, “Given the divisions in our nation today, it’s a blessing to see community leaders come together in support of our vulnerable and promising youth.”