

Stories from the **Community**



This case study is part of a series of stories from residents, business owners, workers, and others who have shaped — or been shaped by — the implementation of the California Transformative Climate Communities grant program (TCC). To learn more about TCC, visit: <https://innovation.luskin.ucla.edu/tcc/>.

Documenting these stories is part of UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation's evaluation of groundbreaking progress in seven TCC communities: Fresno, Ontario, Pomona, Stockton, and the Los Angeles neighborhoods of Northeast San Fernando Valley, South Los Angeles, and Watts.

Rooted in community: Pacoima residents embrace street tree planting

This case study highlights how the TCC-funded street tree project in Pacoima and Sun Valley seeds multiple local benefits. It features two Pacoima residents, David Parks and Reuben Garcia, who learned from the Los Angeles Conservation Corps (LACC) how to care for new trees that LACC job trainees planted near their homes. Mr. Parks and Mr. Garcia also learned about the heat relief and beautification benefits of trees while appreciating that the project provides young adults from the area with meaningful work and job training skills.



LACC Young Adult Corps distributing street and fruit trees to Pacoima/Sun Valley residents. Photo credit: Los Angeles Conservation Corps

DAVID PARKS has lived in Pacoima for over 50 years. When he became an adult, he purchased his first home a couple of blocks away from his childhood home on Glen Oaks Boulevard. He raised his two sons in the community, and his mother still lives nearby. Having his whole family live nearby is exactly why he wanted to stay in Pacoima. Parks worked as a school bus driver for the Los Angeles School District for about 45 years, and he has been enjoying his retirement since 2020.

Before hearing about the tree planting project, Parks first heard of the broader Transformative Climate Communities grant and how its implemented locally by the Green Together Collaborative. Staff from a Green Together partner organization, GRID Alternatives, knocked on his door and told him about a project that could install solar panels on his roof for no cost to him. Parks was eager to install solar

“ I think what convinced me to take on the trees [was] because [the Young Adult Corps] weren't pushy. [They were] willing to explain and answer questions, and all of that helped convince me [and say] 'let's do this.' ”

— **DAVID PARKS**



Newly planted tree in front of Mr. Parks' home in Pacoima.
Photo credit: UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation

panels on his home to save money on utility bills. GRID Alternatives staff also told Parks that another Green Together partner organization, the Los Angeles Conservation Corps (LACC), would be planting over 1,000 street trees in the Pacoima/Sun Valley area.

REUBEN GARCIA has spent his entire life living in Pacoima and is proud of his community. This pride is reflected in his long-time volunteer service. He has served on the Pacoima Neighborhood Council for over 18 years, as president, vice president, treasurer, and, most recently, as the chairperson of the public health and safety committee. Garcia is a champion of improving the environment and well-being of residents in Pacoima.

“ I saw [the Young Adult Corps] at my neighbor's house... the whole time I was watching how well they got along and their social skills with each other... I was like 'wow, that's a really good opportunity for these young adults in our community to learn a different way of life.

– **REUBEN GARCIA**

When Garcia saw youth in uniform and hard helmets on his block, he was curious. They were knocking on neighbors' doors as well as planting and watering trees. Garcia learned later at a Neighborhood Council meeting about the Green Together Collaborative and that the young people were part of the LACC Young Adult Corps. He was struck by their commitment to the trees, coming back to water the trees on a regular basis. Garcia also observed the camaraderie between the trainees and their supervisor as they learned tree planting and stewardship skills while contributing to improving their community.

When members of LACC's Young Adult Corps first came to Parks' home and approached him about tree planting, Parks was skeptical. His hesitation stemmed from a previous experience in which a tree near his house caused concrete damage and he had to pay to address the problem. The Young Adults Corps members explained how the trees that the LACC plants are selected to avoid such damage. They also explained that LACC would provide short-term tree maintenance and teach him how to do long-term tree care. The conversations paid off, giving Parks the confidence to move forward with tree planting and with a commitment to care and water for the trees.

Parks has become a strong champion of the tree planting program ever since his experience with the LACC Young Adult Corps. He is happy with his selection of an avocado tree and looks forward to when the yellow flowers bloom and complement the color of his home.

“ When that shade [cover] does occur, it's going to help me with my water and power bill because I will have shade blocking the sun where I probably won't have to use electricity to power fans and air conditioners.

– **REUBEN GARCIA**

Garcia was supportive of the tree planting and now already sees the results. While before there were no street trees and only a few on private yards, today, the street looks fuller, and almost every house has a tree in front of it. He is looking forward to the day when the trees will grow to their full potential. Additionally, Garcia hopes that with more trees and therefore more shade in the future, his home will stay cooler.

Garcia is also hopeful that the new greenery will bring more peace, tranquility, and beautification to the community. Garcia is eager for the future of Pacoima, of the trees, and the young people helping improve his beloved community.

“ Can you imagine if in 20 and 30 years from now, the [Young Adult Corps] drove by with their kids and said, 'hey your dad... or your mom planted that tree right in front of that house, and we used to come take care of it.'

Wouldn't that be a great story... [to] in the future that they would share with their kids?

– **REUBEN GARCIA**