

## **Brief History of Acosta Plaza, Statement of Why This Project is Important, and Roles of CHISPA, CCA and COPA Provided by CHISPA**

### **Brief history of Acosta Plaza**

The Acosta Plaza Neighborhood (APN) is a 300 unit condominium complex in the heart of Alisal. Built in the 1970's and governed by a homeowners association. Many of these homes were first time home purchases for farm worker residents. This neighborhood is a microcosm of many challenges faced by the Alisal Community. Profound health inequities manifested through decades of underinvestment characterized by gang violence, poor recreational opportunities and overcrowded housing. APN is home to known gangs with first, second and third-generation gang member families.

### **Statement of why this project is important**

There is a generational disinvestment in the human and social capital of residents in Acosta Plaza, East Salinas. This has led to a community plagued by gang violence, poverty, lack of sustainable employment opportunities and filled with "low-performing" schools that are neither developing citizens ready for the workforce nor preparing them for higher education. These problems were identified through multiple group meetings and individual meetings among COPA and CCA leaders living in Acosta Plaza, East Salinas, along with the youth and youth organizers involved in the Acosta Plaza Project.

### **Roles of CHISPA, CCA and COPA**

Community Housing Improvement System and Planning Association, Inc. (CHISPA): CHISPA's Project Manager will provide technical assistance to adult and youth residents of Acosta Plaza regarding the design, fundraising, and construction of a basketball court.

CHISPA, through a grant from The California Endowment, has allocated \$52,000 towards the design and construction of the basketball court at Acosta Plaza. CHISPA will provide approximately \$20,000 worth of construction material for the basketball court. Furthermore, through its relationship with local contractors, CHISPA has received verbal commitments from local contractors to provide discounts in materials and labor valued at about \$15,000.

Through the leadership development efforts of CCA and COPA, CHISPA envisions an improved quality of life and recreational space at Acosta Plaza. One of the models that CHISPA envisions implementing is the mutual self-help model. Since 1991, CHISPA has operated a mutual self-help housing program in which families are organized in groups of 12 – 15 to build each other's homes. CHISPA has successfully built over 600 single-family homes under this model. CHISPA envisions having residents of Acosta Plaza participate in the construction of the basketball court and in some of the improvements of the Sanborn Ranch House.

Center for Community Advocacy (CCA): CCA develops neighborhood resident leadership by enrolling farmworkers and other low-income families in CCA's housing and health programs and then helping those leaders achieve success on specific housing and health projects.

CCA organizers assist farmworkers and other low-income families to form neighborhood committees. Once formed, CCA provides a series of trainings and opportunities to strengthen a committee's capacity for effective advocacy, both internally within the neighborhood and externally before public officials. CCA-trained committees first take action to improve housing and health conditions in their neighborhoods. Next, CCA-trained leaders, and their respective committees, become part of a network of peers that advocate for policies to improve their health and housing conditions. The experience results in neighborhood leaders that remain as leaders for their neighborhoods even after their specific projects end.

CCA has, over the last twenty years, developed a network of neighborhood committees. This infrastructure serves as the base from which CCA will develop leadership for this project. Moreover, this infrastructure is supported by other community-based groups in the area with whom CCA frequently partners, such as COPA and CHISPA.

Communities Organized for Relational Power in Action (COPA): COPA is a non-profit organization consisting of 27 member institutions across Monterey, Santa Cruz, and San Benito Counties. COPA works with teams of people from these member institutions to develop leadership capacity so that residents can work together around positive solutions to community concerns. Since its founding in 2003, COPA has worked on a broad range of issues, including public safety, affordable housing, healthcare access, immigration, education, and economic development.

In Acosta Plaza, COPA has been training youth around a leadership development curriculum. These young people, mostly from Alvarez High School, have put these skills to use through neighborhood cleanups, research around college opportunities, organizing career exploration field trips, and the construction of a basketball court. More critical than the specific projects of the COPA Acosta Plaza Youth Team is the change in narrative that they are developing. Their work is designed to uplift the true human capital in Acosta Plaza, and to paint a positive image of their neighborhood. COPA commits to using its model for youth leadership development and its other assets, to achieve the goals of this project. Together they will be able to change the narrative about Acosta Plaza.