

SACRAMENTO MUTUAL HOUSING ASSOCIATION

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CONTACT: Mark Fleming FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
PHONE: (916) 453-8400 Ext. #22
ALTERNATE: (916) 275-1573

SMHA Youth Development Field Trip

Sandra Ayala, a graduating senior at UC Davis recently presented a class project to her teacher, members of her family and invited guests from the Sacramento Mutual Housing (SMHA) community of River Garden Estates.

Sandra, an American citizen who immigrated with her family from El Salvador, but who grew up in North Hollywood, created an architectural landscaping plan to improve the common grounds and play areas at the River Garden Estates community, a rental housing complex occupied by families who qualify for subsidized, affordable housing and managed by SMHA.

Chai Sae Vang, an immigrant from Thailand, is a community organizer for SMHA. A graduate himself of UC-Davis, Chai's job is to engage residents of SMHA's mutual housing communities in leadership development, community involvement, and youth leadership development.

The day of the class presentation, two teenagers, David Vazquez, 13, and Kevin McDaniels, 14, who live at River Garden met Chai to accompany him to UC-Davis to see Sandra's plan first hand and visit a university campus for the first time.

Sandra made her presentation at the student union. The plan consisted of a series of new play area clusters with play sprays of water for kids to cool off in, some strategically placed boulders, rocks and bench seating for children and adults and some low-maintenance, fast growing trees and shrubs to provide shade over time. Her mother and 10 year old brother beamed proudly as she discussed how she came up with the plan, the many visits she make to the community, photos taken, plans drawn, and research done on the types of improvements that would be appropriate and reasonably priced for the site.

David and Kevin launched into a series of questions and comments directed at Sandra about the plan. No one knew better than they how these changes would benefit the common grounds, since that is where they play after school and on weekends.

After the program, Chai took the youth on a walking tour of the campus and to lunch at a local Vietnamese restaurant. In gardening, seeds must be planted if there is any chance for flowers to grow and bloom. On that day, Chai planted seeds of hope for Kevin and David and seeds of success for Sandra by representing SMHA in showing its appreciation for her efforts on behalf of River Garden Estates.

That's how SMHA transforms communities and the people in them—one youth at a time, one project at a time, one field trip at a time.

[3451 Fifth Avenue Sacramento CA 95817 916. 453.8400](#)