



# Life is Better with Trees

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*Improving the success of our urban forest and building a more engaged, healthy community*

## Background

Los Angeles County is losing its urban forest at a rapid rate, due to combined effects of the drought, new diseases and pests, and natural aging. Maintaining our urban tree canopy has become a County priority to help mitigate the effects of climate change and to preserve valuable habitat and green space in our community. The Department of Public Health (DPH) is collaborating with Department of Public Works, the office of Supervisor Hilda Solis, and community partners on a novel approach for tree planting projects. The goal is to expand the urban forest in disadvantaged communities in the County's unincorporated areas, and to improve the success of our tree planting projects.

## Trees and Public Health

A mature tree canopy is an important safeguard against rising urban temperatures. Trees shade houses and streets and help reduce air conditioning costs. They absorb harmful air pollutants. Street trees provide a physical barrier between cars and pedestrians and absorb noise. Walking along tree lined streets has been shown to improve attention spans in children and reduce stress and mental fatigue in adults. The presence of trees has also been associated with lower crime rates.

### Funding Sources

Tree planting in SD1 is being funded by Prop A, the park bond measure.

Tree education and outreach is funded by the LA County Probation Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act, aimed at reducing risk factors for juvenile crime.

## Community Engagement Model

In unincorporated Los Angeles County, planting a street tree requires resident approval, and residents must agree to water newly planted trees to ensure their survival. Despite the numerous benefits of trees, some residents opt out of planting a street tree in front of their home because of concerns about destructive roots, debris, and water demands. Effective public education is needed to improve resident acceptance of street trees. But grassroots public education and outreach on trees has not traditionally been a part of the County's tree planting program. A new tree planting model was developed to:

1) improve tree acceptance and survival, 2) educate the community on the benefit of trees and improve their long-term maintenance, and 3) improve social outcomes in the communities by engaging at-risk youth (recruited through local community organizations) and providing them job skills, training, and work experience.

*Life is Better with Trees  
ground breaking event  
on February 1, 2017.  
Youth (dark blue shirts)  
observe Corps  
members plant trees.*



## Tree Planting: East LA, Valinda, Bassett, Walnut Park

Supervisor Hilda Solis allocated \$1M from Prop A funds to plant 2,000 street trees in four communities. The San Gabriel Valley Conservation Corps trained a cohort of Corps members to plant the trees. Local youth, recruited by community partners, were trained on the benefits of trees and conducted the public education and outreach. These youth will also do post-planting follow up with residents and help collect evaluation data. Corps members receive job and life skills training, and can complete their GED or required community service hours throughout the project. The program includes structured mentoring in to ensure maximum opportunities for success.

DPH will be evaluating this approach for measurable changes in tree acceptance and survival rates, and also for job placement rates or degree attainment for youth participants, and evidence of community cohesion in the neighborhoods impacted.