The third quarter of Fiscal Year (FY) 2011-12 was very busy with Grand Openings for the Community Development Commission of the County of Los Angeles (CDC). On February 15, 2012, the CDC joined in the celebration for the opening of Canyon Creek, a $22 million affordable housing community in Calabasas built specifically for seniors, 62 years of age or older who are low-income or have been displaced by foreclosure. The CDC provided $2.5 million in Federal Home Investment Partnerships Program (HOME) funds for site acquisition and construction costs to build this new 74-unit affordable housing development that promotes independent living for seniors. With this base funding, the developer was able to leverage approximately $20 million in additional funds to make this project feasible.

Additionally, on March 6, 2012, the CDC joined Jamboree Housing Corporation at the Grand Opening of a multi-generational affordable housing project, Courier Place. The 75-unit affordable housing community, a first of its kind for the City of Claremont and Jamboree, is designed with one-, two-, and three-bedroom units for families, and one-bedroom units for seniors, all of whom earn between 30 and 50% of the area median income. In times of limited resources to build affordable housing, multi-generational developments are more prudent than creating housing for a single population and provide the opportunity for community interaction between the different generations. The project also incorporates green design features, and anticipates receiving a LEED Platinum rating very soon. The CDC contributed $1.975 million from its City of Industry Funds Program, and $775,000 in HOME funding.

Developments like Canyon Creek and Courier Place exemplify the success of the CDC's affordable housing development programs and its desire to participate in non-traditional projects that address specific housing needs. The CDC's goal to increase and preserve the supply of affordable housing for seniors, families, and persons with special needs in Los Angeles County is becoming more challenging due to significant funding reductions for the HOME Program, but the agency is dedicated to persevering and ensuring that Los Angeles County residents have a place to call home.
HACoLA Receives $11 Million Care Grant

On February 6, 2012, the HACoLA received notification of award from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Continuum of Care (CoC) Homeless Assistance Program. HACoLA was awarded $11 million in renewal funding for 17 individual projects. The projects are co-sponsored with 14 partner agencies located throughout Los Angeles County that provide supportive services to homeless individuals and families.

The CoC is comprised of the Shelter Plus Care (S+C) Program, the Supportive Housing Program, and the Single Room Occupancy (SRO) Program, three competitively-awarded programs created to address the problems of homelessness in a comprehensive manner with other federal agencies. CoC grants are awarded competitively by HUD to local programs to meet the needs of homeless clients. The CoC Program provides permanent and transitional housing to homeless persons as well as services including job training, health care, mental health counseling, substance abuse treatment and child care.

HACoLA was awarded funding for the S+C component, a program designed to provide housing and supportive services on a long-term basis for homeless persons with disabilities, primarily those with serious mental illness, chronic problems with alcohol and/or drugs, and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) or related diseases, and their families who are living in places not intended for human habitation (i.e., streets) or in emergency shelters. The program allows for a variety of housing choices, and a range of supportive services funded by other sources, in response to the needs of the hard-to-reach homeless population with disabilities.

HACoLA’s partner agencies are instrumental in providing housing and supportive services for hard-to-house and chronically homeless families and individuals throughout Los Angeles County. These services are essential to providing uninterrupted services to hard-to-house populations during uncertain economic times, and HACoLA is thrilled to be able to continue serving this population.

CDBG Participating Cities Receive Extra Technical Assistance

For more than 37 years, the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program has contributed to projects that support our economy, strengthen public infrastructure, create jobs, and improve the quality of life for millions of low- and moderate-income residents. Serious nationwide cuts to the CDBG program funding have reduced the Los Angeles Urban County allocation by almost 40% over the past 10 years.

In January and February 2012, the CDC began a series of intensive technical assistance (TA) sessions for its participating cities to help them handle the CDBG funding reductions. Faced with the elimination of their administrative authority, more than 18 cities took advantage of the one-on-one TA sessions with expert CDC staff in preparation for the upcoming Fiscal Year (FY), beginning on July 1, 2012.

This targeted TA is one of the many benefits CDBG offers its participating cities. When faced with the difficult financial climate we find ourselves in, the CDC is constantly looking for ways to provide the necessary support our partners need, to help them adjust and manage their programs in these challenging times.

Revitalizing East Los Angeles One Business at a Time

On March 15, 2012, El Gallo Grill, a participant of the CDC’s Community Business Revitalization façade improvement grant program, celebrated its Grand Opening. The scope of work for El Gallo Grill was designed around Spanish architecture that included a new parapet, an all-new wrought iron storefront, entrance canopy, and iron doors, as well as building paint and lighting.

The total cost of the project was approximately $75,000. CDC provided a maximum contribution of $50,250 and the property owner contributed the remaining balance. As part of the grand opening ceremony, Project Manager Susana Oliveros, received a special recognition award from Supervisor Gloria Molina, State Senator Ron Calderon, the East Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and the Maravilla Businesspersons Association for her contributions to the revitalization of the East Los Angeles community.
Something Fishy is Going on at The Growing Experience

In a continual quest to innovate and expand capacity, during the third quarter of FY 2011-12, The Growing Experience (TGE), located at the Carmelitos public housing development, launched an Aquaponics demonstration project, in which tilapia are being raised along with edible aquatic crops. TGE staff built a 750 gallon system based on a prototype developed by an urban farm in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The tank is currently home to approximately 230 pink and black tilapia, though it is sized to accommodate up to 700 fish.

Aquaponics has come into the mainstream recently as a viable way to provide affordable healthy protein for low-income families living in communities without easy access to nutritious food options. Tilapia grows relatively quickly, reaching 1.5 lbs in about 9 months, and breeds readily in captivity.

The system is sustainable because nitrogen waste from the fish is pumped into a planting shelf above the tank that has watercress in a gravel bed. The watercress, in turn, uses the nitrogen as fertilizer to fuel its growth, and releases oxygen purifying the water, which then is pumped back into the fish tank, in a closed loop.

The system also has the potential to become economically self-sustainable. Both the tilapia and watercress can be harvested for nutritious human consumption. TGE has partnered with the Long Beach Aquarium of the Pacific’s Sustainable Seafood Program to collaborate with restaurants who are interested in purchasing and incorporating locally-grown tilapia into their menus. TGE will hold a project fundraiser in mid-May, which will include local chefs participating in a fish fry.

Public Housing Family Self-Sufficiency Program

Last quarter, the Housing Authority of the County of Los Angeles (HACoLA) launched a Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program exclusively for residents living in its public housing developments. Extensive efforts were made to publicize the program such as distributing flyers, brochures, and making presentations at the sites. Property managers also educated residents on the program to motivate those who are actively seeking employment to enroll. As of March 1, 2012, 40 public housing residents voluntarily enrolled in the program, and six have established escrow accounts.

FSS is a five-year voluntary program designed to assist public housing residents achieve economic independence. Angelina Romero, the new FSS Coordinator, pictured at right, provides critical tools, referral services, and counseling to help residents fulfill their self-sufficiency goals. Ms. Romero also helps residents establish a personalized savings plan known as an escrow account. The deposits into their escrow accounts grow proportionately as their earned income increases. Only after successful completion of the FSS program, can residents receive their escrow savings, which are intended to be used as a down payment on their first home!

Interested residents can either fill out an application and turn it in at their designated property management site, or contact Ms. Romero directly at angelina.romero@lacdc.org, to schedule an enrollment appointment or obtain more information.
Investing in Public Housing Youth

Celebrating Reading Literacy!

In February 2012, HACoLA hosted a countywide “Book Buddies Day” for public housing youth to celebrate literacy. The primary focus of the event was to encourage kids to read and have fun while doing so. Over 60 youth participated in the event and received new age-appropriate books. Participants were then given the opportunity to cite an oral presentation on what they enjoyed about the fun-filled day. A ten year-old female participant, summed up the day by saying, “I had so much fun reading the books and learning about different authors.”

The event was sponsored by the Molina Foundation, whose mission is to reduce disparities and access to education and healthcare for underserved populations. The Foundation also provides free books and assists in building libraries in areas identified to have low literacy populations.

Youth Seek Cash for College

On January 21, 2012, public housing youth got a head start in completing college and university financial aid applications. During the annual Cash for College event held at the Maravilla public housing development, 50 youth from housing sites throughout the County, and their parents, were able to seek assistance from student volunteers to complete the Federal Financial Aid application packet, as well as receive information on local colleges. The Cash for College event encourages all public housing youth to strive for higher education through increased knowledge of financial programs available to help low-income families. HACoLA is proud to support its public housing youth in setting goals that will improve their future.

Sharing Stories Through the Lens of a Camera

The Los Angeles County Community Development Foundation (CDF) and Biola University have partnered to bring new resources to Nueva Maravilla Youth in Focus (YIF) students. On February 9, 2012, Biola and ten YIF students met for the first time. After a fun ice breaker, the group split up and YIF students had the opportunity to share their own experiences of growing up in East Los Angeles.

Throughout Spring 2012, photojournalism students will serve as mentors to YIF students sharing their advanced Single Lens Reflex (SLR) cameras and professional digital editing software. The mentors will also teach YIF students basic skills in journalism, including storytelling, caption writing, and organization. With these new skills and tools, YIF and Biola students will collaboratively research, photograph, and describe the East Los Angeles community in a published book.