



**Helping Neighbors Build Strong Communities**

# New name brings identity, ownership for Jackson Ward Youth Peace Pact



Jackson Ward Youth Peace Pact members drum alongside Richmond Peace Education Center staff, Project Director Dr. Ram Bhagat and Virginia LISC Executive Director Candice Streett at the Dec. 2 awards ceremony. Photo credit: Killeen King, Virginia LISC.

What's in a name? For a group of 11 youth peace leaders from Gilpin Court, they would say, "identity." That's why they have been deliberate in changing their name from the Gilpin Court Peace Leaders to the Jackson Ward Youth Peace Pact.

The Jackson Ward Youth Peace Pact, a select group of middle and high school students from Gilpin Court, are participating in a certification program run by Richmond Peace Education Center and funded by Virginia LISC to form youth peace leaders.

"Our purpose in creating this program is to lift youth voices, while also equipping them with the tools they need to realize positive change

in the community," said Adria Scharf, the executive director of RPEC.

In Gilpin Court, where violent crime is high, programs geared towards teenagers are scarce, but the need is abundant.

"While teens in Gilpin Court straddle the fence between dependence and independence, they are forced to face the adult problems of poverty and the resulting trauma of consistent exposure to violence and crime," said Shekinah Mitchell, the neighborhood partnerships manager at Virginia LISC. "These resilient teens play a critical role in building and sustaining the culture and character of their community," said Mitchell.

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# Virginia LISC provides \$8 million in tax credits for grocery store



Pictured above: Rendering of the J. Sargeant Reynolds Culinary School, which is being designed by the same architect that designed VCU's Institute of Contemporary Art.

Opening a grocery store is no small feat, especially in urban centers, where profit margins are thin and the retail footprint doesn't have as big of a reach as it does in the suburbs.

But grocery stores are necessary in urban neighborhoods, especially in ones like Church Hill, which has been categorized as a food desert and has lacked a full-service grocery for decades.

That's why Virginia LISC committed the first investment of \$8 million in New Market Tax Credits to help finance the planned grocery store development going in at the 25<sup>th</sup> St. and Nine Mile Rd.

"This project is vital to the residents in the East End," said Candice Streett, executive director of Virginia LISC. "And it has been a long time coming," she said. "LISC has been working with the city and others for about 10 years to attract a grocery store developer for the East End. The location was deemed risky by major grocery chains, so it was necessary to find the right partners."

Steven A. Markel is willing to take a risk as the developer on the grocery store project because he said he believes there is a great need, as is Norm Gold, a FeedMore executive and former grocer, who will be the grocery store operator.

"I am thrilled to be a part of this project," said Markel, who is also backing the project financially. "Virginia LISC has been involved in this before I have, Candice Streett has been a cheerleader for this project since the beginning," he said.

Virginia LISC is one of many partners financing the project with Markel.

Other partners include: Capital One, City First, Boston Capital and The Community Builders, as well as Markel's personal finances.

"As with any big development, there are a lot of moving parts to the financing," said Schirra Hayes, the Virginia LISC loan officer working on the project. "The collective financing commitments from all of the equity partners will make this long-awaited project a reality," he said.

The grocery store is projected to open in November 2018, bringing 65-70 jobs to the neighborhood.

Besides the full-service grocery store, the project also includes: a health education and wellness center run by Virginia Commonwealth University and VCU Health System; a culinary institute operated by J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College; retail space; restaurant space; and 54 apartments. The entire project will be split into two separate four-story buildings located next to each other at the intersection.

"This project will bring more foot traffic to the business corridor, as well as much needed goods and services," said Streett.

Construction is well underway, and residents are excited.

"The next thing we know is coming to this community is a state of the art grocery store," said long-time Church Hill resident, Mary Thompson. "Some people said that they didn't think it was going to happen, but dreams do come true." she said.

## 2017 by the numbers

### *In Lending*

- **\$8.4 million** in loans committed this year at Virginia LISC
- **471** quality, affordable housing units assisted
- **20,000** commercial square feet supported
- **\$147,500** in capacity building grants to nonprofit development partners

### *In Family Financial Stability*

- **423** clients served by the three Virginia LISC FOCs
- **250** clients (**70%**) receiving two or more of the three service areas of employment, financial and benefits coaching
- **70** job placements by the FOCs in Virginia
- **\$11,143.28** is the average net income change by our FOC clients

### *In Small Business and Corridor Development*

- **\$8 million** in New Market Tax Credits investment in grocery store
- **\$128,000** in grant funding to **7** small businesses—5 in Church Hill (SEED) and 2 in Highland Park (6 BIZ)
- **7** childcare businesses receiving small business coaching and training support through the Advancing the Business of Childcare Initiative

### *In Community Safety*

- **107** teens/young adults involved in community safety efforts in Northside
- **3** crime hot spots addressed in the Northside

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*\*Virginia LISC also appreciates the support of two anonymous donors.*

## Jackson Ward Youth Peace Pact

Jelani Drew, a program coordinator, agreed that the youth getting their certifications in peace leadership will bring a bigger change to the neighborhood. She said she understands why the name of the program is so important to bringing this change.

"I know that folks living in Gilpin do not really refer to themselves as Gilpin Court residents, but rather as living in Jackson Ward," she explained. "So the facilitators asked the youth how they felt about Gilpin Court vs. Jackson Ward, and they all agreed that Jackson Ward is the larger community that they belong to."

Drew continued, saying, "To me, it makes perfect sense to change the name. I hope that the youth find power in the name change as well as the program."

Scharf agreed saying, "It's a powerful statement on the part of the youth that Gilpin Court is part of Jackson Ward, and we are honoring that name change."



Jackson Ward Youth Peace Pact members put on a drum concert at the December phase one recognition ceremony. Photo credit: Killeen King, Virginia LISC.

Virginia LISC and RPEC began the program in the summer of 2017, recruiting teens to participate. Throughout the fall, RPEC met with the youth on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and the phase one recognition ceremony was held on December 2, 2017. Phase two of the program begins Jan. 13, 2018, and they are welcoming newcomers.

In order to be certified as a youth peace leader, the youth must go through 12 hours of training in conflict resolution, meditation, yoga, music and the arts during the Wednesday and Saturday meetups. At the December recognition ceremony, the youth presented the poetry, meditation, yoga and drumming they had been working on throughout the fall.

Scharf also explained the conflict resolution methods that RPEC was teaching the youth.

"There are numerous steps in the conflict resolution process that we teach the teens," she said. "We teach them deep breathing; lengthening time between trigger and response; decision making, which includes analyzing responses; communication and active listening; and affirmation, empathy and respect for self and others."



Jackson Ward Youth Peace Pact members recite poetry they created during the December recognition ceremony. Photo credit: Killeen King, Virginia LISC.

As the program kicks off the second semester, Scharf and the rest of the RPEC staff are excited for what's to come.

"The training and preparation that we are doing with the youth this fall, winter and spring is to reach our ultimate goal to bring change to Gilpin Court in 2018 by having the youth lead projects and programs in the community," said Scharf. "We are teaching these youth to be peace leaders so that they can go out in their community and teach others the same," she said.

Virginia LISC is a proud partner of the Jackson Ward Youth Peace Pact and is eager to see the change that these youth leaders will bring.

"This program improves the health and safety of not only these teens, but it will also impact their neighborhood," said Mitchell.

# Lending Spotlight: New Clay House

Virginia LISC provided financing to Virginia Supportive Housing for the renovation of an affordable housing project in Richmond's Carver neighborhood that serves formerly homeless individuals.



Virginia LISC and Union Bank stepped in to provide a construction loan to the New Clay House development after a previous financier backed out. LISC's portion of the loan totaled \$3 million.

"We had provided a \$1.6 million acquisition loan on this project previously, so we were invested in its completion," said

Schirra Hayes, the Virginia LISC loan officer.

The renovations to New Clay House will include expanding the number of apartments from 47 to 80, increasing the parking from six spaces to 26 spaces, creating a private outdoor courtyard and garden area, and expanding the community room to include a kitchen and pantry. VSH also will add computer and telephone rooms and an on-site laundry facility.

Of the apartment units, 55 will be for formerly homeless individuals and 25 will be reserved for individuals earning 50 percent or less of Area Median Income (about \$25,000 a year).

Virginia LISC is proud to partner with Virginia Supportive Housing on the expansions and renovations to New Clay House.

Wishing our partners a prosperous 2018!



Your friends at Virginia LISC  
*Shekinah, Killeen, Schirra,  
 Candice and Elizabeth*

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