



Eastside Boys & Girls Clubs Merge to Rebrand

However well photographed and chronicled, Los Angeles is a hard place to get to know for city transplants and locals alike. JR Dzubak hails from Venice, but his multiple roles in the Boys & Girls Club movement have afforded him the experience of getting to know the west and east sides of L.A. in a unique way.

Dzubak describes the west side as having more corporate and educational opportunities for youth than the east side. This inequity is the motivating factor in the work he has done as CEO of the Boys & Girls Club of West San Gabriel Valley, including the choice to merge and collaborate with nearby clubs.

“[These parts of L.A.] are so different. The one thing that you see in common is the fact that kids still need education and a special touch of hope that you can provide them at a local club,” says Dzubak.

Although Dzubak’s work base is in San Gabriel Valley, he has a hand in providing club services to about an 18-mile stretch of eastside L.A. — from Baldwin Park to Boyle Heights. Over the past four years, the West San Gabriel Valley club has merged with the East Valley Boys & Girls Club, and opened multiple public housing sites in East L.A.

One of the key components of the clubs’ services is the importance of kids exploring beyond their neighborhoods. Similarly, Dzubak wanted to explore outside his club.

“It just seemed so odd to me that these clubs didn’t work together. I was excited to be part of one of the first clubs in L.A., to [be part of a] merger with this new initiative to partner with one another in different ways,” says Dzubak.

The initiative Dzubak refers to is the Nonprofit Sustainability Initiative (NSI), a funding collaborative that provides grants to help organizations form strategic partnerships to be more sustainable.

“The NSI definitely was a springboard for folks to use the support, and solidify the work that we were already trying to do,” says Dzubak. “We would have been in a collaborative mode regardless, but it probably would have taken a lot longer.”

When Dzubak took the position in West San Gabriel Valley, the club had been operating at a deficit and he knew that a large part of his role would be reorganization. His collaboration with the East Valley club started organically with the implementation of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) classes.

With a one million dollar donation from a funder and a curriculum developed by East Los Angeles College and the Jaime Escalante Math program, Dzubak led the charge to implement STEM classes in 12 Boys & Girls Clubs, including East Valley.

“[The STEM curriculum] became the Girl Scout cookie of the club. It really put the club back on the map. What [a lot of people] don't know is that there is a large percent of immigrants that come through the club that are undocumented. It could be a safe haven for the community,” says Dzubak.

After the success of the STEM curriculum, leadership from the West San Gabriel Valley and East Valley clubs decided to dedicate 18 months of hard work to explore and ultimately implement a merger.

“The merger showed our investors and our donors, who have been involved in the club for many years that we are forward thinking, innovative, creative and thinking about the best interest of the kids,” says Dzubak.

The results are seen in the growth of their budget, which allows them to reach more youth, and in the reinvigoration of the staff and board. After the merger, there was an uptick of 1,520 kids served through club services. There is also a diversity in thinking among the staff and board with the two blended organizations.

Dzubak is ready and excited to blend another local organization into the mix. The club is exploring the possibility of another merger with another Club in the hopes of continuing to meet the needs of local communities.

With his past experience in merging, Dzubak's advice for others who are thinking about exploring a merger, is to remain open to possibilities even if that means a merger might not be the right fit in the end.

“The board doesn't want something to fail. But failure is an opportunity for success. You only learn from your mistakes. If you have that mentality going into it, you are going to win,” says Dzubak.