

Student Group 100 Citizens Hopes to Expand Statewide

<http://csunshinetoday.csun.edu/health-and-fitness/student-group-100-citizens-hopes-to-expand-statewide/>

100 Citizens has a simple but noble goal: to help the community through positive outreach and programs. Members already have made their mark on the San Fernando Valley, and now they're hoping the organization can impact communities across California.

The program was started in 2010 by California State University, Northridge professor Steven Loy. The program soon became two separate but related entities — a club and an organization. The club focused on personal development and networking for kinesiology students, while the organization focused on helping improve the health of the community.

The first project the organization took on was improving the conditions of San Fernando Recreation Park, which had become run down and riddled with gang-related activities. 100 Citizens resolved to help by volunteering their time to inform people about the importance of maintaining health through various exercise programs and personal health education. What started with 10 participants grew dramatically, and today, the park is rejuvenated, with more than 100 participants coming to the park each week, new programs such as Zumba and body sculpting, new roads leading into the park and even a new pool facility. Developers have also gained approval for construction of new apartment complexes close to the park.

As Loy explains, it is even better to see how big of an impact the organization has had on CSUN students,

“What is most rewarding is to see the growth in numbers of students involved and observing the self-empowerment and the personal and professional development occurring while simultaneously seeing the health benefits derived grow from that early group of 20 individuals to over 10 times that number”

With the success of the San Fernando Recreation Park project, volunteers knew they had tapped into a sense of community that could bring real change. They began expanding to other areas such as South Los Angeles, where they found that dealing with community issues such as crime and lack of resources often caused residents to neglect their health — a different situation from that of San Fernando. So they got to work, doing body-weight exercises with local residents and playing music to attract families' attention. This meant a lot more attention was focused on the park, causing a cultural shift from gang members to families.

The student members of 100 Citizens have exhausted every resource to promote their program — from producing flyers for local businesses to hand to their customers, to contacting parks to offer their services. The students know they are making a positive change in the community, and they belong to an organization they truly believe in. But there is only so much these students from CSUN can do to increase their reach beyond the Los Angeles region.

Recently, students from the 100 Citizens applied for the Clinton Global Initiative, in hopes of being recognized as a program “helping to change the world.” Each year, the initiative receives thousands of applications from schools across the country and proposes plans on a number of different subjects. 100 Citizens proposed expanding the group’s work to the 20 other CSU’s with kinesiology programs by November 2016. It was the only CSUN organization — and the only health-and-fitness program — recognized by the Clinton Global Initiative.

Now, the organization aims to raise \$140,000 to help grow their program to reach other campuses. The money will be invested in each CSU equally, with \$7,000 for each campus covering airfare, lodging, food and equipment for kinesiology students to use at the other campus’ local parks. Fundraising is essential to the program’s expansion, said 100 Citizens member Steven Mendoza.

“Innovation can’t just stay here at CSUN,” said Mendoza, a graduate student in Kinesiology with an emphasis in exercise physiology. “Innovation has to go out through the community. Innovation has to thrive through businesses, through schools, through public sectors. In order for us to thrive, we need the community helping us. We are the community, and we are here to help everyone out.”

In addition to the Clinton Global Initiative, the Los Angeles Cleantech Incubator or LACI@CSUN has taken note of the program, helping turn the organization into a nonprofit in order to expand its outreach and presence across the country.

For families, this is an opportunity for parents to improve their health. 100 Citizens wants to offer people the opportunity to be fit and live longer, healthier lives — from being able to easily climb stairs to running around and playing with their children.

For businesses, this is a chance for real investment. The organization has helped improve the community’s general fitness — as well as the economic landscape. Areas that had seen gang members loitering in parks are now open to everyone, helping more people feel safe outside their homes and encouraging residents to explore the area with their families.

100 Citizens already has proven that it has a large influence and impact in the community, and now community members are being encouraged to become a part of that impact. By visiting the organization’s fundraising page and making a donation, people could become the catalysts that help transform a park into a thriving hub for communities statewide. For more information about how to help, [click here](#).