

# HOSPITALS AGAINST VIOLENCE



## CASE STUDY

# TENDERLOIN HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PARTNERSHIP

San Francisco



826 Valencia Tenderloin Center sits on the corner of Golden Gate Avenue and Leavenworth Street in the heart of the Tenderloin.

## 826 Valencia Tenderloin Center helps students to find their voices

By Bob Kehoe

### Overview

With their mission to improve health and safety in San Francisco's Tenderloin neighborhood, the Saint Francis Foundation and the Tenderloin Health Improvement Partnership and community groups didn't take long in early 2014 to identify one large impediment to their goals. The Big Boy Market at the corner of Golden Gate Avenue and Leavenworth Street was a continual source of trouble.

"Big Boy was a notorious negative actor, described by some as the 'hub of the open-air drug trade' in the Tenderloin," says Jennifer Kiss, vice president of programs at the Saint Francis Foundation and TLHIP director.

Sustained pressure from a multi-sector group of community stakeholders including the foundation and TLHIP to end the activities within and outside Big Boy took shape and by September 2014, the collective efforts paid off. The Big Boy Market closed.

In the ensuing six months, says Kiss, community partners worked with the city to identify a use for the space that was positive and neighborhood-serving. Enter 826 Valencia, a whimsical nonprofit writing and tutoring organization that started in San Francisco's Mission neighborhood.

Community groups and TLHIP worked together to figure out how to support the program's expansion into the Tenderloin. Fifteen months later, the 826 Valencia Tenderloin Center opened. The center inspires and transforms students' relationships to writing.



Kids and youth are paired with adult tutors for one-on-one engagement and support, in addition to participating in workshops and programs at 826 Valencia.

“Our programs serve underresourced students from all over San Francisco, many of whom approach writing with fear and trepidation. Through one-on-one support from our volunteer tutors and our creative, project-based approach, we see our students make great leaps in their writing skills, confidence and pride,” says Allyson Halpern, director of advancement at 826 Valencia.

Serving 6- to 18-year-old students, 826 Valencia provides programs such as podcast production classes for middle and high school students; personal statement writing support for high school seniors; in-school tutoring at public schools, including neighboring Bessie Carmichael Elementary School; and a daily after-school writing and homework help service in collaboration with neighborhood groups like the Boys & Girls Clubs

of San Francisco, the Cross Cultural Family Center, the De Marillac Academy and others.

Kiss says the Saint Francis Foundation invested in the program to address the stressors affecting children in the Tenderloin, one of San Francisco's highest crime areas.

“Children growing up in this neighborhood experience persistent and traumatic stress disorders from exposure to a myriad of social and environmental challenges on a daily basis,” Kiss says. “We know that adverse childhood experiences are negative drivers of long-term mental and physical health. In keeping with our commitment to upstream interventions at the ‘tip of the spear,’ we support initiatives that [positively] impact the drivers of the chronic conditions that end up in our emergency room and psychiatric unit.”

## Impact

826 Valencia's podcast program, offered through school field trips and in collaboration with the nonprofit American Conservatory Theater, or A.C.T., provides an opportunity for children and teens to use the podcast medium to process their experiences and express themselves. Last year, more than 1,600 students participated in the program, recording individual podcasts that generated more than 18,000 listens on SoundCloud, an online audio distribution platform that hosts the podcasts. Last month, with the help of neighborhood corporate partner Dolby Laboratories, the Tenderloin Center installed outdoor speakers that broadcast student podcasts out onto the street — literally amplifying student voices for the neighborhood and passers-by.

Tenderloin center staff, volunteers and A.C.T. teaching artists instruct students about such important features in a podcast as writing the story lead, conversational tone, compelling reflection and showing the importance of their ideas.

Halpern says the positive changes are clearly evident in students who go through the podcast and writing programs.

“By working one-on-one with volunteer tutors, our students build community and feel supported by the caring adults who are there for them each week.





826 Valencia partners with American Contemporary Theatre (ACT) to lead a podcasting program for children and youth to write and tell their stories and publish them on SoundCloud.

Through engaging with a variety of authentic, imaginative writing prompts, we see students who began the year as reluctant writers become more enthusiastic and willing to try new things in their writing, building their skills along the way,” Halpern says.

Precious Listana, a TLHIP intern and junior at the University of California at Berkeley who grew up in the Tenderloin, is a strong believer in how programs offered through 826 Valencia can help to change students’ perceptions of themselves and their capabilities.

“Most of us see education as our means to achieving our dreams. But, because we live in a low-income community with limited opportunities, people believe that our dreams are close to impossible. That doubt has a ripple effect in the Tenderloin. Children who grow up here start to believe that their dreams are too big and too difficult to achieve,” Listana says.

826 Valencia will continue to help students overcome such feelings and hopes to expand its programming in the future as it builds its capacity and relationships in the neighborhood. Halpern adds that the support from the Saint Francis Foundation and TLHIP has been critical to the program’s current success.

“From the beginning, they have been great cheerleaders and have been instrumental partners not just

in funding, but in helping us orient, provide advice, make introductions to community members, partners and opinion leaders, and they have provided guidance,” Halpern says. “We consider ourselves to be very fortunate to have a unique partnership of this kind.”

## Lessons learned

The Saint Francis Foundation/TLHIP experience of working across the community to reshape what had been a source of concern at this location demonstrates the power of consensus building. Sustained meetings with block-level stakeholders like the Golden Gate Safety Group built trust and respect over time.

“Clearly defining the issue at hand was key in creating a pathway forward toward potential solutions,” says Will Douglas, manager of community impact, Saint Francis Foundation/TLHIP. “The block organizing work of the Golden Gate Safety Group created the conditions that enabled and supported civic action to put pressure on the Big Boy Market. Once the Big Boy Market vacated the space, the Golden Gate Safety Group also was key in getting 826 Valencia to step into the space and feel welcomed and supported.”

A side benefit: Neighborhood stakeholders have agreed to take responsibility for their respective



826 Valencia programs touched 7,000 San Francisco kids in 2017 through their two tutoring centers and in-school programs.

building storefronts and what happens on the sidewalk in front of their businesses.

Douglas offers this advice to other health care organizations that are trying to improve community health and safety: “Start small. Small actions make way for bigger impact as the group builds confidence and tests what works and what doesn’t.”

## Future plans

---

As for the future, the groups involved in this project plan to continue their work in securing the long-term success of 826 Valencia. The Golden Gate Safety Group will go on advocating for community needs with city agencies and other nonprofit partners. The group also has begun working with other community groups, teaching them how to organize effectively and build hyperlocal collaborations around the neighborhood to create change.

826 Valencia and TLHIP continue to work together to raise the community voice and advocate for changes that mitigate the impact of social and environmental stress on residents, particularly from a youth-led perspective. The groups hope to build on this work and connect it to future neighborhood projects to positively impact community health in the Tenderloin.

## CONTACTS

### Jennifer Kiss

Vice president of programs, Saint Francis Foundation and Director, Tenderloin Health Improvement Partnership

 [jkiss@saintfrancisfoundation.org](mailto:jkiss@saintfrancisfoundation.org)

---

### Jennifer Varano

Director, community health, volunteer services, emergency management, Saint Francis Memorial Hospital

 [Jennifer.varano@dignityhealth.org](mailto:Jennifer.varano@dignityhealth.org)

---

### Bitia Nazarian

Executive Director, 826 Valencia

 [bita@826valencia.org](mailto:bita@826valencia.org)