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**Contacts:**

Kate McLean      Tina Knight  
818-707-0197      805-988-0196, x-120

**Social Justice Fund Announces First Grants of \$50,000**

(CAMARILLO, CA – February 12, 2007) — The Ventura County Social Justice Fund (SJF) announced its first grants, awarding \$50,000 to seven local organizations whose work focuses on community organizing toward systemic social change. The awards will be formally presented during a reception for grantees, donors and persons interested in the Fund on March 8 at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Ventura.

SJF is a grantmaking program created and guided by a “Giving Circle” of community donors and hosted by the Ventura County Community Foundation. SJF seeks to strengthen social justice in Ventura County by providing financial grants and other support to grassroots efforts that address root causes of injustice and remove structural and institutional barriers to social, economic and environmental equity.

Judy Bysse, Chairperson for the Social Justice Fund noted, “This has been an incredible experience for all of us involved in social justice issues. The number of people supporting this first year’s grants exceeded our expectations. The response from the prospective grantee community showed us how deep the needs are as we received 18 proposals requesting \$151,933. Although all of the applicants proposed exciting projects, some tough choices had to be made in the final choices.”

Grants awarded this year include:

- **Big Brothers Big Sisters of Ventura County** for *One Step A La Vez Teen Drop-In Center*, providing a safe space and community organizing training for youths working to promote safety, tolerance and teen wellness in their schools and community. The youth also advocate for greater resources and mental health services in their communities.

*(More)*

- **Cabrillo Economic Development Corporation** for *Empowering Neighborhoods Through Systems Change Program*, to form and empower grassroots coalitions of diverse constituencies in the Meta Street/Five Points and El Rio neighborhoods to identify their community's assets and areas for improvement, particularly around issues concerning safety, crime and environmental health.
- **CAUSE (Central Coast Alliance for a Sustainable Economy)** for *Women's Economic Justice Project*, to support *Centro Mujer*, a women's community organizing center for social change, and to provide leadership development training to low-wage working women in Ventura County to provide the knowledge and skills necessary for low-wage working women to engage in the public policy decision-making process.
- **The Foundation for Educational and Employment Resources** for *CORE Leadership Project* and *South Oxnard Tenant Rights & Youth Organizing Projects*, to empower and organize the south Oxnard community to engage in public policy debate related to the Oxnard gang injunction and to organize residents living in substandard housing conditions to advocate for such issues as rent control, landlord accountability and community quality of life.
- **Parents of Murdered Children** for *My Son Was Murdered: A Community Education and Violence Prevention Project*, to create a video presentation on the affect of a child's murder on the surviving family members, with the goal of changing youth attitudes, beliefs and behaviors regarding violence and homicide.
- **Ventura County Clergy & Laity United for Economic Justice (VC CLUE)** to raise its community organizing capacity with interfaith, non-partisan community leaders to respond to issues such as immigrant rights, healthcare reform, intercultural understanding and affordable farmworker housing.
- **Veterans for Peace** for *Military Recruitment: Alternatives for Youth*, to provide information to local-area high school youth and their parents regarding student rights to privacy of their personal information, ability to opt out of sharing their information with military recruiters, and non-military career options for youth.

SJF's institutional partners include the Ventura County Community Foundation and CAUSE, and it has been financially supported by over 70 people and organizations with major grants provided by the McCune Foundation, Rosenberg Foundation and the School of the Pacific Islands Foundation.

For more information about SJF or to become involved, please contact Tina Knight at the Ventura County Community Foundation, 805-988-0196, extension 120.