

Grant will help Richmond center better serve West County youth

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A foundation dedicated to improving the health of underserved populations in California awarded \$250,000 to a center scheduled to open later this year as a safe haven for young people in West Contra Costa.

The RYSE Center in Richmond received a two-year grant last week from the California Endowment. The funds will be used to better assess how the center can meet the needs of local youth and "cultivate broader collaborations" to better provide services, said Kanwarpal Dhaliwal, RYSE co-director.

The center will be in a 6,600-square-foot county-owned building at 205 41st St. that is "just on the verge of beginning renovation," Dhaliwal said. It is tentatively scheduled to open in October.

The grant "definitely helps our efforts," she said. "We've had a lot of support from foundations and others, and this helps keep us going and sustains us,"

Dhaliwal and Kimberly Acevas last month were named co-directors of the center, which has been in the planning for several years.

The concept for the RYSE (Richmond Youth Student Empowerment) Center came from input provided by young people following the shooting deaths of four high school students in 2000. The goal is to provide 14- to 21-year-olds from West County a safe place to go for recreation and other opportunities, as well as somewhere they can simply hang out away from potential violence on city streets.

Offerings could include tutoring and career support, health services and health education, media arts, performance arts and community-building.

County Supervisor John Gioia, whose office has worked with the nonprofit group Youth Together on the project, said the center is "the only effort in West Contra Costa County that not only encourages participation from our community's youth, but considers them as important partners in the planning and development of the Center every step of the way."

The California Endowment is a 12-year-old private foundation established as a result of Blue Cross of California's creation of the for-profit WellPoint Health Networks. Its purpose is "to expand access to affordable, quality health care for underserved individuals and communities, and to promote fundamental improvements in the health status of all Californians."