

Park creates a safe place outdoors for residents of the San Francisco Tenderloin

What began as [regular block activations](#) in San Francisco's Tenderloin neighborhood to keep youth safe on their journeys to and from school, transformed into the creation of Safe Passage Park. Built on the 200 block of Turk Street earlier this year by [Tenderloin Community Benefit District](#) in partnership with community organizations—including The Salvation Army San Francisco Ray and Joan Kroc Corps Community Center—the designated outdoor space offers a safe place for the community to gather.



“There’s not a lot of space to gather in the neighborhood. There’s not a public plaza in the Tenderloin,” said Hunter Franks, Director of Inviting Space at Tenderloin Community Benefit District. “There are obviously challenges of safety in the Tenderloin. Safe Passage Park was really able to create a space that is safe.”

In addition to safety concerns in the neighborhood, San Francisco Kroc Center Corps Officer Captain Arwyn Rodriguera stressed an increasing need for the park because of the vast number of families living in the area, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Photos courtesy San Francisco Kroc Center.

“[The Tenderloin is] extremely urban. We’re next to an apartment building that houses thousands,” Rodriguera said. “Families on limited income have been...[social distancing] in small units with large numbers of people. Safe Passage Park allows for safe respite opportunities that are outside where we can partner with community partners that help patrol the area and keep it safe.”

Since its opening, the park has become a go-to location for residents to connect with one another and engage in programming that promotes education and physical activity. Community agencies help maintain the park and keep it safe for community members.

The San Francisco Kroc Center has been a part of Safe Passage initiatives since before the inception of the park through block activations and Tenderloin Play Streets events. Now it offers programming at the park, including Zumba, boxing, functional fitness and chess three times a week. The Kroc team also helps with maintenance and repairs at the park.

“It’s being of service to the community,” said Chris Audette, San Francisco Kroc Center Director. “We use exercise, we use fellowship [and] we use engagement as a means to help with the overall physical and mental health of the kids and families in the neighborhood.”

Franks stressed how valuable The Salvation Army's support has been in the project.

"Kroc Center's collaboration has been amazing. They've been a wonderful partner in helping to think about the space and the design and use of the space as it was being created," Franks said. "And once it was on the ground, they've been very supportive in helping to activate the space with movement classes [and] art activities. [They're] just showing up and really supporting the space in a very meaningful way that has allowed the space to be vibrant in its activity...to display to residents that it's a space that's cared about [and] that's for residents to be using."

Being part of the Safe Passage Park initiative also helped the Kroc Center grow and solidify its presence after COVID-19 and renovation-related closures. Audette said parts of the facility have been closed for the last 18 months.

"We were among the very first Kroc Centers or facilities to close because of the pandemic," Audette said. "Opening up our center has been a really long process...We needed desperately to connect with the community in some way, shape or form, and the outdoor space allows us to make some connections as we edge towards reopening fully."

Rodriguera is grateful for the opportunity of the Kroc Center to serve the community in Safe Passage Park.

"The Kroc Center provides an unduplicated service to the internal Tenderloin continuum of care and so it's important for families to connect with us—but also...to offer our resources to other partners," Rodriguera said. "Safe Passage Park allows us to be out of our facility and offer the same things that we do inside in a COVID-safe environment."



Photos courtesy San Francisco Kroc Center.

Audette believes that all the community partners working together at the park will make an impact in the neighborhood.

“If we all do things collaboratively, we’re really making a tangible difference in people’s lives,” he said.

Even once the Kroc Center reopens completely, the plan is to keep its presence in the park, with the hope to expand programming and to further increase awareness of the resources the facility offers.

“We hope that the park project, the stewardship, the continuous funding, the vision, [and] our programming, make a permanent or long-lasting change on that block. We want to invest outside the doors directly in front of our center to make these efforts worthwhile and long-lasting,” Audette said. “We hope as the pandemic lifts that this is a fundamental part of Kroc programming and services.”

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- Learn more about The Salvation Army San Francisco Kroc Center's history of [caring for the Tenderloin neighborhood](#).