



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Forgotten No More:
Rural residents win new transit line for historically
underserved community in Fresno County.**

Fresno County, California: Residents of West Park, California have won access to public transit for the first time ever as a result of community collaboration and resident leadership. "Los Olvidados de West Park" is a community group representing the community of approximately 300 people in Fresno County. The group formed in mid-2017 to advocate for investment in their community and have already won a new transit line to directly connect residents to the City of Fresno transit system.

Despite its location less than half a mile outside the city limits of Fresno, West Park has been excluded from recognition and investment by the County and City for generations. The exclusion has been so extreme that residents named their new community group "Los Olvidados" (The Forgotten) to represent the fact that their community is consistently overlooked.

West Park lacks sidewalks, street lights, a sewer system, park space, or any city services. The streets have not been paved in decades. Residents must travel into the city for all services, including medical appointments and to purchase goods and groceries. Until now, the closest transit stop to the community was over a mile away, and residents were forced to walk or bike to the transit stop or into the City—an act that was dangerous due to lack of sidewalks, bike paths, or lighting along busy Jensen Avenue which borders the community.

Earlier this year, Fresno Council of Governments ("FCOG") completed an "unmet transit needs" assessment and determined that all transit needs for Fresno County had been met. Simultaneously, FCOG began developing the Regional Transportation Plan to determine priorities for transit investment in the coming decades.

Residents of West Park knew that there were unmet transit needs in Fresno County, starting with their own community. “My community was doing whatever it could with what it had to get to the city of Fresno and back as necessary,” said David Sanchez, coordinator for Los Olvidados and West Park resident. Residents requested help from California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc. in advocating for transit servicing their area. “Working together with CRLA, as a community has not only helped move this bus project forward, but it is fun!” said David. CRLA attorney Mariah Thompson advocated on behalf of residents in front of FCOG and Fresno County Rural Transit Agency (“FCRTA”) to increase service into West Park.

Shortly thereafter, FCRTA committed to developing a new transit project to begin servicing the community by the end of 2017.

Los Olvidados led the way in developing the new transit route. “[It] has really taught me about teamwork,” said Terry Hernandez, secretary for Los Olvidados. Residents met repeatedly with FCRTA staff and designed and compared various route options and service times before ultimately settling on a route that will best serve the needs of the community.

Residents look forward to finally having access to this critical service, which will help families access medical appointments, students access school, and farmworker families accessing the City. The project represents a milestone and victory for residents, who are inspired to continue fighting for improvements in their community. “This is going to empower the residents of West Park and will allow us to be more independent!” said Terry.

Transit Kick-Off Event

Los Olvidados is planning a celebration of the new transit line in the community and invites residents and anyone interested in supporting the West Park community to attend. Residents will sell bus passes, offer food, and provide more information about Los Olvidados.

Date: November 12, 2017

Time: 3:00-4:00 pm

Location: Saber’s Market, 3320 W Jensen Ave, Fresno, CA 93706

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About California Rural Legal Assistance:

Founded in 1966, CRLA’s mission is to fight for justice and individual rights alongside the most exploited communities of our society. Through a network of regional offices and cross-cutting programs, CRLA provides legal services to nearly 50,000 low-income people annually. Our work impacts farmworkers, individuals with disabilities, immigrant populations, LGBT communities, women, children and families in rural areas. For more information on CRLA, please visit: www.crla.org