

Youth Clubhouse Opens in Brownsville Lot To Provide Safe Community Space



By [Camille Bautista](#) | October 18, 2016 4:58pm
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BROWNSVILLE — A new gathering space for Brownsville residents that's made of shipping containers will debut on Wednesday as part of a local effort to help make the community safer, according to organizers.

The youth and community clubhouse from

the [Brownsville Community Justice Center](#) (BCJC) and L+M Development Partners takes over an empty lot at Chester Street near Dumont Avenue at the Marcus Garvey Apartments, a rental complex spanning 10 blocks in the area.

“It’s place-making meets community engagement to make a community safer,” said James Brodick, director of Brooklyn Justice Centers for the Center for Court Innovation, which operates BCJC.



A youth and community clubhouse made from re-designed shipping containers takes over a vacant lot on Chester Street and Dumont Avenue in Brownsville and debuts on Oct. 19.

[Real estate developer L+M](#) partnered with BCJC in 2015 to connect court-involved youth at the apartment complex to educational services and other resources.

“It’s really a crime prevention tool,” Brodick said of working with participants and transforming the vacant, 5,300-square-foot lot into a new space.

“What we love the most about this is working with young people most likely to touch the system, and to address an issue about safety in an area that felt most vulnerable. I think this is a model for the rest of the city.”

After surveying Marcus Garvey residents on their neighborhood needs, L+M found that locals’ top priorities included nutrition and fitness, workforce and youth development.

Participants also discussed where they felt safe and unsafe, Brodick said, and crafted the idea of activating an area where the community could meet.

“Out of that grew this consensus where young people wanted a safe space for them to gather outside of school,” said Raquiba LaBrie, director of community investment for [L+M Development Partners](#).

“Because of perceived and real dividing lines in the community, sometimes you don’t travel far distances within the neighborhood. They came up with the vision for this and it’s amazing to see it come from an idea to reality.”

Brownsville’s incarceration rate ranked the second-highest in the city in 2015, according to city data, and the neighborhood’s injury assault rate came in at number one with 180 non-fatal assault hospitalizations per every 100,000 Brownsville residents.

The clubhouse, which is made of redesigned shipping containers, will double as a workshop and meeting place for BCJC participants, along with a space for holiday events and gatherings for Marcus Garvey Apartments' residents, according to Brodick.

Organizers also look to host movie nights and provide multimedia sessions for youth on everything from coding to music production.

During the planning process, BCJC participants helped survey neighborhood lots and worked with Columbia University experts and city planners on design, eventually seeing their work come to fruition by building out benches and other parts of the clubhouse.

“It was good insight and motivation,” said Saquan Livingston, 24, who helped in the project and attended an urban design conference during the planning stages.

“I feel like anything is possible. That’s our work right there.”

L+M Development Partners hopes to evolve the clubhouse into a larger community space based on resident engagement.

“We want to have it be both a safe place for people to gather and a place for them to learn about the existing assets in Brownsville, and to be a space where they can engage and exercise.” LaBrie said.

“We want to have it be a space where they can re-imagine a Brownsville that they want to really see continue to grow and the kind of Brownsville they want to live in.”