

The Learning Village
Homeschool Resource Center of Fresno
Sustainability Plan



1937 N. Winery, Fresno, CA 93703

559-260-6564

www.fresnolearningvillage.com

The Learning Village History

Formation

The Learning Village Homeschool Resource Center of Fresno was created in late 2009 by a small group of Fresno area homeschool moms. As the ones primarily responsible for our children's education, we wanted to find a way to come together to benefit from each other's expertise as well as pool resources in educating our children at home. Feeling that there aren't currently enough quality resources available to fulfill the needs of local homeschooling families, we decided to create what we felt was needed.

Interest was determined via informal online questions asked of a local homeschool group. This group has a fairly active online discussion group with nearly 180 families represented. Through polling and open discussions with the parents on this group, it was determined that the formation of a homeschool resource center was something which was generating enough of a positive response to move forward with our idea.

Plans for an educational resources lending library as part of the center were made. Suggested items for this library were: books, games, puzzles, curriculum, dvds/videos, computer programs, toys, scientific equipment, musical instruments, math manipulatives, and more.

Plans were also made for educational classes and activities. Ideas for these activities were gathered from families and recorded. A number of parents expressed interest in leading activities and children created long lists of desired activities.

A Board of Trustees was formed to help create the organization properly. Research was started on the steps to take to become a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, to help facilitate corporate donations to our library.

The location of The Discovery Center's property at 1937 N. Winery was agreed upon by all parties and an agreement was made with The Discovery Center to rent space from them.

Word was put out in the local homeschool community that we were taking donations of educational items for the library of a forming resource center. Donations started flowing in and quickly built a very good start for our new educational resources lending library. A temporary librarian was enlisted to help with the creation of our library system and processing of the initial library items.

In January 2010, nonprofit status was officially obtained.

Our mission

To provide educational and enrichment resources, materials, activities and classes, and support for families to educate their children at home.

Our First Year

The first half of 2010 saw great interest and participation in TLV activities. Many weekly and monthly activities were started: Art Lab (open ended art experiences), Group Games, Origami Club, Bird Walks, and science and health workshops, etc. Field trips were also undertaken and many locations visited such as: Savemart Center, Meyer's Water Bank and Wildlife Project, Whole Foods, Margaret Hudson Studios, etc.

As time went on and interest fluctuated, changes were made to accommodate for these fluctuations. Ongoing weekly classes proved to be difficult to sustain, due to the hectic schedules and diverse needs

of homeschool families. To accommodate for this, weekly activities were changed to monthly so that each week of the month would have at least one TLV activity.

Despite these adjustments, participation in all programs dwindled by the second half of 2010. This was due to the combined effects of a waning attendance and a decrease in stamina of the organizers of these programs.

When it was time to renew annual memberships at the end of 2010, very few families renewed. As a result, TLV was put in a holding pattern as the Board determined what to do next. Rental of the space at TDC was reduced to just the library space (halting the rental of the class space) so as to reduce expenses while we had no current income.

Sustainability Project

It was during this time of limbo for TLV, in 2010, that we got involved with the Sustainability Project with First 5 of Fresno.

After several months of experience in the Sustainability Project, TLV's board regrouped in 2011 and came to the realization that we, inexperienced as we were, had tried to do too much too soon. The interest that we had thought would be vibrant once we opened our center simply didn't come to fruition, and we were not equipped or experienced enough to do what was needed at the time to still move forward in a positive way.

We, the Board, made the decision to downsize our vision temporarily and focus exclusively on building our lending library. We determined that getting all our available educational resources online, so it would be visible for the public to see what we had to offer, would be absolutely mandatory before we could even think of attempting to market TLV to the local homeschool community again.

The decision was made by the Board that TLV would only be re-launched once our library was online, fully functional and attractive to local homeschool families. At that point, the focus will be on building a strong membership base via our outstanding educational resources library before branching out to further programs again in the future.

The Need

TLV arose from the need of local homeschoolers for group activities and resources to enrich our children's lives. This need was twofold: *financial* and *social*.

Financial:

As homeschoolers are typically one-income families, expense is nearly always a central issue in regards to activities and educational materials. By choosing to have one parent stay home to educate their children, homeschool families more often than not have a very limited income. As such, they often cannot afford such things as educational lessons, opportunities and items, which dual-income families might be more likely able to afford.

By choosing to unplug from the public school system (for an array of very personal reasons, individual to each family), homeschool parents often do not have access to the free educational resources which public school parents might have via the school system. Besides the instructional classes, this would also include such things as books, computer programs, science equipment, math manipulatives, etc.

There is the option of homeschool charters (public school charter schools geared towards homeschoolers) which seem to provide the best of both worlds: home education with public

school resources. However, many homeschoolers (again, for a variety of personal reasons), prefer to be fully independent of the public school system and create their children's personalized educational experience themselves.

For those that do choose to participate in a charter school, an issue is that the high quality homeschool charters that exist in our area are all at least 30-45 minutes away in neighboring communities. Currently, a homeschool charter within Fresno city limits that provides the sort of quality and freedom which are desired by many local homeschoolers, simply doesn't exist.

It is for these families dealing with the situations mentioned above, and to increase all local homeschool families' possible resources, that TLV was created as a way to pool our materials and our teaching strengths, to provide more high-quality, low-cost learning opportunities for our children within a reasonable distance.

Social:

For homeschool parents, the issue of socialization never leaves our minds, and as such we are always seeking activities and ideas for bringing our children together with other children for playing and learning. This is not a difficult task, as social opportunities abound in simple daily living, but there are some activities that require groups. For example, group games like kickball and other "playground games" which are great for learning teamwork and other valuable skills. Also, there are a variety of highly beneficial learning experiences which require or benefit from groups, such as debate, drama, and science experiments.

For this reason, organized group activities are usually welcome additions to a homeschooler's regular routine. Families will often seek them out to further enrich their children's home educational experiences.

Within the Central Valley, there are many organized homeschool groups available, providing many different social benefits as well as group activities. However, with the exception of the homeschool charters mentioned above (which many families prefer not to participate in, or are deemed too far away), currently all of them are religious based. For those families who do not share the faith of these groups or do not choose to homeschool for religious reasons and would prefer secular (non-religious) resources, TLV's programs were formed.

TLV's Vision

In addition to the already mentioned ideas which came together to help create TLV, the founders and current Board have an equally important underlying vision. This vision is to create a close-knit community of support and friendship. We recognize the need for this, not only for our children, but for ourselves, in the unique role of both parent and educator. While we acknowledge this need for support to be vital to all families, we find it particularly important to provide an environment of acceptance and support specifically for families who have chosen to journey on a different educational path than is standard in our society.

As our name indicates, the founders of ***The Learning Village*** are acutely aware of how important it is to have a "Village" to help us raise our children.

Sustainability Plan

The Learning Village's participation in the First 5 Sustainability Project has helped our organization come to some very tough realizations, the most important being that we started all this with very little understanding of what we were getting ourselves into. We are a small, inexperienced, and still very new organization that is off to a slow start, but we are *passionate* about what it is we are trying to do with TLV. We are ready to get to work and essentially start over again, almost from scratch.

From all we've learned from the Sustainability Project, we have created a plan which we think will guide us well on our way towards our ultimate goal of a *sustainable* "village" for all local homeschoolers.

Goal 1

Our plan starts with **library development**. Since TLV already has many items in our existing lending library of educational resources, we will work to process all items currently in the library that have yet to be processed. By having the library ready before we move on to any later steps, we ensure that we have a foundation of quality resources with which to impress potential members.

Further organizing of our library will be necessary: Items need to be shelved, shelves need to be labeled and item descriptions need to be entered into our online library directory, with images. The online library, we feel, is crucial to being seen as a serious organization that have much already to offer local homeschoolers.

The final goal of the library development, after existing items have all been processed properly, will be to start ongoing solicitation of donations for the library. These solicitations will be made to companies

(online and local), as well as to individual families. Fundraisers will also be planned for the raising of funds to purchase larger items which we are unable to have donated.

Goal 2

The next major goal in TLV's sustainability plan will be **vision planning**. The Board of TLV, while very much aware of what **we** want to see come to fruition with TLV, haven't taken sufficient time to connect with enough of the local homeschool community to determine what is wanted and needed as a whole. We feel this is a part of why our programs have so far not taken off the way we had hoped.

With this in mind, our first goal is to go back to the local homeschool community at large; including all the local groups we didn't connect with before, and make strong connections, as possible. This will begin with creating a central list of all local homeschool groups, which up until now hasn't been officially cataloged.

Once we have gathered a list of contact info for all local homeschool groups, we will coordinate a meeting with each group individually, as possible. This is so that we can make a deeper connection with each group and its members. We will get to know each group, their uniqueness, and what they provide and don't provide.

Also, we will share with them what it is we are striving for with TLV, and collect feedback from them as to what their individual needs and wants are. Questionnaires and group discussions will be used to collect this info.

Next, TLV will **mobilize our local homeschool community**. This will not happen until we've connected with every local homeschool group individually. We will plan and implement a large informal event for families (children included) outdoors at The Discovery Center, inviting all local homeschoolers and

homeschool groups. At this event, attendees will participate in small and large group discussions about specific ideas, needs and wants as a group.

This event will be fun and fast-paced and strive towards staying on task at all times. We will provide children's activities as well as team building games and facilitated discussion groups. Much info will be covered and gathered, ideas will be hashed out as to what specifically TLV will provide, and volunteers will be enlisted to take on specific tasks. By the end of this event, we will have lists of specific ideas to put into action, and volunteers assigned to the most immediate tasks. We will also solicit new memberships throughout this event.

As a final part of our community mobilization, we will use this event to gather volunteers to brainstorm and coordinate a future local area conference to provide a low-cost and enriching event for Central Valley homeschoolers.

Goal 3

TLV's next major goal will be **governance** of our organization. During TLV's large community mobilization event, we will gather volunteers not only for TLV activities but also for new Boardmembers. This is a very important step as TLV currently has only 3 Boardmembers.

Prior to the first meeting with our new Boardmembers, TLV's current Boardmembers will create a Board manual, orientation procedure and Board training plan to ensure that new Boardmembers (as well as current) are very clear as to their roles and jobs in our organization.

Goal 4

At the same time that the above goals are being worked on, TLV will work on it's **financial management**. Our Board Treasurer and Board President will meet with Gary Pigg, an experienced nonprofit accountant

that has already agreed to help TLV with their accounting while we are still starting out. We will work with Gary to create an efficient means of handling our financial records, and hand its upkeep over to his very capable hands.

As part of our financial management, TLV Board will also form a Fundraising Committee prior to the large mobilizing event in month 5. This committee will be headed by our treasurer and will start an ongoing program of raising of all financial funds needed for TLV activities and other needs.

Goal 5

Next, TLV will focus on the goal of **marketing**. By this time in our plan, we shall have already become well known among the local homeschool community. However, even though TLV 's focus is local homeschool families, we are also open to membership by non-homeschool families and teachers. Therefore, it will be beneficial to our organization to get the word out to the Fresno community at large about our activities.

To do this, we will create a strong online and local presence from website development, SEO, social networking and the posting of activities to all free local calendars. Individual tasks will be outlined clearly and assigned to volunteers.

Goal 6

Finally, once all the above goals have been met, TLV's **program development** will be re-launched. A new volunteer will be enlisted to lead up this project, and form a Program Development Committee to create and launch TLV classes and activities. This will be an ongoing project which, if all goes well, will eventually take TLV to the place which we, the founders, originally had envisioned.

Conclusion

The Learning Village Homeschool Resource Center of Fresno has benefited greatly from participation in the First 5 Sustainability Project, as evidenced by our plan here. We would like to thank First 5 for allowing us to participate in this program, as our organization literally would not have survived without it.

Throughout the course of this project, we have come to realize our many weaknesses in the way we had been doing things with our organization. By facing these weaknesses, we have turned them around into new ideas to overcome our weaknesses and move forward in a strong way towards a new plan of attack to re-launch TLV.

Most importantly, we have come to realize that while we had thought we had been in touch with our local homeschool community, this simply had not happened to the scale that we need for TLV to thrive. Keeping this in mind, all of our actions in the future will entail staying connected with our members and our local homeschool community regularly to ensure that we are still in line with what is needed and wanted from TLV.

Goal 1: Library Development				
Sub-Goal	Benchmarks	Lead Member	Estimated Costs	Timeline
Process existing library items & make ready for use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Stamp/put pocket in all items *Organize flow of library shelves efficiently *Shelve all items *Label all shelves *Upload all item descriptions to online library directory 	TLV librarian	\$150 for library supplies	Months 1-3
Enlarge/Enrich library	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Solicit donations from companies *Solicit donations of used items from families *Fundraise for larger items unable to have donated 	TLV librarian and TLV treasurer	\$0	Months 2-4 and ongoing
Goal 2: Vision Planning & Community Mobilization				
Sub-Goal	Benchmarks	Lead Member	Estimated Costs	Timeline
Determine & record already existing homeschool programs & groups locally.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Search the internet & phone book *Ask churches *Ask local h.s. families for referrals *Catalog all groups in central file, with contact info 	TLV board members	\$0	Months 1-2
Make and maintain a connection with all local homeschool groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Go to group meetings & connect online *Share TLV's mission with each group *Learn about the uniqueness of each group & what they have to offer as well as what they are lacking 	TLV board members—take turns going to meetings/making connections	\$0-\$50 (gas money to attend meetings around town)	Months 1-3 and ongoing
Collect feedback on needs & interest from local homeschoolers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Create a questionnaire to share with all groups & individual 	TLV board members (split up the groups among	\$0	Months 2-4

	h.s. families we meet, containing questions about the needs & wants of local h.s. families *Compile all collected info into a central file for TLV records	boardmembers & each compile info on the group that they are covering. Save in central file)		
Large event to bring together all stakeholders	*Hold an all-group event of facilitated group discussions & community building. * Cooperative games for children and adults to get to know each other better. *Solicit the signups of new members *Gather volunteers to form a committee to start brainstorming & planning for a future Central Valley Homeschool Conference hosted by TLV	TLV board members for facilitated group discussions, and volunteers for children's activities and refreshments.	\$500 for the cost of materials to record information, game props, and light refreshments. Donation of items where possible.	Month 5
Goal 3: Governance				
Sub-Goal	Benchmarks	Lead Member	Estimated Costs	Timeline
Board development	*Review Board roles & ensure each current Boardmember understands their current job *Recruit additional Boardmembers	TLV president	\$0	Months 5-6
Board training	*Develop a Board manual & orientation procedures & a plan for Board Training.	TLV president	\$300 for creating manual	Month 6
Goal 4: Financial Management				
Sub-Goal	Benchmarks	Lead Member	Estimated Costs	Timeline
Establish efficient	*Meet with Gary	TLV president and	\$0	Month 1

accounting	Pigg to set up accounting for TLV *Determine process for handling of financial matters	treasurer		
Fundraising Program created	*Create a plan for fundraising for TLV *Create a committee to implement ongoing fundraising for all TLV financial needs	TLV treasurer	\$100 for materials to	Months 4-6 and ongoing
Goal 5: Marketing				
Sub-Goal	Benchmarks	Lead Member	Estimated Costs	Timeline
Strong online presence for TLV	*TLV link on all major local websites *TLV link exchanges with locals *SEO for TLV website	TLV president	\$0	Month 7-9 and ongoing
Regular social media and website updates of TLV news	*Assign person to be in charge of social media for TLV *Regular posting of quality content to comments on local Facebook pages & Twitter accounts	TLV president	\$0	Months 7-9 and ongoing
Regular posting of TLV activities to calendars	*Assign person to job *Create a list of all local calendars for free posting of events *Post activities regularly to online & print calendars: CC Parent Magazine, News station websites, Facebook events calendar, all local events calendars, etc	TLV president	\$0	Months 7-9 and ongoing
Goal 6: Program Development				
Sub-Goal	Benchmarks	Lead Member	Estimated Costs	Timeline
Form & implement Program	*Volunteers enlisted to take on the re-	New volunteer & new committee	\$500 for materials to get	Months 9-12 and ongoing

<p>Development Committee</p>	<p>development of TLV programs (classes, activities, field trips, etc.) *Program plan created *Recruitment of additional volunteers & paid educators to make TLV programs a reality. *Continually stay in contact with members and obtain ongoing feedback on how programs are doing & changes that need to be made.</p>		<p>classes/activities started</p>	
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