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COOK COUNTY LAND BANK AUTHORITY PARTNERS WITH LOCAL COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND RESIDENTS TO TRANSFORM VACANT AND ABANDONED PROPERTY INTO COMMUNITY SPACES ON JUNETEENTH

Two Organizations, No Matter What NFP and Urban Male Network, Use Property Donated by CCLBA To Provide Safe Spaces for Youth Across Cook County

CHICAGO — In recognition of Juneteenth, the Cook County Land Bank Authority (CCLBA) today announced its third annual giveaway of properties to community organizations for redevelopment into community spaces. CCLBA also highlighted the transformation of vacant properties that were previously donated to No Matter What NFP in 2023 and the Urban Male Network in 2022 are now community anchors for local residents.

“It’s inspiring to witness the transformative power of community-driven initiatives,” said **CCLBA Executive Director Jessica Caffrey**. “No Matter What NFP and the Urban Male Network have turned vacant spaces into community assets, showcasing what is possible when local organizations are empowered with resources. This Juneteenth, we honor the resilience and creativity of those who envision and create a brighter future for their neighborhoods.”

No Matter What, a Black-owned nonprofit that works to help Chicagoland youth meet their highest potential, received a vacant single family home in West Englewood. Owner Kenneth Griffin, who is also a City of Chicago police officer, is transforming it into the No Matter What Community Arts Center with a culinary arts program, a library, a place for youth to meet with therapists, and “Preston’s Peace Room,” a safe space for youth and first responders named after Griffin’s former colleague Aréannah Preston, a police officer who was killed in 2023. The space already features a vibrant community garden built by neighborhood youth and police officers.

The Urban Male Network constructed the Annie Mae Patterson Community Court from its donated land into a public space named after Executive Director Marlon Haywood's beloved grandmother who once lived across the street. With the help of the CCLBA, the Urban Male Network has transformed the vacant lot into a full basketball court, colorful murals and a fully

equipped online gaming space. This development has provided a crucial space for community engagement and youth activities, fostering a stronger, more connected neighborhood.

“The Cook County Land Bank Authority was established to address the persistent challenges of blight and disinvestment in our communities. On this Juneteenth, we celebrate the spirit of equity and renewal that guides our mission,” said **Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle**. “The transformation of these vacant lots into vibrant community spaces is a powerful testament to what we can achieve when we reimagine and repurpose our land for communal use. These projects not only revive our neighborhoods but also inspire hope and opportunity for all Cook County residents.”

“Neighborhood redevelopment is like medicine. It makes communities- and people- healthier”, said **Cook County Commissioner Bridget Gainer, Founder and Chair of the Cook County Land Bank Authority**. “No Matter What and the Urban Male Network make an impact on our health for the long term.”

“We’re so grateful for the property we received from CCLBA, which is allowing us to create spaces that nurture and empower young people in our community,” said **Kenneth Griffin, Executive Director of No Matter What**. “This community arts center and garden are already shaping the lives of youth in our neighborhood and opening doors to opportunities for them.”

“The Annie Mae Patterson Community Court has brought a new vibrancy to our neighborhood,” said **Marlon Haywood, Executive Director of the Urban Male Network**. “With the support of CCLBA and the City of Chicago, we’ve created a safe place where youth and families can come together to play, learn and grow.”

About The Cook County Land Bank

The Cook County Land Bank Authority, an agency of Cook County, was founded by the Cook County Board of Commissioners in 2013 to address residents and communities hit hard by the mortgage crisis. CCLBA gives local developers, community groups and potential homeowners the tools to transform their own communities from within. The Land Bank acquires properties that have sat tax-delinquent, abandoned and vacant for years and sells them at below-market rates to qualified community-based developers, who then rehab the properties. This approach not only keeps revenue and jobs in the community, but it also helps local developers grow their businesses. Learn more about the Cook County Land Bank Authority at <http://www.cookcountylanbank.org>.

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