

# Neutral Ground

Official Newsletter - July 29th, 2022



To our Neutral Ground Family,

**We would like to thank each and every one of you for coming out to our annual Summer Night Lights (SNL) programming, and welcome you to the first issue of Neutral Ground's official newsletter!**

**In this issue, we will provide an overview of Summer Night Lights here in Santa Ana, introduce you to our Boxing Club and other NG programming, as well as provide multiple ways for you to stay involved in Neutral Ground and provide donations that help keep our year-round programming thriving!**

# Meet Our Founder & Executive Director: Pastor Nati Alvarado

Nati Alvarado was born, raised, and currently resides in Santa Ana, where he has now cultivated over 30 years of gang and violence prevention, intervention, and mediation as well as street outreach and in-school restorative practices.

When Nati was just 13 years old, he was arrested for the first time, and at 15, he became a young father amidst his developing heroin addiction and cycles of drugs, gangs, and incarceration. In turn, he spent a significant portion of his youth in and out of juvenile and adult detention centers.

The vision of Neutral Ground manifested from his life riddled with incarceration, in which Nati began to understand the significance of creating spaces that are neutral for those who have reacted to their marginalization with the implicit dehumanization of others. He began understanding that violence stems from individuals dehumanizing others, and that one thing the carceral system did was bring people together in one place where they were forced to learn that those surrounding them were just as vulnerable and human as they are—even when they came from different neighborhoods.

In 1990, at the age of 30, following his time in a post-carceral Christian Rehabilitation program, Nati began setting the building blocks of what was to become the foundation of Neutral Ground, cementing his vision to *change the story* of youth justice and preventing community violence. In the beginning, all he carried with him was his life experience; no funding. In 2000 he began a transitional housing program, a passion project, which would not begin receiving official grant funding and non-profit recognition for close to 20 years. But what Nati emphasizes is that it never has and never will matter if the money is there, because him and Neutral Ground always will be.

Through Nati's House transitional housing program, he amplified his mission and goals to establish Neutral Ground, returning to the streets to give back to a community he had once damaged. He has been *changing the story* in Orange County for over 32 years, so that those cycles of gangs, drugs, and incarceration that had once entrenched him would no longer swallow up the kids in his community.

Because of Nati Alvarado, Neutral Ground exists as an agency that is truly homegrown, and reflective of the heart and human capital of the City of Santa Ana. Serving as the Founder and Executive Director of Neutral Ground, Nati is *changing the story* every single day.



# Summer Night Lights:

## The More You Know!

### what is Summer Night Lights (SNL)?

Summer Night Lights is like a big party at the park, but for a really amazing cause! Every year throughout July - August, Neutral Ground hosts a 5-week summer prevention program, SNL, in which we serve approximately 400-500 community members per night. Every Friday for 5 weeks, NG keeps the lights on at El Salvador Park, where we provide free food, lead carnival games for kids, host sports tournaments, bring in live bands & DJ's, and so much more! All of our activities are free, and serve as diversions from maladaptive activities for youth, helping to cultivate social connections that replace gang-involvement. We also utilize our SNL grant funding to hire local youth from the community to help us facilitate the event. Summer Night Lights provides a platform for our community to reclaim El Salvador Park, and serves as a critical violence prevention strategy, all while being fun and family-friendly!

### what is the history of SNL? in Santa Ana?

In 2007, the Office of Gang Reduction & Youth Development (GRYD) was established in Los Angeles to reduce gang-related violent crime. GRYD “determined that a lack of safe and accessible public space, oppressive economic conditions, and crowded housing situations created high levels of stress within families, potentially driving kids to hang out on streets and increasing their likelihood of becoming involved in unhealthy activities or becoming victims of violence and crime” (City Parks Alliance) To address this, they designed Summer Night Lights, and in 2008, SNL was credited with “reducing gang violence to its lowest level since 1976” (City Parks Alliance).

Neutral Ground began hosting SNL in Santa Ana in 2018, and has facilitated it annually up to now, 2022. Since we began hosting it, we have seen significant reductions in graffiti/tagging, in gang-related violence, and in local 911 calls during our programming weeks. NG is truly paving the way for the first centralized model of gang prevention/intervention services in Orange County.

# Summer Night Lights:

## The More You Know!

### what is the significance of SNL?

Violence prevention benefits every single member of the community, which means that Summer Night Lights is positively impacting you and your family and friends. In addition to the dramatic reductions in the aforementioned components, SNL has impacts that are less quantifiable, but so critical: kids not going to sleep hungry, community members not engaging in crime and violence, individuals who are gang-involved witnessing what our parks are truly meant for. Summer Night Lights gives our community the chance to feel safe and secure, and provides our youth with opportunities to engage in activities that catalyze healthy social-emotional development. It also is a reminder that community-based leadership can create enormous strides in public safety initiatives.

### how can you help us make it happen?

## Volunteer:

Besides our immediate NG staff, SNL is almost entirely volunteer-based. We rely on community members like you to donate your time, food, resources, etc. to help us engage in this critical crime prevention and youth/family development strategy. If you are interested in volunteering, please locate one of our NG staff members wearing the green 'STAFF' t-shirts at the event, or send us an email at [info@ngservices.org](mailto:info@ngservices.org) / call us at (714)-980-0953.

## Donate:

While SNL does rely heavily upon our amazing volunteers, it simply cannot happen without donations from people like you! Any amount—\$1.00, \$5.00, \$50.00, \$250.00—helps, no matter how small. With a \$10 donation, we can purchase new balls for our Handball & Basketball tournaments. With a \$300 donation, we can purchase an entire pallet of food to provide to our families in need. Anything you can provide helps!

Paypal:  
[bree@ngservices.org](mailto:bree@ngservices.org)  
via Paypal account or  
credit/debit card



# Want More Neutral Ground?

◦ Join Neutral Ground Boxing Club! ◦



If you love spending time with Neutral Ground at SNL, you can spend time with us all year round at Neutral Ground's Boxing Club (NGBC)! Every Monday and Thursday from 6:00 pm to 7:00 pm, and now every Saturday from 8:00 am to 12:00 pm, you can join us for some super cool boxing drills, plenty of strength and conditioning skills, and of course, some light sparring!

We practice on the sanctuary floor below our headquarters, at 1920 E. 17th Street, Santa Ana, CA 92705. Wear some comfortable athletic clothes to sweat in, grab your boxing gloves if you have them, and bring a friend (or 5)! We provide punching bags, so all we need is you to punch them!



## Meet Coach Sam!

If you come to NGBC, you will be coached by Coach Sam! Coach Sam attended the University of Southern California, where he boxed for the USC Boxing Team. There, he participated in the United States Intercollegiate Boxing Association's (USIBA) 2016 National Tournament, and was awarded the 141 lbs & 152 lbs Open Division Championship Titles. He has also participated in the USIBA's 2013 National Tournament, was awarded the title of 2013's Male Athlete of the Year, and helped organize the first Collegiate Boxing show at CSUN. Basically, he's pretty cool.

# Want More Neutral Ground?

Join Neutral Ground Boxing Club!

## Donate:

If you would like to donate to our Boxing Club, please scan the QR code, or pay us directly at the PayPal usernames listed. Every donation helps, and no donation is too small. With a \$5.00 donation, we can purchase one pair of boxing wraps for a participant. With a \$100 donation, you can sponsor one punching bag for our club. Thank you in advance!



Paypal: [bree@ngservices.org](mailto:bree@ngservices.org)  
via Paypal account or credit/debit card



# More Things NG!

## NATI'S HOUSE TRANSITIONAL HOUSING PROGRAM:

Nati's House is Neutral Ground's transitional housing program, in which we serve youth, young adults, and adults experiencing housing insecurity, many of whom recently exited the youth or adult incarceration system, aged out of the foster care system, or are seeking a safe, neutral space from the streets, sometimes to leave behind gang involvement.

We provide on-site intensive case managers, host weekly check-in meetings, provide first month's groceries and initial clothing, and aid in the rehabilitation of our residents, all with the underlying goal that every person departs our home with independence. Nati's House goes beyond meeting the basic needs by providing structure, accountability, and opportunities to learn and heal in a stable and long-term environment.



*Donate:*

**Nati's House and our lead staff are centered on providing new opportunities, and a second chance. And we need your help to do this. No donation is too small, especially for Nati's House programming in which we need everything from basic groceries to beds, storage, clothing, etc. When you donate to Nati's House, you are making a direct impact on the lives of our residents.**



**Paypal:**  
**bree@ngservices.org**  
**via Paypal account or**  
**credit/debit card**

# More Things NG!

## NG'S PARTNERSHIP WITH THE SANTA ANA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT (SAUSD):



With our partnership with seven schools within the Santa Ana Unified School District, Neutral Ground provides on-site restorative justice practitioners to engage in trauma-informed, culturally competent youth development and tier 1-3 intervention support services. We accommodate each student's unique emotional and social needs as an alternative to the traditional approach.



*Donate:*

With the new school year coming up, Neutral Ground relies upon donations like yours to be able to go the extra mile for the students we serve—such as purchasing clothing and shoes when necessary, providing restorative practice training to our staff and school staff, and so much more. We thank you in advance for your contribution!



Paypal: [bree@ngservices.org](mailto:bree@ngservices.org)  
via Paypal account or credit/debit card

# Donating to Neutral Ground

## What Your Kindness Can Do

Neutral Ground is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, in which **every single one of our programs & services comes at no-cost** to the youth, families, and community members we serve. Much of our funding comes from our contracts with our SAUSD schools to provide restorative justice practitioners and services, which means that **we rely on individualized donations, grants, and sponsorships** from people like you to continue serving our community.

**Any amount** you are able to provide will directly benefit the youth we are serving, and **you will be actively contributing to community-based gang & violence prevention and intervention** within your community. Please share our story, our programming, and our donation information with others, so we can continue to change the story!



Paypal: [bree@ngservices.org](mailto:bree@ngservices.org)  
via Paypal account or credit/debit card



# Donating to Neutral Ground

What Your Kindness Can Do

**\$5.00**

Sponsor boxing wraps for one youth in NGBC OR sponsor one grocery item for Nati's House residents

Sponsor 2-3 grocery items for Nati's House residents OR 2-3 basic school supplies for students we serve

**\$10.00**

**\$25.00**

Sponsor snacks and water for one month of NGBC participants OR sponsor half of the initial basic groceries for a Nati's House resident

Sponsor one pair of boxing gloves for NGBC OR sponsor one month's groceries for a Nati's House resident

**\$50.00**

**\$100.00**

Sponsor one punching bag for NGBC OR sponsor a bus pass and \$60 worth of groceries for a resident of Nati's House

Sponsor one punching bag and three pairs of boxing gloves for NGBC OR sponsor one youth we serve with all new school supplies

**\$250.00**

**\$500.00**

Sponsor one youth we serve with new clothing & shoes OR sponsor almost 13 bus passes for youth we serve to attend school and/or Neutral Ground's programming

Sponsor 3 pallets of dry goods for families in need OR sponsor 2-4 youth we serve with new clothing & shoes

**\$1000.00**

*Developing a presence, forming relationships, and changing the story*

# Changing the Story

To the Neutral Ground Family,

Thank you so much for your consistent support and your incredible commitment to your community, and to us here at Neutral Ground. Your time, monetary, and in-kind donations are deeply appreciated and valued, not just by us, but by the youth, families, and community members we are able to serve because of your aid. We could not be where we are today without each and every single one of you.

And thank you for coming out and supporting Summer Night Lights 2022! We place immense value on providing hope, fostering compassion, and making our community a safe place for every person; your presence here tonight embodies all of this and more that we are seeking to cultivate here in Santa Ana.

If you would like to become more involved with Neutral Ground or if you have any questions, comments, or concerns, our contact information is located below.

Thank you again! Let's continue to change the story!

We'll see you Friday, July 29th, and Friday, August 5th for our final two SNL programmings!

In community,  
Executive Director Pastor Nati Alvarado & The Neutral Ground Team



Neutralground



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Neutralground

1920 E. 17th street Santa Ana, Ca 92705 | 714-980-0953

[www.ngservices.org](http://www.ngservices.org) | [info@ngservices.org](mailto:info@ngservices.org)