The Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Center was built with funds awarded January 26, 1968 from the Department of Housing and Urban Development grant in the amount $79,119 and a contribution from the City of Redding of $36,482 for a total development cost of $115,601. The dedication took place on October 11, 1968 and the Grand Opening was held April 4, 1969. The Center was originally operated by the Poverty Study-Action Association of Shasta County from 1968 – 1985 under an operating agreement with the City of Redding. The MLK Jr. Memorial Center nonprofit corporation, under an operating agreement with the City, operated the Center from 1985- 1988. This group disbanded due to lack of resources and the City of Redding began managing the programs in 1988 through the Recreation Division of the Community Services Department.

Over the course of this time, the composition of neighborhood has also changed. In the late-1970's, thirty-six families were relocated from the Linden Canyon to make way for a proposed extension of Buenaventura Boulevard. The project was later re-designed to what is the current alignment down Canyon Creek Canyon. In the 1990's, a larger numbers of families of Asian ancestry lived in the neighborhood. Some of those families moved to ownership opportunities in other parts of the City. Between February 2003 and 2007, 11 new homes and 50 new apartments were completed in partnership with the Redding Redevelopment Agency. Many of these new residents are families with children. Today, the ethnic make-up of the neighborhood more closely mirrors the city at large with a predominantly Caucasian population.

The City partners with a number of organizations to provide a variety of health, education, and social events to the neighborhood. The most notable partnership is the Shasta County Multi-Cultural Advisory Board (Advisory Board). The Advisory Board’s primary objectives and purposes include providing programs and services that will advance the ideas, philosophy and teachings of Martin Luther King Jr. and promoting and supporting education, health, recreation and social opportunities and provide resources and services to the community.

The after school program has been the backbone of youth programming at the Center. Attendance has reached as many as 40 children per day with the majority of the youth living in the neighborhood. The primary purpose of this program has been to provide educational assistance augmented with social activities. The Center is also the site for families in the neighborhood to get together for special events. These have included the Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday celebration, basketball tournaments, community concerts, and National Night Out. While the Center has had many successful years of operation, participation over the last year has waned.

In March 2009, the Community Services Director convened a Blue Ribbon Committee to develop and adopt an Action Plan specifically for the Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center.
The Action Plan was to provide a framework for programming at the Center including: a review and update of Center policies; programming priorities and goals; and an outreach program to increase awareness of the MLK Jr. Community Center activities within the surrounding neighborhood.

Over the course of the past nine years, the Martin Luther King Jr. Center has shown outstanding progress. The Center has accomplished all of the recommendations in the Action Plan developed by the 2009 Blue Ribbon Committee. The Center is flourishing and continues to grow.

Strong partnerships have been the foundation to the many successes of the Center. Notable partnerships include: the Redding School District, Cypress Elementary School, the Enterprise School District, Shasta County Public Health, Sunset Rotary Club, Simpson University Strike Team, Youth Violence Prevention Council, and the Shasta County Multicultural Board. These partnerships have furthered the offerings and mission of the Center.

Currently, the Center has programs operating six days a week, Monday-Saturday. The programs are open to any child of appropriate age. Areas of programming include: Kings Brotherhoood and Positively Girls Club, Science Technology Engineering Mathematics (S.T.E.M.) classes, Kids Night, Outdoor Living Skills and a Saturday Sandlot program. During the majority of these programs, a nutritious meal is served to participants. Additionally, the Center’s partnership with the Redding School District has established a satellite After-School Program (ASP) at the Center. The ASP is a core program and utilized heavily by neighborhood families. During the summer, a Day Camp program is provided for eight weeks to the community with a reduced rate with scholarship assistance. Participants also receive a free lunch through a partnership with the Enterprise School District. These programs in conjunction with each other provide a solid programmatic foundation to build upon.

In addition to the weekly programs, the Center has established several annual special events including a Halloween Carnival, a Thanksgiving Dinner, a Christmas Celebration, Spring BBQ, National Night Out, and more. These special events are well-attended as anticipated by the Blue Ribbon Committee’s recommendations. The Center has also partnered with other agencies to host cultural events at the Center. These partnerships have included The Life Center and the Sons of Italy. The Shasta County Multicultural Advisory Board continues to utilize the Center for their monthly meetings and multicultural events including the Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday and the “I Have a Dream” speech celebration.

Since the 2009 Blue Ribbon Committee, the Martin Luther King Jr. Center has been renovated with several significant projects. The Sunset Rotary Club of Redding donated labor
and materials to upgrade the kitchen including the installation of a double oven, convection oven, a small dishwasher, new counters and cabinets, a commercial refrigerator and freezer, among other donations. In 2010, the MLK Center was awarded a grant through Home Depot to replace the flooring in the Center. Concurrently, Disney Incorporated was offering a ‘Give a Day, Get a Day’ community service project. The Center participated and had the interior of the Center painted by numerous volunteers. A local Interior Designer, Katherine Wilson, donated her time to develop a color palette for the Center. Patrick Mahoney, owner of Hand Painted Houses, managed the project.

In 2009, a new computer lab was established through a generous donation of eighteen computers by N-Computing, a local computer software agency. A lending library was established utilizing a collection of books the Center had been given. A library card system was developed; books were catalogued and coded by reading level for ease of participants. The Sunset Rotary Club built a small community garden on the south side of the building. In 2011, through Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds and the Rotary Club of Redding, a new playground was installed for elementary and middle-school aged children. In conjunction, the MLK Park bathrooms were updated to ADA code and a wheelchair accessible pathway was constructed. In June 2014, volunteers and materials from Orchard Supply and Hardware installed a small patio at back of the Center allowing participants to utilize the space. During the Summer of 2015, participants built a small tea garden outside the library windows. Lastly, in November 2015, the Shasta County Multicultural Board funded new paint for the Preschool Room and tables for the Center.

The Center has maintained a Coordinator at the Center to implement and develop the Action Plan from the 2009 Blue Ribbon Committee. Additionally, the Center has six part-time employees that work with the ASP and run the enrichment programs offered at the Center. Center staff utilizes social media, door to door marketing, and flyers to communicate programs and events to the community. All programs and events offered at the Center are also included in Redding Recreation’s seasonal activity guides that are distributed to schools, businesses and families four times a year.

A new community committee was convened in November 2015 to update the Action Plan. The committee was formed of community leaders and individuals from the Shasta County Multicultural Board, Shasta Public Health, and Faith Works at Francis Court. Input was also provided from residents in the MLK Center neighborhood. The new committee established a five-year Action Plan that will begin implementation in 2016. The new Action Plan will allow the Martin Luther King Jr. Center to continue to grow the number of children and families served through new and helpful programs and activities.