



building a HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Kim Williams' commitment to the community in South Sacramento is more than professional obligation – it's personal. She and her family moved to West Sacramento when she was 3 years old, and she has remained relatively local ever since, eventually going to UC Davis where she studied human development.

In college, Williams began working at St. Hope where she developed the school's first girls after school program. Then in 1996, she took a job with the Boys & Girls Club of Greater

not everybody gets the same chance at achieving a healthy life. But thanks to the California Endowment and the Building Healthy Communities Initiative, many areas including South Sacramento, are getting that opportunity.

BHC is managed by a steering committee made up of various community members, city representatives, county representatives and youth. Williams serves as Hub director and said that she works with the steering committee to make sure each of the Sacramento BHC's 35

“We are trying to make streets safer, healthy food more available and schools a more positive place to be!”

Sacramento where she remained until she joined Hub to begin working on Building Healthy Communities. Through her work over the years, South Sacramento has become very close to her heart and working on BHC gave her a new way to help that community.

Building Healthy Communities is a 10-year, \$1 billion plan paid for by the California Endowment. It's taking place in 14 communities across California where they are working to improve employment opportunities, education, housing, neighborhood safety, unhealthy environmental conditions, access to healthy foods and more.

Williams knows health doesn't just happen when you step in to a doctor's office for a check-up or choose shredded wheat cereal for breakfast instead of bacon. Health is complicated and is shaped by numerous factors: your work, your education, your housing, your neighborhood, etc. In other words, where we live matters when it comes to health. And because of that,

grantees stays on task.

These tasks focus on 10 outcome goals that have been designated for each of the 14 communities to attain by the end of the program. Outcome goals center on decreasing child obesity and youth violence as well as increasing school attendance and healthcare for young people and families.

Working toward these goals in partnership with Williams over the past year, the BHC grantees have constructed several community gardens, created new job opportunities in the grantees' organizations and introduced salad bars in local school cafeterias.

And according to Williams, this is just the beginning. She encourages the community to get "plugged in" to the change evolving in South Sacramento and shine a spotlight on the work being done under the BHC initiative.

Creating Healthy Communities

In 2010, The California Endowment embarked on a new, 10-year strategic direction: Building Healthy Communities. The goal is to support the development of communities where kids and youth are healthy, safe and ready to learn, because research proves that health is linked to employment, education, economic opportunity, housing the environment and more. Healthy communities start with healthy people.

The Endowment brings a wealth of policy and research experience into partnerships with the community. The year-long planning phase brought everyone to the table – schools, local government, business leaders, neighborhood groups and individuals. Community voices came together to create a vision for 2020 and a plan for getting

there. With grants from the Endowment, the community will work across all systems that impact community health, including schools, human services, economic development, transportation and land use. Together, they will revolutionize the way all of us think about and support health of all Californians.

Get connected with CalConnect, the online Building Healthy Communities network, at <http://www.mycalconnect.org/sacramento>.

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“I don't know what kind of effort would be made right now if we hadn't come together and created our network...This is why we are coming together.”

Uniting Neighborhoods

With a father in the military, Stephanie Francis grew up all around the country. But her roots run deep in South Sacramento.

Stephanie's family has lived in South Sacramento since the 50s, and the house her grandparents built in the area is still occupied by her family. After living in D.C. for 10 years, Stephanie moved back to South Sacramento in 2006.

Wanting to be active in her neighborhood, Stephanie took the opportunity to serve on the planning committee for the Building Healthy Communities initiative several years ago. That is where she met Charles Mason, the founder of the then-budding nonprofit Ubuntu Green.

After talking, Stephanie and Charles discovered that they saw a lot of the same problems in South Sacramento, one of them being a lack of community. They came up with the idea of hosting a block party in the Fruitridge Manor area in South Sacramento to inspire neighbors to get to know each other.

“This was a way to get people together who might only see each other on the way to the mailbox,” Stephanie said.

Stephanie said Ubuntu Green gave the seed money for permits, barricades and the like, but left the organization of the block party to Stephanie and a collection of her neighbors. This was to be a party made by the neighborhood for the neighborhood.

The event was wonderful, according to Stephanie, and a lot of hidden gems were discovered during the block party. It turned out a DJ lived in the neighborhood, and one of Stephanie's neighbors played the trumpet. Neighbors discovered common interests and began to connect. Since that day, the neighborhood has changed for the better.

“It just feels different,” Stephanie said. “It feels like people are looking out for each other now.”

One example of this newfound camaraderie can be seen in how the neighborhood handled a problem with a foreclosed house that had been vandalized and used as a hub for illegal activities.

Stephanie and her neighbors banded together to make concerted calls to the property owner and the city about getting the house cleaned up and secured. And in no time, that's exactly what happened. Stephanie said a lone call to the property owner and the city probably wouldn't have amounted to much, but the strength of the network her neighbors created yielded powerful results.

Currently, Stephanie and her neighbors are working together to create a safer environment for pedestrians. This became a cause for concern with the tragic death of a local 16-year-old girl who was hit by a car while crossing Fruitridge Road in January.

Empowering Communities

Founded in 2009 by Charles Mason Jr., Ubuntu Green is a nonprofit organization committed to promoting healthy, sustainable and equitable communities through advocacy, education and community empowerment. The block party Ubuntu Green hosted with Stephanie Francis is just one example of its dedication to building healthy communities.

Ubuntu Green has taken on these endeavors to strengthen the capacity of residents and youth in Sacramento to advocate for themselves. Also,

Ubuntu Green seeks to transform land use and resource distribution by bringing the views and desires of each community front and center. Mason calls it “creating bridges between communities and all levels of decision-making.”

For information on how to help, call 916-669-0671 or visit www.ubuntugreen.org.



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Training Community Leaders

Raising three teenagers as a single mom doesn't hold Mindy Romero back from finding time for community action. In fact, her children are part of the reason for her activism – Mindy wants to set a good example. She believes that taking an active role in her community is the only way to improve her community, and furthered this commitment with her recent graduation from the Boards and Commissions Leadership Institute (BCLI).

BCLI – a program of Sacramento Housing Alliance's project CORE – identifies and trains community members in

for the program. In the six months of training, Mindy built relationships with those training alongside her who also shared her goals for community improvement. Together, they expanded their knowledge about how government functions and how to affect equitable change.

"The program was amazing," said Mindy. "We all have a deeper understanding of equity, and we are all inspired by each other. It has deepened my commitment to making my community better."

Mindy graduated from the program feeling enriched in

“The BCLI is about supporting and developing leadership that can best serve the community”

leadership skills with a focus on understanding the health and equity impacts of government action. BCLI's goal is to increase representation of diverse communities on boards and commissions in the Sacramento region.

"The BCLI is about supporting and developing leadership that can best serve the community," said Mindy. "A key mechanism is bringing folks together that are equity minded."

Even before attending BCLI, Mindy was already affecting community change with equity in mind. After graduating from UC Davis with a degree in sociology and political science, she began work for the UC Davis Center for Regional Change while finishing up her doctorate. Here, she researches ways to create equitable, sustainable and healthy regional change. For example, Mindy helped with a two-year study of the well-being of local youth and their connection to the overall health of the community.

She also serves as President of the Sacramento-Yolo Mutual Housing Association Board. She started as a resident attending council and worked her way up. As a resident of a SMHA property, she feels her role as president empowers others in her community.

She tells people "If I can do it, you can do it," she said. "Residents get to self-govern, but it only works if people are really involved."

The SMHA Board led Mindy to BCLI by nominating her

every aspect of her life. The relationships she built continue to support her, and the knowledge she gained helps her in her current job and board appointment. The program even enriched her role as a mom as she seeks to model leadership to her children.

She hopes it will also land her a seat on a commission in her community where she can help improve health and education outcomes for vulnerable groups.

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Equitable Policies Benefit Everyone

The Sacramento Housing Alliance – formed in 1989 to advocate for housing services and amenities for disadvantaged communities – created CORE in 2007. CORE is a coalition of community groups that come together with the help of the California Endowment to create a sustainable, equitable and healthy region. Leadership is a key component of this effort, and CORE develops leaders with its Boards and Commissions Leadership Institute (BCLI) by training members of the communities it serves.

The BCLI is the second program of its kind, modeled after the Bay Area non-profit organization Urban Habitat's BCLI. Training focuses on land use, environment, health, economic development and transportation. Students also learn logistical and proce

The BCLI benefits the community by providing community members with the skills needed to effectively advocate and represent themselves. Regional boards and commissions benefit from improved diversity and accountability. The end goal is more equitable policies that benefit everyone.



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Great Grandmother Finds Hope

Wendy Yang immigrated to the United States from France 6 years ago to join family and friends in Sacramento. She arrived with dreams of gaining an education and a good job. She hoped to spend lots of time with her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. But Wendy has faced many unexpected challenges since immigrating – challenges that would have overwhelmed her if not for the help of the Hmong Women's Heritage Association, part of the Capitol Community Health Network.

Wendy proudly claims the title of "two generation grandma." Most of her 11 grandchildren now have children of their own, including her oldest daughter's family in France. Wendy recalls a time when she lived in France that the grandchildren came to stay with her often. She misses them very much, and despite plans to fly back to France, she has not had enough money to visit.

Her youngest daughter's family is here in Sacramento. But Wendy stays with friends in South Sacramento, while her grandchildren live across town. She lacks reliable transportation so misses out on opportunities to see them.

To make matters worse, Wendy has faced many other challenges since immigrating. She speaks only Hmong, which makes simple tasks like finding health care problematic due to language barriers. Health problems – including hearing impairment in her right

ear causing an inability to listen in a noisy classroom – make Wendy feel like her age stands in the way of her education and career dreams.

"In the daytime I am fine, but at night I feel really sick and weak," said Wendy. "I can't speak for the younger generation that lives here, has the education, and has been here for a long time. But for me personally, it has been very hard."

“ The Hmong Women's [Heritage Association] has helped me with a lot of things. I don't know what I would do without them. This agency is my biggest hope. ”

Despite the challenges she has faced, Wendy is grateful for her friends here in Sacramento. She enjoys spending time with them doing just about anything, but especially outdoor activities like walks in the park or taking day trips to the mountains.

She is also extremely grateful that her friends told her about the Hmong Women's Heritage Association. Staff at the association with the assistance of the Community Health Navigator Program helped Wendy find a doctor and even gave her a ride to the doctor's office. When English mail arrives in Wendy's mailbox, she takes it to the association for translation and help filling out paperwork.

Strengthening Our Community

The Hmong Women's Heritage Association is a partner of Capitol Community Health Network. While the network provides the association with centralized support services, the association in turn strengthens members of the community. Together, the organizations strive to improve health outcomes of Sacramento residents.

Capitol Community Health Network, founded in 1994, is a non-profit partnership of community clinics, health centers, and health education agencies. In addition to providing advocacy, the network

coordinates a Community Health Navigator project to assist its partners in identifying families in need of health interventions, providing health education, and helping families navigate the healthcare system to find permanent health solutions.

Hmong Women's Heritage Association, a non-profit community-based organization, focuses its efforts on Hmong, Mien and Lao women and their families. By providing healthy support systems for women like Wendy Yang, the association empowers the community to build relationships with one another and to work with government

agencies to improve health outcome as well as prevent youth violence.

Together, both organizations work toward a vision of a region in which all persons, regardless of cultural background, income, education or citizenship status, can easily access quality healthcare services and health education in a welcoming environment.

Contact Hmong Women's Association at (916) 394-1405 or tap into the entire Capitol Community Health Network at (916) 447-7222.



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Youth Rally to Improve Walking Conditions

Every day, 13-year-old Nina Harris walks to school through streets littered with trash and graffiti. Busy intersections and outbreaks of street violence threaten her safety. Rather than ignore all this, Nina did something about it. She joined People Reaching Out and Walk Sacramento to become a Youth Block Reporter and started improving her community by raising awareness about the problems plaguing it and starting a dialogue among community members.

She heard about the Youth Block Reporters last year while participating in another summer program offered by People Reaching Out. She and a couple of her friends completed the training with Walk Sacramento then began conducting walk audits, observing their environment and pinpointing problem areas.

"Kids who walk to school always have the danger of cars because of speeding and lack of crosswalks and sidewalks," Nina said. "Litter doesn't necessarily make it unsafe, but people feel unsafe because it looks dirty."

Nina values her education and wants to feel safe going to and from school. She is on the honor roll in eighth grade and excels in advanced math classes – though she is quick to point out that she isn't a "nerd" because she is also outgoing and has many friends. After school, she and many of her classmates walk to community centers and after school programs to further their learning and Nina worries about the safety of these routes.

Neighborhood walking conditions impact Nina's health too. She would like to take more walks with her family's three dogs to get exercise but doesn't feel safe enough to do it regularly. She enjoys walking with her father, but he is only available to walk with her on the weekends.

Becoming a Youth Block Reporter enabled Nina to take action on her concerns. Nina and her friends, along with some new block reporter friends, photographed and documented the streets surrounding their school and homes. Documenting the problems made her more aware of them, even some she never really noticed before, like the prevalence of graffiti.

"It really disappointed me," she said. "It is a good community. We have a lot of good people. But the look of the graffiti really brought our image down."

After their audit, Nina and her peers created a PowerPoint presentation of their photographs and observations and presented it during a community meeting. Nina thinks the project has impacted the neighborhood – she is already observing cleaner streets and less street fights. She believes raising awareness has made people try to improve conditions.

"I think people are changing," said Nina. "I'm noticing a lot less violence in our community. People are not littering or tagging as much. The community is aware of it and they want to help."

Nina hopes the work of the Youth Block Reporters will lead to big changes in the future, like sidewalks along 65th Street so she and her friends can walk to school without worrying about arriving safely – she would rather focus on staying on the honor roll.

Creating a Walkable Community

Founded in 1998, Walk Sacramento is a nonprofit community organization working to create walkable communities. For 30 years, People Reaching Out has promoted healthy communities by empowering youth to make healthy choices. The two organizations' missions converge around the issue of safe pedestrian routes for youth like Nina.

Walk Sacramento provides technical expertise and policy support, while People Reaching Out

leads the Youth Block Reporters program in which Nina participated. The purpose is to assess the walkability of the Sacramento Building Healthy Communities target area from the youth perspective. The goal is safe streets that are more walkable for youth and adults; walking is a nonpolluting and healthy mode of transportation.



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Guiding Youth by Linda DuBois

The Sacramento Youth Development Network provides after-school programs to support the growth and development of young people and foster their successful transition to adulthood. Teenagers at city-run after-school programs are doing better in their classes, obtaining more job skills and opportunities and connecting better with adults and other youths from diverse backgrounds.

These are just a few of the benefits noticed by Kim Mohler, recreation superintendent for the City of Sacramento Department of Parks and Recreation, who oversees the teen services division. This includes middle- and high-schoolers in the after-school programs at school sites and community centers, and the vocational and employment program targeting low-income youth.

Over the years, Mohler and her colleagues have gone through a variety of YDN training programs, including its flagship Youth Development Institute, which is geared toward educating youth-services providers so they can be better mentors for youth in these after-school programs. The 50-hour extensive training focuses on five pillar practices: building safety, creating relationships, engaging young people, connecting with the community and improving skills.

Some of the programs have hundreds of participants, to keep them from feeling lost in a crowd, Mohler trains staff members to learn every child's name, greet each one by name and connect regularly. "If we know they're having challenging times in math, we check in with them on how their math class is going. If they're an athlete, we ask how their soccer games have been," Mohler says.

While open to any youth in Sacramento, some of the sites, especially those set in the heart of the Building Healthy Communities target area, serve mostly disadvantaged youth who are very diverse ethnically and culturally, many are first-generation immigrants and some are just learning English.

At George Washington Carver School of Arts and Sciences, nearly 95 percent of the student population is involved in the after-school program, coordinator Shannah Dieckman says. Dieckman started the program at Carver four years ago and has been able to see students reap its benefits firsthand.

High school seniors Armando Sandoval and Deshan Khan are two students who have been involved in Carver's after-school program since they were freshmen. The 18-year-olds say even more important than the academic benefits and peer relationships they have developed in the program are the guidance and advice they get from Dieckman. "The after-school program is great because Shannah makes things happen," Kahn says.

Another important aspect of the YDN program, Mohler says, is encouraging students to broaden their horizons and make friends outside of their normal circles. "The after-school program brings us together and helps us build a community," Sandoval says. "It just gives us time to hangout."

Kahn says Dieckman started a basketball program at the request of the students because their high school didn't have a team—this pushed Kahn to pay more attention to his schoolwork so he could play and make better choices in friends.

After-school programs like the one at Carver provide academic support and encouragement for students. Sandoval says he sees his future in a brighter way and is inspired to attend college in the fall. He explains how Dieckman took students to a career fair at Cal Expo to expose them to the workforce and encourage them to set high goals for their futures. Kahn also plans to go to college this coming fall with the intention of becoming an electrical engineer.

"It's just great that these kids are able to have a program that is there to help them and have a fun place to really grow into themselves..." Dieckman says. "It's not seeing how the world affects them, but seeing how they affect the world."

Sacramento Youth Development Network

Young people have a much greater chance of growing into healthy, productive and outstanding adults when the organizations who work with them are well equipped. Knowing this, the Sacramento Youth Development Network supports youth-services organizations through customized training followed up by coaching and technical assistance, as well as networking and policy advocacy.

YDN has trained more than 1,600 youth development practitioners and more than 200 organizations, says Adrian Ruiz, Youth Development Network's executive director. These include the eight organizations chosen to participate in February's Strength-Based Institute: American Legion High School, Asian Resources Inc., City of Sacramento's teen services, Galt Joint Union Elementary School District, Pioneer High School, THINK Together, Ubuntu Green and UC Davis' Early Academic Outreach Program.



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Youth harvest fruit to feed community

by Kendall Fields

A crimson pomegranate hangs on a tree, ripening as the peak of the season gets closer; then as the peak passes, it drops to the ground, left to rot amongst a brown sea of other unharvested fruits. Some people would think nothing of this. But for Farm Saelee, Chee Thao and Hnou Lee, leaving this fruit to rot—and even letting it fall—is no longer an option. The high schoolers teamed with Soil Born Farms to keep so much local fruit from going to waste like those pomegranates.

In just three days, Saelee and nine of her peers picked more than 2,000 pounds of fruit from trees in the South Sacramento neighborhood. The group canvassed the neighborhood, looking for fruit trees and asking residents if they would let them glean fruit from their trees to be donated to a food bank.

The gleaning program is part of Harvest Sacramento, a collaborative effort of South Sacramento residents, nonprofits, community groups and businesses started by nonprofit Soil Born Farms to harvest underutilized fruits and vegetables from backyards and small orchards and donate them to local food banks.

"If we didn't pick the fruit, it could just fall and rot. That's such a waste," Saelee said.

Saelee, a senior at Hiram Johnson High School also serves as a health ambassador and volunteers through the Asian Coalition For Tobacco-Use Prevention (ACT-UP). ACT-UP, which aims to improve health, especially by reducing tobacco usage, is comprised of 85 students from Hiram Johnson, John F. Kennedy, Luther Burbank and West Campus high schools.

Over the three days the students volunteered, they picked mainly pomegranates and persimmons. Then they sifted through the fruit, gave some to the tree owners, boxed it up and donated the rest to Sacramento Food Bank.

Gleaning the fruits mutually benefits the homeowners because it reduces the amount of fruit that drops and rots, and also benefits the homeless and hungry who come to the food bank. "What we are doing is important because we are making sure the food is not going to waste and giving food to people who need it," Saelee said.

And Saelee and Lee are quick to point out that not only are the fruits they are picking free but also a local and nutritious alternative to the cheap fast food that so many low-income families eat out of necessity.

But it wasn't just about picking the fruit and volunteering for many ACT-UP students. The students said they learned about the fruit-growing process and how to harvest it. And Thao, a junior at West Campus, said that by going door to door in the canvassing process, she became more confident and sociable.

The students said they will continue to volunteer in their community and promote the concept of gleaning in order to prevent food from going to waste.

Soil Born Farms

Soil Born Farms is a nonprofit that got its start in 2000 and hinged on a dream of promoting urban agriculture and food access and education in Sacramento. The program seeks to break down the barrier between low-income families and healthy, fresh foods.

Soil Born Farms operates two urban farms on more than 40 acres of property in Sacramento and Rancho Cordova with the help of knowledgeable staff and apprentices

and enthusiastic volunteers. Its various programs—cooking and gardening classes, youth mentorships and gleaning projects—are geared toward promoting health through food and farming education for both youth and adults.

The nonprofit hopes to use its work in South Sacramento as a model for urban farming and replicate it throughout the Northern California region.



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Empowering Youth to Make a Difference

BY KENDALL FIELDS

Ajay paused to imagine what life would be like without community involvement like her seat on District 5 Youth Leaders, part of the City of Sacramento's Way Up project. Just kicking back, relaxing and, in her words, "not really doing much," like many 19-year-olds living at home in Sacramento. But Ajay could only think of one way to describe that kind of life: "Boring!"

For Ajay, community involvement began with a leadership camp in sixth grade. Then in high school,

she was president of the school's Gay-Straight Alliance.

From there, she became involved with other lesbian and gay advocacy groups and, this year, is invited to

speaking at a student leadership conference for LGBT youth. Since District 5 Youth Leaders recruited her, she advocates on behalf of youth in her community. Ajay is also president of California Endowment's Youth Council.

Ajay credits her activist spirit to her mother, who works as a community organizer. Her father is a mechanic and her two younger brothers — ages 7 and 15 — frequently remind her that it is OK to relax occasionally and play video games. "We are a fun group of people," she said.

Ajay attends Sacramento City Community College with hopes of turning her activism into a career.

"Right now I am studying political science," said Ajay, "Last semester I interned with Equality California doing a lot of lobbying and I just fell in love with it."

She joined District 5 Youth Council so she could speak up about the transportation issues faced by Sacramento youth. Ajay thinks finding regular transportation to school is especially difficult. "I ride my bike a lot," she said, "but when I don't, I ask my mom for a ride or there is a bus. But sometimes the bus runs late or it's overcrowded."

Being part of District 5 Youth Leaders empowers Ajay to do something about her concerns. When she and the council surveyed local high schools and colleges, they found other youth who had similar concerns, like reduced bus routes, increased fares, and bus stops without covers or benches. Along with her peers on the council, Ajay brought those concerns to policymakers in meetings with city councilmembers and regional transit board members. She knows she is making a difference in her community and that makes her feel good.

"It's that feel-good feeling of improving my community," said Ajay, "And you meet so many great people while doing it, it's so much fun!"



Way Up is a project spearheaded by councilmember Jay Schenirer to create a healthy South Sacramento neighborhood that supports children and young adults by creating healthcare career jobs and increasing the employment of neighborhood

residents. The project was created out of a partnership between the City of Sacramento and Gifts to Share, a nonprofit organization incorporated in 1985.

Building healthy neighborhoods starts by creating relationships within the community and encouraging youth to get involved. Way Up programs like District 5 Youth Leaders ensure policymakers are hearing the voices of youth. Only then can the barriers youth face be addressed so they can live healthy and productive lives.

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BUILDING A **HEALTHY** SACRAMENTO

Organic Eating in Sacramento

BY BRAD HOOKER

Last spring, students in a class for “health ambassadors” at Hiram Johnson High School wanted to build an organic garden for the community. Since the underfunded school couldn’t cover the costs, the students had to look for outside help. To succeed, they needed to organize, draft a petition, reach out for financial support and build a campaign — a tall order for high school students. For guidance, they turned to the nonprofit environmental group Pesticide Watch.

Pesticide Watch helps communities grow grassroots campaigns to fight the use of potentially harmful agricultural chemicals. Through the Building Healthy Communities initiative funded by the California Endowment, Pesticide Watch helps improve access to fresh foods in the South Sacramento area by building the capacity of youth and residents to advocate for such access.

Under the guidance of Pesticide Watch organizer Asael Sala, the Hiram Johnson students — about 20 in all — spent months talking about what healthy eating means and what goals to achieve for their campaign. They used poignant and powerful language in a letter of petition asking for support on the organic garden. Not only would this encourage healthy eating, they wrote, it would be an important resource for the fast food-saturated community. They gathered 300

signatures from students and teachers, and eventually, the approval of the principal.

Over the summer break, two of the students, Adrienne Chou and Lorena Ceballos, organized their campaign with Sala. For an organic garden committee to oversee the project, they drafted letters to experts in the field, inviting them to volunteer in helping the students. They also contacted gardening-related companies to sponsor the project.

“We’re letting everyone know that it’s a smart plan and also that we need funding,” says Ceballos.

Asael and the students envision a garden open to the school and the community. An outdoor classroom here would educate everyone on the best practices. The team ultimately hopes to establish a garden-to-cafeteria connection, so students can enjoy the fruit of their labors in their own lunchroom.

“They’re letting everybody know they mean business,” says Sala. “They felt that everybody should be able to afford healthy food and that it should be everywhere.”



SUPPORTING HEALTHY EATING

Pesticide Watch is a nonprofit organization that has supported grassroots campaigns across California for more than 20 years. Sponsored by the California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities initiative, the

organization is supporting healthy eating through local pesticide-free projects. Through its organic gardening projects, the organization aims to launch a preemptive strike in the war on chemicals.



www.PesticideWatch.org



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BUILDING A **HEALTHY** SACRAMENTO

Sacramento Residents Take Action

BY BARRY WISDOM

Sacramento Area Congregations Together (ACT) boasts a membership of some 40 neighborhood organizations representing 40,000 Sacramento County families and individuals committed to making a difference in their communities.

Among these grassroots volunteers who are learning how to affect change through the education, guidance and support provided by ACT, are those who have a long history of contributing time and expertise to local causes, as well as those who have only recently

entered the arena of community activism.

Sherwood Vang, a 2010 Sacramento State graduate with a degree in social work, is a Hmong shaman who says a cousin's suggestion he join ACT as a community leader

was met with skepticism from elders who suggested he was too young.

"Part of the reason I pursued involvement with ACT was to prove to the Hmong community that young people do matter, and that we can make changes — we just have to put our mind to it," says Vang.

Vang, 25, who joined the ACT board (as its youngest member) in April, says his volunteer focus has been on helping establish a Sacramento County version of the low-income health program for uninsured adults now enjoying success in San Diego. The pre-Medi-Cal program is expected to be implemented in August.

"Since joining ACT, I've learned a lot," says Vang, who has participated in ACT's PICO network training sessions in Atlanta and San Diego. Vang has also met with elected officials and their staffs, including those of U.S. Congressman Dan Lungren and Sacramento County Supervisor Phil Serna.

"I now understand how things work and how to make things happen."

Vang's fellow board member, Karen Hall-Sandlund discovered ACT in 2006 shortly after moving back to Sacramento and joining St. John's Lutheran Church.

"We were just back from the Peace Corps and looking to extend that experience," says Hall-Sandlund, who served for more than two years as an informal education volunteer with husband Greg in South America's Republic of Suriname.

A participant in St. John's social issues forum, she appreciated the discourse prompted by visiting speakers, but felt it wasn't enough.

"Homeless people would camp out in front of the church, but we wanted to do more than just provide a place for them to sleep," she says of her congregation. "Through ACT, we learned we weren't helping solve the problem if we weren't addressing the root causes."



Hall-Sandlund says St. John's is currently concentrating on "bringing justice to the foreclosure crisis," joining other groups to push for a homeowner's bill of rights, a matter of personal interest after being forced to short-sell her family's home earlier this year.

"One thing I've learned is that change takes time," Hall-Sandlund says, "and that community organizing starts with listening."

BUILDING A JUST COMMUNITY

Healthy communities rely on engaged citizens who promote positive changes. Sacramento Area Congregations Together (ACT) is a multicultural, multi-faith organization which aims to foster civic involvement among residents and empower them

to make positive changes in their communities. The group is fueled by a diverse membership of 40 neighborhood groups, including faith-based and school organizations. ACT believes that active, engaged citizens are crucial to a successful democracy.



www.SacAct.org



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Shredding the Cost of Healthcare for Those In Need

BY SUKHI BRAR

Anna Herrera has been dependent upon government assistance her entire life. Now 30 years old, Anna was born blind, with developmental delays and requires extensive in-home care. After her father tragically passed away when she was 25, the social security benefits that Anna received due to her condition increased, but so did her share of cost for Medi-Cal.

"Her share of cost became enormous," said Anna's mother and caretaker Connie Herrera. "It was an increase of about \$400 a month."

Connie asked if Anna could go back to receiving the lower benefit payments she had gotten before her father's

death so that her Medi-Cal share of cost would be lower.

"I was told Anna did not have the option to stay on the payment program she was already on. It was ridiculous because the higher benefit payments were actually hurting her," explained Connie. "I tried to call Medi-Cal

for help but no one was answering. Then a friend and told me about Legal Services of Northern California."

Connie called and spoke with Jane at LSNC.

"Jane asked me what Anna did. I told her that even though Anna was 25 years old, she only had the mental capacity of a 7- to 9-year old, but she did work a few hours a month shredding documents for a friend," said Connie.

Anna's love for shredding began at home. Connie would place documents to be shredded in a special basket for

Anna to find and shred. Anna loved shredding so much she began shredding anything she could find including important documents that Connie wanted to keep.

"One time I gave her the telephone directory to shred because she loved shredding so much," said Connie.

Eventually, this passion for shredding turned into a job for Anna. One of Connie's acquaintances offered to pay Anna to shred documents a couple of times a month.

Jane at LSNC identified this job as the solution to Connie and Anna's high share of cost problem with Medi-Cal.

Jane informed Connie that Anna's job qualified her for the little-known 250% California Working Disabled Program. This Medi-Cal program brought Anna's monthly premium down to only \$20 a month.

"I would have never known to look up something like this. Even after Jane told me about the program, there were people at Medi-Cal I called who did not know about it," said Connie.



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Legal Services of Northern California provides legal representation to low-income clients in 23 Northern California counties. LSNC helps uninsured people obtain assistance with medical bills, health benefits and obtaining necessary care. LSNC offers free legal services regardless of income for health related programs. LSNC's health law

attorneys are spread across LSNC's Northern California offices located in Sacramento, West Sacramento, Auburn, Chico, Ukiah and Redding. More information about LSNC can be found at www.lsn.net.



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A Fresh Perspective

BY MIKE BLOUNT

Part of living in a healthy community is knowing all you can about it — from the residents to the businesses to the nonprofits to the parks and recreational areas. Healthy community members have a stake in their communities. Thanks to a grant from The California Endowment's Sacramento Building Healthy Communities Initiative to Access Sacramento, Sacramento's 25-year-old public access channel, young reporters in South Sacramento are reporting the news in their community via Neighborhood News Bureau on the website accesslocal.tv.

These are things the local mainstream media often miss or things that might not be a priority for them, says Program Director Isaac Gonzalez.

"The 5 o'clock news is 'it bleeds, it leads' sensationalism, weather and traffic," Gonzalez says. "Through all the commercial side of things, they don't get a chance to really talk about what's going on our streets and specifically, the good things that are happening in South Sacramento."

"MY WRITING SKILLS HAVE GOTTEN STRONGER AND I'VE BEEN ABLE TO GO INTO MY COMMUNITY AND FIND OUT ABOUT THINGS THAT I DIDN'T KNOW WERE AVAILABLE OR WERE GOING ON."

Neighborhood News Bureau is funded by The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities Initiative to promote and advocate for healthy communities. Currently, the program is at the end of its second year. Neighborhood News Bureau began with a trial run over the summer, but now has seven correspondents between the ages 16 and 21, who produce one article a week, one video a week and participate in a biweekly podcast. They are also responsible for recruiting one of their peers to create one video or write an article

each month. For their time, all of the correspondents are paid a stipend.

Gonzalez was astonished at the response he received when he was looking for people to participate. There were an overwhelming amount of youth that wanted to tell people about what was going on in their neighborhood.

One of first people to get involved was 17-year-old Charles Chenault, a Parkway resident of South Sacramento. Chenault met Gonzalez through an internship and was part of the trial run of the program. He returned for the second incarnation of the group and says he has enjoyed watching the program and himself grow.

"When I first started, I didn't really have a strong interest in journalism, but since then, my writing skills have gotten stronger and I've been able to go into my community and find out about things that I didn't know were available or were going on," Chenault says.

To Gonzalez, they are embracing their civic duty to inform the public of issues that are important and instructing them on how to get involved. And, if more youth are engaged in their communities, parental involvement increases and adults take notice. Gonzalez says he wants the youth involved with Neighborhood News Bureau to be critical thinkers and think outside of the box. So far, he says he has been impressed at the quality of work that has been submitted — and it's only getting better as they go, he adds.



BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

In 2010, The California Endowment launched a 10-year, \$1 billion plan to improve the health of 14 challenged communities across the state. Over the 10 years, residents, community-based organizations and public institutions will work together to address the socioeconomic and environmental challenges contributing to the poor health of their communities.

NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS BUREAU

Neighborhood News Bureau is hyper-local online journalism created by young reporters in South Sacramento and affiliated with Access Sacramento, Sacramento's public cable access station for the last 25 years. Visit accesslocal.tv to view content and learn more about the program.



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Telling Stories

Youth become published authors through 916 INK.

BY MIKE BLOUNT

Writing and publishing a book can be a huge undertaking for an upcoming author — especially a student — but a group of students in Sacramento is finding that task a lot easier thanks to an after school program dedicated to helping teens express themselves and improve their literacy. The brainchild of founder and Executive Director Katie McCleary, 916 INK is a mostly volunteer-based organization operating creative writing workshop sites throughout South Sacramento funded by The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities Grant. The 10-year, \$1 billion plan focuses on creating safe, healthy community environments so that children are healthy, safe and ready to learn.

"IN PARTICULAR, I THINK [THE PROGRAM] FOCUSES ON HOW YOUTH SEE THEMSELVES IN TERMS OF HEALTH AND IDENTITY AND HOW WE CREATIVELY MANIFEST THAT IN OUR DAILY LIVES. HEALTHY CREATIVE WRITING IS LIKE SLIPPING A BUNCH OF SPINACH INTO THE BROWNIES."

At Arthur A. Benjamin Health Professions High School in the upper Land Park neighborhood of Sacramento, a handful of kids voluntarily stay after school for an hour and a half once a week to participate in the workshop. With an instructor, students discuss and share their writing with the group, get feedback from the others and — in

the process — improve their writing skills. The goal at the end of each semester is to self-publish a book of their work. So far, 40 students have had their work published — something McCleary says not only improves their writing skills, but also improves their self-esteem and overall confidence. The program is giving these young residents of South Sacramento the chance to share their voice and talk about issues that affect them in their community.

"In particular, I think [the program] focuses on how youth see themselves in terms of health and identity and how we creatively manifest that in our daily lives. Healthy creative writing is like slipping a bunch of spinach into the brownies."

Currently, 916 INK operates at four sites within South Sacramento comprising the BHC Grant. But McCleary says she hopes to expand the program and ultimately, establish a permanent creative writing center for students interested in the program.

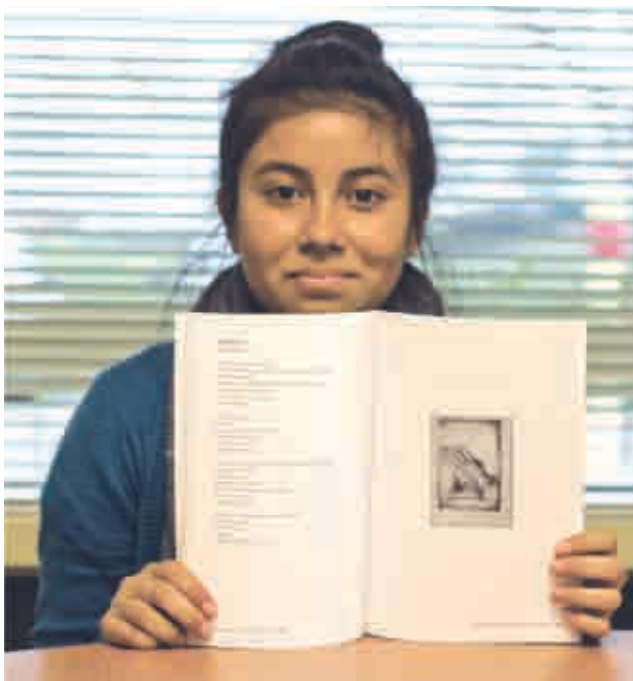
Seventeen-year-old junior Angie Vicente has been involved in the program for a little over a year and says her passion for creative writing goes back to when she was younger. Vicente has kept journals and written short stories for years. But 916 INK allows her to share her creative writing with her peers, and a larger audience, by having

it included in a book.

"I like creative writing because it's how I express myself," Vicente says. "It's how I keep track of myself in a way. Some things, I don't even remember writing, like things I wrote in middle school. Going back and reading it, I see how I've changed and what my thoughts were then and what they are now."

Vicente recently had her poem "Band-Aid" published in the book *Breath and Bones Anatomy of Youth Voice, an Anthology* through 916 INK. She says the program has not only improved her writing, it's allowed her to connect with other writers who are her peers as well.

"All of us in the program get along well and feel comfortable. It's a safe space where we can share."



BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

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916 INK

Filling in the gap between storytelling, writing and literacy, 916 INK is a nonprofit operating four creative writing workshops in South Sacramento funded by the Building Healthy Communities Grant of The California Endowment. The program transforms everyday youth interested in writing into published authors and gives them a platform to share their voice and improve their community through writing.

"BAND-AID"

Angie Vicente, 17, had her poem "Band-Aid" published in the book *Breath and Bones, Anatomy of Youth Voice, an Anthology* through 916 INK.



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