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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

# Making Healthy Choices Convenient

BY MIKE BLOUNT

It's not where you'd expect to find a fresh stalk of celery or a delicious, locally grown cucumber, but walk through the aisles at Sam's Market in Oak Park and you'll now find a cooler filled with fresh produce. In the past, finding healthy foods in South Sacramento required a visit to a grocery store, which could be more than a mile away. One nonprofit is working to change that through a new program funded by the Building Healthy Communities grant of The California Endowment.

Alchemist Community Development Corp. was founded in 2004 with the goal of identifying the challenges and opportunities that arise from urban growth. Today, the nonprofit supports Sacramento-area residents through projects aimed at creating more healthy and diverse communities. One of those projects is converting neighborhood markets into healthy convenience stores.

Executive Director Davida Douglas says the organization began approaching convenience-store owners in South Sacramento last year to see if they would be open to carrying more healthy food options in their stores.

"We mapped out all of the corner stores, conducted focus groups, did interviews with store owners and developed criteria for who we could work with," Douglas says. "For the existing clientele, one of the things we discussed with the store owners was adding healthy options next to the sodas and junk food. But we also discussed the potential to bring in new customers that did not shop there before."

Currently, Alchemist CDC is partnering with two convenience stores in South Sacramento — Sam's Market and Elder Creek Market.

Alchemist CDC helped these stores transition by ordering and stocking all the produce, as well as helping the owners establish a relationship with local growers and suppliers. Eventually, these duties will fall on the store owners themselves. Alchemist CDC is also helping with marketing the healthier options in the stores by providing signage that includes nutritional information and preparation tips. They are also doing community outreach.

**"MY HOPE IS THAT IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS WE'LL ADD MORE STORES AND CONTINUE TO WORK WITH STORE OWNERS."**

**Davida Douglas, executive director of Alchemist Community Development Corp.**

"Before, there wasn't very visible signage," Douglas says. "We've created and brought in new signs, sent out mailings and gone door-to-door to do outreach."

Prior to the nonprofit working with these two convenience stores, the closest access to fresh produce was approximately a mile away. Douglas says one of the things they learned from their focus groups was that residents

who depended on public transit were traveling much farther once a month to get better deals on their groceries. Working with convenience stores in their neighborhoods gives those residents more options when groceries run out or expire.

Ultimately, Douglas says she would like to see the project expand to even more convenience stores in South Sacramento.

"My hope is that in the next few years we'll add more stores and continue to work with store owners," Douglas says. "But so far, the reaction has been very positive."

## 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.

*Davida Douglas is the executive director of Alchemist Community Development Corp. The organization works with local convenience-store owners to increase access to healthy foods in South Sacramento.  
Photo by Mike Blount*



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# Don't You Forget About Breakfast

BY MICHELLE CARL

**W**hen you're a high school student trying to get to class on time, the "most important meal of the day" can end up being an afterthought.

No wonder Tyler Mar has seen students clutching bags of cheese puffs and sodas on their way to first period.

Mar is the HealthCorps coordinator at American Legion High School, and he and a group of passionate students known as The Breakfast Club are trying to exchange that junk food for vanilla yogurt parfaits and whole-grain blueberry muffins.

HealthCorps is a health curriculum taught in schools across the country and several in the area, including Hiram Johnson, Luther Burbank, Sacramento Charter and McClatchy high schools. HealthCorps, which receives funding locally through the California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities grant, was created by Dr. Memet Oz and his wife, Lisa, to combat the obesity epidemic.

Mar is doing that at American Legion with a curriculum that teaches mental resilience, nutrition and fitness. His units have students roleplaying to come up with ways to resolve conflict. They learn how to read the nutrition facts label and come up with realistic weight loss goals. These are life skills students rarely get a chance to learn in regular high school courses, and if students aren't learning them at home, how will they get this knowledge?

"What we're doing in HealthCorps affects these kids in real life," he says. "Some students have family members with diabetes. It really hits them."

Some of Mar's students have lost family members to obesity. One student even enlisted him to help teach her parents how to eat a healthy diet. Students are making positive changes in their lives thanks to what they've learned.

## "WHAT WE'RE DOING IN HEALTHCORPS AFFECTS THESE KIDS IN REAL LIFE."

**Tyler Mar, HealthCorps coordinator, American Legion High School**

"We've had students rethink what they're drinking and drink less sugar," Mar says. "When they find out how much sugar is in soda they say, 'I don't drink that anymore. That's crazy!'"

One group of students wants to take what they've learned and apply it to the whole school. That group is The Breakfast Club (which ironically meets during lunch, Mar points out). The group has studied how daily breakfast impacts student performance and brainstormed ideas for a new way to serve breakfast. With help from the school district's nutrition services department and funding from the National School Breakfast Program, they have come up with a plan.

The Second Chance Grab and Go Breakfast program will totally revamp how American Legion serves breakfast, eliminating breakfast before school and delivering it to students on carts between 1st and 2nd period. The Breakfast Club students will prepare the meals during 1st

period and earn class credit for their work.

Mar's students held a taste test in December to come up with the menu, which also includes lemon tea bread, bagels and other foods that are packaged for on-the-go consumption.

"Kids are generally not favorable to school lunches," Mar says. "So the kids tried [the recipes] and voted. You can't say you don't like it if you voted for it."

Students have started advertising the Grab and Go Breakfast with posters across the campus. They hope to start serving breakfast next month.

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Tyler Mar, far left, and students in The Breakfast Club at American Legion High School share healthy messages with the student body on posters throughout the campus.  
Photo by Louise Mitchell



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# Please Don't Stop The Music

BY MIKE BLOUNT

In a small classroom tucked away toward the back of the Language Academy of Sacramento, students gathered after school and sat quietly in anticipation. All eyes focused on a young man wearing headphones standing in front of a microphone, waiting for the signal. Once the record button was pressed, it was his turn to make magic.

Nine years ago, Sol Collective began a youth apprenticeship program to train aspiring musicians and engineers in music production. The nonprofit offers a variety of programs run by community members who are dedicated to providing youth a positive outlet for creative expression in South Sacramento. Sol Collective is funded by the Building Healthy Communities grant of The California Endowment.

Executive director and founder Estella Sanchez says the music production program has always been one of the more popular programs.

"Each year, it was the one program that young people kept participating in and kept asking about," Sanchez says. "We've had such a great response from the community. Anything that gets kids excited about being creative and expressing themselves is great."

Sol Collective began the program at their South Sacramento center in 2005, but has since partnered with a handful of schools to offer the music production program for free to any students who are interested. Sanchez says she is overjoyed at the response because she believes the program gives kids an after-school activity that keeps them off the streets. According to a study by the National Endowment for the Arts, youth who participate

in arts programs have better academic outcomes and are more civically engaged.

"I'm trained as an educator and I worked as a teacher for a long time, and one of the things that I saw was a lot of the art programs in school were getting cut," Sanchez says. "It gave us an opportunity to bring something like this back into a school. It gives students something positive in the community where they can be around their peers who are interested in the same things they are and gain mentorship from another adult."

**"IT GIVES STUDENTS SOMETHING POSITIVE IN THE COMMUNITY WHERE THEY CAN BE AROUND THEIR PEERS WHO ARE INTERESTED IN THE SAME THINGS THEY ARE."**

**Estella Sanchez, executive director of Sol Collective**

Eighth-grader Yoey Knighton, 14, says he started coming to the program because he was inspired by his father, who is also a musician. "He is a huge influence on me and why I'm doing this," Knighton says. He would like to pursue a career in music, although he admits he still has a lot to learn.

"I didn't know what any of this stuff was until I started doing this," Knighton says. "But I've learned so many things, like how to use [recording software] to make beats and sample other songs. My teachers are great."

Bella Wing has also learned a lot in the program. Prior to her getting involved, the 14-year-old says she didn't know much about writing and recording a hip-hop song. But the program has encouraged her to learn as much as she can about the process.

"I really just enjoy being around people and finding that commonality collaborating with others," Wing says. "The more you learn, the better you get and the more complex you can get."

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Yoey Knighton and Bella Wing create music during an after-school music production program at the Language Academy of Sacramento. The program was started nine years ago by Sol Collective to give youth an outlet for expression. Photo by Louise Mitchell



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# Handing Down Health

BY SHANNON SPRINGMEYER

**I**t started around the kitchen table over a bowl of homemade soup. Three friends, who were all educators, African American women and mothers, discovered they had something else in common: each had seen the effects of diabetes impact her own family.

“We discovered because of the experiences our families were having that there was really a serious problem,” says Sharon Chandler, whose table served as that initial forum. “And we just took on the charge of doing something about it in whatever capacity we could.”

Toni Perry-Colley, a retired parent educator from the Sacramento City Unified School District, explains that type 2 diabetes is sometimes perceived as an inevitable rite of passage in the African American community, despite the fact that it is preventable. According to the American Diabetes Association, African Americans are disproportionately affected by diabetes and are almost twice as likely to develop the disease as compared to non-Hispanic whites. This, however, was not the legacy these mothers wanted to leave for the next generation.

So Chandler, Perry-Colley, and their friend Cloteal Herron launched the African American Women’s Health Legacy (AAWHL) as a program of the nonprofit Yes2Kollege Education Resources, Inc., headed by Chandler. Their goal is to empower African American women of all ages in the Oak Park and South Sacramento areas to leave a lasting legacy of healthy habits to their families.

“We first looked at where the problem really stems, and it stems from our eating habits and our lifestyle. And then we looked at who has control

of that in the family, and it’s usually the female,” explains Chandler. “So that’s why we said we should work with women and empower them to make good and better decisions about what we were going to feed our families, from the very beginning.”

“WE DISCOVERED BECAUSE OF THE EXPERIENCES OUR FAMILIES WERE HAVING THAT THERE WAS REALLY A SERIOUS PROBLEM.”

**Sharon Chandler, executive director of the African American Women’s Health Legacy**

AAWHL, which is supported by a grant from The California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities initiative, has partnered with local groups to provide a variety of programs to educate women on preventing and managing diabetes, hypertension and obesity. The group has joined with Dignity Health to offer a six-week diabetes management class, linked up with UC Davis School of Medicine to provide free medical care to uninsured women, invited a podiatrist to speak about diabetic foot care, and even visited a local farm to learn about buying and preparing healthy, local fruits and vegetables. Recently, AAWHL has partnered with The Brickhouse Gallery in Oak Park to host Covered California health care outreach events.

In the little more than a year since its inception, AAWHL has grown from three women to

more than 150 who have participated in its health education and advocacy programs, expanding through its participants’ family and friend relationships. Participants have gone on to become advocates for health within their communities, engaging in Sacramento Mayor Kevin Johnson’s Indivisible meetings, an assembly of African Americans who gather monthly to discuss issues facing the community.

Colley-Perry says this is exactly the goal of AAWHL.

“The legacy is that they start owning their own community and participating and developing advocacy and leadership opportunities for themselves, not just through us,” she says.

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Toni Colley-Perry, left, and Sharon Chandler, center, co-founders of the African American Women’s Health Legacy, discuss future events to be held at The Brickhouse Gallery in Oak Park with the gallery’s director, Barbara Range, right. Photo by Louise Mitchell



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# Taking it to the Streets

BY CORRIE PELC

Making improvements on Franklin Boulevard that support both economic development and a healthy community is the goal of the North Franklin District Business Association (NFDDBA). After the dissolution of California's redevelopment agencies in 2012, getting money to accomplish this goal became a lot harder.

But efforts are moving forward. Recently the NFDDBA received a grant from the California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities campaign, which it will use to create an economic development plan for the district. According to Marti Brown, executive director of NFDDBA, part of the plan is to conduct a comprehensive survey of the area's residents to develop solutions to some of the district's social and physical infrastructure problems.

The NFDDBA has met with business and property owners, residents and community leaders to develop a questionnaire, which will be administered at public places, such as light rail stations and supermarkets. The hope is that 300-400 people will share their opinions on topics including education, access to health care and affordable housing.

Brown says the purpose of the survey is to take an integrated approach to community wellness and economic development to ensure everyone's needs are being met.

"Businesses need customers and [residents] need businesses and places to shop, so this survey is about forming that cyclical relationship," she explains. "We need to paint a whole picture of what it looks like so we can address those residential and business needs in a holistic way."

In addition, NFDDBA is also evaluating how friendly Franklin Boulevard is for pedestrians and cyclists by holding a walk and bicycle audit on Saturday, March 15, with Walk Sacramento.

"BUSINESSES NEED CUSTOMERS AND [RESIDENTS] NEED BUSINESSES AND PLACES TO SHOP, SO THIS SURVEY IS ABOUT FORMING THAT CYCLICAL RELATIONSHIP."

**Marti Brown, executive director of the North Franklin District Business Association**

Brown says a number of volunteers will spend the day walking up and down Franklin Boulevard to assess its walkability and bikeability, and the data collected will be used to determine if a new streetscape is needed for the area. Brown hopes the information they gather will demonstrate to policy makers and funders the need for street improvements to meet the needs of the district's residents and businesses.

"We have a population down here that is low income and we really need to address their needs and make this a much more user-friendly, complete street that allows for multimodal transportation," she says.

Safe, walkable and bikeable streets are not only a boon to businesses and important in reducing

injury and accidents, they also promote healthy, active lifestyles among community residents.

Brown says without funding from the California Endowment, they would not have been able to do this important work.

"Without an organization like the Endowment... we would continue to limp along with our plan ... to do some of the things that we need some additional expertise [for]," she explains. "I am incredibly grateful and I also hope it will be informative for the Endowment, as [well] as for other public agencies, [as] it's really demonstrated to us how remarkable it is what you can do with so little money."

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One of the aims of the economic development plan headed by Marti Brown, executive director of the North Franklin District Business Association, is to increase the walkability of streets like this one within the district by adding crosswalks.  
Photo by Anne Stokes



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# Inspiring Sacramento Youth

BY MEREDITH J. GRAHAM

**W**hen Brandon Woods was preparing to graduate from high school, one of his coaches approached him about a summer opportunity working with local teens. Woods took the recommendation and became an intern at People Reaching Out, a nonprofit that receives funding from the California Endowment and whose mission is to inspire young people.

The People Reaching Out program Woods joined is called Summer L.A.B. (Learning-Achieving-Believing), which exposes seventh-through 12th-graders to a community college environment. Activities range from science and technology to theater and literary arts. Others, like sports, encourage physical activity and healthy eating.

“One of the things we did was use sports to teach life lessons to kids,” Woods says. “I’m really passionate about sports, so I could easily relate.”

Woods’ first experience at Summer L.A.B. was two years ago. He says it had such a big impact on him that he returned last summer and plans on a third session in 2014. In addition to leading activities, Woods found himself reaching out to the kids, particularly the shy ones. He also found opportunities to be a mentor.

“This past summer, there was this one kid who grew up in the same neighborhood as I did. There are some troubling things in that

neighborhood,” Woods says. “He basically needed someone to be there for him, to let him know that these things are not OK and sometimes you need to walk away. He looked up to me as that person.”

“ONE OF THE THINGS WE DID WAS USE SPORTS TO TEACH LIFE LESSONS TO KIDS. I’M REALLY PASSIONATE ABOUT SPORTS, SO I COULD EASILY RELATE.”

**Brandon Woods**

People Reaching Out has a long history of providing mentors for youth, and the majority of those mentors are peers — teens mentor elementary-aged kids — rather than adults. At 20 years old, Woods is able to relate to the high schoolers and bridge a gap between youths and adults.

“I can relate to adults and students can relate to me, so why can’t students relate to adults?” he says. “There’s no reason they can’t. That’s where People Reaching Out comes in — it gives youth the opportunity to voice their opinions.”

In addition to the Summer L.A.B. and mentorship programs, People Reaching Out also inspires youth to become involved in social change in their communities and to get

engaged in local politics. Woods participated in the formation of a macro-business district in his neighborhood of Valley Hi. As a representative of People Reaching Out, he was able to offer suggestions for youth-oriented solutions. Other programs get kids and teens out to city council meetings and similar civic activities.

In all, Woods says he’s grateful for the opportunities he’s had, and the ones he’s able to offer younger people, through the organization.

“It’s cool because I know I’m making a difference,” he says. “That’s all through People Reaching Out.”

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Brandon Woods enjoys working with youth through People Reaching Out.  
Photo by Louise Mitchell



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# Waste Not, Want Not

BY MIKE BLOUNT

If you live in Sacramento, you've probably seen Valencia orange trees bearing plentiful fruit that ends up rotting on the ground or getting thrown away. Most of this fruit goes unharvested and never makes it into the community's food supply. In fact, the Sacramento Region Food System Collaborative estimates anywhere between 1 and 5 million pounds of fruit in Sacramento is wasted each year.

Harvest Sacramento is trying to change that trend by organizing several fruit gleanings events in South Sacramento. And through a partnership with Sacramento Food Bank and Family Services, they're distributing the fruit to residents in need. Events take place throughout the winter and spring on Saturdays, with up to 75 volunteers harvesting around 2,000-4,000 pounds of citrus at each gleaning.

The organization, funded by the Building Healthy Communities grant from The California Endowment, estimates it will collect more than 60,000 pounds of fruit in 2014, with much of that coming from the Oak Park neighborhood.

"We have huge volumes of this fruit that we've inherited, but we don't utilize or even really take care of these trees in many cases," says Harvest Sacramento Coordinator Dominic Allamano.

Allamano says the effort is also about bringing people together in the community to think about how they can increase food access for residents. Most of the produce grown locally is exported, while most of the produced consumed locally is imported. One of the goals of Harvest Sacramento is to start a discussion about building a more sustainable food system.

"WE USE THESE EVENTS AS COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES TO CONNECT PEOPLE TOGETHER."

**Dominic Allamano, Harvest Sacramento Coordinator**

"We're using this opportunity to connect people to a much bigger re-exploration of the food system in each of our neighborhoods, so in the future, we can endow the residents with even more than we've received," Allamano says. "We use these events as community experiences to connect people together, to connect them to the land and their neighborhoods, to open their eyes to these possibilities and to challenge them to look at other harvests that are out there. It's all about finding mutually beneficial relationships and finding a way to create a better eco-system for the community we live in and share."

Harvest Sacramento partners with several organizations and individuals in South Sacramento to put together gleanings events. In February the organization partnered with Pacific Elementary School, where volunteers helped glean oranges from trees on campus.

Sacramento residents can submit their trees for gleanings, stay updated about future events or inquire about volunteer opportunities at [harvestsacramento.org](http://harvestsacramento.org).

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Volunteers participate in a fruit gleaning event at Pacific Elementary School.  
Photo by Louise Mitchell



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# Creating Greater Awareness of LGBTQ Needs

BY EVAN TUCHINSKY

Ajay Lawson knows her coming-out story is happier than most. As a high school freshman, after revealing to family and friends that she's a lesbian, she encountered nothing but acceptance from everyone with an active part in her life.

"It's really cool to have such a strong support system," says Lawson, now 21. "A lot of LGBTQ youth have to work hard for family acceptance while trying to find their place in the world, and it's really stressful. It's no easy task."

That's why Lawson is so committed to helping young people who don't find themselves in her position. She's a youth-group counselor at the Sacramento LGBT Community Center, youth intern at Mental Health America of Northern California (MHANCA) and president of the Sacramento Youth Pride Coalition.

The latter group, still in its early stages, is part of a program called Healthy Leadership Support for LGBTQ Youth. Through a Building Healthy Communities grant from the California Endowment, MHANCA has nurtured the council and reached out to local organizations serving teens and young adults who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or another orientation within the LGBTQ community.

"A lot of what we do is work with other BHC grantees to build a better community in South Sacramento," says Nicole Scanlan, LGBTQ project coordinator for MHANCA. "It's one of the most underserved, and inappropriately served, areas in this region, so working together we try to make a better life for residents."

Lawson lived in South Sacramento with her parents and two brothers until just recently, when she moved out on her own. She's attended Sacramento City College, majoring in political science, but has taken a break to focus on the youth council. When she returns to college in a year or two, she plans to switch her major to communications with an eye toward social-media counseling.

"WHAT WE HOPE IS THAT IT WILL BE EASIER FOR LGBTQ YOUTH TO GET SERVICES BECAUSE THE PROVIDERS WILL UNDERSTAND TERMINOLOGY AND THE ISSUES THAT LGBTQ YOUTH FACE ON A DAILY BASIS."

Ajay Lawson

"Communicating is a really effective way to effect change," Lawson says. "It'd be really cool to have a youth-led, youth-serving organization with advocacy to push the idea of non-rejecting spaces ... very affirming places that are safe."

Those are goals of Sacramento Youth Pride Coalition, whose members receive leadership training, mentoring and professional services through the Healthy Leadership Support program. Concurrently, MHANCA conducts training sessions for agencies and groups.

"What we hope is that it will be easier for LGBTQ youth to get services because the providers will understand terminology and the issues that LGBTQ youth face on a daily basis," Scanlan said. "They may not see a need to address those issues because they're not aware of them, and so we hope through training and education that we will get a bigger coalition to work on addressing the needs and issues of LGBTQ youth in the community."

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Ajay Lawson facilitates a regular LGBTQ youth group meeting as part of the Sacramento Youth Pride Coalition.  
Photo by Louise Mitchell



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# Poetry in Motion

BY MIKE BLOUNT

Becoming a published author in high school is no easy task. But a group of Oak Park boys are aiming to put together a book of original poems by the end of the year with a little help from local organizers and the nonprofit 916 Ink.

At the Brick House Art Gallery in South Sacramento last month, a workshop called MIC'ed Up (Men Igniting Consciousness) brought together a group of young men of color to learn about the urban expression of poetry — from hip-hop lyrics to spoken word. The event was sponsored by 916 Ink, a nonprofit literacy advocate for teens funded by the Building Healthy Communities grant of The California Endowment.

Organizer Marichal J. Brown says the idea was to expose young men of color in Oak Park to the creative process of expressing themselves. For aspiring young writers like 15-year-old Malcolm Anderson, the workshop was an opportunity to network with other writers his age and create something of his own.

"I have been writing since I was 5 years old," Malcolm says. "I would always listen to hip-hop songs that my older sisters would play, and when I was a child, I liked how it rhymed. But as I got older, I started realizing there was more than that. They're talking about stuff that's happening in the world around them or where they came from. They're storytellers."

Malcolm says he was attracted to the event because he wanted to learn more about the history of urban poetry and hip-hop.

"When you take away the beat in a hip hop song, what you have is poetry," Malcolm says. "I think it's important for people to be able to express themselves, and in some cases, I think it may even save lives. It gives people a positive way to talk about how they feel and share that with others."

"THE WORLD HAS BEEN CHANGED SO MANY TIMES WITH JUST THE STROKE OF A PEN"

Marichal J. Brown,  
MIC'ed Up organizer

Marichal agrees. With his own background in music and poetry, Marichal believes that creative expression is also important to being successful. He says MIC'ed Up is about giving young men of color the confidence to do whatever it is they want to do in life. He hopes that by becoming published authors, they will realize that anything is possible if they put their mind to it.

"Whether it's hip-hop or writing or poetry that brought them here, the one thing we wanted to get across is that words can be powerful," Marichal says. "The world has been changed

so many times with just the stroke of a pen. Being literate is the key to being successful in today's society."

Marichal says he's planning another MIC'ed Up event soon and he hopes to open it up to even more youth. For more information on MIC'ed Up and future events, visit the Brick House Art Gallery Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/brick.house.146](http://www.facebook.com/brick.house.146).

## 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.

Left to right: Vincent Kobelt poses with Malcolm Anderson and Marichal Brown at the Brick House Art Gallery.  
Photo by Louise Mitchell



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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

# Health Care for All

BY BEATRICE M. HOGG

Ten years ago, Gloria Casillas came to Sacramento from Guadalajara, Mexico to be with her sister and start a new life. She found work, got married and had a son, Isai.

After Isai's birth five years ago, some hormonal irregularities made her think that she might have cancer. A biopsy was done and she was found to be cancer-free. When he was eight months old, she developed allergies, along with chills and hives, making it impossible to breastfeed. Treatment at a clinic didn't clear up her symptoms, so finally she went to an emergency room.

As an undocumented resident, her options for getting care for these conditions were limited. She was able to enroll in Medi-Cal to cover her childbirth and emergency Medi-Cal for the emergency room visit, but she knew there were others in her community who could not access health care due to their immigration status. People were dying needlessly. Over the counter medication was the only available treatment. Preventative care was nonexistent. As a housekeeper who worked with harsh chemicals, Casillas wondered if the exposure was harming her.

"How can we be good workers without access to care? We are always afraid of getting sick," Casillas says. "I heard someone say, 'If we have a right to education, why can't we have the right to health care?' That made sense to me."

Casillas is advocating alongside Sacramento ACT, which receives a grant from The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities initiative. Due to federal funding

for the state's health care exchange, Sacramento County has money that could be used to provide health care for undocumented persons. "People who used to be on county programs now go directly to state programs. There is still a lot of money there," says Annie Fox of Sacramento ACT. "ACT is trying to get that money to be available."

"HOW CAN WE BE GOOD WORKERS WITHOUT ACCESS TO CARE? WE ARE ALWAYS AFRAID OF GETTING SICK."

Gloria Casillas  
advocate for health care

There are other efforts to get health insurance for undocumented residents. SB 1005, a bill proposed by State Sen. Ricardo Lara, would "expand access to health care coverage for all Californians, regardless of immigration status." A recent rally was held at the Capitol and attended by the bills supporters, some of them traveling from Bakersfield, Modesto and Los Angeles.

"The people who are doing the most dangerous jobs in America have the least access to health care," Fox says. "Their jobs are prone to accidents and most of them are undocumented. Public health has to be about a community

being healthy. If half of that community doesn't have access to health care, it's hard to keep the community healthy."

Fox added that these are young, working families who could afford to purchase insurance on the state's health care exchange, but they cannot because of their resident status.

Although she missed the rally, Casillas attended a hearing for the bill and feels it has a good chance of becoming law.

"We have lots of support," she says. "People have the power. We want to show other states that they can do this, too."

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Gloria Casillas attended a recent hearing for SB 1005, a bill that would expand health care to all residents, regardless of immigration status.  
Photo by Louise Mitchell



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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

# Making South Sac Bike-Friendly

BY MIKE BLOUNT

**T**ransportation for residents without cars in South Sacramento has long been an issue. Perhaps due to a lack of public transit infrastructure in already impoverished neighborhoods, many residents rely on their bicycles to get around. But navigating busy intersections, such as Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and Fruitridge Road, has proven dangerous for bicyclists in the past.

David Martinez, 56, travels daily from South Sacramento to Midtown for work by bicycle. Martinez says he's been struck twice by a vehicle on Stockton Boulevard — once causing him to break his clavicle.

"People [driving on Stockton Boulevard] are ignorant of bicycle riders," Martinez says. "Stockton is a thoroughfare and people don't pay attention. If I have time, I will go through the neighborhoods. It's a lot longer, but it's a lot safer."

Thanks to the Building Healthy Communities grant of The California Endowment, Sacramento Area Bicycle Advocates hopes to increase safety and improve access for bike riders in South Sacramento.

As executive director of Sacramento Area Bicycle Advocates, Jim Brown works with local government, nonprofits and private business in Sacramento to help make the city more bike-friendly. In order to do that, Brown says that SABA first has to collect data. The organization engages the community and surveys residents about how they are getting around — when, how and where they are traveling. Where are some places that they currently can't go?

"We're on the leading edge of this where we're trying to identify routes where people need to go and address obstacles to make riding a bike in these neighborhoods as convenient and comfortable as possible," Brown says. "We'll be looking this summer into hosting community workshops to ask the residents how they would improve the street conditions in their area. That data is really important to drill down the areas that residents don't feel safe traveling on a bicycle."

"WE'RE ON THE LEADING  
EDGE OF THIS WHERE  
WE'RE TRYING TO IDENTIFY  
ROUTES WHERE PEOPLE  
NEED TO GO."

**Jim Brown**  
Executive Director of Sacramento  
Area Bicycle Advocates

In December 2013, a man riding a bicycle was killed when he was struck by a vehicle at the intersection of Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and Fruitridge Road. In 2012, two bicyclists were killed after being hit by a vehicle on Stockton Boulevard. Brown believes that these tragedies can be avoided by reducing vehicle speed, giving the driver enough time to avoid a bicyclist or a pedestrian.

With support and recommendations from the community, SABA will work with city government officials to implement these

changes, which could include proposed bike route lanes, signals, signs or a combination of all three. Brown says he's hoping to have some proposed solutions by the end of the year, but it's still early in the process.

Residents in South Sacramento interested in participating in one of the SABA community workshops about bicycle safety should visit the organization's website for more information at [www.sacbike.org](http://www.sacbike.org).

"I'm grateful we have the opportunity to participate in the Building Healthy Communities work and have a hand in helping improve travel conditions for residents in South Sacramento," Brown says.

## BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

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David Martinez has been struck by a car twice while riding his bike on Stockton Boulevard.  
Photo by Mike Blount



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# News Through a Different Lens

BY MIKE BLOUNT

Summer is often a chance for young adults to get some rest and relaxation in between school years. But for a select group of young adults in Sacramento, it will be a chance to spend the summer working as journalists, covering the news as they see it.

The Access Sacramento Neighborhood News youth-correspondent program pays a stipend to young reporters ages 16-21 to produce a weekly video for the organization's website. Videos cover a variety of topics, but concentrate on reporting local issues that don't generally get media coverage, such as community events and resident spotlights.

"We tell the stories that don't end up on the nightly news," says Isaac Gonzalez, program director for the Neighborhood News youth-correspondent program. "We're not an 'if it bleeds, it leads' operation. We go out and talk to the residents, organizations and elected officials about the issues that really matter on a street-by-street basis."

Gonzalez says the program isn't just for up and coming journalists, but is open to any young person who wants to share his or her voice.

"We don't just try to find young people who have excellent skills in journalism," Gonzalez says. "We make it a point to find young people who want to share their story, but don't have the skill set to do that, so we can elevate them to become a storyteller."

In the past, the Neighborhood News youth-correspondent program was only partially funded by the Building Healthy Communities

grant of The California Endowment. But as of January, The California Endowment will fund the program for the next two years. Gonzalez says this has allowed the program to expand into even more forms of media.

"MY EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN AMAZING BECAUSE I ALWAYS WANTED TO EXPRESS HOW I FELT, BUT I COULD NEVER FIND A WAY."

Mario Ayala  
Neighborhood News Correspondent

Twice a month, youth participate in a podcast discussion and expand one of the videos from their website into a news magazine-style report. Gonzalez says both the podcast and news show, called "Sacposé," are chances for youth to talk about things they think are important.

"I'm always impressed with the maturity and breadth of content when you just ask young people what is important to them," Gonzalez says. "They're talking about things like access to healthy foods, education, how the media affects their perceptions of their bodies, school funding, gang violence, transportation and sexually transmitted diseases."

Mario Ayala has been in the program for two years. He says the experience has given

him the opportunity to talk about the things happening in his community.

"My experience has been amazing because I always wanted to express how I felt, but I could never find a way," Ayala says. "It's been incredible to let people know about all the things going on in Oak Park."

For more information on Access Sacramento's Neighborhood News youth-correspondent program, visit [www.accesslocal.tv](http://www.accesslocal.tv).

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Youth gather together to discuss the stories they want to cover for the upcoming week. Access Sacramento's Neighborhood News Correspondent program is supported by the Building Healthy Communities grant of The California Endowment.  
Photo by Louise Mitchell



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In Neighborhoods

BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

# The Great Suspicion

BY BEATRICE M. HOGG

**R**ev. Dan Garza, 39, is the pastor of Ebenezer Christian Center in South Sacramento. The church provided him, his wife and three children with health benefits, but the premium was a hefty \$1,500 a month. After enrolling in Covered California, he was able to get a less expensive premium, saving the church \$400 a month. Because of the savings, the church was able to allocate more money to services such as their food bank.

But not all of his parishioners have been able to follow Pastor Dan's example. About 40 percent of his congregation are undocumented and do not qualify for Covered California. But even legal Latino residents face hurdles, technological and cultural, when signing up for health insurance.

One of the barriers to enrollment for legal residents is the inability to access the Covered California website. Not all Latinos have access to the Internet and not everyone is able to successfully navigate the website.

"It was tedious to sign up," says Garza, the son of farmworkers in Washington state.

Although 305,106 Latinos enrolled in Covered California over the open enrollment period that ended in March, making up around 28 percent of total enrollees, the Latino demographic represents 60 percent of those

who are uninsured, according to the California HealthCare Foundation.

Annie Fox of Sacramento ACT says those who sign up for health insurance are often frustrated and overwhelmed by the lengthy application they have to complete.

Latino men with families get enrolled with their wives and children, but single men are not likely to apply. Many men are apt to utilize home remedies passed down from their families. Fox says that men, especially single men, believe that they should just "suck it up" and endure any pain they are experiencing.

LEGAL LATINO RESIDENTS  
FACE HURDLES,  
TECHNOLOGICAL AND  
CULTURAL, WHEN SIGNING  
UP FOR HEALTH INSURANCE.

"It is not in their nature for men to advocate for themselves," she says.

Even if they are legal residents, men may be hesitant to share their information with government agencies. Garza says that many Latinos have what he calls, "The Great Suspicion." This cultural belief is a remnant of the political unrest in their countries of

origin, where giving data to the government could put a person and their family at risk.

Garza feels that more education about Covered California is needed. His church has helped people to access the health insurance marketplace and also partners with community agencies to provide information to his parishioners. Garza feels that to be successful in Latino communities, government agencies need to emphasize that enrollment will not cause personal information to be shared with other entities that they do not trust.

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Rev. Dan Garza of Ebenezer Christian Center signed up for Covered California and saved money, but says many other Latinos may have hesitated to sign up for health insurance. Photo by Louise Mitchell



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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

# Building A Better Tomorrow

BY MIKE BLOUNT

One of 21-year-old Marquez Anderson's biggest dreams is to be able to point at the Sacramento Kings downtown arena and tell his friends and family that he had a part in helping build it.

The lifelong Kings fan is currently gaining valuable experience at Northern California Construction and Training. The school teaches basic construction skills to students in search of a trade. Anderson hopes it will help him land one of 70 initial construction jobs being offered through the Kings' Priority Apprenticeship Program, which will recruit workers from low-income neighborhoods around Sacramento. Anderson, who lives in South Sacramento, will be applying for an apprenticeship after he graduates from the construction program.

"I'm learning plumbing, framing, safety and how to work with others," Anderson says. "Before I wasn't doing anything. I was just applying for jobs. Now, I'm learning skills that can help me get a career."

While construction on the new arena is promising local jobs, the Sacramento Housing Alliance is advocating that the apprenticeship program provides the skills needed for a career in construction. The Sacramento Housing Alliance is a grantee of the Building Healthy Communities grant of The California Endowment.

Executive Director Darryl Rutherford says his organization has provided input and feedback to Sacramento Area Congregations Together,

Sacramento Urban League and Sacramento Employment and Training Agency in developing the program to ensure workers hired for the arena construction jobs leave with the skills needed to succeed after the project is completed.

"A lot of times these apprenticeship jobs don't necessarily lead to full-time employment within the construction trade," Rutherford says. "Those who are going to be providing the oversight into this program need to make sure that the residents are learning employment skills that make them more marketable to future employers."

**"WE WANT TO MAKE SURE THESE RESIDENTS ARE LEAVING THESE APPRENTICESHIPS WITH THE SKILLS THEY NEED TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN THE LONG TERM."**

Darryl Rutherford, Executive Director of Sacramento Housing Alliance

Rutherford adds that many of the residents who will participate will need training in a number of areas.

"They are going to need training in basic math. They will need training on how to communicate with others, how to work with others in a productive way and learn about work ethic — showing up to work on time

and how to be prepared," Rutherford says.

"Initially, they may earn a good paycheck that benefits them in the short term, but we want to make sure these residents are leaving these apprenticeships with the skills they need to be successful in the long term."

Construction on the Kings arena is tentatively scheduled to begin at the end of 2014. Until then, Anderson says he is glad he's learning a new skill set because it will increase his chances of getting an apprenticeship.

"I want this to be a career for me," Anderson says.

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Marquez Anderson is learning valuable skills from Jake Meehan, an instructor at Northern California Construction and Training. Anderson hopes to secure a job helping build the new arena downtown.  
Photo by Louise Mitchell



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4'10"

COST OF  
PRISON

Per inmate/per year

\$62,300



COST OF  
K – 12

Per student/per year

\$9,100

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In Neighborhoods

BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

# Your Voice Needed

BY SENA CHRISTIAN

**J**ust because some people don't go to town hall meetings, doesn't mean they don't care about their neighborhood or have valuable insight to share.

An intensive, multiday planning process from Aug. 11-17 aims to include both this group of residents and those eager to publicly speak about their priorities, concerns and experiences of living in South Sacramento. At the Building Healthy Communities Charrette, several local organizations will collect this feedback and apply it toward their initiatives to improve the neighborhood and the health outcomes for its residents.

For those who don't attend, many of their voices will still be heard thanks to the use of MetroQuest, an online platform that allows for the mobile gathering of public input — the more, the better.

"This charrette is the first of its kind," says Charles L. Mason Jr., founder and CEO of Ubuntu Green, which is coordinating the event. "By engaging residents in some of our region's most underserved communities, we can set a precedent for community engagement that will allow for meaningful interactions with residents for years to come."

Ubuntu Green is a grant recipient of the California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities initiative.

Organizers hope to attract members of neighborhood associations, elected officials, nonprofit groups, youth advocates, residents and other stakeholders to the charrette. Out of the charrette will come community action

plans for bike and pedestrian safety, economic development, housing, environmental health and healthy food access.

"It's a lot of stuff, but in working really intensely in a really short period of time, you can get it done," Mason says.

Ubuntu Green is coordinating the charrette with WALKS Sacramento, Soil Born Farms, Sacramento Area Bicycle Advocates, Sacramento Housing Alliance and Youth Development Network.

**"BY ENGAGING RESIDENTS IN SOME OF OUR REGION'S MOST UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES, WE CAN SET A PRECEDENT FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT THAT WILL ALLOW FOR MEANINGFUL INTERACTIONS WITH RESIDENTS FOR YEARS TO COME."**

*Charles L. Mason Jr., CEO of Ubuntu Green*

"The idea is to include the needs and goals (of residents) in current community plans or into the next update of the city and county general plans," says Teri Duarte, executive director of WALKS Sacramento. "We hope to bring in lots of residents to the charrette to tell us about the changes they'd like [to see] to make their neighborhoods healthier and

a better place to live."

Listening closely to residents makes for more effective advocacy work, Mason says. He described the recent work of a local coalition — which includes Ubuntu Green — to submit language for a new urban agriculture ordinance for the city of Sacramento, after determining that people wanted more opportunities to grow their own food and, in some cases, sell the produce. The coalition is advocating for measures that remove barriers to urban farming and improve access to healthy food for all.

For more information on the Building Healthy Communities Charrette for South Sacramento, visit [www.ubuntugreen.org](http://www.ubuntugreen.org).

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Participants in a June 26 workshop about the upcoming Building Healthy Communities Charrette share their views on issues that should be discussed.  
Photo by Louise Mitchell



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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

# Everyone Can Shop Here

BY BEATRICE M. HOGG

**M**any people aren't aware that food assistance programs such as CalFresh and WIC coupons can be used to purchase food from many places — including farmers markets.

The Oak Park Farmers Market opened in May 2010. In 2011, due to the support of the California Endowment, it moved to McClatchy Park. For the past four years, a partnership with Rabobank has allowed the Oak Park Farmers Market to provide a dollar-for-dollar match for CalFresh recipients, helping low-income families stretch their benefits.

Using CalFresh benefits at the market is easy. At the market's info booth, customers swipe their EBT card at a machine and indicate the amount they want to purchase. They are given tokens for that amount and for the matching funds — so \$20 in CalFresh benefits gives customers \$40 worth of tokens. Tokens do not expire and can be used at a later time.

"We require all of our vendors to accept the EBT card," says Joany Titherington, the Oak Park Farmers Market manager. "There is no shame in using EBT — it's just access to healthy food."

The market has done \$30,000 in EBT sales so far this year, a 15 percent increase from last year. There have been many efforts to encourage shoppers to take advantage of the healthy food at the market. One promotion is the "Word of the Week," which is publicized on the market's Facebook page and through e-mail. Thanks to funding from the California Endowment's Building Health Communities initiative, customers are given \$5 of "funny

money" if they know the word, which can be used to buy almost anything at the market. This helps people who fall through the cracks — seniors, those not eligible for food stamps, or people on SSI or disability — to get extra produce at the market.

Sharon Eghigian is community impact manager at NeighborWorks Sacramento, which founded and operates the Oak Park Farmers Market. She says giving shoppers the ability to use EBT cards at the market was critical.

"It has been a win-win for both our families and our farmers," she says. "Without the support from the Endowment, we would not have the leverage to promote our services."

**"THERE IS NO SHAME IN USING EBT — IT'S JUST ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD."**

*Joany Titherington*

*Oak Park Farmers Market manager*

The market also has cooking demonstrations, music, yoga, massage and activities for children. Titherington would like to see more Latino shoppers, as one-third of the community is Latino. "There is a perception out there that farmers markets are white and middle class. We do not perpetuate that myth," she says. She would

also like to see more WIC coupon distribution at the market, as she says only 65 percent of WIC coupons are redeemed.

The Oak Park Farmers Market benefits everyone — families get fresh, nutritious food; farmers get local, eager buyers; and a positive, lasting impact is made on the community. The market, which is disabled accessible, is open from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. every Saturday from May through October at 35th Street and 5th Avenue.

"It's a place for everybody," Titherington says. "Food is the way we break down walls and barriers."

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Shoppers at the Oak Park Farmers Market are able to utilize their CalFresh benefits by swiping their EBT card and receiving tokens, which are used to purchase fresh food from vendors.

Photo by Louise Mitchell



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In Neighborhoods

BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

# Capturing His World

BY ALYSSA NOELLE RASMUSSEN

**W**e typically take photos to record moments, monuments and communities that speak to us in some way. Our photos reveal the things we believe in. Mhong Thao understands the power of images and is making contributions to his community of South Sacramento using a digital SLR.

Mhong Thao is part of the Building Healthy Communities Youth Media Team, which records local events and addresses local issues through social media. Funding for the program comes from the California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities (BHC) initiative. It's clear that with the BHC Youth Media Team, Mhong has found his niche and a message.

Mhong has lost two uncles to drugs, and he has seen many of his classmates' interest in education wane due to substance abuse. At the events he attends for the Youth Media Team, Mhong utilizes his vantage point as a photographer to educate youth on the dangers of drug use and the benefits of getting an education. "There isn't much happening in Sacramento, but drugs aren't the thing to do," he says. "Your mom feeds you, gives you a house and roof, and a room to live in — and all you can pay them back with is an education."

The recent Luther Burbank High School grad first heard about the Youth Media Team through yearbook club. He remembers his first time out with the team at an event at the Fruitridge

Community Center. With his camera in hand and the team at his side, Mhong says with confidence "it was the best thing that happened."

Mhong's drive and dedication to the Youth Media Team have reaped positive opportunities for him. He traveled with the team to Crescent City where he not only met many adult cohorts, but was able to interact with youth from Oakland, Richmond, Salinas and Crescent City.

## "I JUST REALLY WANT TO PROMOTE MY COMMUNITY."

*Mhong Thao*

*BHC Youth Media Team*

Alberto Mercado, who organizes the BHC Youth Media Team, has mentored many young interns in the program. Team members are trained in photography, video editing and production and sent out to document and publish what they see through social media. Though the interns are passionate about multiple issues, each gravitates toward a topic that they then examine more deeply.

"We don't recruit kids that are already on their way to be successful — we open it up to anyone," Mercado says. "There are life skills here and tools for use in social media. Instead of having those tools be used for a negative impact, they can be your ally."

Though Mhong recognizes that photography is an art, it would be an empty one without the subject. He's proud to document the faces he sees at events in South Sacramento.

"I just really want to promote my community. I try to talk to them, too, have their sons and daughters heard," he says. "I am trying to bring them out there, and make sure they have a voice, too."

See the Youth Media Team's coverage on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/SacramentoBHC](http://www.facebook.com/SacramentoBHC), on Twitter @SacBHC and at the Sacramento BHC blog at [www.sacbhc.org/blog](http://www.sacbhc.org/blog).

## 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.

Mhong Thai, right, was trained in photography and social media skills as part of the Building Healthy Communities Youth Media Team. Alberto Mercado, left, helps train youth interns in the program.  
Photo by Louise Mitchell



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BUILDING A **HEALTHY** SACRAMENTO

# Green is Good

IMPROVING THE ENVIRONMENT CAN IMPROVE JOB PROSPECTS

BY SENA CHRISTIAN

About 14,000 green jobs currently exist in the Sacramento region. But that's not enough, says a group of local governments, utility providers, business owners and environmentalists that want to double that number and create a self-sustaining clean energy economy in the process.

This group, led by Greenwise Joint Venture, is receiving critical assistance from Green For All, a nonprofit based in Oakland and Washington D.C. that aims to create opportunities for people of color and urbanites while building the new green economy. The organization is focusing its Green Pathways Out of Poverty efforts in South Sacramento, who is a grantee of the California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities initiative.

"Our mission is we want to lift people of color and vulnerable communities out of poverty through the green economy," says Michael Blake, senior consultant for Green For All.

The Green Pathways program connects stakeholders interested in green-job training with workforce development to prepare disenfranchised groups for green-collar careers. A working group of national experts is in the process of identifying strategies that work for at-risk communities.

"Green job" is a broad term that can apply to a wide range of professions, such as energy auditor, organic farmer, solar installer, LEED-certified architect or wind turbine technician. These jobs contribute directly to protecting our air, water and plants, while improving communities through access to liveable wages and health benefits. According to Green For

All, "If a job improves the environment, but doesn't provide a family-supporting wage or a career ladder to move low-income workers into higher-skilled occupations, it is not a green-collar job."

The city of Sacramento has prioritized eco-friendly policies since the city council's adoption of the Sustainability Master Plan in 2007. Greenwise Joint Venture formed in 2012 out of an initiative launched by Mayor Kevin Johnson to create a regional action plan to turn Sacramento into a hub for clean technology, urban design and green building.

"There is a new, emerging economy all about sustainability and the passion people have around that," says Greenwise board member Tom Kandris. "There are going to be new jobs that don't currently exist today that will be brought to bear in the next decade for the green economy."

**"OUR MISSION IS WE WANT TO LIFT PEOPLE OF COLOR AND VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES OUT OF POVERTY THROUGH THE GREEN ECONOMY."**

**Michael Blake, policy director for Green For All**

Green For All has partnered closely with Greenwise and Johnson. Blake notes the mayor's leadership on environmental issues. In 2013, Johnson was appointed to President

Barack Obama's Task Force on Climate Preparedness and Resilience.

Green For All is also working with the Sacramento Kings to negotiate construction jobs for the new downtown arena and entertainment center — architects aim to achieve LEED Platinum designation.

"We are not only showing these are good paying, quality jobs, but they can be good to the environment at the same time," Blake says. "Green For All is excited with what's happening in Sacramento. What we're clearly seeing is a tremendous opportunity to engage people who are usually left behind."

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Green jobs, such as solar installer, help facilitate a healthy environment and economy. Photo courtesy of SolarCity



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# The Bus Doesn't Stop Here

IMPROVING THE ENVIRONMENT CAN IMPROVE JOB PROSPECTS

BY BEATRICE M. HOGG

In 2010, residents of the Avondale/Glen Elder neighborhood showed up at their local bus stop and were greeted with a sign that said, “No Bus Service.”

Sacramento Regional Transit (RT) eliminated service due to budget cuts, but the Avondale/Glen Elder Neighborhood Association (AGENA) was not formally notified of the change.

“They put a flier on the bus, the bulletin behind the driver with a list of all of closures and route changes — that was the only outreach. They didn’t come to our community to do a meeting,” says Nailah Pope-Harden, president of AGENA.

Elderly residents make up 30 percent of the population of Avondale/Glen Elder, an area bordered by Florin Road and Fruitridge Road, between 47th Avenue and Power Inn Road. The community is 50 percent Southeast Asian, 25 percent African-American and 25 percent Latino. Everyone has been affected by the loss of bus service.

“We shouldn’t have to fight for services that are automatic for certain neighborhoods,” says Emmett Harden, vice president of AGENA. “These are basic amenities that as citizens and taxpayers we should be entitled to.”

Since then, AGENA and Capital Region Organizing Project (CROP) have been meeting regularly with Regional Transit to try and restore bus service to the area. Michelle Pariset, an organizer with CROP, has been working with AGENA to set up meetings and get things moving in the community.

“We try to build power — to have a stronger effect and amplify the message,” she says.

The organization was founded in 2012, around the time that the community was ending a five-year fight with a gas company that wanted to store natural gas on vacant land in the area. In 2013, CROP received a Building Healthy Communities (BHC) grant from The California Endowment. The grant has helped CROP and AGENA to partner with organizations outside of the community, especially other BHC grantees.

**“WE SHOULDN’T HAVE TO FIGHT FOR SERVICES THAT ARE AUTOMATIC FOR CERTAIN NEIGHBORHOODS. THESE ARE BASIC AMENITIES THAT AS CITIZENS AND TAXPAYERS WE SHOULD BE ENTITLED TO.”**

**Emmett Harden,**  
**Vice president of Avondale/Glen Elder Neighborhood Association**

“CROP gives the community a voice,” Harden says.

The grant also helps with practical matters, such as getting people to meetings and

providing the supplies to make fliers and use other methods to keep community residents informed.

On Sept. 10, CROP and members of AGENA met with RT officials, including RoseMary Covington, assistant general manager of Planning and Transit System Development, and General Manager/CEO Mike Wiley. Pariset says the RT officials indicated they would review several options to discuss during their second meeting in October.

AGENA and CROP will continue the fight until Regional Transit returns public transportation to the residents of Avondale/Glen Elder.

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Nailah Pope-Harden and Emmett Harden are waiting for bus service to return to their Avondale/Glen Elder neighborhood. In the meantime, their neighborhood association is working with CROP to voice residents’ concerns to Sacramento Regional Transit.  
Photo by Louise Mitchell



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BUILDING A **HEALTHY** SACRAMENTO

# Circle of Trust

BY BEATRICE M. HOGG

**G**reg King knows that many African-American men find it hard to trust. They struggle to open up and need a safe place where healing can occur.

For many, the Healing Circle has been that place.

“The circle is a sacred place and we treat it as such,” says King, who created the group in December 2013 as part of his nonprofit, Always Knocking, Inc.

Each week, 15-25 men come to the circle to find solutions to their problems, get resources and connect in an open environment. Members say they feel comfortable here. It’s even OK to cry.

Many participants are ex-offenders on probation or parole who have to attend court-mandated classes. Some of the men stop by the Healing Circle on their way to the mandatory classes and report being more at ease and able to participate in these classes because of the work done during Healing Circle. King hopes that one day, the Healing Circle will be on the list of acceptable court-mandated classes.

Men involved in the Healing Circle are making positive changes in their lives and discovering their potential.

“Since I’ve been part of the Healing Circle, it’s helped me deal with issues I have such as holding in anger. It helps to know I’m not the only one going through this,” says one member, Earnest Cole. “The circle benefits me, and them as well. I obtain knowledge from them, and they obtain knowledge from me.

“We build a brotherhood, brothers I didn’t know until this circle.”

They change their attitudes and their actions — volunteering at schools and community events, becoming more proactive with their health concerns, and getting involved in adult education and job training.

The California Endowment and the Building Healthy Communities (BHC) initiative have been instrumental in the success of the Healing Circle. BHC has been an active partner with Always Knocking and the Healing Circle, not only providing monetary support but also helping the organization to partner with other community agencies.

**“I CAN’T FULLY EXPLAIN THE GREATNESS OF SEEING A MAN GOING THROUGH THE HEALING PROCESS, BUT I SEE IT ALL THE TIME. WE ARE SAVING BROTHERS AND SONS.”**

*Greg King, Founder, Always Knocking, Inc.*

Because of this support, there’s potential for even more “circles.” Men are training to become “circle keepers” of their own circles. King’s wife started a Women’s Empowerment Circle that meets at the office every other Saturday. Healing circles are also being held in high schools, including one at John F. Kennedy High School.

“This is one of the greatest things that I have been involved with. The Healing Circle is about moving forward. It’s OK to change. It’s OK to seek help,” King says. “I can’t fully explain the greatness of seeing a man going through the healing process, but I see it all the time. We are saving brothers and sons.”

Meetings are held at 10:30 a.m. every Saturday at the Always Knocking office, 2251 Florin Road, Suite #29 in Sacramento, and are free of charge.

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Members of the Healing Circle say it’s a safe place to share their issues and begin to heal. Photo by Louise Mitchell.



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# Bringing Green to Urban Spaces

BY LINDA DUBOIS

**S**acramento's city codes have made running a functional urban farm difficult. For example: structures such as greenhouses have been limited by building code regulations. Small animals like chickens, ducks, rabbits and fish have not been allowed in certain areas. Larger animals like goats, pigs and sheep have been prohibited, even in spaces large enough to accommodate them. Sales of produce grown in community gardens have been restricted or banned.

But this could soon change.

The Sacramento Urban Agriculture Coalition has been working with city officials and attorneys to craft a new Urban Agriculture Ordinance that will make it easier for individuals to start and run small urban farms and sell the food on-site to neighbors.

About a year and a half ago when the city was starting to update its general plan, officials sought help in revising the City's urban agriculture policies from Soil Born Farm's Urban Agriculture & Education Project and the nonprofit Ubuntu Green, a Building Healthy Communities grant recipient committed to promoting healthy, sustainable and equitable communities through advocacy, education, community development and empowerment. They, in turn, sought input from other organizations, including sustainable agriculture groups, developers, neighborhood associations, community garden boosters and more. The result was the Sacramento Urban Agriculture Coalition.

Supporting urban farming is important for two main reasons, says Charles Mason, founder,

president and CEO of Ubuntu Green.

"It's important on a personal level for people to have additional access to healthy food, particularly in those communities where there are food deserts and there just aren't enough healthy foods accessible to them," Mason says.

Urban residents need not only the ability to grow food, but also the ability to easily buy it, and, for the farmers, to easily sell it to help provide for their families, Mason adds.

The other reason is many urban communities in the Sacramento region are littered with spaces and lots that have sat vacant for months or years, Mason says.

**"IT'S IMPORTANT ON A PERSONAL LEVEL FOR PEOPLE TO HAVE ADDITIONAL ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD, PARTICULARLY IN THOSE COMMUNITIES WHERE THERE ARE FOOD DESERTS."**

**Charles Mason**  
Founder, president and CEO of Ubuntu Green

"It's critical to provide alternatives like urban agriculture to bring those eyesores in the community into something that's a community asset — instead of continuing to be places that are a drain on the community,

where dumping and vagrancy and crime happens," Mason says.

More plants growing also helps the environment, he notes.

"You can't have codes that make it cost prohibitive or regulatory barriers that make it difficult for people to start these projects," he adds.

Next on the agenda is stepping up efforts to work for a similar ordinance with Sacramento County. He says he hopes both the city and the county ordinances can be finalized within the next year, and then the coalition can continue to work on other objectives.

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Charles Mason founded the nonprofit Ubuntu Green to promote urban agriculture, like this urban community garden.



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