



Putting Youth on the Map

BY ALYSSA NOELLE RASMUSSEN

It's not often that young people get to be the ones compiling data about themselves, but a collaboration between South Sacramento youth and UC Davis is making that happen.

"It's data about youth being presented by the youth. I think it makes a big difference," says Zelia Gonzales, a senior at The Met Sacramento High School.

Zelia and her peers on the Building Healthy Communities South Sacramento Youth Leadership Team visited UC Davis this past summer to learn how to interpret and map data. The data covers topics ranging from substance abuse to college readiness, food access to social relationships. Zelia believes that the data, and the reality that it uncovers, will encourage greater accountability on the part of South Sacramento's youth and adults.

The youth team learned these data-mapping skills from the researchers behind Putting Youth on the Map (PYOM), a project of the UC Davis Center for Regional Change. PYOM and its website combine data from publicly available sources to reveal new demographics on California's youth. The data is especially powerful because it maps youth vulnerability and well-being across the state.

The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities initiative has supported the development of PYOM and its collaboration with the South Sacramento Youth Leadership Team.

UC Davis Assistant Research Professor Dr. Nancy Erbstein says the youth's stories become especially powerful once they combine their

own research with data. But seeing the data put to use is the point.

"The work that the young advocates are doing out in the communities and with policy makers really make that data matter," she says.

Since the Youth Leadership Team's trip to UC Davis, Zelia says they have been using the data on fliers and when they speak to members of our community. They've even pinpointed one statistic in need of improvement.

With a 74 percent graduation rate, and only 34 percent of youth ready for university, the South Sacramento region is ranked as one of the most vulnerable areas in the state. Though the data is disheartening, the team also found it affirming.

"IT'S DATA ABOUT YOUTH BEING PRESENTED BY THE YOUTH."

Zelia Gonzales
BHC South Sacramento Youth Leadership Team

"The data validated everything that we were seeing, and it felt good that other people could see it, too," Zelia says.

To improve college readiness in the region, the Youth Leadership Team is running a Grades Up Campaign. The team seeks out youth and provides educational resources for those who are struggling or need guidance in school. To rally support from policy makers

and community members they use PYOM data on social media, in community engagement efforts and at conferences.

"Decision makers and adults in the community are using data to justify the decisions they're making," says Sergio Cuellar, Community Engagement Coordinator at the UC Davis Center for Regional Change. "We want to put the power of maps and data into the hands of young people."

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.

Youth from the BHC South Sacramento Youth Leadership Team visit UC Davis to learn about how to interpret and map data about youth. Photo courtesy of Youth Leadership Team



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In Neighborhoods

BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Helping Youth Walk the Straight and Narrow

COPS AND CLERGY PARTNER TO BUILD STRONGER COMMUNITIES

BY LINDA DUBOIS

Pastor Anthony Sadler of Shiloh Baptist Church in Oak Park saw great potential in “Ricky,” a bright, good-natured teen from a rough Sacramento neighborhood who had recently had his first arrest. To help steer Ricky away from the wrong path, Sadler convinced him to work around the church once a week, giving the young man an opportunity to earn a sense of accomplishment and a little pocket money. Ricky went on to work alongside Sadler in a community garden project and seemed determined to turn his life in a positive direction. He was sentenced to probation and has had no more trouble with the law.

Ricky is just one of the many success stories of the Cops and Clergy program, started by Sacramento Police Department Chief Sam Somers and several area pastors in January 2013. Clergy have influence and credibility in neighborhoods that may not completely trust police, says Lt. Roman J. Murrietta, the Sacramento Police Department program administrator.

“I don’t think anyone could have imagined the things that would have transpired in our country since then and just how important this program has become,” Murrietta says. He notes that Sacramento has been working to build trust in communities long before anyone here had heard of Ferguson. Thanks to Cops and Clergy, Murrietta says he and other officers have visited many congregations over the last two years to begin “to have those tough con-

versations” about race, trust and the troubling incarceration rate for black men.

The program is currently active in the South Sacramento and Oak Park areas, with plans for citywide expansion. The program is supported by a grant from The California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities initiative.

“I’M TIRED OF PREMATURE DEATHS OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE.”

Pastor Anthony Sadler, Shiloh Baptist Church

Participating pastors visit schools, jails, juvenile halls and sometimes family homes to reach at-risk teens and young adults who have been referred to them by parents, teachers, law enforcement or others.

“I tell the kids straight up: ‘I’m tired of premature deaths of our young people. I’m tired of doing funerals, and then having to minister to their grieving families once they’re gone.’ Usually when I hit them with that, they know I’m serious,” says Sadler.

Sociology students assist the clergy with case management, follow-up and connecting individuals to resources in the community that provide an alternative to crime.

“Many with infractions with the law come from broken homes without a strong set of values or economically challenged envi-

ronments, and they decide that getting things quick and fast is better than delayed gratification,” Sadler explains. “We’re looking for opportunities to act as a resource for them, whether they need tutoring in school, need to get their GED, or they’re applying for college and having trouble getting past admissions.”

The program not only benefits the youth it serves, but also reduces crime in the greater community.

“We all want a safe place in which to raise our families,” Sadler says.

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The Cops and Clergy program, like Pastor Anthony Sadler, (far right) a collaboration between the Sacramento Police Department and area religious leaders, aim to provide at-risk young people resources and alternatives to crime.
Photo by Louise Mitchell



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Preventing Crime Starts in School

BY BEATRICE M. HOGG

Schools can have a big impact on preventing juvenile crime. Just ask Sacramento County Juvenile Court Presiding Judge Stacy Boulware Eurie.

Boulware Eurie says not being at school is one of the factors that cause many youth to become involved in the juvenile justice system, both as perpetrators and victims. School suspensions and expulsions leave many young people alone without supervision for most of their day. While parents or guardians are working full time, youth may get involved in activities that put them in contact with law enforcement.

Boulware Eurie became part of the Restorative Justice Collaborative of Sacramento City Unified School District to demonstrate to educators, parent organizations and students how important participation in school is from the court's perspective.

"For me, education is one of the most effective preventive tools to juvenile justice involvement," she says.

The restorative justice approach actively involves offenders in repairing the harm done by a crime, instead of subjecting them to an arbitrary punishment. In schools, using restorative justice in lieu of exclusionary disciplinary practices, such as suspensions and expulsions, can lead to better outcomes and reduce exposure to crime.

"We are focused on the rehabilitation of the youth, and part of that is going to be through educational access and success," Boulware Eurie says.

Youth that become involved in the juvenile justice system may have experienced trauma, problems at home, and other issues that affect their feelings of safety and stability. Behavior in the classroom should be used as an opportunity for learning, not as a reason for expulsion or suspension, Boulware Eurie says. Teachers and administrators should be able to identify students who need support and services, helping them to stay engaged and enrolled. The results can be dramatic. Studies have shown that not finishing high school can increase the likelihood of incarceration, as well as affect future earning potential and physical health.

"FOR ME, EDUCATION IS ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE PREVENTIVE TOOLS TO JUVENILE JUSTICE INVOLVEMENT."

Stacy Boulware Eurie, Sacramento County Juvenile Court presiding judge

Boulware Eurie feels the role of a juvenile court judge includes going into the community to find appropriate ways to support youth and their families. The Restorative Justice Collaborative, which started in 2013 through a grant from The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities initiative, has allowed her another opportunity to connect with the community.

"It's been enriching to see and hear directly from parents and students what their perspectives are on disciplinary practices and how it impacts them," she says. "They want to be a part of the process and how policies are developed ... It's an important two-way street."

The collaborative includes parents and students as well as teachers, administrators, other school staff, law enforcement, and social service and community agencies. Boulware Eurie says the collaborative has provided an important chance for these groups to interact outside of the legal system.

Through restorative justice and a holistic approach, Boulware Eurie hopes more youth can be kept out of her court.

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Sacramento County Juvenile Court Presiding Judge Stacy Boulware Eurie is part of a collaborative focusing on keeping kids in school to reduce juvenile crime.
Photo by Louise Mitchell



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Restorative Justice Offers Students a Second Chance

BY BEATRICE M. HOGG

When students misbehave, consequences are designed to fit the transgression. But one consequence may do as much harm as good: Suspension from class prevents many students, often those who need it most, from accessing the structure, safety and positive reinforcement found on campus. A cycle of suspensions can leave students vulnerable to dangerous temptations outside of the school environment, jeopardizing their chances of finishing school. Such policies have also been found to disproportionately impact young men of color, making school discipline an issue of social justice.

Stacey Bell, youth development director for the Sacramento City Unified School District, is working to break the suspension cycle and help district educators embrace a restorative justice approach to discipline. Restorative justice focuses on providing offenders the opportunity to repair the actual harm done through an infraction, rather than meting out a standard consequence. Bell says she's very excited about the changes that a focus on positive school climate and restorative justice can bring to SCUSD.

In Fall 2013, a Building Healthy Communities grant from The California Endowment brought together the members of the Restorative Justice Collaborative to implement systemwide changes in disciplinary actions and create a positive environment for students.

The Collaborative includes students, parents, teachers, principals, counselors, school staff and community partners, including representatives from the law enforcement, juvenile justice and social service fields. The group assessed needs, reviewed procedures around

the country and determined what would work for SCUSD, says Bell. The Men's Leadership Academy, an after-school program primarily for young men of color that received support from The California Endowment, held focus groups and engaged with students at various school sites.

In Spring 2014, the SCUSD Board of Education adopted a "whole child" policy, recognizing the school's role in developing not only the academic abilities of students, but also their social and emotional wellness. The district aims to help students and adults become proficient in five areas: self-management, self-awareness, responsible decision-making, relationship skills and social awareness. Restorative justice will go hand-in-hand with social and emotional learning, making students aware of and responsible for their actions. Preliminary participation in the program will start over the next six to twelve months.

"THE LEVEL OF COLLABORATION AND ENGAGEMENT IS VERY EXCITING."

Stacey Bell, SCUSD youth development director

"This is a paradigm shift in regards to a higher focus on social-emotional learning and restorative practices, hopefully shifting the way that we do things with students and adults," Bell says. "We will have more focus on equity and the support that students need to be successful. It's not going to be a quick fix; this is long-term work."

Bell hopes that creating a positive school climate will drastically reduce suspensions, especially "willful defiance" suspensions.

"This is the area where we see the most disproportionality among students, especially young men of color," she says.

Bell feels that high standards in behavior and academics can be expected from students if they are highly engaged, have culturally relevant classes and are in a positive environment.

"The development of this policy has brought together the community, parents, students and school administrators," Bell says. "The level of collaboration and engagement is very exciting ... If we can continue that level of engagement, we will be moving in the right direction."

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Stacey Bell, youth development director at Sacramento City Unified School District, has been working to develop a new, restorative approach to discipline, in addition to social and emotional learning and positive school climate initiatives. Photo by Louise Mitchell.



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Breaking Down Health Care Barriers

Navigators help cultural groups access care in South Sacramento

BY ALYSSA NOELLE RASMUSSEN

As some South Sacramento residents gain access to health care for the first time, many are encountering difficulties trying to navigate the system. Many new enrollees are facing wait times for appointments or enrollment activation. And residents who are new to the country can face unique barriers — cultural beliefs and a lack of formal education are obstacles that can influence health choices and how easily an individual can access needed care.

But navigators at the Southeast Asian Assistance Center (SEAC) in South Sacramento are working to break down some of those barriers. Navigators work mainly with Vietnamese, Cambodian and Mien populations. The center's navigator program is a pilot program funded by the California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities initiative. The program's unique philosophy, "Do for, do with and cheer on," guides the center's staff as they work to strengthen their clients' confidence in the health care system and ability to navigate it.

The SEAC's program manager, Fahm Saetern, began working at the center more than three years ago. Her own experiences of guiding her parents through the American health care system prepared her to support immigrants who sometimes lack education or don't understand the impact that their lifestyle has on their health.

"With the terrain comes a new kind of health battle," Saetern says.

Navigators at the Southeast Asian Center help South Sacramento residents find doctors, schedule appointments, fill medications and provide interpretation services. Fahm is proud of the work the navigators are doing.

"The greatest strength that [the navigators] have is that they are so embedded in the community," she says.

Navigators also help dispel certain myths, such as the pervasive suspicion among many Southeast Asian immigrants toward Western medicine, working to educate clients about illnesses and treatments. But navigators also make it a priority to maintain the trust of clients who might remain reluctant, at least at first, to fully embrace Western medical practices.

"THE GREATEST STRENGTH THAT [THE NAVIGATORS] HAVE IS THAT THEY ARE SO EMBEDDED IN THE COMMUNITY."

Fahm Saetern
Southeast Asian Assistance Center program manager

Navigators are also responsive to the realities of a health care system adapting to a surge in new patients. County enrollment in Medi-Cal increased by 122,000 in 2014, which has resulted in a shortage of doctors — especially in those facilities that accept Medi-Cal. Due to the extended wait times — including processing times for coverage and appointment delays — SEAC has extended each client case

from its initial six-month period to a full year, if needed.

"What we are seeing now with doctors and clinics, other nonprofits and the Capital Health Network is that we are able to build relationships and make appointments to accommodate folks within 10 business days," Saetern says.

But the biggest impact of the navigator program is the education component, which has lasting effects, according to Saetern.

"It makes a difference in people's lives," she says.

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Fahm Saetern is a program manager at the Southeast Asian Assistance Center. Navigators with the Southeast Asian Assistance Center help community members in South Sacramento cut through the complexities of the health care system. Photo by Louise Mitchell.



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Neglected Spaces Get Revamped

Turning Oak Park's alleys into community gathering places

BY LINDA DUBOIS AND BRITTANY WESELY

The Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment is taking some of the most unsightly areas of the Oak Park neighborhood of Sacramento and turning them into safe, pleasant spaces for neighborhood residents to enjoy.

A nonprofit that is focused on building up low- to moderate-income neighborhoods, ACCE received a grant from the California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities initiative and assistance from other nonprofits and community organizations to transform several alleyways and empty lots in Oak Park.

Amelia Garduno, lead community organizer at ACCE, grew up in Oak Park and is proud to see these previously neglected areas revamped.

"Instead of needles and dirty condoms and trash, we have meetings and celebrations there," Garduno says. "It's just amazing what they've done."

For one project, ACCE replaced a previously open space with an edible garden that is now brimming with fresh produce and maintained by the neighbors. ACCE also revitalized an alley, now called Inspiration Alley, that serves as another community garden.

Other alleys and vacant lots have been cleaned up by the City of Sacramento in preparation for the makeovers. Work has begun

on three additional empty lots and another alley. How the spaces will be transformed is up to the neighbors, who may choose to install park benches, tables for board games or vegetable and flower gardens.

"Each one is unique to what the neighbors living around it want," Garduno says.

**"IT BUILDS A COMMUNITY
THAT KIDS CAN PLAY IN AND
PARENTS CAN BE PROUD OF
AND FAMILIES CAN THRIVE IN."**

Amelia Garduno, Community organizer

While the project is spearheaded by ACCE, it is the effort of the entire community that is bringing the idea to fruition. The nearby Home Depot has committed to donate \$100 in product each month to ACCE. Residents have also pitched in. One community member collects scraps from fine dining restaurants to make compost. He has also agreed to give participating families small containers to collect their kitchen scraps to donate to the compost pile. He'll then exchange their scraps for compost that is ready to be used in the gardens.

Garduno says the improvements at Inspiration Alley and the other projects have made her even more excited for the future efforts.

"When we brought in the good — the growing of food, or kids coming to play a game, or people walking around and meeting there for positive, healthy activity — that naturally started pushing out all of the negative, illicit, dangerous activity," Garduno says.

"It builds a community that kids can play in and parents can be proud of and families can thrive in."

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Amelia Garduno (center), lead community organizer for Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment, partnered with local residents like (from left) Andrew Gillespie and Edgar Hilbert to transform empty spaces in the neighborhood. Photo by Louise Mitchell.



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Going with the Grains

WSWA fights poverty in South Sacramento

BY ALYSSA NOELLE RASMUSSEN

Every Sunday, “Mama Laurie” distributes fresh fruits and vegetables to her neighbors in the South Sacramento neighborhood referred to as the Grains.

Stretching from 41st to 47th streets and book-ended by Franklin Boulevard on the west and Highway 99 on the east, the low-income neighborhood has attracted visits from the Western Service Workers Association, a labor union seeking to end poverty. This past summer, Laurie met a member of the WSWA on her doorstep during a weekly canvas and has been volunteering with the group ever since.

More than 150 people with a chronic cash deficit receive food from Laurie and other WSWA members each week.

“Every Sunday we go to the farmers market and pick up fresh fruits and vegetables which are very good, and are usually very inaccessible,” says Elena Sanchez, the WSWA’s operations manager.

Though many businesses pitch in, regular donations come from the Davis Food Co-op, Freeport Bakery and the farmers market. The free and fresh food helps to fight hunger in the Grains neighborhood.

“Everybody is always happy to get something, especially around my neighborhood,” Laurie says.

Since its founding in 1973, the Western Service Workers Association has aimed to “fight

for long-term solutions, to get to the root causes of poverty, and to include the people that are experiencing poverty involved in the solution building,” according to Sanchez.

The union uses an 11-step benefit program to provide members with essentials such as clothing, health care and food. This is accomplished through the work of volunteers and support from allies like the California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities initiative.

“EVERY SUNDAY WE GO TO THE FARMER’S MARKET AND PICK UP FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES WHICH ARE VERY GOOD, AND ARE USUALLY VERY INACCESSIBLE.”

Elena Sanchez, Western Service Workers Association Operations Manager

Another issue facing residents is keeping the electricity on. Roughly 5,000 Sacramento homes have their power disconnected every month. Utility shutoffs have increased due to a reduction of funds for LIHEAP, a federal program that assists low-income families with their utility bills. This has created more traffic at the WSWA office.

“Some of these families have children in the home, and elderly that are sick,” says

Velma Jacques, a member and volunteer with WSWA. “It is really inhumane that they can turn off people’s electricity.”

Jacques is part of the utility advocacy group and works alongside the medical group to be sure that members are being treated fairly.

While working to help others, community members like Sanchez and Jacques are meeting another objective of the union: to build a fighting voice.

“It’s incredibly empowering for somebody, and it makes a big difference,” Sanchez says.

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Volunteers with the Western Service Workers Association including Elena Sanchez, far right, meet with residents in the Grains neighborhood in South Sacramento every week. Photo by Louise Mitchell.



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A Living Wage For All

Increased hourly pay may make working families less dependent on public assistance

BY BRITTANY WESELY

On April 15, nearly 500 activists marched to Sacramento City Hall, hoping to influence change-makers to raise the minimum wage.

The “Fight for \$15” demonstration came two days after the release of a University of California, Berkeley study that reported 56 percent of state and federal welfare dollars are used to support working families. In California alone, \$3.7 billion in public assistance goes to employed households.

Tamie Dramer, director and board chair of Organize Sacramento, says that while public assistance programs offer important support for families, raising the minimum wage would help lift working families out of poverty and allow tax dollars to be spent in other areas.

A local nonprofit with the mission to educate and mobilize communities to influence change, Organize Sacramento is one of three organizations that make up the Sacramento Raise the Wage Coalition. Along with Sacramento Area Congregations Together and the Alliance for Californians for Community Empowerment, the coalition is spearheading the local movement to raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour.

“We’re three really active groups of activists and organizers who are concerned about the disparities in Sacramento families,” Dramer says. “We’ve all received grants from The California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities initiative to provide education and dispel misconceptions about increasing the minimum wage.”

Organize Sacramento used its grant to conduct a poll about Sacramento attitudes toward the minimum wage.

“We learned that a strong majority of Sacramento voters really feel it’s time to raise the minimum wage locally,” Dramer says.

The poll revealed that 58 percent of Sacramento voters would support a measure that phases in a \$15 minimum wage over the course of three years.

“WE LEARNED THAT A STRONG MAJORITY OF SACRAMENTO VOTERS REALLY FEEL IT’S TIME TO RAISE THE MINIMUM WAGE LOCALLY.”

Tamie Dramer, Director and board chair of Organize Sacramento

ACCE Lead Organizer David Mazariegos says there is a lot of concentrated poverty in Sacramento, especially in the South Sacramento area.

“In the neighborhoods we work in, there are a lot of folks in low wage jobs who are just barely scraping by to pay bills, buy food for their families and fill their cars up with gas,” Mazariegos says.

Mazariegos tells the story of a woman in her 50s who is active in the “Fight for \$15” movement. She worked at McDonald’s for a long time until she was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease.

“She had no savings, no benefits and all she earned was minimum wage,” Mazariegos says. “She really wasn’t able to take care of her needs.”

The woman had to retire early due to her disease. She moved in with her son and his family in their one-bedroom apartment. Mazariegos says the situation is tragic, but it is an experience that is unfortunately shared by many.

“Her story really bothers me,” Mazariegos says. “We need to raise awareness and increase the minimum wage so these stories are less common.”

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Activists march to City Hall on April 15 to demand a higher minimum wage. Photo by Laura Anthony



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Farm Stands Open for Business

BY EVAN TUCHINSKY

Growing up on a farm in Winters that's been in her family for 70 years, Rosalyn Van Buren developed a keen understanding of agriculture.

"I understand the hard work that goes into farming," she says. "You get a great appreciation for the land and the ethic of a good hard day of work, so I personally bless everyone who does it."

That's why Van Buren was first in line when the Yisrael family unveiled their farm stand in the vicinity of her residence. Thanks to the Urban Agriculture Ordinance adopted in March by the Sacramento City Council, residents citywide can grow and sell produce.

Some are just offering their surplus fruit and vegetables to neighbors for extra cash. Others are launching wider commercial ventures, marketing to individual consumers or even retailers and restaurants. The Yisrael Family Urban Farm opened a stand April 23 on a vacant lot in South Sacramento, becoming one of the first to take advantage of the new ordinance.

Van Buren doesn't plan to cultivate crops at home — been there, does that — but is eager to patronize green-thumbed Sacramentans.

"I want to buy my fruits and vegetables from a stand," she says. "Particularly what made me go to the Yisrael family's farm and want to support them is the necessity for healthy food to be available for everyone, and in some of our communities in Sacramento that's not true."

The city ordinance modifies zoning to make urban agriculture a permissible land use — both on developed property and vacant lots. At the forefront championing this change has been the Sacramento Urban Agriculture Coalition, a beneficiary of funding from The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities initiative. The business component is critical.

"Agriculture without sales is just gardening," explains Matthew Read, coordinator for the Urban Ag Coalition. "We wanted to make sure people had an avenue for sales."

The coalition's next step is to expand urban agriculture to areas outside city limits. Toward that end, Sacramento County will consider a similar ordinance this summer.

"AGRICULTURE WITHOUT SALES IS JUST GARDENING."

Matthew Read, Coordinator, Urban Agriculture Coalition

"A lot of urban Sacramento is actually in unincorporated Sacramento County," Read says. "These are our neighbors, people who live just across the street from us; they just live in a different municipality. We want to make sure they are able to grow their food and participate in urban agriculture much in the same way as we are."

While the city ordinance opens the door for agriculture, it doesn't eliminate all legal considerations for a home-based business. Read

recommends a future farmer check with the city about business permits and taxes, along with whether the enterprise will require a home occupation permit from the Planning Department. "Cottage food" operations ("selling value-added foods like jams, jellies, breads") must register with the county.

Then, Read suggests, devise a marketing plan. Check out vendor stalls at farmers markets for ideas on presentation, and craft a strategy — advertising, social media, etc. — for reaching target customers.

"Think of ways to sell beyond your front door," Read says.

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Rosalyn Van Buren purchases produce from Judith Yisrael at the Yisrael Family Urban Farm's stand on April 23. Photo by Laura Marie Anthony.



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A Basic Right – For All

Woman urges county supervisors to reinstate health services to undocumented residents

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

Although born in Mexico, Angela Velazquez always considered herself “all-American” — that is, until she started noticing certain rites of passage weren’t available to her.

“I started feeling my limitations when my friends began driving at age 16 and I couldn’t,” said Velazquez, now 26.

Velazquez was denied a driving permit because she’s been undocumented since early childhood. She’s faced other exclusions, too, including not having access to medical insurance.

It is estimated that more than 1 million undocumented Californians are uninsured. Despite the success of the Affordable Care Act, undocumented residents are unable to obtain coverage through the state’s health insurance exchange, Covered California, due to their immigration status.

At 22 Velazquez was diagnosed with cancer. After beating the disease — she underwent state-funded surgery — Velazquez became an advocate for health care for undocumented immigrants. Twice she has testified before the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors pleading for safety net services that ensure this vulnerable population has access to a basic human right.

A government major at California State University, Sacramento, Velazquez draws encouragement from one of America’s founding fathers.

“As a student of government history I’ve often heard the words of Thomas Jefferson, that we are all ‘endowed with the right to life,’” she said, “and I think I deserve to live as much as anybody else.”

The county discontinued primary health services to the undocumented in 2009, after Supervisors Don Nottoli, Susan Peters and Roberta MacGlashan voted to cut the program during the worst of the recession. The intended savings: \$2.4 million.

Now, with the economy rebounding, Board Chairman Phil Serna has expressed cautious confidence that it will be re-established, “though probably not in the same form as before.”

That’s good news to Kelly Bennett-Wofford, executive director of Sacramento Covered, a nonprofit dedicated to connecting Sacramentans with affordable health coverage and health services. Its health navigators, including Velazquez, help families apply for Medi-Cal or buy insurance through Covered California. Sacramento Covered has received a grant from The California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities initiative.

“I’VE OFTEN HEARD THE WORDS OF THOMAS JEFFERSON, THAT WE ARE ALL ‘ENDOWED WITH THE RIGHT TO LIFE,’ AND I THINK I DESERVE TO LIVE AS MUCH AS ANYBODY ELSE.”

Angela Velazquez, uninsured Californian

Sacramento County was in crisis in 2009, when the Board was tasked with cutting \$150 million from the general fund, MacGlashan said. “Cuts were made to almost every department and service,

nearly 3,000 positions were eliminated from the county workforce (and) hundreds were laid off,” she said.

Even now, the county cannot afford “a major new program with unknown future costs,” MacGlashan said of undocumented-immigrant health care. Nottoli, however, said he’s open to considering “doing something equivalent or better than what we had before, through the primary clinic system, for people from all walks of life, irrespective of immigration status.”

Velazquez finally obtained a driver’s license, but she remains medically uninsured. Serna said restoring primary health services to undocumented county residents will be considered as part of budget hearings in mid-June.

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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.

Angela Velazquez has testified twice in front of Sacramento County supervisors, pleading for the return of health care services for undocumented residents. Photo by Louise Mitchell



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The Tools to Fight Racial Inequality

BY NATASHA VON KAENEL

This last year has seen a reawakening in the national conversation about race. And while this renewed attention is positive, there has been little change in the rampant racism that permeates both our institutions and culture.

Julie Nelson, the Director of the Government Alliance on Race and Equity, might have the reason why.

“The vast majority of people, when you ask them, ‘Do you support equality?’ They will say, ‘Yes,’” she says. “But what we need to work on is the institutions and structures that create racial inequity.”

In Seattle, Nelson worked to develop a tool to bring conversations about race into government. The Race Equity Toolkit “bakes equity into the decision-making process” by forcing policy makers to answer questions about race equity and the impacts of their policy on communities of color. When using the toolkit, policy makers involve members and stakeholders from impacted communities directly in the development of policy and legislation, and work to identify and fix problems before they even start.

The Race Equity Toolkit may soon be implemented right here in Sacramento. A few weeks ago, Nelson met with Sacramento city council members and community leaders to educate them about the toolkit and its impacts across the country. The event was put on with the help of The California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities initiative, which aims to create change in the laws, policies and systems that impact health for residents in communities facing inequities, including South Sacramento.

Currently only a handful of cities use the Race Equity Toolkit, but Nelson believes the best way to create race equity in this country is for that number to keep growing.

“When looking at the history of government in the United States, government has played a key role in creating and maintaining racial inequities,” she says. “So for us to get to different outcomes, we have to work across the breadth and depth of government.”

“WHAT WE NEED TO WORK ON IS THE INSTITUTIONS AND STRUCTURES THAT CREATE RACIAL INEQUITY.”

Julie Nelson, Director, Government Alliance on Race and Equity

This may sound lofty in theory, but in practice it is surprisingly simple — and effective. For example, take garbage pickups in Seattle. Before analyzing its data, Seattle’s public utility hadn’t realized there were more missed garbage pickups in lower-income communities of color than in others. But with the Race Equity Toolkit, this disparity became obvious, and policy makers began working to address it.

They brought together all involved parties and found that the higher population density in lower-income communities of color meant the routes needed to be planned differently. Nelson emphasizes that this wasn’t a case of individual racism. Many of the garbage collectors lived in

these very same communities, and were upset when presented with this disparity. But with small tweaks to route planning and practices, the problem was fixed.

“Every single job has a relationship to racial equity,” Nelson explains. “So this toolkit sort of calls out what that relationship is, and makes sure that instead of perpetuating inequities, we are advancing racial equity.”

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Julie Nelson leads a workshop for Building Healthy Communities grantees on ways to break down institutional racism in communities. Photo by Louise Mitchell



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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Part of the Process

Coalition makes sure school district's budget matches students' needs

BY EVAN TUCHINSKY

Carl Pinkston cares about Sacramento students' education. As secretary of the Black Parallel School Board, a community organization that monitors local schools, he plays an integral role in ensuring that the Sacramento City Unified School District meets the needs of all children on its campuses.

State policy — and money — is helping. California recently instituted a Local Control Funding Formula to allocate funding based on demographics and give schools more flexibility on spending decisions. Although granted that freedom, districts cannot act without community input, and must create a Local Control and Accountability Plan (or LCAP) based on input from parents, educators, employees and other residents.

Sacramento citizens long have had ideas about improving schools, but Pinkston says they tend to be disregarded by the school board. The LCAP "provides an opportunity for parents and community to have their voices heard — attached to a dollar amount."

The previous method of state funding, Pinkston explains, "addresses equality but not equity — equality in the sense that everyone gets an equal amount, but some communities have more issues and need more resources than others. That's a question of equity: Those communities need additional funding because they have additional challenges that they have to address because of poverty, racism,

trauma — a whole host of issues that require resources to improve the quality of schools, which in turn improve the outcome of graduation on to college versus going to prison."

For Sac City Unified's LCAP, the Black Parallel School Board got the ball rolling thanks to a grant from The California Endowment, which directed Building Healthy Communities funding toward creating a "community priority coalition."

"SOME COMMUNITIES HAVE MORE ISSUES AND NEED MORE RESOURCES THAN OTHERS."

*Carl Pinkston
Black Parallel School Board secretary*

In December 2013, the organization assembled a dozen local groups — ranging from La Familia to the Sacramento City Teachers Organization — to gauge what the LCAP should include. Then came surveys of the community. Out of this process came three main priorities: reduced class sizes, culturally competent professional development with training in restorative justice, and programs for early intervention and after-school enrichment.

Encapsulating the priorities, the LCAP coalition created an "alternative budget" for the district and submitted it to the school board. Pinkston said board members

compared it to the staff-created budget and asked questions accordingly.

The next step, coming this fall, is a "participatory budget" pilot project, in which parents at The Met Sacramento High School will mock up a full financial plan.

So, how would Pinkston grade the district?

"I wouldn't flunk them, because they're not that bad — they do surveys, they do have an LCAP committee, they do some of the things and take some of the suggestions — but they're not quite there yet," he says. "So I would give them a C, and I think most in our coalition would give them the same."

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Carl Pinkston listens to stakeholders at a community priority coalition meeting. The coalition is providing input to the Sacramento City Unified School District on how to spend school money equitably and best serve all students.
Photo by Louise Mitchell



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Housing in Balance

Advocates hope to spread affordable units across the city

BY JENNIFER BONNETT

Residents in South Sacramento and beyond may be better served when affordable housing is spread across the city, according to advocates of an updated policy being discussed by City of Sacramento government officials.

“When you have affordable housing for the low income, you help stabilize their lives and build a foundation to rebuild their lives,” says Darryl Rutherford, executive director of the Sacramento Housing Alliance.

This goal, known as inclusionary housing, allows low-income residents to then use money they would otherwise use for housing instead for things such as buying fresh food or paying health care costs, he explains.

Inclusionary housing ordinances have been adopted in communities across the country to help preserve so-called mixed-income communities. In sum, the policies require market-rate developers to set aside a portion of their new housing units for lower-income households.

Such an ordinance already exists in the city of Sacramento, but it only addresses new-growth neighborhoods in the Delta Shores and Natomas areas. A new ordinance supported by the Sacramento Housing Alliance and its partners would apply to the whole city, thus not concentrating the poor in one area and providing better access to new schools, as well as retail options.

Policy makers are also moving toward allowing a fee be paid instead. The Alliance would like to see the current ordinance stay in place and be

implemented citywide. However, the political reality is that the ordinance will be revised as a fee-based ordinance with the Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency being responsible for allocating the funds toward affordable housing projects. Additionally, the amount proposed is insufficient to make a difference in the lower-income housing issue, according to Rutherford. “It’s going to take a lot of time to cobble together funds to build affordable housing,” he says regarding the proposed formula. “It’s going to be just a drop in the bucket. We just want it to be high enough to meet the needs of the community.”

“THERE’S A HUGE NEED OUT THERE FOR MORE LOWER-INCOME HOUSING.”

Darryl Rutherford
executive director, Sacramento Housing Alliance

The current proposal is to charge developers a fee of \$2.58 per square foot; the Sacramento Housing Alliance would like to see an increase to at least \$4 per square foot. To build, according to Rutherford, it takes closer to \$9 to \$13 per square foot.

“Because it’s such a low fee, affordable housing builders are going to be forced to build outside the hot market, which can contribute to further segregation,” he explains.

Sacramento Housing Alliance has been working with The California Endowment as part of its Building Healthy Communities initiative, which

aims to improve the health of 14 challenged communities throughout the state, including South Sacramento.

The goal is for lower income households to not spend more than 30 percent of their monthly income on housing costs. Lower income households include low-wage workers such as restaurant employees, childcare providers and health care aides, according to Rutherford. “There’s a huge need out there for more lower-income housing,” he says.

He hopes Sacramento City can adopt an ordinance that creates affordable housing options throughout the city. The new proposed inclusionary housing policy was discussed at the city Planning Commission meeting June 23 and will go before the Sacramento City Council for a vote in the coming months.

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Darryl Rutherford, executive director of Sacramento Housing Alliance, stands outside Mercy Housing, one of Sacramento Housing Alliance’s partners in maintaining affordable housing in the community. Photo by Louise Mitchell



Get involved! Visit the Sacramento Housing Alliance www.sachousingalliance.org, or attend a Sacramento City Council meeting. Agendas and the schedule of council meetings can be found at www.cityofsacramento.org.

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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Girl On The Rise

Isis Johnson educates her Oak Park community

BY JANICE DANIELS

When 18-year-old Isis Johnson isn't designing fashionable clothing in the comfort of her Oak Park home, she can likely be found educating her community on health and nutrition with Girls On The Rise.

A program for young women of color focused on transforming the South Sacramento community, Girls On The Rise is funded by The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities initiative: a 10-year, \$1 billion plan to transform 14 challenged communities in California.

So far, Johnson and her powerful girl group have made a big difference in the South Sacramento community by doing everything from leading cooking demonstrations at Oak Park Sol Community Garden, to volunteering for nonprofit community events, including WEAVE'S Walk A Mile In Her Shoes, which raises awareness for domestic abuse and sexual assault.

"What I love the most is that whether I am doing community work by myself, or in a small group, I am making a difference," says Johnson. "I am changing the community for the better, or starting the process of doing so."

Johnson first learned of Girls On The Rise while working in a community garden in South Sacramento with other Girls On The Rise members.

"I was invited to last year's Girls On The Rise conference by some of my garden team

members," Johnson says. "I had a great time, and then I signed up to be a part of it."

On top of doing work with Girls On The Rise, Johnson has also advocated for establishing a local food trade in Sacramento through the Urban Agriculture Ordinance — which she spoke about to the City Council in March — and has discussed the importance of youth community involvement at a panel regarding youth development at Sacramento State.

"WHAT I LOVE THE MOST IS THAT WHETHER I AM DOING COMMUNITY WORK BY MYSELF, OR IN A SMALL GROUP, I AM MAKING A DIFFERENCE."

*Isis Johnson,
Girls On The Rise member*

"Isis always looks for opportunities to shed light on issues she cares about and continually encourages her peers to get involved in their community in any way they can," says Katie Keeler, Youth Program Manager for the Center of Community Health & Well-Being, Inc.

Every year, Girls On The Rise hosts an annual leadership conference to educate

their peers about health-related issues and empower young women to become leaders within their communities. This year's conference will be held on August 7 at Sierra Health Foundation and is open to all high-school-aged young women.

"I am excited to see the ideas and projects that Girls on the Rise embarks upon in the future and hope to see more young women get involved in the program and recognize their own power to create change," Keeler says.

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Eighteen-year-old "Girl On The Rise" Isis Johnson is determined to fight for what she believes in, like health and nutrition, to make her community a better place.
Photo by Laura Marie Anthony



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Find out more or register for the free Young Women's Leadership Conference by searching for the event at Eventbrite.com.

For more information on Girls On The Rise South Sacramento, visit www.facebook.com/GOTRSS or call 916-476-8106.

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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Inspiring the Next Generation

BY JANICE DANIELS

Earlier this month, more than 180 young men of color came together for the fourth annual Sacramento Boys & Men of Color (BMoC) Summit at Sacramento State University to learn how to become men of change, and thus prove to society “I am not who you think I am,” which was this year’s motto.

The goal of BMoC — funded by The California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities initiative — is to inspire, empower and provide opportunities to young men who need it the most, and 24-year-old Sacramento State electrical engineering student Luis Guerrero has played a significant role in making the program such a huge success in Sacramento.

Guerrero learned of BMoC five years ago while volunteering for a mentorship and tutoring program that he and a few other young men started at Arthur A. Benjamin Health Professions High School.

“It was then that I realized how important it is for older male brothers to connect with the younger generation,” Guerrero says. “After hearing about Boys & Men of Color through a mentor, we started attending the Boys & Men of Color Summit meetings, and we have been there ever since.”

While Guerrero humbly states, “I receive way too much credit for the success of the Boys & Men of Color Summit,” it is clear that he deserves it — and more — for the wholehearted efforts he has contributed as facilitator and co-coordinator of the last three BMoC summits.

“THE FOUNDATION OF THE SUMMIT COMES FROM OUR YOUNG MEN AND THEIR VOICE. I JUST HELP THEIR VOICES BECOME A REALITY.”

Luis Guerrero

Guerrero, who works for BMoC during his “free time,” spends three months of his year strictly planning for these summits with the youth, doing everything from booking venues to planning workshops.

“The foundation of the summit comes from our young men and their voice; I just help their voices become a reality,” Guerrero says.

This year’s BMoC Summit provided young men with the opportunity to speak out about issues that impact their career goals — such as upbringing, community crime rates and preconceived notions — and introduced them to various ways they could resist these factors to become better leaders in their schools and communities.

“What I love most about being a part of Boys & Men of Color is connecting with others, whether it be at our youth collaborative meetings, camp, the summit, workshops or volunteering on student panels,” Guerrero says. “I have met so many people, gained so many mentors, and I have established so many friendships. It is truly a blessing.”

When Guerrero isn’t busy working with Boys & Men of Color, he can be found DJing at private events, interning as an engineering assistant at SMUD, or coaching basketball as head freshman coach at his old high school, C. K. McClatchy.

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Sacramento State electrical engineering student Luis Guerrero, 24, works to motivate young men of color during his free time for Boys & Men of Color.
Photo by Laura Marie Anthony



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To learn more about
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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Workshops put young offenders on right path

BY SUSAN WINLOW

“Snick” went the lock as the young offender entered the juvenile detention center after being convicted of a crime on the streets of Sacramento.

Behind the locked door the youth’s life is regimented under watchful eyes.

But what happens after the lock is “unsnicked” and the youth walks free?

“A lot of time they seem so lost,” says Yvette Rodriguez, a program manager with the nonprofit La Familia. “(They don’t) know where to go to get services. If we don’t pave the way and provide (support for) them, they’re just going to return to what they know.”

Preventing recidivism by improving rehabilitation for young offenders is the primary goal of a new partnership between three nonprofits — La Familia, Always Knocking and the East Bay Asian Youth Center — in conjunction with the juvenile probation department. The partnership’s pilot youth detention facility transition program began in June and was made possible by a grant from The California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities initiative, a \$1 billion plan to improve 14 challenged California communities, including South Sacramento.

Help begins inside the detention facility with weekly interactive workshops co-facilitated by each organization. The workshops focus on

how to meet probation commitments, such as community service work, restitution, drug and alcohol counseling and mandated classes like anger management and parenting, plus where to find the resources to accomplish these mandates.

“IF WE DON’T PAVE THE WAY AND PROVIDE (SUPPORT FOR) THEM, THEY’RE JUST GOING TO RETURN TO WHAT THEY KNOW.”

Yvette Rodriguez, La Familia

“Our workshop is based on how and where to get those services,” says Greg King, founder of Always Knocking.

With services scattered throughout Sacramento, lack of follow through is common with those released on probation, according to both King and David Kakishiba, executive director of the East Bay Asian Youth Center.

The workshops are designed to “intercept” the roadblocks.

“What’s critical for us is to develop, establish and sustain a mutually accountable working relationship ... between our staff person and the young person,” Kakishiba says.

The goal for the young person, once released, is to seek hands-on support available through each nonprofit with the hope that probation

will be completed and life skills learned in order to live a positive life.

Creating that connection and sense of community so youth, many without family support, know where to go for help is important, Rodriguez says.

“These are our young men and women who are in our community,” she says. “It breaks my heart because we don’t pay attention to our youth until they do something wrong.”

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Representatives from three local nonprofits work with juvenile offenders in the Sacramento County Youth Detention Facility to connect them to services before they are released. Photo by Laura Marie Anthony



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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

A 'Vision' for Zero Pedestrian Fatalities

BY SUSAN WINLOW

Three years ago a 16 year-old girl did not die in vain.

In January 2012, a car struck Michelle Murigi as she crossed in a marked crosswalk designated by a stop sign at the intersection of 58th Street and Fruitridge Road. Murigi died shortly after the collision.

Today there is a traffic light at that bustling intersection. The community nonprofit WALKSacramento was instrumental in galvanizing community support and identifying a solution.

The death of the young West Campus High School student – along with the number of pedestrian and vehicle collisions in South Sacramento – was the inspiration behind WALKSacramento adopting Vision Zero, an initiative to improve traffic safety that began in Sweden.

"We didn't want there to be another Michelle Murigi," says Emily Alice Gerhart, a project manager for WALKSacramento and Vision Zero's leader.

According to the State's Office of Traffic Safety, out of 13 major California cities, Sacramento ranks eighth for pedestrian/vehicle collisions with 163 victims in 2012.

A grant from The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities initiative allowed WALKSacramento to begin planning

Vision Zero's campaign in early 2015 in order to reduce the number of pedestrian versus vehicle fatalities in the South Sacramento area, many due to speed and lack of lighting, Gerhart says.

OUT OF 13 MAJOR CALIFORNIA CITIES, SACRAMENTO RANKS EIGHTH FOR PEDESTRIAN/VEHICLE COLLISIONS WITH 163 VICTIMS IN 2012.

Kendra Macias, 30, a South Sacramento resident involved in Vision Zero, regularly traverses local streets, including the Fruitridge Road corridor. Speed, she says, is an issue, and she would like to see speed detractors such as speed bumps, roundabouts or curb extensions.

"Just slowing down the traffic is the first thing the initiative can work on," Macias says.

The campaign includes community relationship building, promoting safety for both drivers and pedestrians, identifying dangerous streetscapes with upcoming community walk audits, and addressing street design with the goal of identifying projects to become part of the 2016 transportation programming guide, which prioritizes projects such as major street improvements.

Community support for the initiative to create safer streetscapes is "essential," Gerhart says.

In addition to citizens and other organizations, input via stakeholder committee members includes the Sacramento Police Department, the Sacramento City Unified School District plus Sacramento's Public Works and the County Planning Department.

"We need initiatives like this to bring these issues to light ... to educate people," Macias says. "People are dying on the streets."

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Emily Alice Gerhart is project manager for WALKSacramento, which has adopted Vision Zero, an initiative aimed at eliminating pedestrian-versus-vehicle deaths. Photo by Laura Marie Anthony



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Tell us what you'd do to
improve pedestrian safety in
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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

After-school Program Focuses on the 'Whole Child'

BY SUSAN WINLOW

While playing a Scattergories-style game with elementary school students three years ago, Kelsey Neff had a wake-up call. The youngsters had to rattle off as many vegetables as they could think of, and they could name only one: lettuce.

"It was pretty bad," recalls Neff, program manager of social emotional learning at the Sacramento Chinese Community Center. "Making responsible decisions for food helps make responsible (decisions) for academics and their personal life. It builds upon the other."

Understanding the impact your choices have on health is just one element of new after-school programming being introduced in South Sacramento with the goal of helping students improve their mental, physical and emotion wellness.

It focuses on "the whole child," which includes social and emotional learning and health and nutritional wellness, says Mario Garcia, the associate director of youth development for the Sacramento Chinese Community Center, which facilitates the program.

"Our main focus is on socially, emotionally challenged students," Garcia says. "South Sacramento has a number of (students with) PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) from the environment they're growing up in."

Lessons include helping middle- and high-schoolers develop their "personal brand" and understand that how they dress, eat, and take

care of their minds and bodies are all interrelated with healthy living. Anything could be a teaching moment — as elementary students playing a schoolyard game might be taught how teamwork and communication are part of the game.

"SELF-AWARENESS, SOCIAL AWARENESS, RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING, SELF-MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS — THESE ARE THINGS A LOT OF THESE STUDENTS LACK."

Mario Garcia
Associate Director of Youth Development,
Sacramento Chinese Community Center

"Self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making, self-management and communication skills — these are things a lot of these students lack," Garcia says. "To be a responsible human being they need to have these skills and they don't have them yet."

The program, which also includes field trips and service learning projects created by students, serves hundreds of students from four South Sacramento schools in the Sacramento City Unified School District — Nicholas Elementary School, Will C. Wood Middle School, Hiram Johnson High School and continuation school American Legion High.

It is funded by The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities, which aims to improve the health of 14 challenged California communities, including South Sacramento.

Creating a program like this is something they had toyed with for sometime, Garcia says. The Endowment gave the ability to move forward.

A recent six-week summer course that used the same student demographic and curriculum gave Neff and Garcia some good news. A survey indicated that students were learning what the group set out to promote.

"Students are starting to see the connection between physical activity and mental and emotional wellness," Garcia says.

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.

Mario Garcia and Kelsey Neff work with students at Nicholas Elementary School as part of new after-school programming that emphasizes social and emotional skills. Photo by Charles Gunn



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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Growing a Movement

Young woman uses permaculture principles to improve food access

BY SUSAN WINLOW

Talk to Ruby Avila for just a few minutes and it's impossible to miss the passion in the young Sacramento woman's voice when the subject turns to growing her own food.

Her passion is personal and the 20-year-old anthropology major is ratcheting up that dedication by making it her life's work to understand the connection between people, the land and their food.

"This whole journey investigating food kind of changed me," she says.

Avila's journey started with her mother's diabetes battle and subsequent struggle to find affordable healthy food. But it stretches back even further to her own Mexican farming roots.

During high school, Avila connected with Sol Collective, a community-based arts education center, and its founder, Estella Sanchez. Avila began questioning where local food came from, and she particularly wondered, "Why don't we have affordable organic food around (here)?"

She soon learned of a holistic, organic approach to growing food called permaculture, which utilizes patterns found in the natural ecosystem to create a sustainable agricultural system that benefits the earth and people.

She dug deeper into permaculture's philosophy when Sol Collective brought in permaculture

expert Rafael Aguilera to teach a yearlong workshop, which was funded by a Building Healthy Communities grant from The California Endowment. Avila learned about gardening aspects such as soil, compost, which plants grow well together and large-scale aquaponics. Permaculture's unique approach to balancing a natural ecosystem struck a chord with her.

"THIS WHOLE JOURNEY INVESTIGATING FOOD KIND OF CHANGED ME."

Ruby Avila
Permaculture advocate

She went on to receive her permaculture certification, allowing her to help others with permaculture design. Avila brought permaculture into her community by helping create local gardens.

Sanchez says she saw Avila's passion for the method rooted in learning about "food justice."

"Permaculture became a direct way to take action and learn how to grow her own food if it wasn't accessible to her community due to high costs of organic produce," Sanchez says. "It was a solution she was looking for, not only for herself, but for her family and community."

Currently a student at University of California, Santa Cruz, Avila would like the permaculture philosophy to become mainstream.

"It's a revolutionary tool," she says. "It's a balance of everything. I think it's a great way to interact positively with the Earth."

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Ruby Avila hopes permaculture can be a tool to create food justice in our community.
Photo by Laura Marie Anthony



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www.facebook.com/ArtCultureActivism



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BUILDING A **HEALTHY** SACRAMENTO

A Fresh Start

Prop. 47 removes barriers created by low-level felony offenses

BY BRITTANY WESELY

We all make mistakes when we are young, although some mistakes carry greater consequences.

Some young people in our community face additional challenges in their most impressionable years. Neglect and abandonment, abuse, sexual exploitation, homelessness and the death of friends from gun violence are just some of the harsh realities that many young people confront.

According to the National Research Council's Panel on Juvenile Crime, children growing up in a neighborhood where there are high levels of poverty and crime are at higher risk of involvement in serious crime.

It's a problem Greg King knows well. He's the founder of Always Knocking, Inc., a nonprofit rehabilitation program in Sacramento that focuses on community interaction and life planning. King admits that there are many reasons why youth commit crimes, but if we want to help youth stop such activity and turn their lives around, we need to first show them compassion.

For many people with felonies on their record, attempts to move their lives forward are often stifled by an inability to obtain jobs, secure housing and access opportunities available to others. Not having access to these things makes it much more difficult to get back on their feet and stay out of trouble, King says.

In 2014, Proposition 47 — also known as the Safe Neighborhoods and Schools Act — was passed to allow individuals with certain low-level felony offenses to reclassify those to misdemeanors.

King and his team at Always Knocking, Inc. are going to great lengths to spread community awareness about the legislation, thanks to grant funding from The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities initiative.

"We're motivated to get this information out to the community," King says. "We have a full street outreach team and we're partnering with people throughout the city of Sacramento to host events and trainings to help people get started."

"WE ALL WANT TO BE SUCCESSFUL, AND [PROP. 47] IS GOING TO ENABLE THEM TO MOVE FORWARD IN LIFE."

Greg King
Founder, Always Knocking, Inc.

Always Knocking, Inc. has helped many people apply to reduce their felony convictions through Proposition 47. According to the Judicial Council of California, Sacramento County courts have received 6,872 petitions for resentencing and 1,398 petitions for reclassification.

Always Knocking is commemorating the one-year anniversary of Prop. 47 with an event from 1-3 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 4, at 2251 Florin Road, Sacramento. King says he is looking forward to celebrating the lives changed and spreading the word on how more people can get a fresh start thanks to Prop. 47.

"When their felonies go away, they won't be hindered from getting good jobs and getting an education," King says. "We all want to be successful, and this is going to enable them to move forward in life."

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Greg King, founder of the nonprofit Always Knocking, Inc., is helping inform the community about Prop. 47.
Photo by Tony Nguyen



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helping people get
a fresh start here



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Healers Have a Cultural Approach to Health

BY SUSAN WINLOW

A lot of people call Sacramento resident Trudy Robles a “curandera” — a traditional Mexican healer.

“Curanderismo,” traditional medicine in the Mexican culture, is grounded in prevention and a natural balance that involves a three-way approach to healing spiritually, emotionally and physically by using a variety of methods such as herbal remedies, prayer and massage.

Despite learning about traditional medicine at a young age, Robles, 61, a retired state worker, still wasn’t sure she had the wisdom or the years to properly be called a curandera since most of the traditional healers she knew growing up in Sacramento’s Gardenland area were over 80 years old.

“They had so much life experience,” Robles says of the men and women, including her aunt and grandfather, who were revered in the Mexican community.

Several years ago Robles met Estela Roman, a curandera in her 40s from Cuernavaca, Mexico, who burst the age stereotype for Robles. Not only that, Robles credits Roman with helping to launch the curanderismo — traditional healing — series at Sacramento’s Sol Collective, a community-based arts education center that has received Building Healthy Communities grants from The California Endowment, including a grant for its curanderismo program.

“Through the support of The California Endowment, Sol Collective was able to provide community space and administrative support to incubate this community-led program and help it grow,” says Estella Sanchez, Sol Collective

founder. “It is culturally rooted and gives value to knowledge that has been passed down through generations, while linking it with current health practices.”

It’s knowledge that has been making steady movement in the last few years throughout California as traditional medicine gains traction with diverse groups and not just indigenous people who have practiced it for generations.

CURANDERISMO, TRADITIONAL MEDICINE IN THE MEXICAN CULTURE, IS GROUNDED IN PREVENTION AND A NATURAL BALANCE THAT INVOLVES A THREE-WAY APPROACH TO HEALING ...

There are currently about 100 curanderos in Sacramento; about 30 of them work with Sol Collective. Most work underground at a local level helping the undocumented, those who can’t afford health care and others who are moving away from western medicine, Robles says.

The low-cost curanderismo series at Sol Collective, where Robles is one of the coordinators, provides a forum for sharing traditional medicine practices during two-hour monthly learning labs that involve both

lectures from local and national natural healing practioners, and hands-on activities to those eager to absorb various aspects of curanderismo such as herbal remedy recipes, massage and other forms of self care.

Roman was the first curandera to come to Sol Collective to speak, introducing the topic of energies and how feelings such as envy, jealousy, fright and trauma can “upset our natural balance.”

“Her teaching set the foundation for our program,” Robles said. “We’ve been incubating the seeds for this program and she came and gave birth [to it].”

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Trudy Robles, left, learned the art of curanderismo, traditional Mexican, at a young age. The healing practices used in curanderismo, such as herbal remedies, prayer and massage, are gaining traction locally thanks to a series of workshops in Sacramento. Photo by Laura Marie Anthony



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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Just Add Water

Students learn about cultivating food through aquaponics

BY SUSAN WINLOW

Aquaponics isn't exactly an everyday word.

But to a group of at-risk students in the South Sacramento area who hooked up with Green Tech Education, it's become a common one.

Aquaponics is the marriage of raising aquatic critters, called aquaculture, with hydroponics, which is raising plants in water. The sustainable ecosystem uses fish waste instead of soil to provide nutrients to the plant roots and conserve water since the plants use recirculating water. At harvest time, consumers get both vegetables and a source of protein from the edible fish.

The process was new to Simeon Gant, Green Tech's executive director, when one of his colleagues suggested this project for the nonprofit career technical education organization, which offers supplemental education to students. The organization received a grant from The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities initiative.

Most of the Healthy Foods Aquaponics Project students — who are age 16 to 19 and struggling academically — come from the nonprofit's partnership with the Sacramento County Office of Education.

"We were looking for something innovative and different," Gant says. "We thought this was a good way to teach [students] how to grow their own food and learn about healthy eating habits."

Adds Gant, "A lot of our students are going to the neighborhood convenience store and having a meal on ... Cheetos."

Gant says the program also teaches about small business such as how to sell at farmers markets and potentially sell to restaurants.

The project currently is growing kale and beans and raising blue gill fish. It's looking forward to a first harvest in November.

"WE THOUGHT THIS WAS A GOOD WAY TO TEACH [STUDENTS] HOW TO GROW THEIR OWN FOOD AND LEARN ABOUT HEALTHY EATING HABITS."

Simeon Gant, Executive Director, Green Tech

The group started with a blighted house in Oak Park in June 2014. They brought over a group of students to help clean the outside of the house and then erect a 1,000-foot greenhouse and install three different aquaponics systems with the help of Paul Trudeau, the owner of Southside Aquaponic Farm in Sacramento.

"Some people say it's beyond organic," Trudeau says. "If you use pesticides you kill off the fish. It's like an ecosystem you're making. It's a very natural system, very natural food."

Trudeau says he doesn't see aquaponics taking over traditional gardening — "they're very complimentary," he says.

Indeed, at the Green Tech aquaponics site, lettuce, herbs, cilantro and fresh strawberries have graced the area around the aquaponics greenhouse.

"First and foremost, this is science," Gant says. "When we bring our students in they can actually see how science works."

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Green Tech program students tour the organization's new aquaponic greenhouse in Oak Park.
Photo by Anne Stokes



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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Changing Records, Changing Lives

Prop. 47 gives people a second chance

BY KATE GONZALES

Things have been looking up for Martell Koster. After years of temp work, he has landed a full-time job, purchased a home and is getting ready to have a second child.

The 32-year-old credits Proposition 47 — which reduces certain nonviolent offenses from felonies to misdemeanors on a case-by-case basis — with giving him the chance to take steps toward a brighter future.

**“I WANT TO BE A
PRODUCTIVE MEMBER
OF SOCIETY.”**

Martell Koster, Reclassified under Prop. 47

“For the last five years, I’ve been fighting to get a real job,” Koster says. “I want to be a productive member of society.”

Since California voters passed Prop. 47 in November 2014, thousands of people statewide have had their felony convictions reclassified to misdemeanors, opening up eligibility for benefits like Section 8 housing and reducing barriers to employment.

“I think you should give people a second chance,” Koster says. “A real second chance.”

Koster says his permanent, full-time job will allow him to provide for his family and give back to the community. Always Knocking Inc., a Sacramento nonprofit that provides wraparound services to families, has helped spread the word about the positive community impacts of Prop. 47.

Gregory King, CEO and founder of Always Knocking, says the organization has helped nearly 1,000 Sacramento residents apply for reclassification.

On Nov. 4, Always Knocking hosted a celebration of the one-year anniversary of the passing of Prop. 47. Sponsored by The California Endowment, which supported Prop. 47, the event featured stakeholders like Sacramento County’s Office of the Public Defender, as well as stories from community members who have directly benefited from reclassification.

King praises the law any chance he gets for “changing records, changing lives.” Always Knocking will continue to help community members apply for reclassification during its Sacramento Inner City Tour. The deadline to apply for reclassification is Nov. 4, 2017.

SACRAMENTO INNER CITY TOUR DATES

**Need help reclassifying
your records?
Come to these events:**

South Sacramento

Saturday, Nov. 21
12 p.m. to 4 p.m.

South Sacramento Christian Center
7710 Stockton Blvd., Sacramento

Del Paso Heights

Saturday, Jan. 23, 2016
12 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Roberts Family Development Center
766 Darina Ave., Sacramento

Rancho Cordova

Saturday, May 21, 2016
12 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Unity Church
9249 Folsom Blvd., Sacramento

Oak Park

Saturday, June 25, 2016
12 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Oak Park Community Center
3415 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.,
Sacramento

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Martell Koster, 32, is one of thousands of Californians whose felony convictions have been reclassified as misdemeanors under Prop. 47.
Photo by Anne Stokes



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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Pride in Action

Creating safe spaces and acceptance for LGBTQ youth

BY ANNE STOKES

Many LGBTQ youths are rejected by their families out of love, according to Emily Bender, LGBTQ program coordinator with NorCal Mental Health America.

“The rejecting behaviors, many times are not intended to be cruel or mean,” says Bender. “They do it out of love, they think that it’s what’s best for them, that society would love them if they were straight.”

“IF YOU REDUCE YOUR REJECTION MESSAGES, THERE’S A BETTER CHANCE THAT YOUR CHILD WILL SURVIVE AND TURN OUT TO BE A HEALTHY ADULT.”

Emily Bender, LGBTQ Program Coordinator

Unfortunately, youth who face such rejection are more likely to do drugs, engage in risky behaviors and commit suicide. “If you reduce your rejection messages, there’s a better chance that your child will survive and turn out to be a healthy adult,” she says.

It is that message that Bender wants to get out to the community. Through a grant from The California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities (BHC) initiative, Bender is

working with the BHC’s Pride Action Team to empower adults to establish safe and affirming environments for kids and youth who are, or who are perceived to be, LGBTQ or their allies through outreach, trainings and community events. The team is divided into four subcommittees to address everyday issues that affect the lives of LGBTQ youth: schools and families, faith-based and spiritual organizations, businesses and service providers, and neighborhood safety and transportation.

The Pride Action Team focuses mainly on South Sacramento, an area where LGBTQ youth face an increased amount of aggression, gender-based oppression and verbal harassment compared to other neighborhoods.

“It’s a really diverse community, mostly Southeast Asian, African American and Hispanic, with very few Caucasians, so it’s really a community of color,” explains Bender. “Many times, it’s tough to go into that community and open those doors. That’s why we want to make sure that in this Pride Action Team we include people of color, and that we include groups like La Familia, the Asian Pacific Islander groups, and that we include groups from African American churches and spiritual centers, so we have that vocabulary to talk with these families.”

From working with schools to help them better support Gay-Straight Alliance clubs to showing businesses how to create safe spaces

where youth can be free from harassment and treated with respect, the Action Team works to foster acceptance. They also reach out to law enforcement, nonprofit organizations, churches and families who are struggling to reconcile religious or cultural values with what their children are going through.

“If you want your child to continue living a healthy life, we need to create a climate that is loving and supporting,” Bender says. “It doesn’t mean that you have to wave a rainbow flag and walk at the parades, we’re not asking you to do that. What we’re asking you is please don’t make your child feel like less of a person.”

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Pride Action Team members attended a LGBTQ Youth retreat in November where site representatives engaged in networking sessions and idea-sharing meetings aimed at sharing successful projects with other BHC sites across the state.
Photo courtesy of NorCal MHA



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Want to get involved? Attend the next Pride Action Team meeting on Tuesday, Dec. 8 from 9:30 to 11 a.m. at the Mutual Housing at the Greenway, 6311 Sampson Blvd. Sacramento. Can’t attend but still want to get involved? Call 530-366-1777.



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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Creating Compassion

Youth activist parlays his own confidence to build up others

BY ANNE STOKES

Today, 18-year-old Ronnie Swinburn has found a community of acceptance, but growing up he felt set apart from his peers.

“When I was younger, I thought I was the only one,” remembers Swinburn, who identifies as a trans man. “At school especially, I thought I was the only person who was like who I was.”

Throughout middle and high school, Ronnie experienced harassment to the extent that he was hospitalized for depression. It was in his sophomore year that he found his school’s Gay-Straight Alliance club, which helped him better understand his sexual orientation and gender identity, and find the courage to share his experiences with others.

“That helped me to build a lot of confidence, and I started to realize that I should embrace myself more,” he says.

He shares that confidence with others through his work with The California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities (BHC) initiative. As a member of the organization’s Pride Action Team, he works to establish safe and affirming environments for kids and youth who are, or who are perceived to be, LGBTQ and their allies.

“IT’S BECOMING MORE ACCEPTING FOR LGBTQ PEOPLE OUT IN THE WORLD, BUT [I WANT] TO MAKE IT SO THAT IT’S NOT AN ABNORMAL THING, TO MAKE IT MORE OF A NORMALITY IN LIFE.”

Ronnie Swinburn,
Youth Activist with the Pride Action Team

“I’m finding ways to get out into my community so that I can reach out to people more and [help] people understand things that they used to think were unnatural and bring things into more modern day terms,” he explains. “It’s becoming more accepting for LGBTQ people out in the world, but [I want] to make it so that it’s not an abnormal thing, to make it more of a normality in life.”

LGBTQ Program Coordinator Emily Bender says that Swinburn has a gift for reaching out to the youth served by the Pride Action Team.

“He has a lot of great advice for young people and he’s able to put into words a lot of the feelings that youth go through,” Bender says. “He’s a young man who has a lot of great attributes.”

Recently, Swinburn attended an LGBTQ Youth Retreat funded by The California Endowment, an opportunity to network and share ideas with other BHC sites. He and other Sacramento BHC representatives shared their Rainbow Routes concept, a plan that would help LGBTQ youth plot safe travel plans around town.

“It amazes me that I only knew these people for three days, and yet made such great connections and networking opportunities with each and every single one of them,” Swinburn says. “I learned how to bring that mutual compassion back. That’s something that I’ve realized growing up, that not too many people are genuinely compassionate towards each other. Just experiencing that, it’s something I would like to implement into my community.”



From left, Ronnie Swinburn, youth activist with the Pride Action Team, and LGBTQ Program Coordinator Emily Bender work to create safe and accepting environments for LGBTQ youth in South Sacramento. Photo by Anne Stokes

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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

A Makeover for an Underpass

BY NATASHA VON KAENEL

It doesn't always take millions of dollars to improve a city. In fact, it is often the smaller projects, spearheaded by community members and activists, that can really transform a neighborhood.

Katie Valenzuela Garcia, an Oak Park resident and project consultant for an upcoming mural beautification project, knows this. Valenzuela Garcia has been working with Caliph Assagai of Public Interest Advocacy to transform the Highway 99 underpass at 2nd Avenue between Franklin and Alhambra boulevards into a place of pride for local residents.

The underpass is one of the main connections between Oak Park and Curtis Park and has been a source of blight and concern for many years.

"Residents really saw the underpass as a safety and security concern," Valenzuela Garcia says. "Traffic was moving really quick, it was really dark and people would park RVs under there for weeks at a time. It was terrible."

The plan to revamp the underpass was drafted with input and support from Public Interest Advocacy, The California Endowment's Building Healthy

Communities initiative, local residents and business owners, and other community supporters including Oak Park and Sierra Curtis Neighborhood Associations, the North Franklin District, and Oak Park Business District. Suggested changes include improving lighting, bike lanes and sidewalks, removing parking, and implementing traffic calming measures. But what Valenzuela Garcia is the most excited about it is the mural.

**"THIS SORT OF THING
CAN SEEM REALLY SMALL
OR INSIGNIFICANT, BUT IT
MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE
IN HOW PEOPLE
FEEL ABOUT THEIR
NEIGHBORHOOD."**

*Katie Garcia, Project Consultant
and Oak Park resident*

Phil America, an internationally known artist and writer based in Sacramento, has graciously volunteered his time to the project. And while the mural design is still

being finalized, Valenzuela Garcia says they plan on highlighting what has historically stood in both neighborhoods and what remains now. She hopes this project will improve cohesion between Oak Park and Curtis Park, and make the underpass "a place people move to, instead of a place people move through."

"This sort of thing can seem really small or insignificant, but it makes a big difference in how people feel about their neighborhood, how they feel about really walking around and interacting with their neighborhood," Valenzuela Garcia says. "Projects like this make people want to come outside and talk to people, to interact, to do things, and that increases health, both physical and mental health."

As well as improving the health of the local community, Valenzuela Garcia emphasizes that this project has empowered local residents to become decision makers in their neighborhood. The multiple community meetings where they debated different ways to transform the underpass "gives people exposure to what it looks like to create change in their neighborhood, and the more people we do that with, the more change agents we create and the healthier these neighborhoods become."

Caliph Assagai of Public Interest Advocacy and Oak Park resident Katie Valenzuela Garcia are working with the community to beautify the Highway 99 underpass at 2nd Avenue.

Photo by Anne Stokes



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.



Your **ZIP code** shouldn't predict how long you'll live – but it does. Staying healthy requires much more than doctors and diets. Every day, our surroundings and activities affect how long – and how well – we'll live.

Health Happens in Neighborhoods. Health Happens in Schools.
Health Happens with Prevention.

Help make this project a reality! Individuals or businesses can email their feedback about the project design to 2ndAvenueUnderpass@gmail.com or attend one of the upcoming stakeholder meetings. To donate to the project, mail a check to Public Interest Advocacy at 717 K Street, Suite 420, Sacramento, CA 95814, or email the above address for more options.



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