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In Neighborhoods

BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Urban Agriculture Can Provide Health and Wealth in 'Food Deserts'

BY ANNE STOKES

California is the country's largest agricultural producer. However, within this agricultural powerhouse, communities exist where healthy and affordable food options are hard to come by.

Katie Valenzuela Garcia comes from one of these so-called "food deserts" — Oildale, a town just north of Bakersfield. Like the name suggests, oil springs from the soil there, more so than fruits and vegetables. Growing up, she remembers more fast food restaurants and convenience stores near her home and school than grocery stores.

Today, Valenzuela Garcia is a coordinator with the Sacramento Urban Agriculture Coalition, a partner of The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities initiative. The organization advocates for urban agriculture-friendly policies, economic development and community involvement.

Currently, the coalition is reviewing a proposed urban agriculture ordinance in Sacramento County that would provide regulatory framework allowing residents to grow and sell produce in private, community and market gardens. As of now, such activity is restricted based on property zoning. The ordinance — which is set to be heard by the County Board of Supervisors on Jan. 24 — is

similar to the one that's been successfully implemented in the city since 2015.

"If we could use all the vacant spaces for food production, that could shift communities' health and well-being and general quality of life," Valenzuela Garcia says.

"IF WE COULD USE ALL THE VACANT SPACES FOR FOOD PRODUCTION, THAT COULD SHIFT COMMUNITIES' HEALTH AND WELL-BEING AND GENERAL QUALITY OF LIFE."

*Katie Valenzuela Garcia
Coordinator, Sacramento Urban Agriculture Coalition*

Inadequate nutrition has been linked to conditions like obesity, diabetes and heart disease. Urban farming can improve nutrition by making healthy foods affordable and

available. According to the Community Food Security Coalition, local fresh produce can have twice the amount of vitamins and nutrients than industrial agricultural products that have traveled long distances to reach supermarket shelves.

Repurposing vacant lots into green spaces benefit surrounding communities. Valenzuela Garcia says she's seen gardens transform blight into hubs of neighborhood involvement.

"Having people out working on a community space like a garden [can] help decrease the amount of code violations and decrease the amount of time they have to spend solving community problems with police," she says.

Growing and selling produce and food products provides entrepreneurship and job training opportunities as well. Valenzuela Garcia urges people to think more than local when it comes to their groceries — think hyper-local!

"If you have a farm near you ... purchase from them," she says. "Those small purchases really make a difference for the farmers in this region."



Katie Valenzuela Garcia, coordinator with the Sacramento Urban Agriculture Coalition, advocates for urban agriculture opportunities as solutions to food deserts.

Photo by Anne Stokes

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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.

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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

School Clinic Improves Access to Care

BY ANNE STOKES

Depending on your ZIP code, good health care can be hard to find. In low-income areas of south Sacramento, few providers accept Medi-Cal or Medicare, and facilities that do are usually overburdened and underfunded. That lack of access contributes to poor health outcomes as patients are less likely to get preventive care and more likely to delay care for conditions such as diabetes, hypertension or mental health issues. They are also more likely to rely on “safety net” resources such as emergency rooms.

With 17 years of emergency and acute care experience, Nurse Practitioner Catherine Oakafor has seen firsthand how a lack of accessible care — especially preventive services — affects patients.

“The reality of life is there is more demand than supply. So many people need help, but there’s not so many of us,” she says. “They’re waiting longer than they should when they could have come here and managed their care.”

Oakafor is a nurse practitioner at the Richard Ikeda Health Center at Hiram Johnson High School, one of several WellSpace Health Centers providing comprehensive care to underserved populations throughout Sacramento County. Health Centers offer primary medical, women’s health and mental health care, dental services, suicide prevention and addiction treatment programs — services that Dr. Jonathan Porteus, WellSpace’s chief

executive officer, refers to as a “blanket of care” rather than a “safety net.”

“We believe a safety net is something you throw someone out of a window in to as a measure of last resort. What people need is appropriate access to health care,” Porteus says. “We’re trying to build an appropriate system of health care ... in the right place without relying on tiny clinics or emergency departments. It’s so much cheaper and much more effective.”

“WE BELIEVE A SAFETY NET IS SOMETHING YOU THROW SOMEONE IN TO... AS A MEASURE OF LAST RESORT. WHAT PEOPLE NEED IS APPROPRIATE ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE.”

*Dr. Jonathan Porteus
Chief Executive Officer, WellSpace Health*

Funded in part by a federal grant and The California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities initiative, the full-scope primary care center is the first in the Sacramento region to be located at a high school. The center, which started seeing medical patients in fall 2016, provides affordable and easy access to medical care at a place many in the community already visit.



Claudia Neri, left, finds affordable and accessible health care from providers such as Nurse Practitioner Catherine Oakafor at WellSpace Health’s Richard Ikeda Health Center located on campus at Hiram Johnson High School. Photo by Anne Stokes.

“I think just being at this location at the high school is going to help the students — and the community at large — get more health care access,” says Magda Chavez, the clinic’s school-based health care coordinator.

Claudia Neri says she has received excellent care through WellSpace when other health care providers have been cost prohibitive.

“It’s really important to have these kinds of places [especially] for people who cannot afford it,” Neri says. “I don’t see another option for me.”

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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Sowing the Seeds of Healthy Living

BY ANNE STOKES

Sacramento City Unified School District wants to hear from you.

The district is seeking community input on its School Wellness Policy, which fosters healthy living habits in students through nutrition, health and physical education.

Schools — where students spend a majority of their day — are in a prime position to influence healthy habits, providing up to two meals daily and most of students' daily physical activity through P.E., recess and sports.

In 2010, the district created the Healthy Food Task Force to help draft key aspects of the School Wellness Policy as well as to implement many of the policy's programs. With funding assistance from The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities initiative, the task force includes the district's nutrition services department, school board, faculty members, parents, the Sacramento County Department of Health and Human Services and several nonprofits.

"The focus was changing the culture around food in the school district, getting healthier food into cafeterias, increasing the number of school gardens and increasing the use of gardens in the curriculum and food education," says Robyn Krock, project manager with Valley Vision, a regional stewardship nonprofit that works with the district and The California Endowment to facilitate the task force and its mission.

Valley Vision and others on the task force have been working to update the policy to increase healthy opportunities for students. Some of the proposed changes include:

- Not offering food as an incentive or reward in school;
- Food offered at classroom celebrations will meet state and federal guidelines;
- Non-food fundraisers will be strongly encouraged, and fundraisers that do sell food have to comply with new state and federal regulations;
- Students cannot be punished by taking away recess and physical activity;
- All schools will meet or exceed the PE requirement for each grade level.

"WE REALLY WANT TO HEAR FROM PARENTS, WHETHER THEY AGREE OR THEY DISAGREE."

Victoria Flores
SCUSD director of student support and health services

Some of the updates are intended to meet new state and federal guidelines, but the impetus for many of the proposed changes were advocated for by community partners and parents.



Sacramento City Unified School District's School Wellness Policy institutes policies to help students make healthy life choices, including "Go Green. Eat Fresh" salad bars at every school site. Photo courtesy of Sacramento City Unified School District

"We have a massive increase in our students with diabetes. We have a lot of parents wanting — and needing — help in being able to control what their children are exposed to. That was one of the driving forces," says Victoria Flores, SCUSD director of student support and health services. "We really want to hear from parents, whether they agree or they disagree. We want to hear what their concerns are so that we can make sure we address them."

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www.scusd.edu/post/proposed-changes-our-school-wellness-policy

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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Why Can't Medi-Cal Patients Get Primary Care at UCD?

THEA MARIE ROOD

In January 2015, UC Davis Medical Center quietly stopped providing primary care to patients insured by Medi-Cal, which covers about one-third of Californians, all of whom are low-income, disabled or elderly.

There are community leaders who believe the time has come for the university to explain — in a public forum — its decision to no longer provide primary care to these patients.

“As a public hospital, UCD should not be turning down public insurance,” says Sen. Richard Pan (D-Sacramento), a pediatrician whose senate district includes the South Sacramento neighborhoods surrounding the medical center. “If your position is you can’t take Medi-Cal because you can’t afford to, then give the Legislature the opportunity to address that. But if you’re not going to publicly say what the barriers are, you’re telling me you don’t want to see these patients and you don’t want to solve this problem.”

Pan is not alone in questioning the university’s position. “The whole thing is a walking contradiction,” says Amy Williams, a local attorney and UCD law school alumna who sits on the Building Healthy Communities Health Equity Action Team. Williams says the team was first approached in early 2015 by patients, many with chronic disease, who could no longer see their longtime UCD physicians — and then their doctors and medical students started turning up. Their argument: How

are you maintaining your commitment as a teaching hospital if you are restricting students’ exposure to a diverse, medically vulnerable population?

“AS A PUBLIC HOSPITAL, UCD SHOULD NOT BE TURNING DOWN PUBLIC INSURANCE.”

*Sen. Richard Pan,
California state senator and pediatrician*

A university spokesman says current Medi-Cal contracts “emphasize the utilization of our specialty care services.” The university reports more than 100,000 Medi-Cal patients were seen in 2016, both as outpatients and as 37 percent of its hospital admissions. This care is described as “access to highly specialized medical equipment, unique surgical procedures and life-saving clinical trials.”

But without access to primary care, patients’ health is being affected, particularly in South Sacramento, UCDCM’s own neighborhood. Residents, many with limited private transportation, must now find basic care in outlying areas. Failing that, they end up disproportionately in UCDCM’s emergency room with issues like flu or bronchitis, because ERs cannot legally turn away patients based on their insurance.



State Sen. Richard Pan, who represents residents in South Sacramento, has questioned UC Davis Medical Center’s decision to stop providing primary care to Medi-Cal patients. Photo courtesy Sen. Pan’s office

“That goes to the very heart of the Affordable Care Act,” says Williams, which aims to reduce these unnecessary — and costly — ER visits.

But even critics believe a solution could be brokered if UCD leaders agree to address this issue. “Look, I have a tremendous affection for the university,” says Pan, who was on UCD’s faculty for 12 years. “That’s why so many of us are so passionate.”

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BUILDING A **HEALTHY** SACRAMENTO

City to Develop New Youth Services Department

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

For the first time in 24 years, the Sacramento City Council appears poised to create a new department with the goal of enhancing the city's youth services.

A leading advocate of the proposed youth department is Councilman Jay Schenirer, who contends the city neglects its young.

"We should value our young people" by ensuring all are provided opportunities to succeed, Schenirer said recently.

For every \$30 spent on police and fire services from the city's general fund, only about \$1 is spent to support youth programs, including recreational activities and after-school tutoring, he said.

He has called for an infrastructure to better deliver youth services — many were reduced during the recession — along with the metrics to measure success. The new department may eventually oversee Mayor Darrell Steinberg's endeavor to provide paid year-round internships for at least half of the city's high school seniors. That plan currently has \$1.9 million in state/city start-up funds, enough for around 1,500 interns, with more monies being sought.

Nine young people, including Luther Burbank High School senior Cheng Thao, recently urged the City Council to launch the youth department and the internships in partnership with the state and other local employers.

"Youth employment is very important for us seniors ... because we are transitioning into

adulthood," Thao, 16, told the council. "Youth employment provides the work experience and the money we need for our future needs, such as college."

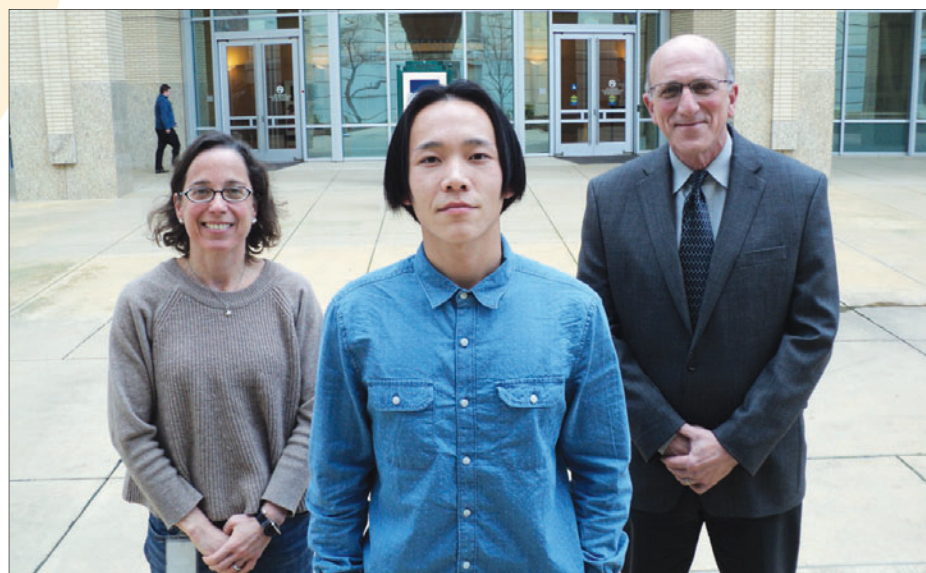
**"YOUTH EMPLOYMENT
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FOR US SENIORS ...
BECAUSE WE ARE
TRANSITIONING INTO
ADULTHOOD."**

Cheng Thao
Luther Burbank High School senior credit 2

Thao campaigned for Measures Y and G, which would have generated new taxes to fund local youth services. Both were narrowly rejected by voters last year, much to the dismay of Thao, who championed both through the local chapter of the East Bay Asian Youth Center.

Besides matching a \$950,000 state grant for internships, the City Council requested a youth department blueprint for discussion on April 18. The template will be crafted by a multi-sector team led by Claudia Jasin, a consultant working for the city.

Shaping a new governmental department is a first for Jasin, a Harvard-educated youth development expert.



From left, Youth Development Expert Claudia Jasin, Luther Burbank Senior Cheng Thao and Councilmember Jay Schenirer. Thao recently spoke during a City Council meeting in favor of creating a new youth services department, an idea supported by Schenirer. Photo by Edgar Sanchez

"I'm going to rely on a lot of expertise inside and outside of City Hall to make this happen," said Jasin, whose position was recently funded by a grant from The California Endowment.

The city hasn't created a new department since the 1993-94 fiscal year, when Neighborhood Services opened. Schenirer expressed confidence the youth department (its exact name to be determined) can open July 1.

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**For information about
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Jay Schenirer at
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Change Begins With Youth

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

With resistance to President Donald Trump growing daily, a new generation of social justice advocates must be trained — and the time is now. So believes Marcus Strother, coordinator of the Men's and Women's Leadership Academy, which grooms Sacramento teens to be tomorrow's leaders.

"If we're going to teach advocacy, we're in a situation of being able to do that now more than ever," Strother says.

The reason: By attacking myriad groups, from Latinos to Muslim-Americans, Trump has sparked nationwide protests that have created a teaching moment for the academy's 390 students.

Besides learning in class how to protect their rights, they can also learn from the "Resist" movement that is occurring, Strother suggests.

Launched five years ago, the academy has expanded from an after-school club to an elective program at 13 campuses in the Sacramento City Unified School District. The academy initially targeted at-risk boys in grades 9-12; its sites at McClatchy and American Legion high schools today include girls.

With partial funding from The California Endowment, the goal is to reduce minority dropout rates by teaching academic excellence, respect for elders and advocacy. The students encompass all races; most are African-American and Hispanic.

"We don't want our students to just go to college. We want them to graduate and

become the advocates our communities need," says Strother, a dynamic educator who came from his native Illinois in 2015 to lead the academy.

"IF WE'RE GOING TO TEACH ADVOCACY, WE'RE IN A SITUATION OF BEING ABLE TO DO THAT NOW MORE THAN EVER."

Marcus Strother

Men's and Women's Leadership Academy coordinator

He tries to visit each academy site at least twice monthly, and during such visits, he observes the teacher who is running the class (and does some of the teaching himself).

One product of the academy is 19-year-old Matthew Cornelius-Germany, who says his experience was transformational. After enrolling in it as a junior at McClatchy High School, Cornelius-Germany went from bad student to good. As a senior he enrolled in the academy at Kennedy High School, from which he graduated in 2015.

"The academy was an eye opener," Cornelius-Germany says. "It laid out opportunities for me. ... I was reaching out to grab them."



From left, Marcus Strother and Matthew Cornelius-Germany represent the Men's and Women's Leadership Academy, which encourages minority students to excel academically and become leaders in their community. Photo by Edgar Sanchez

Cornelius-Germany is now the academy's youth ambassador. He speaks to community groups on topics such as the need to build more schools, not prisons.

The current sophomore at Cosumnes River and Sacramento City colleges calls Strother, 41, "a great mentor ... inspirational to the upcoming generation."

In April, Cornelius-Germany and 23 members of the academy's student council will explore Washington, D.C. for a week, on a trip partly funded by The California Endowment.

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For more information on the Men's and Women's Leadership Academy:

Email: marcus-strother@scusd.edu

Phone: 916-643-7992

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The Need for Affordable Housing in Sacramento County

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

When Verna Ekpедuma moved into a bright, one-bedroom apartment in North Sacramento, she knelt, kissed the living room floor and wept. As the tears cascaded, Ekpедuma embraced sweet reality: She no longer was homeless or living with “horrible” roommates.

“I couldn’t believe I had such a beautiful apartment,” the 62-year-old housekeeper says of the place she’s called home since 2012. “I love it here.”

Ekpедuma lives at Mutual Housing at Norwood, an attractive housing complex for families of modest means. While Ekpедuma has found affordable housing, other low-income Sacramentans find it harder to do so, says Darryl Rutherford, director of the Sacramento Housing Alliance (SHA).

The SHA is at the forefront of the fight for affordable housing, a mission it pursues partly with a grant from The California Endowment.

According to Rutherford, local developers were long required to designate 15 percent of all new homes as affordable units — but that requirement vanished in Sacramento County in 2014 and in Sacramento in 2015.

Instead, the county now requires developers pay \$2.69 per square foot of new construction into its housing trust fund. Developers inside the city pay even less — \$2.67 per square foot into the city’s fund. Developers claimed the housing market was

so weak, they could no longer build homes for the poor. As a result, no affordable homes are currently being built locally at a time when, by one estimate, Sacramento County needs 59,000 more affordable rental homes.

“I COULDN’T BELIEVE I HAD SUCH A BEAUTIFUL APARTMENT ... I LOVE IT HERE.”

Verna Ekpедuma
Resident, Mutual Housing at Norwood

“We had a policy in place that was very successful,” Rutherford says of the former 15 percent mandate.

Between 2000 and mid-2015, the city’s 15 percent rule alone resulted in 1,559 new affordable units, according to the Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency.

While the City Council and the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors may soon revisit the issue, Rutherford cited other options for affordable-home construction, including a new source of funding that would have to be approved by 66 percent of voters.

“It would be pretty challenging to do,” he says of the funding source, “but other cities have done it.”

Meanwhile a range of factors, including President Donald Trump, skyrocketing local



Verna Ekpедuma stands in front of her first-floor apartment at Mutual Housing at Norwood, an affordable housing complex that was built by the nonprofit Mutual Housing California. Photo by Edgar Sanchez

rents and a loss of redevelopment funds, threaten to increase local homelessness.

Recently married, Ekpедuma enjoys living with her husband of nine months, Macauley Ekpедuma, and their chihuahua, Bella. A resident leader, she serves on the board of Mutual Housing California, the nonprofit that built and operates her complex.

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Phoebe-Isabella Comeaux-Cochran works as a budtender at RCP.
PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES



A LEADER

RCP promotes employee and patient well being

IN

River City Phoenix isn't content to be a leader in customer service. The RCP team wants to change the future of the medical cannabis industry, and two ways they're achieving this goal is through allowing employees to unionize and advanced product testing.

Partnership with organized labor

The United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW) first welcomed cannabis workers into its core membership in 2010. The following year, RCP became the first Sacramento dispensary to encourage its workers to unionize within the UFCW Local No. 8 chapter.

"We reached out to the union as a result of feeling a strong need to protect our workers from a variety of threats at the time," says David Spradlin, RCP board member. His concerns stemmed from an increase in federal and local legal action after Melinda Haag, then the U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of California, began shutting down dispensaries, claiming they had been "hijacked by profiteers."

RCP's board members were concerned that crackdowns on dispensaries could impact their ability to act on behalf of employees.

"Things were so much different back then," Spradlin says.

They proactively joined the union to protect employees' jobs, wages and benefits. Spradlin says he credits the union for backing his employees "during a time when most large labor and political groups were trying to distance themselves as much as they could from cannabis."

With additional union members from Southern California and Colorado, the UFCW now represents thousands

of cannabis workers. In recent years, Sacramento's Local No. 8 welcomed workers from two other locals dispensaries, but RCP remains the largest union cannabis employer in all of California.

For RCP employees, union membership means top wages in the region with scheduled yearly raises. Staff also enjoy a full benefits package that includes medical, vision and dental coverage, as well as paid vacation, sick time and bonuses.

"As we progress in the industry, this will become a standard we have already set for other dispensaries."

CURTIS DUCART
Director of purchasing, RCP

RCP also pays into an Individual Account Plan (IAP) for every employee. Because the cannabis industry still has federal banking issues, an IAP functions in lieu of a regular pension plan.

In addition, union shops enjoy the protections built into their collective bargaining agreement. For example, an employee cannot be terminated at the whim of an employer. There is a process that includes a progressive discipline program and grievance hearings. These steps are built into every contract, and when issues arise, workers have a fair opportunity to tell their side of the story.

Groups Pressure UCD to Accept All Medi-Cal Patients

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

UC Davis Medical Center has failed its institutional mission by denying primary care to Sacramento County's 442,000 Medi-Cal patients, State Sen. Richard Pan charged recently.

"The mission of our health system is to take care of everyone in our community, including, and most particularly, the disadvantaged," the Sacramento Democrat and pediatrician said.

But since January 2015, when UCD ended its last Medi-Cal-managed care plan, only Medi-Cal patients arriving in the emergency room have been treated at the Med Center, Pan said. Hospitals are mandated to treat all ER patients by law, regardless of insurance.

"Unfortunately, (UCD) has failed the community by not accepting health care coverage provided by the state ... to (poor) people," he said at a press conference hosted by the Health Equity Action Team, or HEAT, a coalition pressuring UC Davis to fully reinstate primary care for the underprivileged. HEAT is a coalition that consists of grantees of The California Endowment and other interested partners.

UCD spokesman Charles Casey said the Medical Center, a public hospital, is "providing its fair share of care for Medi-Cal patients."

"It's the Medical Center's largest single group of patients," he said, pointing out that about 37 percent of the Med Center's admissions in 2016 were Medi-Cal patients. He added that contrary to HEAT's assertions, the Med Center isn't turning away Medi-Cal patients with serious medical conditions.

"Many patients have ... complicated medical conditions that frequently require hospitalization and the kind of highly specialized care that is often only available at UC Davis Health," Casey said.

He said UC Davis Health has four managed Medi-Cal contracts. "Where Medi-Cal enrollees go for care — whether it's primary or specialty care — depends on where the health plan, not UC Davis, decides to direct its enrollees," he said.

"THE MISSION OF OUR HEALTH SYSTEM IS TO TAKE CARE OF EVERYONE IN OUR COMMUNITY, INCLUDING, AND MOST PARTICULARLY, THE DISADVANTAGED."

Sen. Richard Pan, California legislator

Many Medi-Cal recipients who live near the Medical Center had to switch primary care doctors to other local hospitals, but, lacking transportation, some have a hard time getting to those institutions, HEAT officials said.

Efforts to work with UCD to fully restore primary care to Medi-Cal patients have stalled, HEAT officials said. The only meeting between UCD officials and HEAT occurred in



State Sen. Richard Pan speaks at an April 17 media event calling on UC Davis Medical Center to resume talks on accepting Medi-Cal patients for primary care.

Photo by Anne Stokes

February 2016, according to Kim Williams, a HEAT organizer. UCD seems uninterested in follow-up talks, she says.

Senator Pan, a former UC Davis faculty member, said it pained him to criticize an institution he loves. He called on UCD to resume the talks.

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Community support adds up

SMUD supports many nonprofit organizations through sponsorships, volunteering and employee contributions.

Suzanne Dizon, SMUD community relations supervisor, says community involvement is a priority for the organization. "We see this as our privilege and part of our responsibility," she says. "That runs really deep here at SMUD."

Look at SMUD's community impact in 2016:

\$2 million

donated to local nonprofits
(cash and in-kind contributions)

14,067

trees delivered and planted
with the Sacramento Tree
Foundation

126

career fairs and
education events

934

events, sponsorships
and partnerships



Nilda Valmores is the executive director of My Sister's House, which runs My Sister's Café. The nonprofit helps underserved women and benefits from SMUD's corporate and employee support.

Photo by Anne Stokes

"It's so important to have a big company show its support. It helps legitimize our work and our role in the community."

Nilda Valmores, Executive Director, My Sister's House

Lending a neighborly hand

SMUD shows commitment to community organizations

by Kate Gonzales

It may seem unlikely that an energy provider and a nonprofit that uplifts underserved women in Sacramento would have similar goals. However, the partnership between SMUD and My Sister's House reveals their shared vision for a healthy community.

Since 2001, My Sister's House has provided vital services and opportunities to help victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and human trafficking leave abusive environments and re-establish their lives. The nonprofit serves mostly female victims and their children and has deep appreciation for SMUD's above-and-beyond support.

"The fact that SMUD is making the lives of our women easier, that's so meaningful," says Nilda Valmores, executive director of My Sister's House.

The nonprofit plays a major role in addressing domestic violence and human trafficking in Sacramento through education, prevention work and services including emergency

and transitional housing and a 24-7 multilingual help line. While My Sister's House focuses on the needs of Asian and Pacific Islander families, it aims to offer culturally appropriate services to every victim. For instance, the nonprofit hosts an annual event to educate a diverse group of religious leaders about the signs of domestic violence and how to respond.

Through the Women to Work program, clients work on resumes, practice interviewing and gain hands-on professional experience.

"SMUD employees have helped our clients practice job interview skills," Valmores says. "SMUD has helped us in so many ways."

SMUD employees have served as members of the nonprofit's board and advisory board. Some have even taken their support to the stage, participating in an annual musical gala fundraiser at The Crest Theatre.

"In addition to being a sponsor

of the gala, we've had some SMUD officials be part of the cast," Valmores says, adding that many also join the nonprofit's Run for a Safe Haven.

"It's been great to see SMUD employees in their running T-shirts," she says. "It's so important to have a big company show its support. It helps legitimize our work and our role in the community. SMUD's support truly helps energize My Sister's House."

SMUD's strong relationship with My Sister's House is emblematic of its support for community organizations throughout Sacramento. Suzanne Dizon, Community Relations supervisor at SMUD, says community involvement promotes SMUD's values of community, ingenuity, integrity and leadership.

"Those core values are intrinsic to contributing to a healthy community," Dizon says. "By supporting organizations like My Sister's House, we help to build toward a healthy community overall."

Reinvesting in Communities is a Priority for Sacramento Voters

BY ANNE STOKES

Pastor Dee Emmert remembers when she first met her 12-year-old stepson Matthew — his goal in life was to be a drug dealer.

“The drug dealers up the street had the money and the girls and the cars, and that’s what he wanted,” she says.

For nearly six out of the next 15 years, Matthew was in and out of juvenile hall and prison. Now 32, he’s out of prison and working hard to build a life for himself. Emmert says she’s proud of his determination to stay out of prison, but admits he struggles to find employment with his background.

Through her activism with Sacramento Area Congregations Together (ACT), Emmert has seen how mass incarceration tears at the fabric of entire communities, just as her stepson’s experience in the criminal justice system affected her own family. ACT, one of several organizations in the Sacramento Reinvestment Coalition, works with The California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities initiative to promote increasing preventative services like mental and health care (including substance abuse treatment), schools, housing and economic opportunities, especially for communities of color and the formerly incarcerated. The coalition advocates for the allocation of funds resulting from cost-saving measures, including Prop. 47, be reinvested into vital community services rather than back into the criminal justice system.

“It’s clear to me that locking people up does not stop the issues we’re trying to stop, it just

leads to recycling people through prison,” Emmert says. “Prisons are expensive. And the cost of human life is expensive.”

According to a recent survey funded by The California Endowment, many Sacramento County voters agree.

“PRISONS ARE EXPENSIVE. AND THE COST OF HUMAN LIFE IS EXPENSIVE.”

Pastor Dee Emmert, leader, Sacramento Area Congregations Together (ACT)

The poll, conducted in March 2017, found that 64 percent of voters surveyed supported community reinvestment funding over law enforcement as a more effective way of making their community safer. Additionally, 53 percent of those surveyed agreed that more Prop. 47 dollars should be going to such reinvestment policies rather than jails.

“There’s support in the community to use funding to address the underlying causes instead of just locking them up and throwing away the key,” Emmert says. “They want to reduce the rate of incarceration and use those funds to address homelessness, to address lack of jobs, to address education, to address drug treatment and mental health treatment.”

For Sacramento ACT, that means keeping the pressure on Sacramento County’s Board



Pastor Dee Emmert, leader with the Sacramento Area Congregations Together (ACT), advocates for reinvestment programs that would reduce incarceration rates in Sacramento County. Photo by Anne Stokes.

of Supervisors to make budgetary choices that benefit reinvestment policies — instead of pumping funds back into jail facilities, prison staff and probation officers — and to remember that’s how voters want it.

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BUILDING A **HEALTHY** SACRAMENTO

Asian Youth Center Keeps Kids on the Right Path

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

Leesai Yang has two jobs. In one, he deals with adults who have crossed the line into the criminal justice system; in the other, he counsels teenagers never to cross that terrifying line.

To be more specific: As a Sacramento County Sheriff's deputy, Yang works at County Jail, monitoring inmates. At the East Bay Asian Youth Center in Sacramento, he guides youth toward productive, law-abiding lives.

"I prevent young people from making bad decisions," said Yang, 29, of his part-time post as director of the EBAYC Sacramento program.

The local EBAYC program is an offspring of the EBAYC of Oakland, which has an ambitious goal: Help young people become lifelong builders of a just and compassionate multicultural society.

EBAYC Sacramento, which receives funding from The California Endowment and the City of Sacramento Gang Prevention and Intervention Task Force, offers services including afterschool tutoring, career preparation and gang-diversion counseling. Shunning drugs also is emphasized to the boys and girls.

"I tell the young people I'm a typical Hmong guy," said the Fresno-born Yang, whose parents are from Laos and Thailand and who holds a degree in criminal justice from Sacramento State University. "I'm not special."

In Sacramento since 2014, the nonprofit moved into new offices on Franklin Boulevard in January. Clearly in its infancy, the four-

employee program will grow. For now, it remains a sort of tiny vessel navigating the waters 85 miles from its mothership in Oakland, which has a 41-year history and 130 employees.

"IF THE WORLD HAS GIVEN UP ON YOU, EBAYC HAS VARIOUS WAYS TO HELP YOU."

Dexter Niskala
Participant in East Bay Asian Youth Center

"We have been trying to build organizations in Sacramento and Fresno," said David Kakishiba, an alumnus of Sacramento's McClatchy High and EBAYC's executive director.

Most of the teens in EBAYC Sacramento are Hmong students who attend nearby Luther Burbank High.

"EBAYC is a home away from home for youth," said Dexter Niskala, 18, who, after graduating from Luther Burbank this week, is bound for Sacramento State to study mechanical engineering. "If the world has given up on you, EBAYC has various ways to help you."

Last year, Niskala became civically involved. He and other EBAYC youth campaigned for Measure Y, which would have generated a new tax to fund youth programs in the city.

"We made phone calls and went door-to-door," he said.



From left, EBAYC Sacramento Program Director Leesai Yang and Dexter Niskala, 18.
Photo by Edgar Sanchez

Last June, voters narrowly defeated the measure. "It was very sad," Niskala said. "It was almost heartbreaking. But I learned a lesson, that persistence is the key."

Niskala went on to campaign for Measure G, another initiative that would have imposed new taxes for local youth services. It too, was barely rejected in the November election.

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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Health Program for Undocumented Immigrants Will Continue in County

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

Eighteen months after it opened, Sacramento County's health care program for undocumented immigrants has been renewed.

The Sacramento County Board of Supervisors recently agreed to spend more than \$4 million in fiscal 2017-18 to continue primary and limited specialty care to undocumented persons living in the county through its Healthy Partners program.

The funding is included in a recommended \$4 billion county budget approved by the board for the fiscal year starting July 1. Supervisors held back-to-back budget hearings this month before adopting the tentative package, which faces final approval in September.

At the first hearing, more than 10 speakers from the community asked the board to:

- Eliminate age restrictions that allow only low-income patients aged 19 to 64 to receive Healthy Partners services, and
- End a 3,000-patient cap, which was reached in August, when Healthy Partners was closed to new enrollment. About 300 people are on a waiting list; on average, roughly 30 waitlist applicants are enrolled in the program every month.

David Ramirez, treasurer of Sacramento Area Congregations Together addressed the board: "Two years ago, the community came to this board (to) request that the county restore health services to undocumented immigrants — those services having been discontinued in 2009. This board voted 5-0 (in June 2015) to establish Healthy Partners."

By all accounts, Ramirez continued, Healthy Partners has provided high quality care since it opened at the Sacramento County Health Center in January 2016.

"Lives have been saved and ... many patients have experienced relief from their ailments," he said. "But those who turn 65 while in the program are terminated ... I ask you to eliminate the age and enrollment caps."

**"LIVES HAVE BEEN
SAVED AND ...
MANY PATIENTS
HAVE EXPERIENCED
RELIEF FROM THEIR
AILMENTS."**

David Ramirez
Sacramento Area Congregations Together

Ramirez's multi-faith nonprofit advocates for a more just and fair community for all — a goal that coincides with The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities initiative.

Health and Human Services Director Sherri Heller said \$1.8 million budgeted for specialty care through Healthy Partners was unspent. Those funds amount to roughly 28 percent of the program's original \$6.4 million budget.

While this funding is allocated for a specific purpose, Ramirez said if the county could



David Ramirez stands in front of the Sacramento County Administration Center after addressing the County's Board of Supervisors on June 13. He and more than 10 other speakers asked the Board to remove certain restrictions from Healthy Partners, the program that provides health care to undocumented immigrants.
Photo by Edgar Sanchez

be more flexible with its spending, it could lift the age limit and the 3,000 member enrollment cap and help more people.

"The money is there, the people are there, but they're not getting help because of an arbitrary rule," Ramirez said. "Our concern is that the county is not spending all the funds they have budgeted to meet the needs of the community."

Supervisors will have to decide how best to spend the unused funds.

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BUILDING A **HEALTHY** SACRAMENTO

Put This Number in Your Phone

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

Undocumented immigrants have always feared deportation — now more than ever. The unprecedented panic was created by President Donald Trump, who has vowed to build a wall between Mexico and the United States and to deport millions of undocumented residents.

As a result, many people without papers are afraid to step outside their homes. When they do, they avoid police and stay away from government buildings; some won't drive a car unless its lights function properly, lest they be pulled over for a minor infraction.

For these immigrants, the ultimate horror is being arrested by, or turned over to, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, the lead federal agency in Trump's ongoing war on the undocumented.

"There's definitely an increase in fear" among undocumented immigrants, Gabby Trejo, associate director of Sacramento Area Congregations Together, said recently. "This is the first time I've seen that level of fear."

The Sacramento Immigration Coalition, which includes Trejo's Sacramento ACT, has responded to that fear. In May, it launched a round-the-clock Rapid Response hotline to help protect undocumented Sacramentans — in a city that is a self-declared sanctuary for such residents.

At 916-245-6773, people can report if ICE is outside their home, at their work or in any Sacramento neighborhood. The calls are taken by bilingual operators who dispatch specially-trained legal observers to videotape ICE raids. Videos of ICE violating a person's rights may help prevent deportation.

"The hotline is one way we make sure people are not being taken away in the middle of the night without anyone else noticing," Trejo said.

"THE HOTLINE IS ONE WAY WE MAKE SURE PEOPLE ARE NOT BEING TAKEN AWAY IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT WITHOUT ANYONE ELSE NOTICING."

Gabby Trejo
Associate Director, Sacramento ACT

The observers also provide counselors for children suddenly separated from a parent, or phone numbers for immigration attorneys, and other resources.

"Legal observers do not interfere during" ICE operations, Trejo said. "Their role is to be moral and legal observers."

On May 14, a caller reported that ICE was staking out a Del Paso Heights church while the Latino congregation celebrated Mass. The pastor told ICE that the church was off limits. No one was arrested.

The coalition also holds know-your-rights forums. Rule 1: Never sign a voluntary departure form.



Gabby Trejo, associate director with Sacramento Area Congregations Together, says her organization is helping undocumented immigrants avoid deportation with a new Rapid Response hotline.
Photo by Edgar Sanchez

Trump claims to be targeting criminal foreigners, but under his policies all undocumented residents — estimated at 11 million nationwide — are at risk of removal, Time magazine reported this month.

Trejo's multifaith organization seeks a more just society for all, including the undocumented, who it says make valuable contributions. The nonprofit receives funding from The California Endowment, which shares this vision.

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BUILDING A **HEALTHY** SACRAMENTO

Youth Advocates for School Justice Reform

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

Araiye “Ray” Thomas-Haysbert believes too many minority students have been suspended for allegedly violating school rules. Punishment, she says, puts students of color on the school-to-prison pipeline.

During her junior year, Ray, who is gay and African American, argued with a teacher. She was removed from the class and subsequently failed to meet a requirement for admission into state-funded universities.

In June, Ray graduated from Hiram Johnson with straight As. This fall, she will become the first in her family to attend college — at Oklahoma’s Langston University, majoring either in political science or social work.

While excited about attending a historically black campus, Ray said her preference would have been Sacramento State University, to be near her family.

“My altercation cost me an opportunity” to enroll at Sac State, Ray said. “I could attend a two-year community college in Sacramento, but my mom ... wants me to go to a four-year university.”

Her message to keep K-12 kids in school was heard this May, when she and 250 other youth descended on the State Capitol. Their mission: to urge support for key bills before the Legislature.

The visit was part of Free Our Dreams, an effort to strengthen the youth movement in California by cultivating a network of youth leaders. Sponsored in part by The California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities (BHC) initiative, visitors to the Capitol represented Youth Leaders and Adult Allies from 14 BHC sites statewide.

**“MY ALTERCATION
COST ME AN
OPPORTUNITY.”**

Araiye “Ray” Thomas-Haysbert
Free Our Dreams participant

Ray never will forget these annual visits to the Capitol. Walking the halls of power, the students met with legislators from both sides of the aisle and with support staff, some of whom provided special insights.

“When our young people go to the Capitol to speak with our state Legislature about why we need these policies in place and connecting their personal stories, that’s powerful,” said Nakeya Bell, BHC Sacramento’s youth engagement coordinator.

Bell, Ray’s mentor, said she admires her protégé. In May, the Senate passed SB 607, which would eliminate willful defiance as grounds for suspension/



Araiye “Ray” Thomas-Haysbert, 18, is an advocate for eliminating willful defiance suspensions and expulsions in K-12 schools. Photo by Edgar Sanchez

expulsion for K-12 students, unless they disrupt school or commit other blatant acts. The bill, introduced by Sen. Nancy Skinner (D-Berkeley) faces likely approval in the Assembly.

Though she wasn’t expelled from school, Ray proudly backed SB 607 so that what happened to her “won’t happen to others like myself.”

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BUILDING A **HEALTHY** SACRAMENTO

Graphic Novel Tells History of South Sac

BY THEA MARIE ROOD

When Cal Expo opened in 1968, the South Sacramento fairgrounds were rendered obsolete. Nearly 50 years later, the neighborhood is still struggling to recover. When the fairgrounds were on Stockton Boulevard, the fair fueled the local economy,” says Katie McCleary, founding executive director of 916 Ink, a writing program for young people ages 8–24 located in South Sac. “When the fair left, all the mom-and-pops pulled out — which meant losing healthy eating options and fresh food — and no major hospital systems remained.”

In fact, it’s these types of historical incidents — not well known to many of today’s South Sac residents, who often believe the problems they face are purely personal — that inspired the publication “How Did We Get Here?,” 1,000 free copies of which will be distributed in September. The project — part of The California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities initiative — brought sociology professors Dr. Jesus Hernandez of UC Davis and Nicholas Miller of Sacramento City College together with McCleary and her organization.

“The California Endowment funded us to work with residents and identify what sort of disinvestment shaped South Sac,” says McCleary, who sent students out to collect narratives from their own families. “South Sacramento is a neighborhood

of immigrants — first, second and third generation — and they’ve historically been victims of structural racism and structural violence.”

“THINGS WILL NEVER GET BETTER IF WE DON’T PUSH FOR CHANGE.”

Katie McCleary,
916 Ink founding executive director

Based on the true stories students gathered, the group was able to construct a fictional storyline for their publication, which they chose to do in comic book form. The narrative centers on a little girl, Ellie, and her single dad. “Ellie is sick from black mold in their rental house and she is seen at UC Davis Med Center, but can only be treated in the ER, because no one takes Medi-Cal in her neighborhood,” says McCleary. The family also struggles with transportation, work and school issues, until an activist neighbor offers to help them. Eventually, Ellie and her father move from passive victimhood to joining with others to fight for what’s right.

Professional cartoonist Robert Love, who illustrated the book, says that working on



Artist Robert Love and 916 Ink’s Katie McCleary show some of the artwork that will be part of “How Did We Get Here?” a new graphic novel that tells the story of South Sacramento.
Photo by Melissa Uroff

the project opened his eyes. “It’s a quick read, a quick history lesson,” he says, adding that “there is so much good work going on.”

Indeed, the ultimate message is one of hope. “People have been impacted by policies that come from racist institutions,” says McCleary. “But things will never get better if we don’t push for change, and there are ways you can make change happen.”

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The Next Storytellers

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

At first, Ivan Caballero delivered the news seven days a week. He had a newspaper route, dropping off morning dailies at hundreds of homes in Sacramento's Greenhaven sector.

Now, as an Access Sacramento neighborhood news youth correspondent, he covers the news himself and delivers his reports online about once a week.

"I want to someday be an actual journalist," said Caballero, 18, a recent John F. Kennedy High graduate bound for Sacramento City College. "I enjoy doing local stories, stories that matter to people."

Access Sacramento, a nonprofit public-access television/radio station, launched its Neighborhood News Youth-Correspondents Program in 2013. Since then, it has trained nearly 50 youths in the basics of broadcast journalism, from shooting and editing videos to writing on-air scripts. On average each correspondent works four months, for \$10.50 an hour.

The program, funded in part by The California Endowment, is directed by Isaac Gonzalez, who views his role with a sense of urgency now that Donald Trump is president.

Trump's ongoing attacks on the media — think "fake news" and "enemies of the state" — make it imperative that a new generation of reporters be trained to pursue the truth and give a voice to the voiceless, Gonzalez suggested.

He hires the correspondents based on commitment, not their equipment.

"The most important part is attitude and eagerness to learn," Gonzalez, 36, said. "If someone says he has five years' video editing experience but has a chip on his shoulder, there's no reason for me to hire him."

If someone has no internet access, yet craves to learn, "that's the guy I want," he said.

"THROUGH JOURNALISM, I HAVE SEEN SO MUCH THAT IS WRONG WITH THE WORLD. AT THE SAME TIME, I HAVE SEEN THE STRUGGLE ... TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE."

Bruce Tran
Neighborhood News Youth Correspondent

In July Gonzalez supervised four correspondents, who assembled for weekly production meetings in their newsroom — the garage of Gonzalez' Tahoe Park home. With his car gone, the garage is dominated by a massive table where the correspondents discuss their latest projects and debate local and national issues for podcasts. Their website, accesslocal.tv, averages about 3,000 visits monthly.



Neighborhood News Youth Correspondents Bruce Tran and Ivan Caballero say telling stories that matter can change the world. It's what inspired their interest in journalism.
Photo by Edgar Sanchez

Correspondent Bruce Tran, soon to be a senior at JFK High, said: "Through journalism, I have seen so much that is wrong with the world. At the same time, I have seen the struggle ... to make the world a better place."

Tran, 17, who has also written for the Land Park News, hopes to effect positive changes through his stories — changes that would help "children of color" and the poor, among others.

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Concert Draws Thousands to 'Imagine Justice'

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

First, there was a total solar eclipse — only partial in California.

Later that day, Sacramento beheld an “Imagine Justice” concert that eclipsed the Capitol Mall with thousands of peaceful attendees who were ready to imagine a better future.

A crowd estimated by police at 23,000 gathered August 21 for the free concert. It featured Oscar-winning rapper Common and other hip-hop artists such as J. Cole and Goapele, all advocating for criminal justice reform.

Reflecting the city’s diversity, the attendees represented all races — and they all got along, dancing, swaying and pointing their fingers at the sky in tune to the beat.

“There were no public safety issues,” city police spokesman Eddie Macaulay said. “The event was successful ... Everybody worked together.”

Common organized the concert to raise awareness about “the mass incarceration” of black people and others. It all begins with the schools-to-prison pipeline, in which students of color are set up for failure by being unfairly suspended, making them more likely to offend.

California has plenty of room for juvenile and adult offenders: Since 1980, the state has built 22 prisons but only one University of California campus.

With his back to the gleaming Capitol, the seat of state government where the bills’ fate will be decided, the Chicago-born Common said:

“When we see an injustice ... we have to stand up for each other. It’s going to take black people standing up, Latino people, white people, Asian people, Native American people, Jewish people, Christian people, LGBT people.”

“WHEN WE SEE AN INJUSTICE ... WE HAVE TO STAND UP FOR EACH OTHER. IT’S GOING TO TAKE BLACK PEOPLE STANDING UP, LATINO PEOPLE, WHITE PEOPLE, ASIAN PEOPLE, NATIVE AMERICAN PEOPLE, JEWISH PEOPLE, CHRISTIAN PEOPLE, LGBT PEOPLE.”

Common
Rapper and criminal justice reform advocate

The California Endowment co-sponsored the concert along with the Anti-Recidivism Coalition.

“We should be giving more money to schools, not prisons,” said Jennie Quan, 37, of Land Park. She attended with her wife Samantha, 31, and their 6-month-old son, Sheppard, who wore noise-cancelling headphones.



Jennie Quan, left, and wife Samantha Quan attended the Imagine Justice concert on Capitol Mall together with 6-month-old Sheppard. “We need a justice system that is more about rehabilitation than punishment,” Samantha Quan said. Photo by Edgar Sanchez

Jennie hopes her son will attend schools that will be renowned for their arts/music programs, not for calling police.

For Lorreen Pryor, 38, who works in the Capitol and is president of Sacramento’s Black Youth Leadership Project, the concert was “historic.”

She summarized part of its message: “We can’t [be in] the business of throwing people away for mistakes they made as children.”

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Former Juvenile Offender Now Advocates for Reforms

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

You may have seen him on billboards around Sacramento: A young white male wearing a “Black Lives Matter” T-shirt, his right fist in a “power” salute.

He is Michael Rizo, 21, a former gang member who was repeatedly incarcerated from age 11 until his late teens for gang-related violence, burglary and other crimes.

Today, as a reformed offender, he is an advocate for the Anti-Recidivism Coalition, a nonprofit that helps people released from prison remain free and lead better lives.

Born in Los Angeles in 1993, ARC has a new office by the State Capitol, the seat of state government, where the organization fights for criminal justice reform with allies that include The California Endowment.

By literally elevating his profile, Rizo has taken his role in this battle to new heights.

Since his release from prison in mid-2016, he has lobbied for prison-reform bills. One of them is SB 190, a newly passed measure that awaits the governor’s signature to eliminate administrative fees charged to families of juvenile offenders. At present, the state’s 58 counties can charge parents or guardians for the costs of transporting a child to a juvenile facility, and for many other expenses, such as meals and shelter.

“How do you expect poor parents to put food on the table when their money is being taken away like that?” Rizo said recently.

His family experienced the situation.

Separated from his drug-addicted biological mother at around age 5, he moved from foster home to foster home until his grandmother in West Sacramento adopted him. Later, when his arrests began, she accumulated \$25,000 in debt for his incarceration. She filed for bankruptcy.

“HOW DO YOU EXPECT POOR PARENTS TO PUT FOOD ON THE TABLE WHEN THEIR MONEY IS BEING TAKEN AWAY LIKE THAT?”

Michael Rizo
Anti-Recidivism Coalition advocate

“When I came home last year, the first thing I had in the mail was a \$10,000 bill from (Yolo County) juvenile hall,” said Rizo, who still owes that amount.

Sacramento County stopped charging juvenile fees effective July 1, joining Alameda, Contra Costa, Santa Clara and Sonoma counties in doing so. San Francisco County never imposed such fees.

The anti-fee movement gained traction when the rapper Common held a free “Imagine Justice” concert attended by 30,000 people



Michael Rizo, 21, advocates for reforms to the juvenile justice system, including a bill that would prevent parents of juvenile offenders from being charged for administrative fees.
Photo by Edgar Sanchez

on Capitol Mall last month, said Ryan McClinton, of Sacramento ACT. Common endorsed bills that would be a first step toward reducing “mass incarceration.”

“The community has definitely understood that we have a systemic issue that needs to be addressed,” said McClinton, whose multi-faith group seeks a better world.

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One Piece of Paper, A World of Difference

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

This Halloween was supposed to be crunch time for some offenders looking for a second chance.

Under Proposition 47, the criminal justice reform law approved by California voters in 2014, people with low-level felony convictions had until Nov. 4, 2017 to petition a judge to reclassify their cases as misdemeanors.

But the deadline was extended until Nov. 4, 2022, with the Legislature's passage of AB 2765 last year, to help ensure maximum applicants.

"When Proposition 47 passed, there was a three-year window for petitions," said Karen Flynn, former Sacramento County chief assistant public defender, who retired recently after 31 years with the office. "With the deadline extension, things became a little less urgent."

By August, about 9,794 people had petitioned Sacramento Superior Court to reduce their felony convictions for crimes such as drug possession and check forgery for \$950 or less, to misdemeanors. About 5,209 of the petitions had been granted, according to Kim Pedersen, a spokeswoman for the court.

As of March, 124,780 people had filed reclassification petitions statewide, according to the Judicial Council of California, which doesn't track final dispositions in the 58 counties.

Prop. 47 was passed by voters on Nov. 4, 2014 and enacted a day after the vote.

As officials in other counties scrambled in the face of new paperwork, Flynn began visiting local churches, community centers and other

places to urge people to have their felony records expunged.

**"[PROP. 47] REALLY MADE
THE PUNISHMENT FIT
THE CRIME."**

Karen Flynn
*Former Sacramento County chief assistant
public defender*

Even before Prop. 47 passed, she had begun developing a one-page petition for Sacramentans seeking a re-designation of their felony convictions. The Sacramento County District Attorney's Office and the County's Superior Court edited the form further, said Flynn, who noted that the petition is simple, unlike the 10-page bureaucratic petitions some counties adopted.

Flynn "guesstimated" that 75 percent of the Prop. 47 petitions filed with Sacramento Superior Court to date were prepared with the help of herself and her former co-workers, who continue to help petitioners — for free.

For Flynn, the best part was when successful petitioners thanked her. Not being a felon means better jobs, access to student loans and other benefits.

She believes sentencing guidelines discriminated against minorities before Prop. 47, which also led to the release of thousands of inmates.



Karen Flynn, retired Sacramento County chief assistant public defender, helped develop a one-page petition that county residents convicted of low-level felonies use to reclassify their cases to misdemeanors. Around 5,209 people have successfully petitioned Sacramento Superior Court to reclassify their cases under Prop. 47.
Photo by Edgar Sanchez

"Some claim there's been an increase in crime because of Prop. 47," the devout Sacramento Catholic said, "but in my view, it didn't do that. It really made the punishment fit the crime."

Anyone interested in filing Proposition 47 petitions can come to the misdemeanor division of the Sacramento County Public Defender's Office at 700 H St., Suite O270, on Fridays at 9 a.m. for assistance or call 916-874-6417.

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In Neighborhoods

BUILDING A **HEALTHY** SACRAMENTO

Transit Riders Union Works to Improve RT

Last summer, Sacramento Regional Transit was considering cutting bus routes and raising fares, measures that would have severely impacted residents in South Sacramento's low-income neighborhoods.

"We knew RT was heading down the wrong road, we knew it was in crisis, and we knew that it was going to take a community campaign to turn things at the public transit agency," said Tamie Dramer, co-founder and chair of Organize Sacramento, an all-volunteer nonprofit that provides training and education to community groups, individuals and organizations on the tactics of community organizing. Training and education for members is supported in part with funding from The California Endowment

"We realized we needed to form a transit riders union similar to those in Seattle, New York and other cities," Dramer said.

The result: The Sacramento Transit Riders Union.

SacTRU holds its own meetings, on the second and fourth Saturdays of the month at 1 p.m., at Organize Sacramento's small but tidy 1714 Broadway office. SacTRU's 100 members spend their meetings reviewing upcoming RT Board agendas for items that impact riders and discussing which items to oppose and support, ongoing RT problems, and the union's long-term goal strategy. The members take turns attending RT Board meetings and speaking up when necessary.

SacTRU's long-term mission is to increase access in the Sacramento region to safe, reliable, and fiscally responsible public transit service that

links people to resources and opportunities. As SacTRU, the goal is to collectively build power to advocate effectively with the decision-makers at Regional Transit to ensure riders' and workers' needs and demands are met.

TOO MANY CARLESS SACRAMENTANS SPEND HOURS GETTING TO WORK DAILY BECAUSE THEY LIVE FAR FROM RT'S NETWORK OR IN AREAS WITH INFREQUENT SERVICE.

From the beginning, public participation at SacTRU's meetings and events has been exceptional. Even Henry Li, RT's new general manager, has attended at least two SacTRU meetings, according to Eric Sunderland, another board member of Organize Sacramento. Li's presence has signaled that he, too, wants improvement. According to an RT spokesperson, RT is "always interested in organizations sharing the same concerns we have: to make transit service ... as excellent as possible."

Organize Sacramento and its offshoot SacTRU, have for now achieved getting the recommended bus route cuts taken off the table, and riders no longer have to wait in long lines in the blazing summer sun to purchase their monthly passes at



Organize Sacramento advocates for good public policies that bring justice and equality to build healthier and stronger communities. Organize Sacramento is the umbrella organization which houses the Sacramento Transit Riders Union (SacTRU). SacTRU is a campaign around restoring rider equity and efficiency to the Sacramento Regional Transit system.

the RT Customer Service center on 12th Street, thanks to the shade structures erected by RT after SacTRU advocated that something be done about the situation.

But too many carless Sacramentans still spend hours getting to work daily because they live far from RT's network or in areas with infrequent service, Dramer said. Those people "desperately need better transit options. So we will continue to grow our riders union, and we will continue to advocate for a better, more user-friendly and affordable system overall."

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BUILDING A **HEALTHY** SACRAMENTO

Advocates Hope Bills Will Address Housing Crisis

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

For many Californians the “American Dream” of home ownership has been crushed by skyrocketing property values and other factors.

But some who have given up on ever owning a home will likely have a new chance, now that Gov. Jerry Brown has signed 15 bills that encourage more affordable homes statewide, including new homeless shelters.

Housing advocates celebrated Sept. 29 when Brown approved the extensive package, dubbed a first step toward solving California’s housing crisis. One legislator said the approved measures contain “everything from A to Z — affordability to zoning.”

“I was absolutely thrilled,” said Veronica Beaty, policy director for the Sacramento Housing Alliance (SHA). “Housing advocates had worked on this legislation for a long time. What the governor did was historic.”

“The housing situation is so bad, a lot of people from different backgrounds are trying different solutions across the state,” she said, adding that proposals made by longtime housing advocates are embedded in the new legislation.

One key bill, SB 2, imposes a new fee of at least \$75 for some real estate transactions. It will generate up to \$300 million annually to fund, among other things, new affordable homes and homeless-assistance programs.

Another, SB 3, is an urgency statute that will require voter approval to authorize a \$4 billion housing bond. If approved by a simple majority

of voters in November 2018, the bill will set aside millions of that money for construction of new homes for low-income and middle-class families who meet certain requirements, along with \$1 billion in loans to help military veterans purchase homes.

**“HOUSING ADVOCATES
HAD WORKED ON
THIS LEGISLATION FOR
A LONG TIME. WHAT
THE GOVERNOR DID
WAS HISTORIC.”**

Veronica Beaty
Policy director, Sacramento Housing Alliance

With this legislation in place, how will it impact Sacramento County, which has an estimated 3,600 homeless people and needs 62,000 more affordable rentals?

The SHA, a nonprofit that advocates for affordable homes with the support of The California Endowment, wants transformational change.

On Monday, it hosted its third annual Sacramento Regional Affordable Housing Summit to discuss “innovative solutions” for the local housing crisis. More than 200 people, ranging from developers and architects to local



Sacramento Housing Alliance’s Veronica Beaty hopes more developments like the apartments at 7th and H streets, seen here, will soon be built locally. The 150-unit complex opened in downtown Sacramento five years ago. Half of its units were reserved for formerly homeless people, and the rest for low-income residents. Photo by Edgar Sanchez

elected officials and community activists were invited.

“We had a lot of passionate people there, people who know the crisis,” Beaty said of the summit.

She said SHA and some of its allies, including the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment, will educate voters on SB 3.

“I think voters are ready to do something substantial” about the housing crisis, Beaty said.

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Summit Looks for Solutions to Housing Crisis

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

A “pipeline of stability” must be built in greater Sacramento to deliver the homeless from a dangerous life on the streets, to permanent housing solutions. The first step is top-notch shelters, with comprehensive services.

So believes Sacramento City Councilman Jeff Harris, who notes that state/federal monies can help pay for such a system.

“Now is our time to work with the homeless ... to start ending the cycle of poverty on the streets,” Harris said at the third annual Regional Affordable Housing Summit hosted by the Sacramento Housing Alliance (SHA) on Oct. 30. Nearly 300 people attended — the biggest turnout ever for the event, sponsored in part by The California Endowment.

Under the theme “All Hands on Deck: Solving Our Housing Catastrophe,” the guests included elected officials, developers, architects, business leaders, and the homeless and formerly homeless.

All shared ideas on how to resolve two crises in Sacramento County: the need for 62,000 new affordable homes to meet housing demands, and how to reduce the number of homeless, estimated at 3,600.

“Many strategies” will have to be implemented, SHA Director Darryl Rutherford warned in his welcoming remarks. “We’re going to have to roll up our sleeves and get really dirty into this mess.”

The guests then heard a talk among Harris, Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg,

Sacramento County Supervisor Don Nottoli and Rancho Cordova Mayor Donald Terry. Steinberg said recent housing bills signed by Gov. Jerry Brown will not solve “our problems.” The bills, Steinberg said, are only a start-off that may have to be complemented by local bond measures that would require voter approval, perhaps in 2020.

“THE NUMBER OF ATTENDEES AND THE BREADTH OF STAKEHOLDERS PRESENT ... ATTEST TO THE STRENGTH OF OUR COMMUNITY’S RESOLVE TO FIND REAL, LASTING SOLUTIONS TO OUR LOCAL HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS CRISIS.”

Darryl Rutherford
Director of the Sacramento Housing Alliance

Steinberg said the region is advancing in fighting homelessness.

Harris said one end of the pipeline he envisions will be in his own District 3, bringing the homeless to a winter shelter expected to open soon, with 300-plus beds, on Railroad Drive off Del Paso Boulevard.

This was the second SHA summit for Shirley Darling, 65, a onetime homeless Sacramentan



Shirley Darling, 65, a onetime homeless Sacramentan, attended Sacramento Housing Alliance’s summit on Oct. 30. “Homelessness is ... a trauma,” she says.
Photo by Edgar Sanchez

who enjoyed the workshops. “Homelessness is ... a trauma,” she said, praising the nonprofit SHA for advocating for the unsheltered.

Afterwards, Rutherford called it the SHA’s best summit.

“The number of attendees and the breadth of stakeholders present ... attest to the strength of our community’s resolve to find real, lasting solutions to our local housing and homelessness crisis,” he said.

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Summit inspires young men of color to succeed

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

Dropping out of school is not an option for Jacquez Cosby or Angel Diaz, two youths determined to excel in college.

"I want to pursue the arts, as in music or acting, and become a great performer," said Cosby, 15, a 10th grader at Rosemont High in Sacramento who is already pursuing acting by sharing a lead role in Sacramento Theatre Company's "Kings of America."

"I want to have a big future," said Diaz, 13, an 8th grader at Will Rogers Middle School in Fair Oaks. "I'm trying to keep my grades up and plan my career, probably as a doctor."

Both took part in the sixth annual Boys & Men of Color Summit at Sacramento State University, where they were urged to continue their quest for excellence, partly by spurning drugs, alcohol and gangs. Two hundred local students, ages 13-18, and some 30 adult mentors attended the Oct. 31 event organized by a diverse group of young men and educators, with The California Endowment's support.

Its theme, "I am my brother's keeper," meant always help your peers, always have their backs.

For the first time, the summit had a woman keynote speaker, civil rights activist Carmen Perez, who co-chaired the Women's March

on Washington, which saw 500,000 people converge on the nation's capital in January to demand that President Donald Trump respect women.

"You may be asking yourself why do we have a woman speaking today?" she told the teens. "I'll tell you why: because I am my brother's keeper."

"I WANT TO HAVE A BIG FUTURE."

Angel Diaz
8th grader at Will Rogers Middle School

Perez described how, on her 17th birthday, she attended the funeral for her 19-year-old sister, who died in a car accident. She exhorted the youths to excel every day, because, "You never know if you have tomorrow to do what you can today."

Defensive end Arik Armstead of the San Francisco 49ers told the gathering that passion — "the motivation to succeed" — is great.

"But passion by itself is wasted if you don't have an education," said Armstead, a Pleasant Grove High graduate. "Take your



Jacquez Cosby, 15, and Angel Diaz, 13, participated in the sixth annual Boys & Men of Color Summit held Oct. 31 at Sacramento State University. The boys, along with 200 other attendees, were told to continue their quest for excellence. Photo by Edgar Sanchez

education seriously! Once you become successful, give back to your community."

Former offenders who did prison time also gave advice. During a workshop co-sponsored by the Anti-Recidivism Coalition, one of them, a man named Penani, warned: "If you're on the right path, stay on it. The other path may lead to a casket, or life in prison."

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BUILDING A **HEALTHY** SACRAMENTO

Inside the Circle

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

Raymond Garcia has been to hell and back. He spent 17 years in prison for an attempted murder in Los Angeles, plus three years for stabbing another convict.

As a new inmate, he was tortured by flashbacks of his childhood, one he didn't enjoy because his parents were into gangs and drugs.

Garcia attended healing circles, in which prisoners openly described the baggage they carried inside prison walls. He eventually became a circle facilitator, along the way earning a spiritual name, denoting he had overcome most of his hurts.

Now, the newly released Garcia presides over healing circles in Sacramento for the public and ex-offenders.

The setting is a dark room, where nine people recently sat in a circle. Some in the ring were parolees; others had never been to jail, except as visitors.

After lighting a candle, Garcia led the group in an African chant before announcing: "My name is Raymond. My spiritual name is Nurturing Dragon King."

Garcia said his mother, a heroin addict, was slain when he was 3. His father, who abused alcohol, often beat him. "A lot of the things that happened in my dysfunctional family caused me to do stuff," such as join a gang himself and "start hurting people," Garcia, 37, said.

The other guests then described their personal demons, from memories of violent upbringings to ongoing addictions. The participants get on-

the-spot "guidance" to help them resolve their trauma, using techniques from Self-Awareness & Recovery, a nonprofit funded in part by The California Endowment.

"I'M SCARED THE RUG COULD BE PULLED OUT FROM UNDER ME ... AND I'LL BE RETURNED TO PRISON."

Raymond Garcia, Healing Circle facilitator with Self-Awareness Recovery

SAR, which also holds healing circles in prisons, was created by Daniel Silva, who spent 39 years behind bars, until his release several years ago.

During the recent circle, tears flowed. The youngest participant, a 16-year-old boy, weepingly confessed to hitting his older sister during a quarrel. Soon after, he said, he and his father fought.

"My sister no longer talks to me," the youth said. "My father talks to me off and on."

Ex-inmate Robert Williams counseled: "Go hug your dad and apologize. And apologize to your sister."



Raymond Garcia has facilitated Healing Circles in and out of prison. Currently, he is a circle facilitator at the Anti-Recidivism Coalition. He was released from prison in May.
Photo by Edgar Sanchez

Garcia revealed his new crisis. "I'm scared the rug could be pulled out from under me ... and I'll be returned to prison," he told the circle. "I know you guys are going to watch my back."

Healing circles are held at 9:30 a.m. on Fridays at the Anti-Recidivism Coalition, 1414 K St., Sacramento. Each session lasts two hours. Admission is free. The public is invited.

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BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Steering Youth Away from Gangs

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

At 43, Eddie Paradela is living a dream at Luther Burbank High in Sacramento. Once a week, he urges troubled boys at the school to repudiate “la vida loca” — the crazy life — so they won’t go to prison as he did.

Paradela served 18 years for a second-degree murder in Stockton. He vowed that once freed, he would steer youth away from gangs, drugs and other evils that lead to jail. To guide teenagers toward college became his dream.

“I can never bring back the life I took,” Paradela said recently, but he hopes to change other lives.

This year, Paradela spread his message at Self-Awareness and Recovery (SAR) workshops, whose goal is to keep at-risk kids in school, not prison. Twenty-five Burbank students, mostly Latinos, heard his lectures last semester. Deemed potential dropouts, the youngsters were largely from low-income families, in which a loved one may have been incarcerated. Some of the youths had juvenile records themselves. Several belonged to rival gangs.

But at the workshops everyone got along.

Respect for others was advocated by Paradela and co-facilitator/ex-inmate Raymond Garcia, and by Miguel Campos, the students’ primary instructor. Four days a week, Campos taught Brown Issues, a program that motivates Latinos to succeed.

On Thursdays, SAR visited the classroom. On those days, students formed a circle and described their personal struggles during what is called a healing circle.

In prison Paradela and Garcia joined healing circles, ultimately recovering from most, if not all, of their pains.

Self-Awareness and Recovery, a nonprofit supported by The California Endowment, was created by ex-inmate Daniel Silva, with two goals: help prisoners vanquish their agonies and prepare them for productive lives once freed.

“IT’S HARDER TO REACH THE KIDS THAN IT IS TO REACH PRISONERS ... THE KIDS DON’T KNOW THE CONSEQUENCES ... THEY THINK THEY’RE NOT GOING TO GET CAUGHT.”

Raymond Garcia
Healing Circle facilitator with Self-Awareness and Recovery

Today, SAR conducts circles in prisons and out.

With an educational format, the Burbank circles — which will continue in the spring — are not as intense as those behind bars, noted Garcia, 38.

Of his students, he said: “I teach them to be young men of character. But it’s harder to reach the kids than it is to reach prisoners ... The prisoners are



Four days a week, Miguel Campos (left) taught Brown Issues at Luther Burbank High. On Thursdays, his students attended Self-Awareness and Recovery workshops led by Raymond Garcia (center) and Eddie Paradela (right). Photo by Edgar Sanchez

dealing with the consequences of their wrong choices. The kids don’t know the consequences ... They think they’re not going to get caught.”

One student said he “enjoys learning” from Paradela and Garcia, who are members of the Anti-Recidivism Coalition

“Both are important people in my life,” said the youth, 17, who was arrested in August for possession of a firearm, before he met the duo. “I hope to learn more from them.”

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