



Program gives minority entrepreneurs tools to start a cannabis business

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

As 2018 began to fade, one Sacramentan was looking forward not so much to New Year's Day — but to 2019's final days.

"By the end of 2019, I believe we'll see several entrepreneurs of color legally operating cannabis enterprises in Sacramento," said Malaki Seku Amen, CEO of the California Urban Partnership (CUP), an economic justice organization supported by The California Endowment. "And, absolutely, I am looking forward to that."

Over an 18 month period, the CUP led a community organizing campaign and successfully negotiated with the Sacramento City Council on the terms of the Cannabis Opportunity, Reinvestment and Equity (CORE) program. CORE is now the gateway for people of color to enter the lucrative marijuana business in California's capital.

The program was approved in August, seven months after recreational marijuana joined medical pot as a coveted product at licensed cannabis dispensaries statewide. In the Sacramento region alone, legal cannabis is expected to become a \$4 billion-a-year industry.

The CUP is working to make sure that people disproportionately hurt by America's war on drugs have an opportunity to participate in the new legal market, as well as directly benefit from marijuana tax revenue reinvestment at the local and state level.

"People of color, particularly African Americans, paid a heavy price," Seku Amen said a year ago, referring to the inordinate numbers of blacks incarcerated for marijuana. The jail sentences traumatized children and

separated families, unfairly depriving them of home ownership, college education and stable neighborhoods, he said.

After managing to push the City to complete a study of marijuana arrests, the CUP coalition was able to make a case for legally removing obstacles that hinder minority cannabis entrepreneurs in Sacramento.

The Council agreed to provide \$1 million in funding for technical assistance and training,

"BY THE END OF 2019, I BELIEVE WE'LL SEE SEVERAL ENTREPRENEURS OF COLOR LEGALLY OPERATING CANNABIS ENTERPRISES IN SACRAMENTO."

Malaki Seku Amen
CEO, California Urban Partnership

which can be costly barriers for minority startup businesses. The free assistance — ranging from business plan writing and attorney support with the nuts and bolts of the permit process, to advice on how to approach private investors — will be administered by a soon-to-be-named CORE program facilitator. Fees for a city permit to operate a cannabis business will be waived for program graduates. Normally, such permits cost thousands of dollars; graduates would still pay



Malaki Seku Amen, president and CEO of the California Urban Partnership, says more than 160 individuals are eligible for the Cannabis Opportunity Reinvestment and Equity program, which helps minority entrepreneurs to enter the legal cannabis industry. Photo by Edgar Sanchez

for a state permit.

Low-income people arrested for nonviolent marijuana crimes between 1980 and 2011 are eligible for the program. So are those who between 1980 and 2011 lived five consecutive years in low-income households in ZIP codes that include Oak Park and South Sacramento.

More than 160 CORE-eligible people have been identified, said Seku Amen, a Harvard-educated economic justice advocate. It's not known when the city will begin accepting applications for the CORE program.

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For more information, visit
CaliforniaUP.org
and click on Marijuana Policy





Nonprofits Help Ex-inmates Thrive on the Outside

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

After serving 18 years in prison for manslaughter with a gang enhancement, Henry Ortiz was determined to prove he was a new man.

But in November 2017, after only five days of freedom in Los Angeles County, Ortiz was arrested by Culver City police on what he called phony charges of associating with gang members.

He regained his freedom a week later, after an investigation by External Affairs.

"I concluded I was not going to make it in L.A. County," Ortiz, 37, said recently.

He immediately moved to Sacramento — a city he didn't know, but where a network of friends that he met in prison awaited him, some of whom belonged to the Sacramento Community Reinvestment Coalition, or SCRC.

Besides campaigning for criminal justice reform, SCRC ensures that newly released parolees arriving here receive emotional support, plus help in finding jobs, affordable housing and other services.

Parolees "have paid their debt to society. They deserve an opportunity to become a thriving part of the community," said Ryan McClinton, a community organizer for Sacramento ACT and an SCRC leader. An advocacy group, the broad-based SCRC works with nonprofits including the Anti-Recidivism Coalition to Self-Awareness and

Recovery (SAR) to develop assistance for ex-inmates.

SCRC heard concerns about the criminal justice system by hosting four public forums in 2017/2018, with the support of The California Endowment. More than 500 people attended the forums, which identified the need for Sacramento County to create more mental health/therapy services for parolees and their families, and more liveable-wage jobs/job training in disadvantaged communities.

"SACRAMENTO HAS BEEN A BLESSING TO ME."

Henry Ortiz
Co-Founder/curriculum developer for Self-Awareness and Recovery

SCRC is sending a letter to Sacramento County officials, asking that extra funds generated by prison reform measures, such as Propositions 47 and 57, be invested in community-based organizations that help parolees.

SCRC collected letters of support for its proposal, which it hopes will be discussed by the County Board of Supervisors.

Ortiz, meanwhile, has done well.



Henry Ortiz is grateful for the help of Sacramento Community Reinvestment Coalition since regaining his freedom after 18 years in prison. The coalition advocates for more supports for former inmates transitioning back into the community. Photo by Edgar Sanchez

He became a program coordinator/ curriculum developer for SAR at its Sacramento office. The rehabilitation program was founded by Ortiz and fellow inmate Daniel Silva in 2005 at Mule Creek State Prison to help offenders overcome destructive behavior. Silva opened SAR's local office upon his release in 2015; it has since expanded to serve at-risk youth and parolees.

"Sacramento has been a blessing to me," Ortiz said gratefully.

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For more information on SAR, visit selfawarenessrecovery.weebly.com or e-mail selfawarenessandrecovery@gmail.com

CalFresh Recipients Welcome at Farmers Markets

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

The call for artists went out last May: A striking design was needed for two Sacramento billboards announcing that CalFresh — also known as food stamps — are welcome at farmers markets.

Stacy Almy, an artist from Arden-Arcade, learned about the entry deadline just a day prior.

"I had 18 hours to put an idea together," said Almy, 34. "I worked until 10 minutes before deadline and I sent it off."

A special panel that received input from CalFresh recipients named Almy's the best among four submissions, earning her a \$2,500 commission.

On Jan. 17, a coalition of nonprofits, led by the Sacramento Food Policy Council (SFPC), unveiled the waterproof billboards — one in English, one in Spanish. They stand on a cement foundation at Oak Park Art Garden, a 1/3-acre plot at 14th Avenue and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard that is privately owned and leased by Alchemist, a coalition partner.

Depicting newly harvested produce and a CalFresh electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card, the 9-foot-by-6-foot billboards say: "Use CalFresh EBT at Farmers Markets."

The installation is part of SFPC's ongoing campaign to increase CalFresh utilization at nearly 15 Sacramento County farmers markets.

In November, the county had 93,508 CalFresh households, but many are unaware their benefits are accepted at farmers markets, a coalition press release said.

Forty people witnessed the unveiling.

"It's not often you get art folks and food folks in the same room, but we've done it with this project," Adrian Rehn, of coalition member Valley Vision, told the guests. "This art piece will advance an equitable farm-to-fork economy while furthering our robust art scene."

The project was funded in part by a \$5,000 grant from the City of Sacramento's Creative Economy Program, Rehn said.

"PEOPLE LITERALLY GO HOME, OR KIDS GO TO SCHOOL, AND THEY'RE HUNGRY. [THIS IS] NOT ACCEPTABLE!"

Darrell Steinberg
Mayor, Sacramento

Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg, who was also present, noted the billboards combine "public art and public good."

"People literally go home, or kids go to school, and they're hungry," Steinberg said. "[This is] not acceptable!"

City Councilmember Jay Schenirer, Sacramento County Supervisor Phil Serna and SFPC President Brenda Ruiz also spoke.



Stacy Almy designed two billboards for a busy Oak Park corner, with identical English/Spanish messages: Farmers Markets welcome Food Stamps. Photo by Edgar Sanchez

"Our mission statement at SFPC is to propel collective action towards an equitable and sustainable food system" said Ruiz, whose agency is supported by The California Endowment.

At Oak Park Farmers Market, CalFresh recipients can double their benefits: For every \$1 of CalFresh EBT benefits, they receive \$2 to shop for produce at the market.

Considering the billboards' message, Market Manager Joany Titherington expects to see more CalFresh participants at the Oak Park Farmers Market when it reopens for the season on May 4.

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www.sacfoodpolicy.org



Land Trust aims to be 'developer for the people'

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

Nine new "luxury homes" located on 34th Street in Oak Park recently went on the market. The listing price? More than \$500,000 each.

A wiser use for land in Oak Park would be affordable housing, according to the Sacramento Community Land Trust, or SacCLT, a volunteer organization that is on its way to becoming a nonprofit "developer for the people."

Its goal is to create more affordable housing in California's capital, starting in Oak Park, where longtime residents and businesses are being displaced by gentrification.

At present, "We are pivoting from planning to doing," said Katie Valenzuela, co-chair of the SacCLT board, a 35-member group that is actively pursuing nonprofit status.

"We are also contacting people interested in selling land to us," she continued, adding that there are various federal/state grants available for nonprofit advocates of affordable housing. SacCLT will apply for such grants.

Some foundations have also expressed interest in funding SacCLT. One of them is The California Endowment, which supports SacCLT's vision.

SacCLT traces its genesis to 2016, when 50 people attended a neighborhood policy forum in South Sacramento. Among the topics that spring day: creation of a community land trust to fight for housing equity.

"Oak Park was a lightning rod of that discussion," Valenzuela said, noting that the formerly working class, mostly African-American neighborhood was then well into gentrification.

"People felt helpless," she said. By then, some Oak Park residents had been forced to sell their homes because they didn't meet new housing codes or because the owners couldn't pay mammoth property tax bills. Higher rents had also prompted some tenants, as well as mer chants, to abandon Oak Park.

"OAK PARK WAS A LIGHTNING ROD OF THAT DISCUSSION."

Katie Valenzuela, Co-chair of the SacCLT board, on the conversation around creating a community land trust

The talk led to action, said Valenzuela, a former president of the Oak Park Community Neighborhood Association. In October 2017, members elected SacCLT's incorporating board. Under the motto "Building community, not profit," the six current members meet monthly.

SacCLT primarily serves "historically discriminated communities." Its website



With so many vacant lots, Oak Park has plenty of room for new affordable housing, according to Katie Valenzuela of the SacCLT board, pictured here. Photo courtesy of Katie Valenzuela.

says, "our primary objective is to preserve affordability and community cohesion by preventing displacement."

In an interview, Valenzuela described ways SacCLT might help people in crisis. One of them could be by buying the land from the homeowner, allowing them to keep the value in their home and use the money for repairs or debt payments.

With its many vacant lots, she said, Oak Park has plenty of room for new affordable housing — not \$500,000 homes.

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Form allows SCUSD students to express gender identity

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

For students whose gender identity differs from their assigned sex, the name on the attendance sheet may not reflect who that student really is.

Youth in the Sacramento City Unified School District now have a way to address that issue thanks to a simple sheet of paper.

The district's Name and Gender Update Form allows students to change their legal names to their affirmed name, which will be used by school staff and appear on school records. At 18, students can independently seek permanent legal name changes through the courts, effectively changing all of their legal documents.

This form was developed by the district's Connect Center, which receives support from The California Endowment. Seventy-one students have completed the form since 2016.

"The idea of coming to school and being recognized for who they are, rather than the gender they've been assigned, is quite meaningful for our transgender youth," said Danny Buffington, a Connect Center Youth and Family Mental Health Advocate.

The Sacramento City Unified School District has made great strides in accommodating transgender students, according to Nichole C. Wofford, a licensed marriage and family therapist/social worker who manages the district's Connect Center.

Since its opening in 2011, the Connect Center has been a gateway to a range of critical support services — both in-district and through community partners — for 47,900 students and their families.

In addition to providing LGBTQ support services, the Connect Center also provides mental health/

case management support and ensures that all SCUSD students have health insurance.

"When I first started at the Connect Center, we had transgender students but no district policy to protect them," Wofford said.

"At that time, some of the primary concerns were around bathroom and locker room usage," she said. "Students were being told they needed to use restrooms and locker rooms which corresponded with the gender they were assigned at birth."

Without a state law or school district policy to protect them, transgender students' rights were not being recognized and many school principals were frustrated, with no policy/law to guide them.

"THE IDEA OF COMING TO SCHOOL AND BEING RECOGNIZED FOR WHO THEY ARE...IS QUITE MEANINGFUL FOR OUR TRANSGENDER YOUTH."

Danny Buffington, Youth and Family Mental Health Advocate, Connect Center

"For the most part, school administrators wanted to support the transgender students" as the Connect Center had requested, Wofford said. "But if there was pushback from parents



The Sacramento City Unified School District has made tremendous strides in accommodating transgender students, said Nichole Wofford, director of its Connect Center, shown with Danny Buffington, a youth and family mental health advocate at the Center. Photo by Edgar Sanchez

who opposed the new state law (AB 1266) or the district transgender policy — administrators wanted something that they could point to and say, 'This is what we need to do.'

A law known as the School Success and Opportunity Act (AB 1266) solved the crisis, effective Jan. 1, 2014. Among other things, it requires that California public schools give transgender students access to facilities and programs that match their gender identity.

Since December 2013, the district has had its own Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Student Policy, which contains specifics on how to accommodate transgender youth.

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go to scusd.edu/lgbtq-support-services



City of Sacramento takes environmental focus

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

With temperatures rising everywhere, scientists have sounded an alarm and the community is responding: Global warming endangers the entire planet.

When Sacramento residents attended a recent “open house” meeting for the city of Sacramento’s General Plan Update (GPU) — or the city’s policy guide — environmental concerns were a main point of focus. For instance, Laurie Rivlin Heller, who teaches part-time at Woodland Community College and is retired from the California Natural Resources Agency, believes global warming can be mitigated if people advocate for anti-pollution measures in their own backyard.

“Most of the changes need to happen in local communities, with local governments, citizens and businesses” said Heller, who is part of 350 Sacramento’s effort to encourage these entities to adopt clean energy strategies and turn away from burning fossil fuels, which releases gases and chemicals into the air and contributes to climate change.

As Sacramento — her city — prepares for its GPU, Heller will make her voice heard during the two-year process that will shape the blueprint for Sacramento’s growth through 2040.

So will her friend, fellow Sacramentan Oscar Balaguer, a retired environmental scientist from the state Water Resources Control Board. Balaguer and Heller were some of the 30 residents who heard a project overview from city staff during the open house event at Sacramento’s City Hall.

“The GPU must address eight topics,” Remi Mendoza, a senior planner for the city’s Community Development Department, told the guests.

Topics will range from transportation and housing to land use, and will address environmental justice for the first time ever.

Environmental justice stems from SB 1000, a new law mandating that municipalities listen to historically-discriminated communities during General Plan revisions.

“MOST OF THE CHANGES NEED TO HAPPEN IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES, WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND BUSINESSES.”

Laurie Rivlin Heller,
Woodland Community College faculty

An important part of addressing environmental justice will be incorporating the feedback of disadvantaged communities, as mandated by SB 1000. This law will help give these communities more of a voice in goals, policies and objectives.

Public hearings on the city’s GPU are planned throughout Sacramento, starting this spring. The county is also conducting a GPU.



Countering climate change is a priority for Laurie Rivlin Heller and Oscar Balaguer, who attended a recent “Open House” for Sacramento’s General Plan Update. Photo by Edgar Sanchez

The city’s General Plan was last updated in 2014, under conditions that have since changed. As part of the GPU, staff will prepare a Climate Action Plan with a new “framework for programmatic greenhouse gas emissions” reductions.

“We will be involved with the GPU from beginning to end,” Balaguer said of the community, to ensure the final plan appropriately responds to climate change.

The California Endowment financially supports some nonprofits working to include community perspectives in the GPU.

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www.Sac2040GPU.org

Women's Leadership Academy helps students soar

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

A senior at Sacramento Charter High School, Kiarah Young, 17, is excited about her future — she's been accepted to more than 25 colleges.

A major factor in her development as a student has been her participation in the Women's Leadership Academy (WLA), which is a subset of the Men's and Women's Leadership Academy, a program offered by Sacramento County Unified School District (SCUSD) to steer youth of color across 13 campuses toward success by providing mentors, special classes and other supports. This program, which has a total of 487 students in grades 5-12, works in partnership with the California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities Initiative.

Although the program first focused on young men and dismantling oppressive policies that may push them on a path toward incarceration, the program has grown to include young women and empowering them as well.

Kiarah arrived at Sacramento Charter High School in August 2015, when WLA was being implemented at other schools in the district. She joined in 2017 when it reached her campus.

"I saw how much the men were benefiting from Men's Leadership Academy at Sacramento High," Kiarah said.

Schools that participate in the WLA either have daily classes led by teachers, or weekly meetings led by community members. At Sacramento High, Ericka Burns is a mentor to its WLA students, meeting with them twice weekly during lunch to discuss different subjects including historic African Americans.

"Ms. Burns has taught us a lot we didn't know," Kiarah said.

"WE WILL IMPACT OTHER PEOPLE'S LIVES, AND I FEEL IT WILL TEACH US A LOT."

**Kiarah Young,
WLA Student**

Kiarah is a stellar student, said Marcus Strother, SCUSD's Youth Development director who oversees the Men's and Women's Leadership Academies — he is also Kiarah's academic mentor.

"Kiarah is one of the top three students I have ever dealt with," said Strother, noting her capabilities go beyond her 3.8 GPA.



Sacramento High Senior Kiarah Young, left, is a brilliant student with unlimited potential according to Marcus Strother, director of the Men's and Women's Leadership Academy. Photo by Edgar Sanchez

She will graduate from Sacramento Charter High School on June 8, 2019. Ten days later, on June 18, she will fly to Peru with nine fellow members of the Men's and Women's Leadership Academies. The group will work on a service project in an indigenous community in Oxapampa, on the fringes of the Amazon, and is the first trip for the combined academies.

"I'm excited about the trip," Kiarah said. "This will be my first time going out of the country. We will impact other people's lives, and I feel it will teach us a lot."

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Sol Collective creates space for arts and activism

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

As a troubled high school senior, Deveon Smith wasn't sure what to expect when he first visited Sol Collective — a Sacramento nonprofit that uses art and activism to provide programs, promote social justice and empower underserved communities. He first entered the arts center in 2016 while seeking an internship that would count toward his high school diploma.

"Growing up in a challenging environment, I was used to hearing ignorance," Smith, now 20, recalled. "I was used to people spewing hatred."

He found the opposite at Sol Collective. Instead, Sol Collective staff welcomed him with respect.

"It was strange because of the way they spoke — the unconditional love they had for a human being they had just met," Smith said.

Sol Collective has been a go-to place for artists, poets, musicians, youth and community activists since it was founded in 2005 by Estella Sanchez. It is supported by the California Endowment as its initiatives create a space for youth of color to express themselves and develop skills in a safe environment.

In a 3200-square-foot building on 21st Street near Broadway, Sol Collective hosts art shows, concerts, poetry readings, community meetings and many other events that promote social justice.

Various programs at Sol Collective use the arts for community building, empowerment and inspiring the next generation of leaders. Sol Collective also facilitates workshops alongside global and local artists that encourage community organization.

"SINCE THE BEGINNING, SOL COLLECTIVE HAS BEEN A SAFE SPACE FOR YOUTH TO NOT JUST LEARN BUT TO EXPLORE AND EXPRESS THEMSELVES."

Dea Montelongo
Sol Collective programs coordinator

Smith obtained the internship at Sol Collective, which later became part of his independent study senior project for graduation. After, he stayed on at Sol Collective where he now works as an events coordinator. There, he found role models among the staff, such as Dea Montelongo, Sol Collective's programs director.

"Since the beginning, Sol Collective has been a safe space for youth to not just learn



Dea Montelongo and Deveon Smith first connected with Sol Collective as youths looking for a safe space. Now they work there. Photo by Edgar Sanchez

but to explore and express themselves through visual arts, music, poetry or civic engagement," said Montelongo. "We always have youth interns."

Youth play a large role in shaping Sol Collective's programs, she said. Like Smith, Montelongo first connected with Sol Collective as a youth and returned to work for it as an adult.

"I had been trying to find a place that I fit in," said Smith.

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solcollective.org



Advance Peace Sacramento Fights to End Gun Violence

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

After doing prison time for non-violent crimes, Clemmie Fields vowed never to be behind bars again. The 54-year-old Sacramentan has upheld that promise since 2003 and urges others do the same through his work with Advance Peace Sacramento (APS).

"The work that we do here, I would do it for free," Fields, a Neighborhood Change Agent (NCA), said recently, sitting in the headquarters of Advance Peace Sacramento (APS). "I enjoy helping others better their lives."

Advance Peace is an organization dedicated to ending gun violence in urban neighborhoods. The program has not only been successful where it was founded, in Richmond, CA, but also in Sacramento where it was implemented in June of 2018. APS currently has a four-year, \$1.5 million contract with the City of Sacramento, and received additional funding from a state grant. APS is also supported by The California Endowment.

As an NCA, Fields helps prevent gun violence in Oak Park, Del Paso Heights and South Sacramento by reaching out to gang members or other residents who may be affiliated with crime, both young and old. These three areas were identified by the City of Sacramento's Gang Prevention & Intervention Taskforce as being "gunfire hot zones." NCAs act as mentors and outreach workers, often drawing on their own experiences as former gang members or felons. Many of these NCAs were raised in

the same neighborhoods where they are now looking to make a positive difference.

"Neighborhood Change Agents have accomplished a significant amount in only about six months of regular outreach work," stated a report by Jason Corburn, a professor in University of California, Berkeley's Department of City and Regional Planning and School of Public Health.

**"WE HAD NO
TEEN HOMICIDES
IN SACRAMENTO
IN 2018."**

**Julius Thibodeaux
Program Manager, Advanced Peace
Sacramento**

The 24-page report said there were 18 homicides in Sacramento in 2017, and the same number in 2018. Although gun-related homicides rose in Del Paso Heights from five to 12 between the two years, they dropped from six to two in Oak Park and from seven to four in South Sacramento.

"The key finding was that we had no teen homicides in Sacramento in 2018," said APS Program Manager Julius Thibodeaux, who also noted there were nine in 2017.



Advance Peace Sacramento had a successful start, an independent evaluation found. Its Program Manager, Julius Thibodeaux (right), posed with Clemmie Fields, an APS Neighborhood Change Agent. Photo by Edgar Sanchez

Thibodeaux credited that improvement to Advance Peace and its community partners who also advocate for non-violence, like the Anti-Recidivism Coalition.

Mayor Darrell Steinberg agreed.

"Advance Peace has added an important new tool to address gun violence in Sacramento alongside the great work already being done by [other] nonprofits in our city," said Steinberg in reaction to the evaluation.

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In Neighborhoods

BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Repairing Sacramento's RT System

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

Sarah Kerber attends almost every Sacramento Regional Transit Board meeting. When the Board discusses proposals that might negatively impact public transportation in Sacramento, she protests them during the public comment period.

"Our transit system ... is going through a period of improvement," but it needs more, Kerber said in a recent interview.

Kerber, a state worker who relies on public transit, belongs to the Sacramento Transit Riders Union (SacTRU), a group with over 100 members that advocates for a better public transit system.

The Union, which is supported by The California Endowment, is working to secure the vital funds RT needs to begin buying new trains.

Founded shortly after Henry Li became RT's new general manager and CEO in 2016, SacTRU made it their aim to improve the quality of Sacramento's RT system.

The Union is a project of Organize Sacramento, a nonprofit that trains people how to mobilize and make social change that tend to benefit the working poor. Organize Sacramento adheres to a core principle: If you seek improvements in your community, speak to the people in power and help them make the right decisions for their constituents.

The nonprofit's meeting room displays the portraits of local elected officials,

including all 11 RT Board members – a reminder of who the powerful are.

Upon learning that Kerber and other SacTRU members were attending his Board meetings, Henry Li appeared at some SacTRU meetings himself, signaling that RT would listen to the Union. Since then, Organize Sacramento and RT have developed a strong, positive relationship.

"OUR TRANSIT SYSTEM ... IS GOING THROUGH A PERIOD OF IMPROVEMENT."

Sarah Kerber
Sacramento Transit Riders Union Member

"Mr. Li has brought a customer-focused approach to RT that was not present before," SacTRU member Russell Rawlings said.

According to SacTRU, their efforts convinced RT to reduce fares, effective last fall, for the first time in its 47-year history and successfully pressured RT keep a critical bus line in South Sacramento that they might've discontinued otherwise.

The Union and RT agree: more than half of RT's trains are past their useful life.



More than half of Sacramento Regional Transit's train fleet is old and needs to be replaced, the agency says. Funds for new trains may soon be obtained with SacTRU's help. Photo by Edgar Sanchez

That's why SacTRU is speaking up to the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG), which coordinates regional transportation planning and funding. This new partnership could bode well for the future of SacRT.

"SACOG welcomes public input from all individuals, organizations and stakeholders across the region," including SacTRU, SACOG spokesman Alastair Paulin said.

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In Neighborhoods

BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

LaFCC Empowers Sacramento Youth to Thrive

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

Paola Benitez was struggling in school — her grades were low and she was suffering from anger-management issues due to trauma experienced at home.

Paola's mother wanted to see her daughter succeed, so she enrolled her in the Summer Lunch Program of La Familia Counseling Center (LFCC) in South Sacramento and into Youth Voice, a program funded by The California Endowment.

Paola savored the free meals offered by the program and the support staff gave her — something she didn't feel she was getting from her school.

When Paola started attending the after-school program, Youth Voice, La Familia's staff realized Paola had anger-management issues, and they enrolled her in their Project Reach program, which provided her with individual support and case management. They gave her the loving care and attention she needed to overcome the troubles that were holding her back.

Three years later, Paola is completing 10th grade at McClatchy High School. An emerging leader, the 15-year-old is determined to attend college and help others.

People who have seen Paola's development over the last few years expressed their awe at her transformation.

"Paola has blossomed into one of our future leaders," said Rachel Rios, La Familia's executive director. "Her growth and confidence in herself, and her interest in helping others, are truly admirable."

Hers is just one of the many success stories at LFCC.

For over 45 years, the nonprofit has provided free multicultural counseling, outreach and support to low-income families. Some of the many programs offered by LFCC include Behavioral Health Counseling for children 0 to 21, Youth Leadership, At-Risk Youth Case Management, a Parenting and Home Visitation Program, Health Programs, Employment and Educational Services, and after-school activities such as STEM, Homework Club, Girl Scouts and Youth Voice. LFCC also partners with other community agencies to offer additional services that support families and youth.

"OUR STRONGEST ASSET IS HAVING CARING STAFF... AND BUILDING TRUST [WITH CLIENTS]."

Rachel Rios
Executive Director,
La Familia Counseling Center

"Our strongest asset is having caring staff... and building trust [with clients]," Rios said.

Paola is also active in LFCC's Youth Voice where participants meet after school every Friday to talk about neighborhood issues and ways to address them. The goal: amplify



Paola Benitez (right) is "reaching her potential through La Familia's Support," said Rachel Rios, the nonprofit's executive director (left). Photo by Edgar Sanchez

young people's voices and get the youth involved in the community.

In March, Paola graduated from the Sacramento County District Attorney's Youth Academy, an after-school program that teaches high school students about the criminal justice system.

"I wanted to be an FBI agent," Paola said.

Now, she's uncertain about her career but she knows it will be meaningful.

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The Girl Inspired Conference Gives Young Women in Sacramento Advice on Success

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

Days before she graduated from Pacific Elementary School in South Sacramento, 11-year-old Amyah Davis had a chance to hear successful women speak on important topics such as how to excel in life.

Among that advice: Follow her dreams, never give up, be herself and not forget her community.

The sixth grader also heard messages about the beauty of her character and that she has the power to change the world.

These words of encouragement came from the Girl Inspired Conference sponsored by the Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD) with the support of The California Endowment.

The day-long event, held at American River College, aims to promote female empowerment and sisterhood among girls of all ethnicities in grades six to eight in the SCUSD.

This year, the girls attended classroom workshops dealing with leadership development, college and career readiness, social justice and healthy lifestyles. Most of the workshops were conducted by nonprofit partners of the district.

"Our hope is that the girls walk away with something" that will help them reach their full potential, said conference co-founder Aliya Holmes, coordinator and liaison for SCUSD's Foster Youth Services and Targeted Prevention/Intervention programs.

The conference was inspired by the Boys & Men of Color (BMOC) Summit, an annual event that in recent years has been held at Sacramento State University, to steer Sac City Unified boys toward excellence, and away from drugs, gangs and arrests.

"After BMOC began (in 2009), a group of women made up of community partners and SCUSD staff talked about what we could do for our young girls," Holmes said. "The boys at BMOC have sisters, and the same things that our young boys are experiencing, their sisters are experiencing, too."

"THE SAME THINGS THAT OUR YOUNG BOYS ARE EXPERIENCING, THEIR SISTERS ARE EXPERIENCING, TOO."

Aliya Holmes
Girl Inspired Conference Co-Founder

The first Girl Inspired Conference, held in 2010, drew 50 middle school girls and it has steadily grown each year.

During lunch, the attendees heard inspirational songs performed by solo artist



Amyah Davis (left) attended the Girl Inspired Conference days before she completed sixth grade at Pacific Elementary. "It was fun," she said of the summit co-founded by Aliya Holmes (right). Photo by Edgar Sanchez

Gabrielle Reid, who sang the self-composed tunes while playing guitar.

Reid, 18, also known as VirgoGabrielle, told her audience: "In middle school, I was not popular. But my individuality has brought me to a point where I can express myself through my music. So, as you go through school, be yourself!"

Amyah, a member of Pacific Elementary's Student Council, applauded.

"The conference was a lot of fun," Amyah said, adding she learned lessons that will help her, starting with her transition to Fern Bacon Middle School next fall.

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For more info about the Girl Inspired Conference or ways you can get involved, contact:
liya-Holmes@scusd.edu

Community Leaders Join Together to Restore Morrison Creek

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

In 2017, the Avondale Glen Elder Neighborhood Association (AGENA) wanted to apply for a hefty state grant to help restore Morrison Creek, a storm water drainage canal that stretches from Rancho Cordova to Elk Grove.

But the application was never filed.

“When we went to fill it out, we realized we wouldn’t qualify,” said Nailah Pope-Harden, AGENA’s community organizer. “We didn’t have the right community parties to support the application and didn’t have the city of Sacramento involved.”

Fast forward two years and AGENA has a stronger coalition of support, with the city as a partner and The California Endowment’s backing. Pope-Harden said the group will apply for a \$1 million Urban Stream Restoration grant from the State Department of Water Resources (DWR). Sacramento city officials have called for additional outside funds for the creek’s revitalization, starting in Avondale Glen Elder in South Sacramento.

Potential features of the multi-phase project include gardens and a ½-mile bike trail from Power Inn Road to 65th Street.

“We’re trying to create healthier spaces in our underserved neighborhood,” said Pope-Harden, outreach coordinator for the Morrison Creek Project, a mixture of community partners that — in addition

to Sacramento — include AGENA, the Sacramento Community Committee, the newly formed Morrison Creek Community Committee and DWR.

Neglected for years, Morrison Creek’s unkempt banks don’t discourage litterbugs from dumping more refuse along its banks — from old mattresses and car tires to everyday household rubbish which includes diapers and plastic bags.

**“WE’RE TRYING TO
CREATE HEALTHIER
SPACES IN OUR
UNDERSERVED
NEIGHBORHOOD.”**

Nailah Pope-Harden
Outreach coordinator, Morrison Creek Project

In 2017, AGENA’s call for volunteers to help clean the creek every three months brought many respondents. One of them was Sacramento City Councilman Eric Guerra, who represents Avondale Glen Elder and who has become a regular at the cleanup events.

“The creek is multi-jurisdictional. Some parts of it are owned by Sacramento or



Draden Graf and his son Riley, 10, live in a South Sacramento home beside Morrison Creek. They are excited about the prospect of a restoration project for the creek. Photo by Edgar Sanchez

Sacramento County and other sections are federal property,” which can make it difficult to allocate funds for cleanup efforts.

He and City Councilman Jeff Harris, both members of Sacramento’s Water Committee, have asked the Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency to pursue federal monies to help Morrison Creek’s restoration. Draden Graf, who has lived in an Avondale Glen Elder home for decades next to Morrison Creek, welcomes the news about its cleanup and renewal.

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Project Sacramento
facebook page.**

Sacramento Residents Call for Stronger Tenants' Rights

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

Gina Massey's South Sacramento apartment has rats and electrical issues — problems, through no fault of her own recently landed her in the ER. So, like any responsible tenant, she reported the issues to her landlord.

Speaking to the Sacramento City Council, Massey, 58, expressed her frustration about her situation. Instead of finding a maintenance person at her front door, she received an eviction notice for reporting the problems.

"I'm a disabled senior experiencing physical and mental distress," Massey told the Council, asking it to act against "bad landlords."

Massey, who must move by the end of August with nowhere to go, was among 17 local tenants and housing activists who told the council on June 25 that new protections are needed for Sacramento's 246,000 renters.

Most of the speakers, including Massey, belong to a tenants' union formed by the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE), a nonprofit that advocates for tenants' rights and receives support from The California Endowment to provide general education and strengthen coalition building in the region.

Jovana Fajardo, ACCE's Sacramento director supports stronger laws for Sacramento tenants, pointing out, "City

laws are always stronger than state protections."

Last year, ACCE helped collect over 44,000 local voter signatures on petitions calling for a rent-control initiative on Sacramento's 2020 ballot. Among other things, that measure would cap rent increases at 5% and prohibit unfair evictions.

"I SUPPORT REASONABLE RENT CAPS, ESPECIALLY WHEN THERE ARE LOW VACANCY RATES."

Darrell Steinberg
Sacramento Mayor

Though the initiative qualified to be on the ballot, it hasn't been scheduled for the March primary or the November general election. Fearing it will not go on the ballot at all, some speakers demanded that the council itself enact rent control.

Because the topic of rent control wasn't on the agenda, a few activists took the mic during public comments, when anyone can voice their concerns.



Edith Fajardo (left) strives to protect tenants like Gina Massey (right) from "bad landlords." Massey was given an eviction notice from her Sacramento apartment for reporting problems with the unit.
Photo by Edgar Sanchez

One Councilman was optimistic, stating that he hoped to find compromise by talking to local housing and business groups on this matter.

And in a later statement, Mayor Darrell Steinberg said: "I support reasonable rent caps, especially when there are low vacancy rates. I'm hopeful my colleagues on the council and advocates from all sides can reach a compromise that protects tenants and doesn't create a disincentive to build housing."

Residents eagerly await to see if the initiative for rent control makes the ballot.

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Sacramento DHA Works to Dismiss or Reduce Cannabis-related Felonies

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

The Sacramento County Department of Human Assistance (DHA) strives to help people transition from public assistance to financial independence.

More than 420,000 county residents receive services from DHA, ranging from Medi-Cal to CalFresh—formerly known as “food stamps.”

And now, DHA has a new endeavor.

A year ago, it joined a partnership, led by community advocates and non-profits, that helped Sacramento County District Attorney Anne Marie Schubert dismiss or reduce more than 5,300 marijuana-related felony convictions under Prop 64. The voter-approved initiative legalized recreational use of cannabis in California and made it possible to expunge or reduce certain marijuana-related felony convictions to misdemeanors.

Other partners include Sacramento County’s Public Defender’s Office, Code for America—a nonprofit whose technology streamlined the clearance process for these cases—and Youth Forward, a nonprofit supported by the California Endowment, is dedicated to serving disadvantaged youth and youth of color through policy advocacy, education and community action.

Youth Forward’s aim in eliminating marijuana-related convictions is to benefit the community and those who were disenfranchised by harsh drug policies. In many cases, felony convictions can inhibit job prospects, housing opportunities, voting

privileges and other rights afforded to non-criminalized citizens. Expunging felonies for marijuana-related crimes can restore thousands of California residents back to civic participation and give them a second chance at reintegrating back into the every-day activities that so many Californians enjoy.

“OUR CUSTOMERS ARE BETTER OFF, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES ARE MORE PROSPEROUS.”

Tim Choi
Human Services Program Planner, DHA

“Since the passage of Prop 64, our office has been processing re-sentencing petitions,” Schubert stated. “The partnership with Code for America allowed us to proactively and automatically reduce or dismiss eligible marijuana convictions. We also felt it important to work with community leaders and agreed to additional relief by expanding eligible convictions beyond what the law requires.”

Tim Choi, a DHA human services program planner, said the agency advocated for using



Tim Choi of DHA praises new “criminal justice remedies” for past cannabis-crimes.
Photo by Edgar Sanchez

“best practices” in the clearance process, in which a judge makes the final decision on each case. This procedure ensures that every case is made carefully, through the appropriate legal channels and each person who is up for consideration has been thoroughly evaluated.

Regarding the dismissal or reduction of marijuana cases, Choi added: “When we support these types of initiatives, our customers are better off, families and communities are more prosperous.”

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Marijuana Conviction Relief.

Sacramento Coalition Spearheads Effort to Reclassify or Reduce Cannabis Convictions

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

Sherie Drawn's life derailed after she got pulled over by Sacramento County Sheriff's deputies in 2006. According to Drawn, officers searched her car and found "maybe ½ an ounce" of medically prescribed cannabis. She was arrested for felony possession of marijuana with intent to sell—a charge she disputes.

That was her one and only arrest to date.

Drawn has no proof but she suspects she was arrested because her then-boyfriend, an African American man, was with her—he was carrying \$600-plus in cash and had an active arrest warrant out on him. Regardless if her conviction was guilt-by-association, racial profiling or simply possession-related, she was swept up into the criminal justice system and she paid for it in unforeseen ways.

"Because of this charge, I lost my job as a nurse in a convalescent home," Drawn, who lives in Antelope, said recently. "I lost my nursing license. I also lost my car, which was impounded. I didn't have the money to get it back."

This spring, however, through Prop 64—the voter-approved initiative that expunges or reclassifies certain marijuana-related felony convictions—the Public Defender's Office partnered up with Sacramento County District Attorney Anne Marie Schubert to dismiss or reduce more than 5,300 marijuana-related felony convictions.

Other partners included Code for America, a nonprofit whose technology expedited the clearances and Youth Forward, a nonprofit supported by The California Endowment.

Code for America engineers connected their computers to state Department of Justice data to determine which Sacramento criminal cases were eligible for reclassification.

"Our technology can read 500,000 lines of conviction data" in a flash, said Alia Toran-Burrell a senior program manager at Code for America.

"[PROP 64 IS] EMPOWERING PEOPLE TO HAVE CONTROL OVER THEIR LIVES."

Tiffanie Leon-Synnott
Supervising Public Defender, Public Defenders of Sacramento County

After learning of Schubert's clearances, Drawn asked the Public Defender's Office, "What about me?"

In July of this year, Drawn's case was reduced to a misdemeanor. Drawn, who now cleans buildings for a living, expects to have a brighter future.



Sherie Drawn (left) had a pot-related felony conviction reduced to a misdemeanor through Prop 64. Tiffanie Leon-Synnott (right), a Sacramento County Supervising Public Defender helped her. Photo by Edgar Sanchez

She praised the Sacramento County Public Defender's Office for filing her petition for relief, which was granted by a Sacramento Superior Court judge.

Getting a felony expunged or redesignated can be life-changing, said Tiffanie Leon-Synnott, a supervising public defender who helped Drawn for free.

Prop 64 is "empowering people to have control over their lives," Leon-Synnott said. "It's opening opportunities to vote, to get housing, to get professional lives."

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Sacramento County Activists Protest Funding Increases for Jail Expansions

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

Just this month, in a stunning move, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors voted 4-1 to scrap a \$1.7 billion jail project. Officially, the project was meant to replace the Men's Central Jail in the heart of downtown LA with a "mental health treatment center." But opponents of the project argued that community-based treatment centers provide better services than mental health jail facilities.

This decision may have a ripple effect on other cities when it comes to the development of new lockup facilities. In California's capital, criminal justice activists want the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors to follow suit, urging them to abandon plans that would expand county jails.

As the L.A. decision showed, Sacramento could reject the expansion of the Rio Cosumnes Correctional Center (RCCC) in Elk Grove and avoid spending \$89 million on the project. According to activists, Sacramento could also save an additional \$21 million—money that would be diverted from human assistance and child services—if it didn't expand the downtown county jail.

Thirteen members of Decarcerate Sacramento, a group of nonprofits and private citizens opposing the expansions, gave an earful to the Board of Supervisors on July 16, as bids for the RCCC project poured in. The county received \$80 million from the state for the RCCC project—money taxpayers must repay. The county will provide \$9 million in

matching funds. The project calls for seven new buildings that, among other things, would support medical and mental health programs with 26 beds that jailers say will improve services for RCCC inmates.

But Decarcerate Sacramento partners, including Sacramento Area Congregations Together, which is supported by The California Endowment, maintain that the county should

"OVER 50% OF THE PEOPLE IN COUNTY JAIL HAVE BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS."

Courtney Hanson
Activist, Californians United for a Responsible Budget (CURB)

prioritize diversion instead of planning for a future with more incarceration. They also maintain that jails are not the best settings for mental health services.

"Over 50% of the people in county jail have been diagnosed with a mental illness," speaker Courtney Hanson told the board, "and if you don't have it when you go in, there's a good chance you'll get it from being in the jail."



According to activists Courtney Hanson (left) and Asantewaa Boykin (right), Sacramento County should invest in social services, rather than spend millions on expanding jail facilities.
Photo by Edgar Sanchez

Asantewaa Boykin, a registered nurse from a local hospital's ER, also blasted the board. She said it would be "irresponsible" to expand funding for jails while reducing allocations to health and family services if the goal was to help balance the fiscal 2019-20 budget.

"I ask that our citizens not lose valuable services to pay for the inhumane conditions in your jails," Boykin told the board. "The current system is not working. Let's be an example of how to fix it, instead of expanding it."

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For more info: Decarcerate Sacramento will host a **two-hour public forum** at 6 p.m. Sept. 4.
For location, contact decarceratesac@gmail.com

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The Fight for Rent Control in Sacramento Rages On

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg and Jovana Fajardo, a pro-tenant community organizer, agree: Crafting citywide rent control is not easy.

“If it were easy, it would have happened a long time ago,” Steinberg said on August 13, when the City Council enacted the city’s first rent control/tenant protection ordinance. Effective this week, the ordinance caps annual rent increases to between 7% and 9%, depending on the consumer price index (CPI).

“Definitely, creating rent control policy is not easy,” Fajardo, Sacramento director of the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE), said during a later interview.

Despite agreeing on that, they differ on what constitutes good rent control — the reason Fajardo said she continues her quest to place a rent-control initiative on the city’s 2020 ballot.

“This is an outstanding piece of work,” Steinberg said of the city’s rent-control ordinance, saluting council members Steve Hansen, Eric Guerra and Rick Jennings for producing “a reasonable anti-rent gauging piece and a real tenant protection.”

The city’s plan is retroactive to July 1. Among other things, it protects tenants who have lived in a rental unit at least a year from no-cause evictions.

Fajardo, however, contends that the city’s plan doesn’t protect “low-income families

of color that are going to be pushed out of their homes.”

Rather than embrace “watered-down” rent control, Fajardo contends, the council should allow voters to decide what effective rent control should look like.

“CREATING RENT CONTROL POLICY IS NOT EASY.”

Jovana Fajardo
Sacramento Director, Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE)

Last year, ACCE was in a coalition that collected over 44,000 voter signatures on petitions calling for a rent-control initiative. Among its features, it would tie annual rent increases to the CPI, with a minimum 2% increase and a 5% maximum. It also would establish an elected rental-housing board.

The initiative qualified, yet is not on the 2020 ballot.

Some of the partners of the city’s plan—which include the Sacramento Housing Alliance and Organize Sacramento—are financially supported by The California Endowment to provide education about housing and transportation related issues. And while The California Endowment does support these organizations, it does not fund



ACCE’s Jovana Fajardo (left) and Laura Jimenez (right) continue their quest to place a rent-control initiative on the 2020 Sacramento ballot after the City Council enacted its own rent control. Photo by Edgar Sanchez

or take positions on initiatives or legislative issues that require a vote of a public entity.

ACCE organizer Laura Jimenez, who attended that meeting, said that the council’s decision will create more homelessness. And on August 13, Fajardo warned the council that, if necessary, ACCE will sue to add the initiative to the ballot.

“We’re still fighting,” Jimenez said. “We’re not giving up!”

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Hmong Activists Set Their Sights on 2020 Census and Elections

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

With 2020 fast approaching, community organizer Cha Vang is preoccupied with the golden opportunities the new year will bring for Sacramento communities to advance politically and economically.

But, according to Vang, those gains will only be possible if local residents—especially those of color—do three things in 2020:

First, vote in the March 3 California primary. Second, vote again eight months later in the Nov. 3 presidential election. And, third, participate in the decennial census on April 1.

“We need to make sure our voices are heard in both elections,” said Vang, the executive director of Hmong Innovating Politics (HIP), which is supported by The California Endowment. “And all of us have to be counted in the census. If we aren’t counted, technically we don’t exist.”

Vang, 35, was born in a Thai refugee camp to parents who fled war-torn Laos. Now, as a naturalized U.S. citizen, Vang understands the value in political participation. She votes in every election and urges others to as well through her work at HIP.

HIP, a nonprofit grassroots organization, focuses on strengthening the political power of Hmong and other communities—Sacramento County alone has between 37,000 to 40,000 Hmong-American residents who can make a big difference in local elections. HIP also has a seven-year history of educating voters on democratic values,

on the candidates and issues and getting residents out to vote for every election.

In 2020 HIP will intensify its efforts to raise awareness about the importance of voting, while encouraging people to be counted in the census. Besides hitting the streets to knock on household doors, HIP will hire 10 “outreach specialists” who, starting in mid-October, will phone local residents to talk about the election and the census.

“IF WE’RE NOT COUNTED (IN THE CENSUS), TECHNICALLY WE DON’T EXIST.”

Cha Vang
Executive Director,
Hmong Innovating Politics

HIP will work on these endeavors despite having no contract with either the U.S. Census Bureau or the Sacramento County Department of Voter Registration and Elections.

“We understand how important these things are,” Vang said, explaining why HIP is taking on those tasks.



“It’s important that our communities actively participate” in the 2020 elections and the census, said Cha Vang, executive director of Hmong Innovating Politics. Photo by Edgar Sanchez

The census results will help determine the flow of federal monies into states and communities, not to mention the number of seats in Congress for each state.

By casting informed ballots and having robust turnouts, she said, underserved communities will have a better chance to elect candidates—from the City Council to the White House—who will truly help struggling communities with, for example, more local investments and more jobs.

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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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The Issue of Rent Control

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

As recently as 2017, some Sacramento City Council members ducked the volatile issue of rent control, according to pro-tenant community activists.

Amid skyrocketing rents, some of these elected officials privately requested that the term “rent control” not be used in their presence, the activists say.

“No one made that request of me because I wasn’t using the words rent control,” said Veronica Beaty, policy director of the nonprofit Sacramento Housing Alliance (SHA).

Each time Beaty met with city reps, she instead delicately advocated for “rent stabilization” — a recollection that makes her laugh.

But rent control was discussed by the City Council on Aug. 13, when it enacted the Tenant Protection and Relief Act, the first rent ordinance in the city’s history.

The driving force for this discussion was Housing 4 Sacramento, a coalition that last year collected over 44,000 voter signatures on petitions to place a rent-control initiative in front of local voters next year. The initiative qualified, but is not on the 2020 ballot.

When the council approved its own measure, some Housing 4 Sacramento partners objected and left the coalition.

But other coalition members, including SHA, back the ordinance.

Calling it a first step, Beaty said it will protect most of Sacramento’s 246,000 renters from outlandish rent gouging and unfair evictions, which contribute to homelessness

in a city where the average monthly apartment rent is \$1,400.

Retroactive to July 1, the ordinance, among other things, caps annual rent increases to 6% plus the change in the Consumer Price Index, with a maximum 10% increase.

“I was opposed to rent control ... But I’ve been convinced this is something we need to do, and need to do now,” Councilman Jeff Harris said during the Aug. 13 meeting. “We can’t let people suffer the way they have. I know it’s taken a while ... I will support this [ordinance].”

“WE CAN’T LET PEOPLE SUFFER THE WAY THEY HAVE.”

Sacramento City Councilman Jeff Harris, before voting for the new Tenant Protection Program.

In September, the Legislature approved a statewide “anti-gouging” rent bill that, among other things, would cap annual rent increases to 5% plus inflation, to a maximum of 10%, effective Jan. 1.

If Gov. Gavin Newsom signs the bill as expected, Sacramento will likely adjust its ordinance.

The California Endowment continues to support some current and former Housing 4 Sacramento nonprofit members that have



The Tenant Protection Program recently approved by the Sacramento City Council is truly historic, said Veronica Beaty, of the Sacramento Housing Alliance. Photo by Edgar Sanchez

taken different stands on the city’s ordinance.

For example, it supports the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment, which opposes the ordinance and is still fighting to let voters decide what rent control should look like. The Endowment also supports the pro-ordinance SHA.

However, The Endowment does not fund or take positions on matters that require a vote of a public entity.

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Frequently asked questions about Sacramento’s Tenant Protection Program, are at tppcityofsacramento.org

916Ink Provides Young Writers Publishing Opportunities

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

Three months ago, Molly Seely began a new chapter in her life by attending Amplify — a week-long summer camp for girls and boys in South Sacramento.

Like traditional camps that involve nature hikes and canoe trips, this camp unfolded in a creative writing center, where everyone learned to craft better fiction, poetry and nonfiction.

The literary camp, led by adult writers, was created by 916 Ink, a nonprofit supported by The California Endowment.

“I’ve been writing poetry and short stories since I was eight, maybe earlier,” Molly, a 6th grader at Sacramento’s Alice Birney Waldorf School, said recently. “Amplify is a great program. You can work on your writing techniques and get feedback.”

The highlight was in September, when Molly and other camp graduates returned to 916 Ink for a book-release party. More than 40 youth received copies of *Secrets*, a 260-page professional anthology of their best writings from camp.

“I was pretty excited having my works published,” said Molly, 12, who opened *Secrets* to find two of her poems and a short story in it.

Equally thrilled was Autumn Peterson, a 7th grader at Golden Valley River School in Orangevale, who contributed three poems to the book.

“I’m really proud I put my work out to the public,” said Autumn, who began writing short stories and poetry early last year.

Like many writers, Molly and Autumn occasionally experience writer’s block.

“Writer’s block is a dreaded thing,” said Autumn, who turned 13 this month. “When it pounces on me, I try to find inspiration by looking outside through a window. Other times I take a break.”

**“I WAS PRETTY
EXCITED HAVING
MY WORKS
PUBLISHED”**

**Autumn Peterson
Published Author, *Secrets***

Helping youth appreciate the power of the written word is 916 Ink’s mission.

In the last nine years, the nonprofit has produced more than 140 anthologies with the writings of over 3,500 youth throughout the Sacramento area according to Ian Hadley, executive director of 916 Ink. Some of the authors attended 916 Ink workshops at their schools; others wrote during various programs at 916 Ink.



Autumn Peterson (left) and Molly Seely (right) are accomplished writers. Their works were included in *Secrets*, a new anthology of young writers published by 916 Ink. Photo by Edgar Sanchez

“One of my favorite moments is seeing the young authors’ proud smiles when they receive copies of their published work,” Hadley said. “Publishing is an important milestone in the program.”

“It shows the youth that their stories matter and that they deserve to be heard.”

Autumn and Molly have joined the Author’s Lab, an after-school workshop for advanced creative young writers that meets Tuesdays at their headquarters in South Sacramento.

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Decarcerate Sacramento Opposes Costly Prison Expansion Proposal

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

The Sacramento County Board of Supervisors is getting cold feet about proceeding with an \$89 million expansion of Rio Cosumnes Correctional Center (RCCC) in Elk Grove.

Most of the five-member board came out against the project in its current form on Oct. 22, concerned that the improvements will cost more than expected.

One factor threatening the project, approved by the board in April: construction cost inflation.

Of two construction bids received for the RCCC expansion, the low one was \$14.5 million over the engineering estimate, county staff told the board.

And that's not all.

The expansion would be financed by \$9 million in county funds and an \$80 million lease-revenue bond from the state.

Local taxpayers would have 30 years to repay the bond with interest, a debt that may double by the time it is fully paid, some observers have warned.

And, for 30 years, the county would be obligated to pay at least \$5.5 million annually in salary for new employees in RCCC's new buildings, plus new operational costs. Despite agreeing that the 59-year-old RCCC needs improvements, Supervisors Don Nottoli, Patrick Kennedy and Phil Serna backed away from the project.

Since 2013, the county has spent \$8 million

on consultants and county staff involved in the RCCC pre-project, Nottoli said, adding:

"If we have new costs that start at \$5.5 million annually, God knows what those costs will be 30 years from now."

"We need a different outside funding source that doesn't have so many expensive strings attached," Kennedy said.

"DO NOT EXPAND THIS HORROR."

Adnan Minasian
Opponent of RCCC expansion

Citing tough fiscal times, Serna said he won't support the costly RCCC plan at the expense of social programs.

The project calls for several new buildings next to RCCC, that among other things, would support medical/mental health programs with 26 beds that jailers say will improve inmate services.

A coalition named Decarcerate Sacramento has pushed against the expansion, maintaining that jails are not the best settings for mental health services, and that the county must kick its addiction to incarceration. The coalition includes Sacramento Area Congregations Together, which is supported by The California Endowment.



Sixteen speakers — including Robert Cummings (left) and Adnan Minasian (right) — recently asked Sacramento County Supervisors not to expand local jails. Both belong to Decarcerate Sacramento. Photo by Edgar Sanchez

Sixteen speakers, including Robert Cummings and Adnan Minasian, asked the board to cancel the expansion.

"I'm hoping for an outcome of hope," Cummings, a printing press operator, told the board, urging it to support programs that keep youth from "getting locked up or dying."

"Prisons are the new plantations," Minasian, a Sacramento City College student, told the board. "Do not expand this horror."

The board's discussion was to resume November 5.

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Decarcerate Sacramento Celebrates Victory Over Stalled Jail Expansion

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

Criminal justice reform activists won a huge victory this month, when Sacramento County Supervisors walked away from an \$89 million plan to expand Rio Cosumnes Correctional Center (RCCC) in Elk Grove.

Opposition to the plan was led by Decarcerate Sacramento (DS), a grassroots group born in early July as a response to the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors' April 23 decision to start accepting construction bids for the project.

Moving quickly, DS members first appeared before the board on July 16, with a warning: Expanding RCCC would aggravate the county's addiction to incarceration, particularly of the poor and minorities.

Just as quickly, DS evolved into a coalition of private citizens and nonprofits, including Sacramento Area Congregations Together, which is supported by The California Endowment.

DS made two more presentations to the board — most recently on November 5, when the RCCC project was abandoned.

"I'm no longer willing to support this project in any form," not even in a scaled-down version that county staff recommended at the last minute, Supervisor Don Nottoli said, thanking the DS speakers for their "compelling testimony."

"We won because we walked in armed with information, education and data — the numbers that gave power to the

conversation," an elated Mackenzie Wilson, a DS community organizer, said afterwards.

She was referring to several carceral studies that DS cited to help prove that the expansion plan was ill-conceived and too costly.

"WE NEED TO DEVELOP A PLAN TO SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE OUR JAIL POPULATION."

Robyn Ayres
Social Worker, Decarcerate Sacramento

DS immediately said it "looks forward" to working with the county toward a comprehensive plan to reduce its jail population and ensure investment in community programs that prevent incarceration.

RCCC, built in the 1960s and run by the Sacramento County Sheriff's Department, is the main custody facility for county inmates. It houses about 1,750 men and women, many of whom await trial.

The \$89 million plan was developed by the Sheriff's Department without community input. The plan called for several new buildings next to RCCC that, among other things, would support medical/mental



"People cannot get well in a cell," social worker Robyn Ayres told Sacramento County Supervisors. She was the first of more than 40 speakers who urged cancellation of a plan to expand Rio Cosumnes Correctional Center. Photo by Edgar Sanchez

health programs that jailers said would improve inmate services.

DS maintained that jails are the wrong settings for mental health programs. Forty two expansion opponents addressed the board on November 5, starting with Robyn Ayres, a social worker from Citrus Heights.

Rather than expand RCCC, "We need to develop a plan to significantly reduce our jail population," Ayres, a DS member, told the board. "The plan should include community mental health... and a plan that keeps people in their home, keeping jobs and housing and families together."

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Boys & Men of Color Summit Fosters Brotherhood

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

Thirty diverse young men—most of whom had never met—sat in a circle recently in a room at Sacramento State University, during the 8th annual Boys & Men of Color Summit.

The circle is just one of the activities at the pro-education summit organized by local youth with support from The California Endowment. About 200 youth from Sacramento and beyond attended.

Two adults, Raymond Garcia and Ryan McClinton, asked the thirty youth in the ring who attended, ages 12 to 23: “How many of you know who Stephon Clark was?”

The name resonated like gunshots in the night.

“I heard about him on the news,” one youngster said.

“He was killed in his grandmother’s backyard,” said another.

Clark, a 22-year-old African American, was indeed gunned down in the backyard of his grandmother’s Meadowview home on March 18, 2018 by two Sacramento police officers who mistook his cellphone for a gun. Responding to a call of a fence-jumping man smashing car windows, they fired 20 shots at Clark, killing him instantly. No charges were filed against the police.

“When I learned about this incident, I was upset,” McClinton told the youth. “The cops who were responsible for keeping us safe didn’t keep us safe [that night].”

As community organizers for Sacramento Area Congregations Together, or the

Endowment supported Sac ACT, McClinton and Garcia, in conjunction with groups like Black Lives Matter, arranged protests against the police over-reaction that claimed Clark’s life.

“I FELT LIKE
STEPHON
CLARK WAS MY
BROTHER.”

Josh Harris
Student, American River College

Protesters blocked I-5 downtown, closing the freeway. And there were other demonstrations, including two in which picketers blocked Golden 1 Center entrances, resulting in the Sacramento Kings playing basketball before mini-crowds, because most fans couldn’t get in.

Josh Harris, an American River College sophomore, said he joined the protests “because I have three younger brothers,” and he doesn’t want them shot by police for being black.

Recalling Clark’s tragic death, Harris added: “I felt like Stephon Clark was my brother.” Other students said they walked out of their classes in protest.

Garcia, a formerly incarcerated man who now obeys the law to the point of being a role



During a break at 8th Annual Summit at Sac State are, left to right: Speaker Raymond Garcia of Los Angeles; Elijah Scott, 12, an 8th grader at Rosemont’s Albert Einstein Middle School; Josh Harris, 23, a sophomore at American River College and speaker Ryan McClinton. Photo by Edgar Sanchez

model, recently moved to Los Angeles, but plans to return here.

Citing the power of protests, Garcia told the circle: “Slavery existed for a long time. But there’s no slavery any more. People like us fought against it. You guys are the next generation” that will fight injustice.

Elijah Scott, 12, of Rosemont’s Albert Einstein Middle School, said the circle was about brotherhood.

“When we walked into this room, we were strangers,” he said. “When we started talking, we were like brothers.”

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WALKSacramento Strives to Ensure the Safety of Sacramento Students

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

Five days a week, thousands of boys and girls throughout Sacramento walk to school and back—putting themselves in peril.

At many corners, the children face motorists who might run red lights and stop signs, without yielding to pedestrians.

The situation has reached a crisis: According to recent reports, in 2016—the latest year for which numbers are available—40 youths, age 14 or under were injured or killed by drivers while walking in Sacramento. That's the highest rate among California's large cities.

"Children and parents shouldn't have to worry about safely getting to school," Alicia Brown, of WALKSacramento, said recently. "But the reality is that our streets prioritize cars over pedestrians and create dangerous conditions for students."

Getting motorists to stop for pedestrians is a key goal of WALKSacramento.

The nonprofit works with transportation and land-use planners, elected officials and community groups to create safe, walkable environments for all citizens, ranging from children and seniors to people with disabilities.

In 2017, The California Endowment awarded a three-year grant to WALKSacramento's Safe Routes to School Program (SRTSP) which seeks to reduce car-pedestrian accidents before and after school.

WALKSacramento has since partnered with nine South Sacramento schools, all in the

Sacramento City Unified School District, to enhance pedestrian/bike safety.

"CHILDREN AND PARENTS SHOULDN'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT SAFELY GETTING TO SCHOOL."

Alicia Brown
WALKSacramento

Soon after receiving Endowment funds, WALKSacramento documented a lack of sidewalks on streets leading to Fern Bacon Middle School. Citing that report, Sacramento County successfully applied for a state grant of about \$1 million, which helped pay for bike lanes to Fern Bacon, as well as for the ongoing installation of sidewalks adjacent to the school, said Brown, an SRTSP coordinator.

This semester, WALKSacramento has worked with Elder Creek Elementary, the largest elementary school in the Sac City Unified District.

Elder Creek had fast-moving cars zooming past it all day, and many drivers delivering their children to the school in the morning, then picking them up later.



"We want to continue to partner" with WALKSacramento, said Thule Doan (left), principal of Elder Creek Elementary School, one of nine South Sacramento campuses that have worked with the pedestrian-safety nonprofit, through a California Endowment grant. Alongside is Alicia Brown (right) of WALKSacramento. Photo by Edgar Sanchez

This fall, the traffic woes have been alleviated to a degree, Elder Creek Principal Thule Doan said. That said, an Elder Creek third-grader was recently struck by a car in a nearby crosswalk, Doan said. The boy suffered minor injuries.

Part of the solution: Each morning, some parents now drive their children to the George Sim Community Center parking lot on Logan Street. Parents and students then walk to the school, along a ½-mile safe route that doesn't require crossing any intersections. Most of the route is on the south side of Lemon Hill Avenue, beside Morrison Creek.

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